

PREACHING THROUGH PROVERBS

"A proverb is a short sentence based on long experience," according to a recent definition. The book of Proverbs is basically a collection of such sentences, although it includes several more extended poems praising the virtues of wisdom and its practical applications in the life of man. The proverbs find their power in repetition, comparison, and contrast. Many of them sparkle with wit.

The form of teaching in Proverbs is different from that in any other book in the Bible. It speaks in the terms of a father instructing his son. The book urges the same virtues which the prophets did—honesty, chastity, thrift, justice, reverence, and self-control, especially in the use of the tongue—but it approaches the matter from a different angle. Viewing the same breach of the commandments, the teacher in Proverbs would say, "It is folly," whereas the prophet would say, "It is sin." Both agree that reverence for God is the "beginning of wisdom."

ANALYSIS OF THE BOOK

There are five titles in the book, indicating a general division into five sections, beginning at Chapters 1, 10, 25, 30, and 31. The first three are ascribed to Solomon, the third being the "proverbs of Solomon, which the men of Hezekiah king of Judah copied out." The final two chapters are from Agur and King Lemuel, men who are otherwise unknown. The first part (chs. 1-9) forms a general introduction to the collections of brief, disconnected proverbs which make up the main body of the book. The whole bears out the reputation for wisdom and the love of wise sayings for which King Solomon was known (see I Kings 4:29-34).

The book of Proverbs is one of the easiest and most entertaining to read in the entire Bible. If you have not joined us in the Book-of-the-Month readings before, this is a good place to start. You will be glad you did.

Sermon Outlines Provided:

"God's Way to Plenty" (Proverbs 3:9, 10; Philippians 4:10-20)

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“The Way of Man” (Proverbs 14:12)

“The Eyes of the Lord” (Proverbs 15:3)

“The Law of Kindness on the Tongue” (Proverbs 26:18—27:2;
31:8, 9, 26)

Other Suggested Sermon Topics:

“Of Sparing and Spoiling” (Proverbs 3:11, 12)

“Withhold Not Good” (Proverbs 3:27-35)

“Better Than Temperance” (Proverbs 16:16-32)

“The Cheerful Heart” (Proverbs 17:22)

“Things” (27:23-27)

QUESTIONS OVER PROVERBS

1. What is the beginning of knowledge? (1:7)
2. How valuable is wisdom? (3:13-18)
3. What is the beginning of wisdom? (9:10)
4. What insect is used as an example of industry? (6:6)
5. What did the Lord possess at the beginning of things? (8:22)
6. Who is on the path of life? (10:17)
7. What does a wise son do? (13:1)
8. What exalts a nation? (14:34)
9. What will the Lord do to the house of the proud? (15:25)
10. How can one's plans be established? (16:3)
11. What is the extent of a friend's love? (17:17)
12. What does he who finds a wife find and obtain? (18:22)
13. What preserves the king? (20:28)
14. What is named as being better than living in a house with a contentious woman? (21:9)
15. What will remove foolishness from the heart of a child? (22:15)
16. What happens to those who drink much wine? (23:29-35)
17. What is a word fitly spoken like? (25:11)
18. What happens to a child who gets his own way? (29:15)
19. What is the value of an excellent wife? (31:10)

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GOD'S WAY TO PLENTY
(Proverbs 3:9, 10; Philippians 4:10-20)

INTRODUCTION — A matter of attitude.

A farmer was once asked how much milk a certain cow in his prize herd would give. He answered, "She will give nothing voluntarily, but if you can get her in a corner, hitch her fast so that she can neither kick nor hook, she will let go eleven quarts." That is not the attitude we wish to take in church finance, for: "Though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing" (I Cor. 13:3). We seek the profit to the giver: "Not that I seek for the gift, but I seek for the fruit that increaseth to your account" (Phil. 4:17).

I. UNGENEROSITY IS AN INSIDIOUS EVIL—
TO OURSELVES.

- A. The wealth of the rich young ruler stood between him and Christ, for he refused to give it to the poor (Matt. 19:16-26).
- B. We seldom recognize this sin in ourselves. St. Xavier said, "I have had many people resort to me for confession. The confession of every sin that I ever heard of, and of sins so foul that I never dreamed of them, have been poured into my ears, but no one person has ever confessed to me the sin of covetousness."

II. ITS TREATMENT CONSISTS IN BECOMING
BETTER ACQUAINTED WITH CHRIST.

- A. His love and generosity to us were not measured. (Illus. — A young woman needed help. The other was sorry, but could do nothing, for her budget for charities was already spent!)
- B. Contrast the feeding of the five thousand, to church bazaars and ice cream suppers.
- C. Contrast "Naked, and ye clothed me" (Matt. 25:36), with church women haggling for pennies at a rummage sale.

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- D. So Paul urges generosity, "For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might become rich" (II Cor. 8:9).

III. THE RICHES OF GOD'S BLESSING COME TO THE GIVER (II Cor. 9:8).

- A. The Jew was promised material blessings.

1. In all ages the bounties of God's finest gifts are promised to the generous. (Compare Mal. 3:10).

- B. There is something better reserved to Christians. "My God shall supply all your need" (Phil. 4:19).

1. Fellowship—this is the real heart of Christian fellowship, and there is no scriptural evidence that there is Christian fellowship without it.

2. Satisfaction in Christianity. It is not the worker and contributor who are dissatisfied. (A man came to a missionary society head and complained of the way its funds were managed. The society head thereupon offered to return to him all he had put into the project. He had given nothing.)

3. The perfect stature of Christ:

Spiritual power like His who gave:

To overcome temptation

To gain a serene nearness to God

To accomplish the work whereunto we were sent.

A genuine prayer life:

"Give us this day our daily bread" can mean little to him who spends most of his time taking care of No. 1.

CONCLUSION —

The ultimate blessing: "Come ye blessed . . . ye gave me . . ." (Matthew 25:34-40).

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THE WAY OF MAN

(Proverbs 14:12)

INTRODUCTION — A pair of doubles:

- A. Our text is repeated in Proverbs 16:25.
 - B. Another double—Judges 17:6 and 21:25. “And there was no king in Israel in those days, and every man did that which was right in his own eyes.” The two appearances of this verse serve as a frame between which is set the history of Israel’s darkest days: idolatry, theft, murder, rapine, inter-tribal warfare, treachery, wife-stealing, etc.
- I. “THE WAY OF A FOOL IS RIGHT IN HIS OWN EYES, BUT HE THAT HEARKENETH UNTO COUNSEL IS WISE” (Prov. 12:15).
- A. We have our own proverbs for it: “He who is his own lawyer has a fool for a client,” and “He who is his own doctor has a fool for a patient.” —Thus, what would we say of him who would be his own savior?
 - B. There is the story of the one who declared loudly for a religion in which every man chooses that which is best for himself, following his own conscience; and then almost at once, as he missed a turn in the road through failure of another to direct him, complained, “I’ve never been here before; how can I know where to go, if you don’t tell me?” We have never been the road of this life before, and hence are given as Guide Him who has trod it without stumbling.
- II. CONSCIENCE A COMPASS FOR MAN’S DIRECTION.
- A. There are many who set their faith in it. (Herbie Vaught, who boasted in one breath of being as tough a man as there was in the community, and then in the other expected to get to heaven because he had not defrauded his neighbor and had followed his conscience.)

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- B. But the compass must be set properly. (Doug Corrigan claimed that a mis-set compass directed him from New York to Dublin, Ireland, when he intended to go to Los Angeles, but men didn't believe him, because a mis-set compass leads far more often to destruction than to any sort of victory, even by chance.)
- C. The true compass is squared with the north pole as its guiding ideal, and points to it faithfully.
 - 1. We have one true Christ on which the compass of our conscience must be set as an ideal, that we shall not be content to point inward, but toward Him.
 - 2. The compass must be squared with God's Word, for there alone is revealed the perfect Christ.

III. THE WAY OF MAN

- A. The way of self indulgence seemed right to those to whom Proverbs was written.
 - 1. But Solomon tried the way of self indulgence to the end, and concluded that it was all vanity.
 - 2. That was the fault of the rich fool, who committed no sin in the eyes of man when he said, "Soul, take thine ease," but before God he was worthy of death (Luke 12:16-21).
- B. Closely akin to it is the way of riches. The parable of the rich man and Lazarus is brief commentary on the value of riches. We know of no sin the rich man committed except that he was rich, and did not minister to the beggar at his gate. He awoke in hell. (Luke 16:19-25).
- C. The way of the Law. Saul of Tarsus tried it and found that he had to listen to a guide. "By deeds of the law shall no flesh be justified" (Gal. 2:16).
- D. The way of religion. The Athenians—"I perceive that in all things ye are very religious." Then Paul preached that God had raised up a Son to judge (Acts 17:22-31).

CONCLUSION —

The way of the *Son of Man* is the way of life!

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THE EYES OF THE LORD
(Proverbs 15:3)

INTRODUCTION —

The Greeks have a word for secrecy: e.g. "He *escaped notice*, approaching the city." The Hebrews do not use it so blithely; they know that nothing completely escapes notice. God sees!

I. THE EYES OF THE LORD ARE IN EVERY PLACE.

A realization of the children of God from first till last! Hagar—"Thou God seest me" (Gen. 16:13). Revelation 6:16: They shall call for the rocks and mountains to fall and hide them from God. The middle book of the Bible, we find Psalm 139. See Proverbs 15:11.

II. BEHOLDING THE EVIL.

This is most often emphasized, because that is what we most often try to hide. — "The seamy side," hidden from view.

A. Therefore, fear judgment, when every secret thing shall be made known. — Many are more afraid of their neighbors' finding out than they are of God's present knowledge.

B. Therefore, respect His will, for He loves, and seeks the best for us. — His purpose is to save us *from* that sin.

C. Therefore, seek not revenge: God will take care of the matter. "Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath" (Rom. 12:19). "Wherefore judgest thou another man's servant? To his own master . . ." (Rom. 14:4).

III. BEHOLDING THE GOOD.

A. Therefore, boast not (God can see the good; you need not tell of it). "Where is glorying then? it is excluded" (Rom. 3:27).

B. Therefore, don't worry about man's praise or gratitude. For whom do you do the good?

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- C. Therefore—"when thou prayest"—"when thou doest thine alms" be content with God's—not man's—seeing and knowing (Matt. 6:1-6).
 - D. Therefore, God can see good in the other man when you cannot. Let not a man "think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but . . . think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith" (Rom. 12:3).
- IV. "KEEPING WATCH OVER" (ASV)—"keeping watch over their flocks by night" (Luke 2:8).
- A. What is the purpose of God's beholding the evil and the good (people)?
 - B. What kind of sheep were in the flocks? Black as well as white? What was the purpose of the shepherds in keeping watch?
 - C. God commended his love toward us, that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us (Rom. 5:8).

CONCLUSION —

Story of two watching the world's mightiest tide, in the Bay of Fundy. Seeing its mighty power, "Why, in the face of such might as is His, should God care for such insignificant creatures as we"? "Because He is God."

THE LAW OF KINDNESS ON THE TONGUE

(Proverbs 26:18—27:2; 31:8, 9, 26)

INTRODUCTION —

A special responsibility has come to mankind with the special power of speech. Proverbs' 31 chapters contain more than 130 verses, more than four per chapter, on the subject. It is in every chapter, except possibly two.

I. FOLLY IN SPEECH OF THE "FOOL," "WICKED," AND "SCOFFER."

- A. Falsehood, slander, false witness. (This one thing is most often mentioned.) Six things which Jehovah hateth (6:16-19). (See the company in which the liar and false witness keep.) "Remove far from me falsehood and lies" (30:8). "A false witness shall not be unpunished: and he that utters lies not escape" (19:5).
- B. Whispering, talebearing. (If you can't be heard in a shout, try whispering.) "A talebearer revealeth secrets; But he that is of a faithful spirit concealeth the matter" (11:13).
- "A worthless man deviseth mischief,
And in his lips there is a scorching fire.
A perverse man scattereth abroad strife;
And a whisperer separateth chief friends"
(16:27, 28). (ASV)
- C. Violent words. "A soft answer turneth away wrath; but grievous words stir up anger" (15:1). "In the mouth of the foolish is a rod of pride; but the lips of the wise shall preserve them" (14:3).
- D. Clamorous, contentious. Of the wicked woman—"She is loud and stubborn" (7:11). "A continual dropping in a very rainy day and a contentious woman are alike" (27:15).
- E. Flattering and boasting. "A man that flattereth his neighbor spreadeth a net for his feet" (29:5). "The lips of a strange woman drop as an honeycomb and her

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mouth is smoother than oil, but her end is bitter as wormwood, sharp as a twoedged sword" (5:3, 4). "Let another man praise thee, and not thine own mouth" (27:2).

- F. Thoughtless words. "Seeth thou a man that is hasty in his words? There is more hope of a fool than of him" (29:20). "The heart of the righteous studieth to answer: but the mouth of the wicked poureth out evil things" (15:28).
- G. Too much talk. "In the multitude of words there wanteth not sin: but he that refraineth his lips is wise" (10:19). "Even a fool when he holdeth his peace is counted wise" (17:28). But the power of speech was given to be used.

II. WISDOM IN SPEECH.

- A. Speak up for the afflicted: "Open thy mouth for the dumb in the cause of all such as are appointed to destruction" (31:8).
- B. Teach or rebuke. "He that rebuketh a man afterward shall find more favor than he that flattereth with the tongue" (28:23). "As an earring of gold, and an ornament of fine gold, so is a wise reprover upon an obedient ear" (25:12).
- C. Encourage. "Heaviness in the heart of a man maketh it stoop: but a good word maketh it glad" (12:25). "Pleasant words are as a honeycomb, sweet to the soul, and health to the bones" (16:24).
- D. Pray and praise. "The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord: but the prayer of the upright is his delight" (15:8).

CONCLUSION —

"Every tongue shall confess that Jesus Christ is Lord" (Phil. 2:11). "With the heart man believeth unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation" (Rom. 10:10).