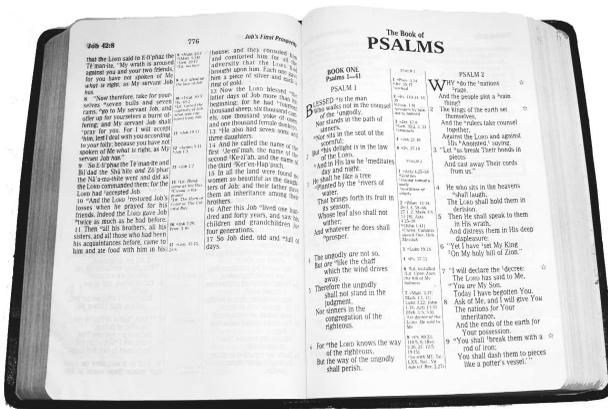


PILGRIM BIBLE NOTES

God's holy Word simply explained and applied



March 2022

Bible readings from Proverbs chapters 1 to 15

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PROVERBS

Most of the proverbs in the Book of Proverbs came from King Solomon (1:1). No doubt they were among the three thousand proverbs spoken by him (1 Kings 4:32). The Hebrew word translated ‘proverb’ (‘*mashal*’) ‘indicates a brief, pithy saying which expresses wisdom’ (E.J. Young). They are ‘short sentences drawn from long experiences’. Proverbs has been described as ‘laws from heaven for life on earth’ (William Arnot). This is the third of the poetical books, with parallelism being used many times. Hebrew Poetry is not based on rhyme or metre as found in English verse, but uses such devices as parallelism where a similar or a contrasting thought is expressed:

Psalm 30:5 *Weeping may endure for a night,
But joy comes in the morning.*

Proverbs 15:20 *A wise son makes a father glad,
But a foolish man despises his mother.*

Many commentators believe that Proverbs 8:22–31 speaks of Christ who is ‘*the wisdom of God*’ (1 Corinthians 1:24,30), *in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge* (Colossians 2:3).

Purpose of the Book is *to know wisdom and instruction* (1:2). Paul wrote, ‘*Do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is*’ (Ephesians 5:17). The Book of Proverbs will help us to be wise.

Outline of the Book of Proverbs

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|----|---|---|----------------|
| 1. | The worth of wisdom | – | 1:1 to 9:18 |
| 2. | Proverbs of Solomon | – | 10:1 to 22:16 |
| 3. | Words of the wise | – | 22:17 to 24:34 |
| 4. | Proverbs of Solomon
(copied by Hezekiah’s men) | – | 25:1 to 29:27 |
| 5. | The words of Agur | – | 30:1–33 |
| 6. | The words of Lemuel
(learned from his mother) | – | 31:1–31. |

Some Themes from Proverbs

- P**ride and its dangers – 6:16–17; 8:13; 11:2; 13:10; 16:18; 20:6; 27:2; 29:23
- R**ecognising a fool – 1:7; 12:15–16,23; 13:20; 14:9; 17:24; 18:2–7; 19:1; 20:3; 23:9
- O**pen-handedness – 3:9–10; 11:24–25; 13:7; 19:6,17; 22:9; 28:27
- V**irtuous wife – 12:4; 18:22; 19:14; 31:10–31
- E**vil woman – 2:16–19; 5:3–20; 6:24–26; 7:5–27; 22:14; 30:20
- R**espect for parents – 1:8–9; 6:20–21; 13:1; 15:20; 19:26; 30:17
- B**ad company – 1:10–19; 4:14–19; 13:20; 24:1–2; 29:24
- S**loth or idleness – 6:6–11; 10:4–5; 13:4; 18:9; 20:4; 21:25; 24:30–34

A recommended Commentary on the Book of Proverbs

For further study I warmly recommend Charles Bridges' COMMENTARY ON PROVERBS, published by the Banner of Truth Trust. You will find that I frequently quote Bridges in my notes on Proverbs.

The wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy (James 3:17)

The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge

If you are a Christian, you should desire to be wise! The Book of Proverbs will point you in the right direction. We all need spiritual wisdom because it has a vital bearing on our behaviour and character (3; cp. James 3:17–18). The Book of Proverbs not only instructs us in wisdom but also *in justice, judgment and equity* (3). The word *justice* means ‘rightness’, *judgment* is ‘discernment’ and *equity* is ‘fairness’. We all need to do what is right, to have discernment and to be fair in our attitude to others. When we obey the instruction in Proverbs we will have *prudence* (the ability to act wisely and sensibly, 4).

Wisdom is not easily acquired but the verses in today’s reading give us some help:

- We obtain wisdom through receiving ‘*instruction*’ (3). We must be prepared to listen to what God is saying to us through his Word as we read it or hear it preached. If we refuse to listen to admonition from our pastor or from a godly person we are foolish (7). The word ‘*instruction*’ (2–3,7) is also translated ‘*chastening*’ (3:11); it carries the idea of discipline and training. We live in a very undisciplined age and most of us struggle to order our time wisely. We must discipline ourselves to make time to pray and to read God’s Word.
- We must know the fear of God in our lives. *The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge* (7; cp. 9:10). Charles Bridges describes ‘*the fear of the LORD*’ as ‘that affectionate reverence, by which the child of God bends himself humbly and carefully to his Father’s law’ (COMMENTARY ON PROVERBS, pages 3–4). Do you worship and serve God with reverence and godly fear (Hebrews 12:28)? **If you know the fear and instruction of the Lord in your life you will acquire spiritual wisdom and knowledge. You will be spared the lack of discernment that is so evident in many of our churches.**

My son, if sinners entice you, do not consent

Many parents fail to give any instruction to their children. Young people are not told the difference between right and wrong and some so-called progressive thinkers reject any thought of imposing our ideas upon the young. That type of thinking is far from the teaching of Scripture and lacks practical common sense. Children need to learn from the wisdom of those who have experienced life and can warn of unforeseen dangers. The words ‘*My son*’ (8,10,15) are words of tender pleading and love. The father has his son’s best interests at heart.

The training of children is the responsibility of both parents (8). Fathers must not opt out but must take the lead. I write to you, Christian men. Are you leading family worship in your home, teaching God’s Word and instructing your family in Christian living? What kind of example are you to your children? Parents, you must teach them the Word of God. You must read the Bible with them and take time to explain its teaching. You must pray with them. Our children face great pressure in this wicked world and we must warn them against the enticement of sinners (10). If we fail in our duty to give loving and patient instruction to our children, we hinder our prayers for their conversion and Christian development.

Let me now address those of my readers who are young. You will face many pressures from friends at school, college, university or work to fit in with their sinful ways. Verses 11 to 19 describe the way you may be enticed and persuaded into sin. First of all your non-Christian friends will say, ‘*Come with us*’ (11) and later they will say, ‘*Cast in your lot with us*’ (14). If you listen to them, you will soon be following their wicked ways. You must learn to say, ‘No’ to every suggestion that is sinful. *My son, if sinners entice you, do not consent* (10).

Whoever listens to me will dwell safely, and will be secure

Wisdom is personified in verses 20 to 33 and elsewhere in Proverbs (eg. chapter 8). There is a picture of:

- Wisdom pleading. *She calls aloud – she raises her voice – she cries out* to be heard (20–21). These words denote urgency and importance as wisdom appeals to three classes of people to consider their evil ways and to turn from them – the *simple ones, scorers and fools* (22). The simple ones are those who are gullible and who do not see danger in their sinful ways. The simple person may agree that God does exist and that there is life after death, but he does not take the trouble to think about the consequences of rejecting the gospel. He loves being simple (22). The scorner takes great delight in scoffing at the message of the Bible. He is arrogant and disdains the gospel (22,25,30). He is not clever – any fool can taunt and mock. *Fools hate knowledge* and the fear of the Lord, and they are complacent in their sin (22,29,32).
- Wisdom warning. If we refuse the pleading of wisdom, we are in a precarious situation. To refuse the wisdom of God is to travel on a road which leads to terror and destruction. Those who scoff at God and reject his offers of mercy will themselves be mocked in the day when calamity comes upon them (24–27). The Lord will not answer their prayers when judgment comes. They will seek him, but not find him (28). **If you are not a Christian, I urge you, I plead with you, to take the message of the Bible to heart. There is no second chance after death (Hebrews 9:27). You must seek the Lord while he may be found (Isaiah 55:6–7).**
- Wisdom promising. There is a great promise for those who have chosen *the fear of the LORD* (29), who listen to the Word of God and obey it. *Whoever listens to me will dwell safely, and will be secure without fear of evil* (33). The NKJV and ESV do not translate ‘spirit’ (23) with a capital ‘S’ and some commentators take the verse to promise the spirit of wisdom rather than the Holy Spirit.

The LORD gives wisdom

Notice the tender appeal of father to son throughout the Book of Proverbs ('My son' – 1:8,10,15; 2:1; 3:1,11,21, etc). God speaks to us through his Word as a loving father speaking to his son (1). This chapter continues to show us the value of wisdom and how we can obtain it. Wisdom is priceless and must be earnestly sought after as someone searches for *hidden treasure* (4). It is not obtained by those who are lazy! How are we to find it?

- We must treasure up the commands of God in our hearts (1). To do this, we must love God's Word enough to meditate on it and to apply its teaching to our own lives (2; cp. Psalm 119:97; Colossians 3:16). Charles Bridges observes, 'Never has apostasy from the faith been connected with a prayerful and diligent study of the Word of God' (COMMENTARY ON PROVERBS, page 16).

- We must pray for wisdom. *The LORD gives wisdom* (6) but only to those who seek for it. We must have God-honouring motives in our quest for wisdom. Solomon asked God for a wise and understanding heart so that he could rule Israel righteously. The Lord granted his request and more (1 Kings 3:7–12). The previous chapter gives us a picture of wisdom crying out to be heard (1:20–21) but we are now urged to lift up our voices to God for discernment and understanding (3). **There is a great need for discernment in these confusing days. Do you pray for spiritual wisdom?** There is a great promise in the New Testament for those who do (James 1:5).

Wisdom and knowledge are again linked with the knowledge and the fear of God in our lives (5). *He stores up sound wisdom for the upright and preserves the way of his saints* (7–8). The Christian may face attacks from sinners but he is safe. *Sound wisdom* is based on the love and knowledge of God's Word (1–2) and helps us to *understand righteousness and justice, equity and every good path* (9). It very different from the wisdom of the world (James 3:13–18).

Understanding will keep you

The Lord says, ‘*When wisdom enters your heart, and knowledge is pleasant to your soul, discretion will preserve you; understanding will keep you, to deliver you from the way of evil*’ (10–12). Wisdom will deliver us from:

- The evil man *who speaks perverse things* and who walks *in the ways of darkness* (12–15). There are many who are so perverse that they delight in doing evil and in walking in crooked paths. **If we are wise and godly, we will have the courage to stand against the tide of lawlessness that surrounds us.**
- *The immoral woman* (16–19). Immorality and adultery are no longer frowned upon in the western world. We are told that the way to enjoy life is to indulge in sexual freedom but that is a lie. Sexual permissiveness has led to widespread instability and misery and it is a path that *leads down to death* (18). The Bible is quite explicit in teaching us that sexual immorality is wicked in the sight of God (1 Thessalonians 4:3–8).

Wisdom delivers us from the evil man and the immoral woman so that we may walk *in the way of goodness and keep to the paths of righteousness?* These are paths that lead to everlasting life with the Lord in heaven (20; cp. Psalm 23:3,6). There are many evil paths before us which we must learn to recognise and to shun. The end of upright and the wicked is contrasted in verses 21 and 22.

Allow me to conclude with some comments from Charles Bridges: ‘And now, what serious reader of this chapter can fail to estimate above all price the privilege of being early enlisted under the banner of the cross; early taught in the ways, and disciplined in the school of the Bible; and early led to hide that blessed book in the heart, as the rule of life, the principle of holiness, the guide to heaven!’ (COMMENTARY ON PROVERBS, page 20).

Trust in the LORD with all your heart

The Christian life brings us much happiness, but there are principles which we must apply to our own lives if we are to enjoy God's blessing:

- We must obey God's Word. *But let your heart keep my commands* (1).
- We must hold fast to *mercy and truth* and not allow them to forsake us. *Write them on the tablet of your heart* (3). Mercy and truth are inseparable twins (cp. Psalms 25:10; 85:10; 89:14; 100:5; 117:2; Micah 7:20). We are merciful when we have compassion on needy fellow-Christians and help them (Colossians 3:12–14; 1 John 3:16–17). We are also merciful when we freely forgive those who have wronged us (Luke 11:4). Jesus said, *'Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy'* (Matthew 5:7).
- We must trust in the Lord. *Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding* (5). This does not contradict the command to seek the understanding linked with wisdom and the fear of God (2:2–4,11). It is trusting in God when we are bewildered and can find no rational answer to God's dealings with us. If we lean on our own understanding and are wise in our own eyes (7) at such times, we will sink in despair.
- We must know God in all our ways. *In all your ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct your paths* (6). The Hebrew word translated 'acknowledge' is usually translated 'know' (eg. 4:1,19; 27:1). We are to acknowledge God in the home, at work, in serving him, in suffering, in grief and in prosperity.
- We must *fear the LORD and depart from evil* (7).

Notice the stress on 'heart' religion (1,3,5). **If we are right in heart, we will know the blessing of God in our lives. We will not be restless, chasing after 'second blessings' or sensational experiences.**

Do not despise the chastening of the LORD

There are more principles here for knowing the blessing of God in our lives:

- *Honour the LORD with your possessions.* We must be generous if we would know God's blessing (9). Matthew Henry comments, 'We mistake, if we think that giving will undo us, and make us poor; no, giving for God's honour will make us rich.' We are the losers if we are mean in our giving. We should never give to the Lord in order to get from him, however; such a motive is unworthy. If we honour God, he will honour us (1 Samuel 2:30) and this is apparent when we honour him with our possessions (9–10).
- *My son, do not despise the chastening of the LORD* (11). We must not lean on our own understanding nor despise the discipline of God (11–12; cp. Hebrews 12:5–11). The Lord may use sickness, loss, disappointment or a withdrawal of the sense of his presence to correct us. We must always remember that the Lord chastens us because we belong to him, because he loves us and delights in us (Hebrews 12:6–9; Revelation 3:19). 'Behind a frowning providence, he hides a smiling face.'

God disciplines us so that we will acknowledge him in all our ways (6). He chastens us to wean us from worldliness, pride, coldness of heart and many other sins. Chastening makes us more godly and *yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it* (Hebrews 12:11). If we want to be wise, we must expect to experience correction from God. The Puritan John Trapp described God's dealings with us through chastisement as his 'love-tokens'. **Let us learn to appreciate these 'love-tokens' and to be thankful for them.**

- *Happy is the man who finds wisdom, and the man who gains understanding* (13). Wisdom brings priceless blessings (14–18).

Keep sound wisdom and discretion

The fact that God created the universe and sustains it is taught throughout the Bible. His wisdom is seen in creation. *The LORD by wisdom founded the earth* (19). We are exhorted in chapter 2 to seek wisdom as we would search for treasure (2:4) and now we are warned to keep wisdom because we can lose it. We must not allow wisdom and discretion to depart from us but *keep sound wisdom and discretion* (21). Solomon, who by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, wrote these words was renowned for his God-given wisdom, but he did not keep it, and he turned away from the Lord and ended up a fool and an idolater (1 Kings 11:1–6).

We must put to death sinful desires in our lives (eg. by refusing to feed or entertain them) if we are to retain wisdom (Romans 8:13; Colossians 3:5). **If we play with temptation, wisdom and reason will flee from us.** There are many who once walked in the fear of God and served him with joy and enthusiasm, but they are now cold in heart. Wisdom has departed from them. Oh, guard wisdom and discretion in your life by maintaining a close walk with the Lord! We are again reminded of some of the blessings of wisdom. It brings security and peace and the man who fears God can remain calm in times of danger (22–24; cp. 1:33; Psalm 46). Spiritual wisdom leads us to a greater trust in God. *The LORD will be your confidence* in times of trouble (26). Benevolence and love for our neighbour is a fruit of spiritual wisdom (27–30).

We must not envy those who are evil. *The perverse person is an abomination to the LORD ... the curse of the LORD is on the house of the wicked, but he blesses the habitation of the just* (31–33). True wisdom never leads to pride. *The Lord gives grace to the humble. The wise shall inherit glory* (34–35).

The path of the just is like the shining sun

We are again reminded of the need for parents to instruct their children from the Word of God and to set them a godly example (1–4, 11, 20). We must give our children *good doctrine* teaching them to obey the Bible (2, 4). This is vital for their spiritual well-being. Solomon remembered how his father, David, had taught him the value of wisdom and understanding (4–9). *Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom, and in all your getting, get understanding* (7). Is it any wonder that he asked God to give him wisdom and knowledge rather than wealth, honour or victory over his enemies when he became king of Israel (2 Chronicles 1:10–12)? We live in confusing and evil times and strange doctrines and practices are found in many churches that profess to be evangelical. We all need wisdom and understanding and we must ground ourselves firmly in the Word of God.

The way of the righteous is contrasted with the way of the wicked (10–19). We must not enter the path of the wicked which is a way of evil-doing, of darkness and ignorance (16–17, 19). The Lord Jesus said that it is a broad way which leads to destruction and that there are many who travel on it (Matthew 7:13–15). The way of the righteous is narrow and difficult, but on it we love, honour and enjoy God. It also becomes better and brighter. *But the path of the just is like the shining sun, that shines ever brighter unto the perfect day* (18). We know the presence, care and direction of God when we walk this blessed path. **The path of the just is a clean and wholesome path that leads to heaven. Are you on it?**

*O walk with Jesus, wouldst thou know
How deep, how wide his love can flow!
They only fail his love to prove,
Who in the ways of sinners rove.*

*Walk thou with him; that way is light,
All other pathways end in night;
Walk thou with him; that way is rest,
All other pathways are unblest.*

(E. Paxton Hood)

Keep your heart with all diligence

Heart trouble disables or kills thousands of people every year. We are constantly urged to discipline ourselves by practising healthy eating habits and taking sufficient exercise. We have no quarrel with such advice, but do we take it? If all this is true with regard to the body, how much more is it in the spiritual realm? – *Keep your heart with all diligence* (23). This could be translated ‘Above all keeping, keep your heart’.

Charles Bridges writes, ‘The greatest difficulty in conversion is to win the heart to God, and after conversion to keep it with him.’ He describes the heart as ‘the citadel of man — the seat of his dearest treasure. It is fearful to think of its many watchful and subtle assailants ... here Satan keeps — here therefore must we keep special watch. If the citadel is taken, the whole town must surrender. If the heart be seized, the whole man — the affections, desires, motives, pursuits — all will be yielded up’ (COMMENTARY ON PROVERBS, page, 53). The heart is a spring out of which rises both sin and holiness (Matthew 12:34–35). The unregenerate heart is a fountain of poison, the purified heart a well of living water (Matthew 15:19; John 4:14).

Backsliding begins in the heart before it ever shows in outward actions. What are the signs of spiritual heart trouble? A lack of desire to pray, to read God’s Word, to be at the services of the church, or to enjoy fellowship with the Lord’s people; a greater love for material things rather than seeking first the kingdom of God (Matthew 6:33). We keep our heart by putting away all harmful influences from our lips, our eyes and our feet (24–27). We are prone to wander from God and to grow cold towards the Lord Jesus Christ. **Are you suffering from spiritual heart trouble through a flabby, unhealthy Christian life? Are you finding the Christian race (Hebrews 12:1) too much for your unfit condition?** Feed upon God’s Word and exercise yourself in godliness by prayer and holy living. *Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it spring the issues of life* (23).

I was on the verge of total ruin

There is a passionate plea in this chapter to avoid the sin of adultery. This sin no longer shocks most people in the western world and it has become more common in evangelical fellowships. We must always remember that adultery violates the seventh commandment and it is wicked in the sight of God. Look at the appeal in the first verse, ‘*My son, pay attention to my wisdom.*’

The devil makes sin appear attractive (Genesis 3:4–6). Adultery and promiscuity are presented as excitement and fun. *The lips of an immoral woman drip honey, and her mouth is smoother than oil* (3; cp. 9:17). The warning here is against immoral women, but the same goes for immoral men. The path of immorality leads to death and hell (5; 7:27; cp. Hebrews 13:4). God appeals to us, ‘*Therefore hear me now, my children, and do not depart from the words of my mouth*’ ... *Lest you give your honour to others, and your years to the cruel one?* (7,9). Adultery wrecks homes and destroys families, bringing misery and instability.

The strongest Christian is not immune from adultery. Remember it begins in the heart (Matthew 5:27–28). We must take measures to avoid falling into this sin:

- We must hide God’s Word in our hearts (1,2,7; cp. Psalm 119:11).
- We must cultivate a healthy thought life (Philippians 4:8). We must not feed our minds on filth. We must shun all pornographic literature, films and websites.
- We must avoid temptation (or those who would tempt us) and flee from lust (1 Thessalonians 4:1–8; 2 Timothy 2:22). Joseph fled from Potiphar’s wife when she tried to seduce him (Genesis 39:7–13).
- We must be content with our own spouse and seek to strengthen our marriages (15–20). We must take much time to be with our husband or wife, to talk and to share, to be thoughtful and kind.
- We must be on our guard. Respected men and women have fallen into this sin. How terrible to have to admit, ‘*I was on the verge of total ruin, in the midst of the congregation and assembly*’ (14).

Go to the ant, you sluggard!

The Book of Proverbs warns us against pledging ourselves as a surety for others who borrow money, whether they are friends or strangers (1–5; cp. 11:15; 17:18; 22:26). Many people have lived to regret taking on such a liability and have brought financial ruin upon themselves and their family. There are those who readily borrow and who rashly spend, even among professing Christians. They may be very persuasive and suggest that as believers we should help them. Christian benevolence does not extend to taking on the responsibility of those who take on debt. Let these verses also be a warning against taking on excessive financial commitments for ourselves. We are encouraged in our ‘consumer society’ to load ourselves with debt. We should ask ourselves, ‘Do I really need whatever it is I want to purchase and cannot presently afford? Do I have the means to pay off the loan? Will my Christian life suffer because I will have to work excessive hours of overtime to pay off the loan? Will God’s work suffer because my giving will be reduced?’ We must live within our means, not beyond them.

Ants are a nuisance when they invade our homes but they are a great example to us in their prudent, hard-working way of life. *Go to the ant, you sluggard!* (6–11). There are a number of warnings against the sin of laziness in Proverbs. In the parable of the talents, the Lord Jesus called the man who buried his one talent, ‘*You wicked and lazy servant*’ (Matthew 25:26). God created Adam and put him in a garden to tend it and to keep it. He was to work and to find fulfilment in his work (cp. 1 Thessalonians 4:11–12). If you are unemployed, you can still find plenty of voluntary work to do. The church needs workers. The words of Ecclesiastes 10:18 can be applied to the Lord’s work. *Because of laziness the building decays, and through idleness the house leaks.* Charles Bridges writes, ‘Always, therefore, look on sloth, not as an infirmity, but as a sin, affecting the whole man’ (COMMENTARY ON PROVERBS, page 62). **The believer who is busy in working for the Lord has no time for grumbling or mischief-making. He gets on with his work and God will bless and reward him.**

Things the LORD hates

The wicked person is worthless! He is no good to his fellow-men and all his actions breathe out defiance against our sovereign Creator. Notice how he devotes his bodily members to wickedness – mouth, eyes, feet, fingers and heart (12–14). The word ‘*perverse*’ means ‘crooked’. *He walks* (lives) *with a perverse mouth* and all manner of filthy talk, blasphemy and lies come tumbling from his lips. He also has a perverse heart which continually devises evil (14; cp. Matthew 15:19). The wicked person will not go unpunished and *calamity shall come suddenly* upon him (15).

Look at the *things the LORD hates* and which are *an abomination to him* (16–19). Some of these ‘seven deadly sins’ have already been described in the characteristics of the wicked man. It is a frightening fact that many of these sins which God hates are found in the lives of Christians.

Be determined to shun these things that God hates:

- *A proud look.* Pride puts self on the throne of our hearts and displaces God. It is the sin which led to Satan’s rebellion against God (1 Timothy 3:6). Proud Christians have wrecked many churches.
- *A lying tongue.* The devil was the first liar (John 8:44) and we must put away all forms of lying (Colossians 3:9).
- *Hands that shed innocent blood.* Whoever hates his brother is a murderer (1 John 3:15). Is there any murder lurking in your heart?
- *A heart that devises wicked plans.* Do you scheme and plot in order to advance yourself?
- *Feet that are swift in running to evil.* We are to pursue holiness (Hebrews 12:14).
- *A false witness who speaks lies.* Such men testified against Naboth (1 Kings 21:9–13) and against our Lord (Mark 14:55–60).
- *One who sows discord among brethren.* **If we sow discord among our brothers and sisters in the church, we will reap a terrible harvest of bitter strife and division.** *Blessed are the peacemakers* (Matthew 5:9).

Can a man take fire to his bosom, and his clothes not be burned?

We are again reminded of the value of instruction from godly parents (20–24). They bring to us the Word of God whose commands and teaching we should bind continually on our heart and tie around our neck. God’s Word will lead us, keep us and speak with us (22). The Bible leads us into paths of truth and righteousness, keeps us secure and speaks to us when we read it, meditate upon it or hear it preached. It is a lamp to give us light and it leads to eternal life (23; cp. Psalm 119:105).

There is another warning against the sin of adultery in this chapter (24–35). You may wonder why such a warning is often repeated in the Word of God. We are bombarded by the thinking of the age in which we live. This wicked world would seek to persuade us that sex outside of marriage and adultery are quite acceptable. They are not! Adultery begins in the heart (25; cp. Matthew 5:27–28). **If we entertain sexually immoral thoughts, we play with fire.** *Can a man take fire to his bosom, and his clothes not be burned?* (27). ‘The fire of lust kindles the flames of hell’ (Bridges).

Men do not despise the thief who steals to satisfy hunger, though he will not go without punishment if he is caught (30–31). He is the object of pity rather than of scorn but the adulterer *destroys his own soul* (32–35). Charles Bridges observes, ‘His plea is not the cry of hunger, but of lust; not want, but wantonness; not the lack of bread, but of understanding. He is wilfully given up to his sin’ (COMMENTARY ON PROVERBS, page 66).

Let us be on our guard continually and avoid anything that may lead us into temptation. A sure antidote to the sins of the heart is to hide God’s Word there (21–24; cp. Psalm 119:11). Let us seek always to order our lives by his Word. The Holy Spirit does help those who look to the Lord for help. The way of obedience is the pathway of blessing and what greater joy can there be than to know the smile of God upon our lives?

Her house is the way to hell

The importance of the Word of God to guard us against immoral thoughts and behaviour is again stressed in this chapter. *My son, keep my words and treasure my commands within you. Keep my commands and live* (1–2).

There is a graphic description of the ways of the prostitute in this chapter. She entices *a young man devoid of understanding* (7–8). She is crafty, loud and rebellious (10–11), lurking at every corner and impudent (12–13). She may show a pretence of religion, claiming to have her peace offerings with her, having paid her vows (14). A cloak of religion often hides behind it a perverse and wicked heart. The sinner often confuses lust with love and does not realise that the so-called delights of illicit love lead to destruction (18–23).

The chapter closes with a tender plea to the young, that they shun the folly of the young man who was devoid of understanding (24–27). The standards of the world fall far short of the teaching of God's Word and our young people are bombarded with all manner of wicked and perverse ideas. Young person, I urge you not to allow the world to influence your thinking (see Romans 12:1–2). Sinners may scoff at the Bible and despise its teaching but obedience to it brings life, peace and joy.

Many have been hurt and severely damaged by falling into immoral behaviour. The harlot has slain *strong men ... her house is the way to hell* (26–27). Some are like the youth, devoid of understanding; others are well acquainted with the warnings of God's Word, but still fall into sexual sin. Samson was a strong man but he was unable to control his own lust and this led to his captivity and death (Judges chapter 16). **Many preachers and church leaders have been brought down through immoral behaviour. We cannot afford to be complacent but remember to take heed lest we fall (1 Corinthians 10:12).**

Whoever finds me finds life

There are many voices that seek to entice us away from God but their way is the way of death and hell. In the previous three chapters, there are warnings against the enticement of the immoral woman. In this chapter wisdom is personified. She cries out to be heard, especially by the simple who are so easily seduced by sinners (1–5). We have already seen that true wisdom is obtained through knowing God’s Word and through diligently applying it to our lives. The translators of the New King James Version have entitled this chapter, ‘The Excellence of Wisdom’. This excellence is seen in:

- Wisdom’s words (6–8). Wisdom speaks of excellent things, of right things, and of truth and of righteousness. If we have spiritual wisdom, we will shun all wicked or perverse talk, and be gracious and kind in our speech.
- Wisdom’s worth (10–11,17–21). Many people spend all their time and energy in the pursuit of money or possessions but very few seek after wisdom. If we diligently seek wisdom, we will find it (17) and its blessings are priceless (cp. 3:13–18). To find spiritual wisdom is to obtain *favour from the LORD* (35).
- Wisdom’s ways (12–17). Wisdom, prudence and the fear of the Lord go together. To have wisdom is to hate pride, arrogance and every wicked way.
- Wisdom’s warning (33,36). Those who hate wisdom love death. If we despise and scorn the wisdom of God, we will harm our own soul and choose death.

God cries out, calling on sinners to embrace his wisdom (1–11; cp. John 7:37–39). It is not only folly to reject God’s Word, it is death (36; John 5:40). **If you are not a Christian, I urge you, ‘Forsake foolishness and live’ (9:6). Come to Christ who says, ‘Whoever finds me finds life’ (35).**

My delight was with the sons of men

It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that these verses speak of the Lord Jesus Christ. He is called *the wisdom of God* (1 Corinthians 1:24,30) and in him *are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge* (Colossians 2:3). What truths about Jesus do these verses teach?

- He is the eternal Son of God, begotten by the Father (23–25). His Oneness with the Father and yet his distinct Person are revealed here. *‘The LORD possessed me at the beginning of his way ... When there were no depths I was brought forth’* (22, 24–25). *‘The beginning’* is before the creation of the world. Theologians describe this bringing forth as ‘the eternal generation of the Son’. He has always been the Son of God. He has no beginning. *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God* (John 1:1).
- He enjoys glorious communion with God the Father who delights in him. *‘I was beside him ... and I was daily his delight’* (30; cp. Isaiah 42:1; Matthew 3:17). He always rejoiced in the presence of his Father and in his works of creation (30–31).
- He is the *master craftsman* by whom the worlds were made (27–30; cp. John 1:1–3; Ephesians 3:9; Colossians 1:16; Hebrews 1:10). Creation displays his astonishing power and wisdom.
- His *delight was with the sons of men* (31). The Lord Jesus left the glory and joy of heaven to come to earth to suffer sorrow, humiliation, shame and death to save us from our sin so that we can have fellowship with him and with God the Father. **Let us pour out our hearts in praise and gratitude!**

*Ere God had built the mountains
Or raised the fruitful hills,
Before he filled the fountains
That feed the running rills,
In me from everlasting,
The wonderful I AM,
Found pleasures never wasting,
And Wisdom is my name.*

(William Cowper)

Rebuke a wise man, and he will love you

The Book of Proverbs is full of contrasts – between simplicity and knowledge, between good and evil, between the merciful man and the cruel man, between the desire of the righteous and the expectation of the wicked, and so on. In chapter 9 there is a contrast between wisdom (1–6) and folly (13–18), and between a wise man and a scoffer (7–12). Wisdom and folly both cry out from the highest places of the city, directing their appeal to those who are described as simple (3–4, 14–16). Wisdom has spread a feast to which all are invited; the gospel is also likened to a great supper to which many are invited (Luke 14:15–24). There is a threefold appeal:

- ‘*Come, eat of my bread and drink of the wine which I have mixed*’ (5); this speaks of life and joy (Isaiah 55:1–3)
- ‘*Forsake foolishness and live*’ (6). This is a call to repent, to forsake sin.
- ‘*Go in the way of understanding*’ (6). True religion exercises the mind as well as the emotions. The way of understanding is found in the Bible.

Folly offers excitement but it leads to death and to *the depths of hell* (17–18). Sin is deceitful (Hebrews 3:13) and is always more attractive in the imagination than in experience. You cannot argue with a scoffer because he has closed his mind to the gospel. He just refuses to see plain sense and he will hate you if you reprove him (7–8). The wise man is different. *Rebuke a wise man, and he will love you* (8). He appreciates correction because he knows it is for the good of his own soul. **How wise and mature are you? Do you sulk when lovingly corrected, or do you thank the person brave enough and concerned enough to rebuke you?**

We are again reminded that *the fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom* (10). Charles Bridges writes, ‘The child of |God has only one dread — to offend his Father; only one desire — to please and delight in him’ (COMMENTARY ON PROVERBS, page 87).

Blessings are on the head of the righteous

A new section of the book, called ‘*The Proverbs of Solomon*’, begins with this chapter and runs through to chapter 22, verse 16. This chapter, like others in Proverbs has a number of contrasts between the righteous and the wicked. Notice the number of times the word ‘*righteous*’ is found in this chapter. The Lord has chosen us and called us to be holy (Ephesians 1:4; 1 Peter 1:15–16). Let us think of some of the blessings of the righteous:

- Righteousness delivers from death and leads to eternal life (2).
- He knows the smile of God upon his life. *Blessings are on the head of the righteous* (6) and the Lord does not allow him to go hungry (3).
- He leaves his mark long after he dies. *The memory of the righteous is blessed* (7). Most of us remember with great affection and thankfulness godly Christians, now with the Lord, who led us to the Saviour, or who played an important part in our growth and maturity in Christ.
- His work *leads to life* and is not in vain (16; cp. 1 Corinthians 15:58).
- The righteous man has a teachable spirit (8,17). He is not a know-all who refuses to listen to the counsel of others (Psalm 32:8–9).
- His life overflows with love and *love covers all sins* (12); an example of such love is shown in seeking to restore a brother who has fallen into error or sin (James 5:19–20). If we truly love our fellow-believers, we will not gossip about their sins and failings, but rather pray for them.

A godly character does not come through obtaining some sensational ‘blessing’. It is gained in the school of obedience to God’s Word, through affliction, testing and chastisement. Are you teachable? **Is your life a blessing to your family, friends, church fellowship and those in your workplace, college or school?**

The desire of the righteous will be granted

Our speech often gives us away. When we come to faith in Christ, we have to learn a new way of speaking (not to be confused with the religious jargon that we may acquire). We put away lies, slander, malice and crude or arrogant talk (Ephesians 4:29; 5:3–4; Colossians 3:8–9). A mark of Christian maturity is the ability to control the tongue (James 3:2). *In the multitude of words sin is not lacking, but he who restrains his lips is wise* (19). The righteous person is gracious in his speech (32) and he brings blessing through his words (11, 20–21,31). His words bind the wounds of the broken-hearted, they lift up the downcast, they encourage the weary and they challenge the wicked. Here are more blessings of the righteous:

- *The desire of the righteous will be granted* (24; cp. Psalm 37:4). He is not taken up with selfish desires, but he seeks the honour of God and he is submissive to God's will (1 John 5:14–15).
- *The righteous has an everlasting foundation* (25; cp. Matthew 7:25). The godly person is not easily shaken by false teaching or by times of trial when his faith may be sorely tested. He has a stability in his life (30; Psalm 1:3,6)..
- *The hope of the righteous will be gladness* (28). Godly living brings lasting joy and contentment in this life and in the world to come. Where are you looking for your satisfaction? **Are you seeking first the kingdom of God and his righteousness (Matthew 6:33)?**

*Saviour, since of Zion's city
I through grace a member am,
Let the world deride or pity,
I will glory in thy name.
Fading is the worldling's pleasure,
All his boasted pomp and show;
Solid joys and lasting treasure
None but Zion's children know.*

(John Newton)

The integrity of the upright will guide them

Dishonesty is an abomination to the Lord (1; cp. 20:10; Deuteronomy 25:13–16). Pride is offensive to God (2). We are to *be clothed with humility, for God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble* (1 Peter 5:5) The Christian must always seek to have a blameless testimony wherever he goes. Integrity is a quality that should be seen in every Christian though it is often lacking in the world around us. *The integrity of the upright will guide them* (3). This word ‘*integrity*’ includes such characteristics as wholeness, perfection, purity and honesty. It is the opposite of perversity or crookedness which is an abomination to the Lord (3, 20). We can rely on men and women of integrity knowing that they will never seek to deceive or cheat.

The righteous are contrasted with the wicked in verses 4 to 11), We must beware of gossip despises our neighbour and from tale-bearing (12–13). We are warned against becoming surety for a stranger (15); this can bring more danger than being a surety for a friend (6:1–3). The righteous woman is a gracious woman (16). Beauty of character, which never fades, is far more important than physical beauty (22; 1 Peter 3:3–4). *The merciful man does good for his own soul* (17). The Lord Jesus said, ‘*Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy*’ (Matthew 5:7). We must *as the elect of God ... put on* (the Greek means ‘clothe ourselves with’) *tender mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering; bearing with one another, and forgiving one another even as Christ has forgiven us* (Colossians 3:12–13).

God delights in the righteous (20) but this chapter shows how wickedness leads to misery and destruction. *The wicked will not go unpunished* (21). How can we shine as lights in this dark world? We must sow righteous deeds: *But he who sows righteousness will have a sure reward* (18). **There are many people around us who need to see our Christianity in practice; they may then be more open to listen to our spoken testimony.** Think about the way you can sow righteousness in your home, place of business or work, or in your school, college or university.

He who wins souls is wise

God grants the desire of the righteous because it is not motivated by self-interest but is good (23; cp. 10:24). *The generous soul will be made rich* because *God loves a cheerful giver* (25; 2 Corinthians 9:6–7). The more we scatter, the more we will increase (24). Are you a generous soul? Do you give sacrificially to the Lord's work? Do you help a needy brother or sister (1 John 3:17–18)? An inscription on the tombstone of a Christian illustrates this truth:

*Here lies a man, men thought him mad,
The more he gave, the more he had.*

Spiritual wisdom makes winners of souls: *He who wins souls is wise* (30). A person's soul is his most precious possession (Mark 8:36–37). All the gold and wealth in the world cannot purchase a single soul. The Lord Jesus died on the cross to save sinners and to purchase us with his own blood (Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 1:18–19). However, he uses Christians like you and me to win souls. There is no joy to be compared with that of leading a soul to Christ and there are eternal rewards for *those who turn many to righteousness* (Daniel 12:3). Are you moved with compassion over the plight of sinners (cp. Matthew 9:36–38)? Do you pray for the lost? Do you ever speak to those around you of their need of Christ? Do you love them enough to be concerned for their souls?

Christian, dare you remain silent when people around you are without God and without hope, and you know the answer to their deepest need? Pray for the lost in your family, at your place of work and in your neighbourhood. You will be surprised at what God may be pleased to do.

*There's a work for Jesus
Precious souls to bring;
Tell them of his mercies,
Tell them of your King.
Faint not, grow not weary,
He will strength renew;
There's a work for Jesus
None but you can do.*

(Elsie D. Yale)

A good man ... an excellent wife

These verses speak of a ‘good man’ and of an ‘excellent wife’. Do remember that when the Book of Proverbs speaks of a good man, such goodness is not measured by human standards, but by God’s Word. All our own righteousness falls far short of what God expects from us (Isaiah 64:6). The good man is the godly man who trusts in the Lord and seeks to honour God in his life by obedience to his Word (Psalm 1:1–3). *A good man obtains favour from the LORD* (2) and as a result he knows the smile of the Lord upon his life.

Happy the Christian home with a husband who is a good man and a woman who is an excellent wife! Such a home is a stable place (7). The Christian home should be a testimony to the grace of God in our lives. Many people rush into marriage and live to regret their haste. If you are single, prayerfully seek the hand of a godly person in marriage. Such a person is spiritually-minded and a reliable worker in the church. They are thoughtful and kind. **I ask those of you who are married, ‘Are you seeking excellence as a Christian husband or wife? Do you read God’s word and pray together? Are you teaching your children the Word of God and setting them a godly example? Is your home a place of friendship and hospitality?’**

Many a man is blessed by having an excellent wife but others have been ruined by one who is worthless. *An excellent wife is the crown of her husband, but she who causes shame is like rottenness in his bones* (4). Our bones are the frame on which our body depends; without them we would collapse. The worthless wife brings ruin and misery (21:9). The godly wife is a home-maker who brings great blessings to her family. Charles Bridges writes, ‘She is not the ring on her husband’s finger, or the chain of gold around his neck. That were far too low! She is his crown; his brightest ornament; drawing the eyes of all upon him, as eminently honoured and blessed’ (COMMENTARY ON PROVERBS, page 133).

A righteous man regards the life of his animal

The godly man is not only a blessing to humans, but also to any animals in his possession. *A righteous man regards the life of his animal* (10). Israel was different from its heathen neighbours in that they had clear guidelines for the humane treatment of their working animals. Their animals were given the sabbath rest and were not muzzled while working so that they could satisfy their hunger (Deuteronomy 5:14; 25:4). The cruel way in which some people treat their animals is an indication of their godless way of life. They have no compassion for man nor beast. *The tender mercies of the wicked are cruel* (10).

We are again reminded of the importance of our words, the fruit of the mouth (13–14). Our words can wound or heal (18, 25). Some Christians can be very unkind and harsh in their speech though they insist that they believe in the Bible and obey its commands. Our profession of belief is useless unless we actually practise what we claim to believe. It is not only important to believe in the truth of the Bible, but also to be truthful in all our dealings with others and in our speech (19–22; cp. 13:5). *Lying lips are an abomination to the LORD, but those who deal truthfully are his delight* (22). Whoever loves and practises a lie will be shut out of heaven and cast into the lake of fire (Revelation 21:8; 22:15).

In this world, dishonesty and deceit are a way of life for millions. The sin of deceit was also found in the Jerusalem church (Acts 5:1–11) and since then lying lips have torn apart or destroyed many a church. *Therefore, putting away lying, each one speak truth with his neighbour, for we are members of one another* (Ephesians 4:25).

Let us examine our own hearts. Do we seek always to be 100% truthful? Do we ever tell half-truths (lies) in order to deceive? If there is any deceitfulness within us, let us now repent and seek the Lord's forgiveness.

The soul of the sluggard desires, and has nothing

There is another warning against laziness in these verses. *The soul of the sluggard desires, and has nothing* (4). Charles Bridges writes, ‘The sluggard desires the gains of diligence, without the diligence that gains. He would be wise without study, and rich without labour.’ We may or may not be lazy by nature but many hard-working men and women are lazy in spiritual matters. Bridges continues to write of the sluggard, ‘His religion is of the same heartless character. He desires to overcome his bad habits, to enjoy the happiness of God’s people. So far well. Desires are a part of religion. There can be no attainment without them. Many have not even the desire. They ridicule it as enthusiasm. Yet the sluggard has nothing, because it is desire without effort ... **Oh! be industrious — if anywhere — in religion. Eternity is at stake. Hours, days are lost. Soon they will come to years; and for want of energy all is lost. Heartless wishes will not give life.** The halting step will not bring us to God. A few minutes’ cold prayers will not seize the prize. To expect blessing without diligence is delusion’ COMMENTARY ON PROVERBS, pages 151–2).

Verse 7 would be better translated, ‘There is one who pretends to be rich, yet has nothing; and one who pretends to be poor, but has great wealth.’ Let me apply this spiritually. Many of us have a tendency to make ourselves appear more godly than we really are. This is hypocrisy and it has pride at its root; we put on a good show before others because we want them to think well of us. Those in the church at Laodicea had material wealth but were oblivious to their own spiritual need. They were wretched and poor (Revelation 3:17–18).

The Lord sees into our hearts and we cannot deceive him, even if we deceive ourselves. If we pretend to be what we are not, we will never advance in spiritual growth. Those who are godly are well aware of their own need to depend upon the Lord and mourn over remaining sin in their lives. Let us get rid of all spiritual pretence. *Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven* (Matthew 5:3).

He who despises the word will be destroyed

We live in a corrupt world where fraud is to be found in every layer of society. We must be vigilant and resist all temptation to follow the ways of the world. The Lord warns that *wealth gained by dishonesty will be diminished* (11). It is not sinful to be wealthy when wealth is gained by honest endeavour and possessions do not become a ‘god’.

Hope deferred makes the heart sick (12). Charles Bridges comments, ‘The first springing of hope is a pleasurable sensation, yet not unmixed with pain. It is hunger that makes our food acceptable. But *hope deferred*, like hunger prolonged, brings a kind of torture. *It maketh the heart sick* (Psalm 119:82,123; 143:7) ... The child of God is often tried in his faith, but never disappointed of his hope. Long we may have to wait. But never let us despair. “The patience of hope” issues in “the full assurance of hope”’ (COMMENTARY ON PROVERBS, pages 151–2) The Bible speaks much about hope and God is described as ‘*the God of hope*’ (Romans 15:13). The Christian hope of a new heaven and a new earth will not be fulfilled until the Lord Jesus comes again (2 Peter 3:10–13). We rejoice in our great hope (Romans 5:2;12:12) even though it is deferred.

Those who despise the Word of God have no true hope. *He who despises the word will be destroyed* (13). Noah, a preacher of righteousness, warned his generation of coming divine judgment for 120 years. They despised God’s Word and were destroyed (2 Peter 2:5). *The way of the unfaithful is hard* (15). The Hebrew word translated ‘*unfaithful*’ in verses 2 and 15 could be translated ‘treacherous’ as in the English Standard Version. Those who reject God’s law are on the road to ruin. There is no escape from judgment for those who refuse the message of the gospel (2 Thessalonians 1:7–8). **If you are disobeying God, I urge you to pay attention to the solemn warnings of the Bible. See that you do not refuse him who speaks (Hebrews 12:25).**

He who spares his rod hates his son

There are more warnings in this chapter concerning the folly of despising instruction, correction and the Word of God (1,13,18). Moreover, those who despise the Word of God will be destroyed (13). We are reaping a terrible harvest of lawlessness, much of this because of godless psychological and social theories concerning family living and discipline, and in the punishment of criminals. One area where the western world has drifted far from the teaching of the Bible is in its attitude to corporal punishment. **Most psychologists and politicians say that the physical punishment of a child for wrongdoing is barbaric and inhuman.** They often point to examples where someone applying corporal punishment has gone beyond reasonable limits. **The very same people, however, often see no wickedness in killing the unborn child through abortion.**

He who spares his rod hates his son, but he who loves him disciplines him promptly (24). Charles Bridges wrote these words in 1846, ‘Among many modern theories of education, how often God’s system is overlooked! Yet should not this be our pattern and standard? The rod of discipline is its main character; not harsh severity, but a wise, considerate, faithful exercise; always aiming at the subjugation of the will, and the humbling and purifying of the heart’ (COMMENTARY ON PROVERBS, page 168).

We read later in Proverbs, ‘*Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child; the rod of correction will drive it far from him*’ (22:15). Some suggest that the rod in Proverbs is a figure of speech which must not be taken literally. Other verses in Proverbs would not support this notion (20:30; 23:13–14). Any punishment must be administered in love (Hebrews 12:5–6). The rod should never be applied when we lose our temper, and never in isolation from admonition and reproof; the child must be told why he is being punished (24). **Let us be sure that our attitude to discipline and correction is based on God’s Word.**

There is a way that seems right to a man

We are again reminded of the value of a wise woman; she *builds her house* (1). Charles Bridges points out that the godly wife ‘is the very soul of the house. She instructs her children by her example, no less than by her teaching. She educates them for God and for eternity; not to shine in the vain show of the world, but in the church of God.’ (COMMENTARY ON PROVERBS, page 170).

There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death (12; cp. 16:25). The devil makes sure that the ungodly man is convinced that his way is right when it is all wrong. These verses highlight the way that leads to death and to eternal separation from God:

- The perverse (crooked) way which knows nothing of the fear of God. The person on this way despises the Lord (2). He may seek wisdom but he will not find it because he rejects the Word of God (6,8).
- The deceitful way in which falsehood is found (5).
- The way of *fools who mock at sin* (9). Charles Bridges writes, ‘Go to Gethsemane Go to Calvary. Learn there what sin is. Shall we make a mock at that which was a crushing burden to the Son of God? Ask converted souls, awakened consciences, dying sinners – do they speak lightly of sin? How will the wretched mocker call himself in eternity what God calls him now – a fool!’ (COMMENTARY, page 175).
- The way of credulity (15). Those on this way refuse to believe God’s Word but are ready to believe everything uttered by the ungodly.

If you are not a Christian, I urge you to ponder your way. You are travelling far from God and will be separated from him for all eternity unless you repent of your sin. If there is a backslider reading these words, remember that your ways will never fill the void that has been left since you have drifted from the Lord. You may fill your life with all kinds of pleasures, hobbies and diversions, but you will never find lasting contentment while you are backslidden in heart (14). Fear the Lord and depart from evil (16) and he will restore to you the joy of your salvation.

He who is slow to wrath has great understanding

Self-control is a fruit of the Holy Spirit which should be seen in our lives (Galatians 5:23). Two of the most difficult things to control are our tongues and our tempers (James 3:2–10). If we are quick-tempered, we display a lack of self-control and we behave foolishly (17). Sinful anger is seen when a person is controlled by his temper. Such a person may shout, slam doors or hit out with hands or fists. We are right to be angry with all that is wicked and perverse, but we must be careful to guard ourselves against sin when we display righteous anger (Ephesians 4:26). We must be slow to anger (James 1:19–20). If we lead our lives in the fear of the Lord (26–27), we will control our temper and be kept from sinning.

He who is slow to wrath has great understanding (29). How does he have great understanding?

- He has an understanding of the nature of God who is slow to anger (Nehemiah 9:17). God's wrath is his settled and holy indignation against sin but it is never out of control. If we follow ('imitate') God we will be *slow to wrath* (Ephesians 4:31 to 5:1).
- He understands himself knowing that he may soon fall into sin if he does not control his temper. He knows that to be quick-tempered is to give place to the devil (Ephesians 4:26–27).
- He understands others, knowing that a soft answer turns away wrath (15:1). **Sinful anger in Christians has damaged many a church, bringing division and a refusal to seek reconciliation (15:18).**

Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people (34). Many nations which were once guided by Christian principles have forsaken biblical values. We are paying the price for our wickedness in seeing the misery caused by the breakdown of family life, increasing lawlessness and violence and massive economic problems. Let us shine as lights in this dark world.

A wholesome tongue is a tree of life

God sees all things and nothing escapes his eyes (3,11) It is a great encouragement to the Christian to know that we are never out of the sight of the Lord who lovingly watches over us.

God also hears all things. We were reminded yesterday that our words have much power for good or for evil and we need to control our tongues. The soft answer is far more effective than the fierce words of a lashing tongue (1). *A wholesome (healing) tongue is a tree of life* (4) that speaks a word *in due season* (23). The Hebrew word translated ‘wholesome’ (4) means ‘healing;’ it is elsewhere translated ‘healing’ (Malachi 4:2) and ‘health’ (4:22; 12:18; 13:17; 16:24). Do our words bring healing and encouragement to some needy soul or do they hurt and wound? Before we speak about others, we should ask ourselves, ‘Is it true? Is it helpful? Is it necessary? Is it kind?’ God hears all that we say and we will be judged for our words (Luke 12:3). Let us at all times seek to have healing tongues.

Religion without righteousness is useless. *The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the LORD, but the prayer of the upright is his delight* (8). God will hear the prayer of the repenting sinner, but not the prayers of those who have no intention of obeying his Word. The Lord delights in the prayers of his children and he loves the person who follows after righteousness (8–9). If you are a Christian, that should give you great encouragement and an incentive to pray. God wants us to seek him in prayer and to come to his throne of grace with our thanksgiving and requests. *He hears the prayer of the righteous* (29).

The fear of the LORD brings contentment, even in times of poverty (16–17). A contented heart is a priceless possession! Paul could write of his contentment though he was in prison (Philippians 4:11). *Godliness with contentment is great gain* (1 Timothy 6:6). **If you are restless and discontented, examine your life. Are you lacking in godliness?**

He who disdains instruction despises his own soul

There are some angry people who stir up strife; we must not be like them (18). We are again warned against the sin of laziness (19). *Folly is joy to him who is destitute of discernment* (21). Charles Bridges asks, ‘What think we of *folly*? Not only does the ungodly practice it. But it is *joy* to him. He sins without temptation or motive. He cannot sleep without it’ (COMMENTARY ON PROVERBS, page 212).

Our best laid plans may come to nothing if we fail to seek advice, *but in the multitude of counsellors they are established* (22). It is wise to seek the counsel of those who are godly when faced with difficult decisions. There is another warning against pride; *the LORD will destroy the house of the proud* (25). *The thoughts of the wicked are an abomination to the LORD, but the words of the pure are pleasant* (26). Our words are an expression of our thoughts (Matthew 12:34). Are they pleasant to God and to others?

He who is greedy for gain troubles his own house (27). This fact was evidenced in the lives of Lot (Genesis 13:10–11; 14:12; 19:14,30), of Achan (Joshua 7:20–26) and Gehazi (2 Kings 5:20–27). Our consumer society encourages us to be covetous but we must resist its enticements because covetousness is a form of idolatry (Colossians 3:5). True contentment comes from a godly lifestyle (1 Timothy 6:6). The Lord Jesus said, ‘*Take heed and beware of covetousness, for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses*’ (Luke 12:15). If you have lost your Christian joy or your zeal to serve the Lord, is it because of covetousness for this world’s honour or possessions?

There is another encouragement for those who love the Lord in verse 29: *The LORD is far from the wicked, but he hears the prayer of the righteous*. Our Christian character is moulded and strengthened when we obey God’s Word but *he who disdains instruction despises his own soul* (32). Were you challenged when you read your Bible today? Has it touched a ‘raw nerve’? **Do not disdain instruction, but gratefully accept reproof; it is for your own good.**