

**"AVOID IT, PASS NOT NEAR IT, TURN FROM IT."**

– *NOV. 27.* – *PROV. 4:10-19.* –

"My son, if sinners entice thee, consent thou not." – Prov. 1:10.

HOWEVER well or illy Solomon followed his own teachings, it is conceded by all that those teachings were sound wisdom – as true to-day as when uttered. While Solomon's writings may not be ranked exactly with the inspired prophecies of the Scriptures, the fact that we are told that the Lord heard his prayer for wisdom, and granted the request, together with the fact that his writings were accepted as a part of the sacred canon in our Lord's day, and not objected to by New Testament writers, but on the contrary quoted from, is sufficient guarantee to us that the wisdom of these Proverbs is of a kind that cometh from above.

In the lesson under consideration the wise man represents himself as a father giving good advice to a son, and it were well for all the youth of the world, if their fathers more frequently communed with them and gave them the benefit of their experiences in life. Fathers recognize a responsibility for those whom they bring into the world, in respect to natural things, food, clothing, etc. Have they not a much greater responsibility respecting the culture of the minds and hearts of their children in the path of wisdom, justice, righteousness, truth?

One of the growing evils of our day, even amongst Christian people, is the disposition of parents, and we believe particularly of the fathers, to shirk this responsibility which they assumed when they became fathers. They incline to leave the instruction, reproof, guidance, counsel of their children entirely to others – to the church minister, to Sunday School teachers or to mothers. It is well that children whose fathers are so lacking in the proper parental instinct should have the counsel, advice, etc., of others, especially of their

mothers; but all of these will not properly take the place of the father's counsel, if he be a father in the true sense of the word, – taking watch-care over the highest interests of those committed to his care by divine providence.

Nor is it merely the children who are injured by such parental carelessness of divinely imposed responsibilities: the matter reacts upon the parents – the neglected child realizes the neglect of its highest interests, and depreciates the parent correspondingly. The result is a home lacking respect for parents and hence lacking obedience to parents; therefore a home in which disorder is sure to reign – an unhappy home. In such a home it is most difficult for the Christian graces to take root or flourish in any member of the family; yet it sometimes does take hold in just such a place. Many parents learn when it is too late, how seriously they neglected to cultivate right principles in the gardens of their children's hearts, and allowed them to become overgrown with weeds of ill dispositions, – unkindness, disobedience to parents, unthankfulness, etc. We cannot urge too strongly, upon Christian parents, the necessity of training up a child in the way it should go: in precept and also in example, illustrating patience, kindness, thankfulness, gentleness, meekness, love, as essential rules of daily life. Such are giving their children a good start in the right way; a start which they need at the entrance to life, and which they and society have a right to expect at the hands of those who brought them into being.

Father Solomon suggests that the obedient son of a wise father will prolong his days, by giving heed to the good counsel. The parent's whole course of life should manifest toward his children his love for them, and his deep interest in their welfare. The child is naturally disposed to think highly of its parents, and to appreciate their advice, unless this childlike confidence has been shattered by unkind treatment, threats and parental neglect. Children reason often as correctly as do older people, sometimes more so; they should be able to reason, upon evidence, **(1)** that they have the parental love and

interest in their welfare; (2) that parental experience in life should be valuable to them at its threshold, to start them properly. And who will say that the child thus guided and helped by parental counsel would not be saved from many of the difficulties and pitfalls and troubles in life, and from much [R2388 : page 339] sickness, physical debility, etc., to a longer life? Moreover, the parent thus interested in the child, and seeking to give it lessons from his own book of experience, will find himself profited by his review of the successes, disappointments and mistakes of his life, and the *causes* of these. Whoever, therefore, performs his duty as a father is blessing himself as well as his child – and adding to his own years as well as to the years of his child.

How blessed for any parent to be able truly to use the words of the eleventh verse of our lesson as he lies upon his death-bed, addressing his children, "I have taught thee in the way of wisdom; I have led thee [by my example] in right paths," and how blessed are such children; how much less liable than others to stumblings in life's pathway: how much more likely they are to be ready to hear and heed the voice of the Heavenly Father, and to walk in his paths.

Indeed, we may profitably apply this lesson to the sons of God, and consider God to be the speaker: for in holy things we but copy the Heavenly Father. While we were yet sinners he redeemed us, and by his love and justice he has drawn all that have been so far drawn to Christ as the Redeemer. Coming to Christ for forgiveness of sins, even justification, through faith in his blood, we thus came to the Father. It was then that the Heavenly Father addressed us, through his Word, saying, "My son, give me thine heart" – thy affections – thy love. And those who gave their love, their affections, to the Lord, gave their all; for our affections control us, whether for good or for evil. When we accepted the Lord's invitation, and gave him our hearts, our all, a living sacrifice, to be his and to do henceforth his good pleasure, it was not because we first loved him, but because he first loved us, and gave his Son to be a propitiation (satisfaction) for our sins. Now, therefore, having been accepted of the Father as new

creatures in Christ, having been adopted into his family, by receiving the spirit of adoption and sonship, he speaks to us as to sons, in the language of Solomon, – that we take heed to his Word; and he promises us that by so doing the years of our life shall be many – very many, everlasting.

All who have been "taught of God" can bear testimony to the applicability of the 11th verse to themselves and to all the sons of God: "I have taught thee in the way of wisdom; I have led thee in right paths." And all such, relying upon the exceeding great and precious promises of the Scriptures, can look forward in confidence to the 12th verse as a prophecy respecting the divine care over all those who have put themselves thus under divine protection and instruction as sons of God, and who will to abide in his love. They are assured that their steps in the spiritual way, in the narrow path, shall be guided of the Lord, and that in their race for the great prize of their high calling they shall not stumble, so long as they are followers in that path in which the Lord's providence guides them: yea, all things shall work together for good to those who love God, supremely.

And the older and more experienced the son may be, – the spiritual son of the Heavenly Father, or the [R2389 : page 339] natural son of the earthly father, – the more he should appreciate the testimony, "Take fast hold of instruction; let her not go; keep to her; for she is thy life." It is along these same lines that the Apostle urges the Church, saying: "We ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, *lest...we should let them slip.*" (Heb. 2:1.) It evidently is not enough that we should hear the Lord's Word; nor yet that we should receive it into good and honest hearts. It is necessary that we take *fast hold* of it; that we act upon it; that we incorporate it as a very part of our being: thus the spirit of the truth becomes the spirit of all the children of God; – the holy spirit in them is in harmony, in full accord, with the Heavenly Father's mind, disposition, will.

What better advice could be given to either natural or spiritual sons than is presented in the 14th verse? We are to remember that, no matter how far along we may have gone in the "narrow way," there are always branching paths leading from it – paths of self-will, of pride, of worldly ambition, of selfishness, which lure us to leave the direct path, and which sometimes we may be in danger of entering, unintentionally, unwittingly. These paths at first emerge so gradually from the "narrow way" as to seem very little different from it, but gradually they diverge more and more from it, so that any of the Lord's people, filled with the spirit of righteousness, truth, love, may soon discern the change, the different spirit and tendency.

All pilgrims seeking the heavenly city, the Kingdom, are exhorted by the Word of God to be very watchful against all the wiles of the Adversary, especially his disposition to switch us from the "narrow way." It is well that we should be on guard, to note the spirit of all with which we have to do, and to refuse to go forward in any direction in which the spirit of holiness, meekness, purity, love, does not lead. Thus, if we have gotten into the wrong way, and our hearts be still loyal to the principle of love, we need not go far upon the wrong course without finding out and retracing our steps: but it is still better, as expressed in our lesson, that we *enter not* the path of the wicked.

Once entered, we may be able to retrace our steps with more or less difficulty, but the safe program is never to enter these by-paths. One of the Adversary's seductions, by which many are led astray into by-paths [R2389 : page 340] of wickedness, contrary to their consecration vows, is through the human quality known as *curiosity*. They reason, – "I know it is untrue and has a wrong spirit, but I want to see and know: the knowledge of evil will but do *me* good." But we remember that it was mother Eve's *curiosity* and her *fearlessness* to disobey the Lord's command, that got her into difficulty as the first transgressor; and this reminds us of the Apostle's words, "I fear lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty, so

your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity which is in Christ." (2 Cor. 11:3.) The wise man seeks to impress the lesson of the necessity of not tampering with evil, not touching it, not tasting of it, not putting himself within the reach of its influence, saying, – "Avoid it, pass not near it, turn in another direction away."

The spirit of liberty is a part of the spirit of the Lord, the spirit of the truth, and no Christian can too highly appreciate this liberty, nor too faithfully maintain his hold upon "the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free," nor too carefully avoid any "yoke of bondage." But this is made one of the Adversary's strong points of attack – *liberty*. He even used this argument upon our dear Redeemer – Use your liberty – Command that the stones be made bread, etc. The only safe or proper course for God's children is to walk carefully in the footprints of our Redeemer and Forerunner, Christ Jesus, and to avoid every appearance of evil – avoid the use and exercise of liberty where there would be the slightest danger of being led into temptation and into sin. And be it noted that our Adversary never tempted us along the lines of *liberty* until our Lord set us *free*. The slavery from which we were set free by our Redeemer was the bondage of Sin, and being thus made free, we in consecration presented our bodies living sacrifices to the Father, in order that we might receive the adoption of sons in his *spiritual family*. This meant that we voluntarily gave up all human rights, liberties and preferences, accepting instead the divine will represented in the divine law, summed up in the one word, Love.

Since we have taken this step, we are no longer at liberty to do anything contrary to this law of the New Covenant, Love, even as God himself has no liberty to do contrary to it. We are therefore to scrutinize carefully all the matters, incidents and affairs of life as they come before us, lest the Adversary should beguile us from this "narrow way" of self-denial, self-sacrifice: lest he should seduce us into doing something that would be contrary to our Father's Word, and in violation of his spirit of love. Hence, if any pathway has the

slightest appearance of evil, or the slightest antagonism to the spirit of our law of Love, we (as obedient sons of God) should "avoid it, pass not through it, turn from it away."

Next we have a description (vss. 16,17) of those who, having become the servants of Sin, have pleasure in unrighteousness. We all know of some wicked characters (men and women) who make it their business in life to entrap others, financially, morally or socially: persons to whom it seems the chief end of life to do evil, and to seduce others into evil doing; and often, as in verse 17, their *business* in life takes on this form of entrapping the unwary. In this sense it is their food and drink to do evil: they make their living in that way.

And we regret to say that we have knowledge also of a similar class of Satan's more or less deluded servants, who seem to make it their business in life. They accept good salaries for misrepresenting, yea, blaspheming, the Heavenly Father's character and plan: it is their *business* – to entrap the ignorant and to bind them with superstitions. Still others delight in mischief, in sowing discord, in slanders, malice, hatred, envy, strife, to stumble and entrap, mislead, the spiritual sons of God. They are not content to have these evil principles at work in their own hearts, but are active agents of the great Adversary in planting roots of bitterness, and misleading those who wish to walk in the right way. And if these last do not live literally by their evil work, it is at least *their spiritual life* – an evil spirit – their light become darkness. In any case the Lord's children and the world's children are to pass by all such, recognizing the unrighteousness of their course, and have neither fellowship nor sympathy with their evil work, nor countenance it in any respect.

The next two verses show us the two paths, and give us their general characteristics, and especially their terminations. Since there are none who are absolutely just, "None righteous, no, not one," we must understand the reference to "*the just*" here to signify the *justified* children of God – reckonedly justified by faith. And from

this standpoint this entire lesson may properly be regarded as a prophecy or teaching to the justified class of this Gospel age. It is true of every one of the Lord's children – justified sons – that his path through life should be one of increasing light and blessing: one of personal progress and of blessing to others, through the light of the knowledge of the truth.

However, the application, we believe, is specially for the entire Church as a whole – Head and Body: – Christ the Just One, we his justified members. Our Lord was the great Light, which came into the world; his consecrated followers are his representatives in the world, who seek to let their light shine before men, and to glorify their Father in heaven. The pathway of this Church, Head and Body, has lain through a wilderness state, and a night of darkness, "gross darkness covering the people" of the world in general. Divine favor **[R2389 : page 341]** has been manifested toward this consecrated holy Body, in that the light of the divine Word has shone upon the pathway step by step. Of this light Solomon's father wrote, prophetically representing the Body of Christ, saying, "Thy word is a lamp to my feet, a lantern to my footsteps." The Head of the Body was thus enlightened by the Word of God, and guided in doing the divine will – even unto death; and so each member of the Body has been similarly guided by the same lamp of truth.

We have the assurance that no part of the true Church's pathway has ever been left in darkness, nor will it be – even to the end of the age. As the Apostle said, "Ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief." The text under consideration seems to harmonize with this declaration, that the path of the Just would shine *more and more clearly* (lighted by the lamp, God's Word) even unto the perfect day. Since we have not yet reached the perfect day, we cannot know how much more *brightly* our lamp may shine in the future; but we do know that it is now shining more brilliantly than ever before for all those who are walking in the "narrow way." In its light we can see, as never before, the glories of



the divine character, illustrated in the divine plan of salvation for mankind. We can see also our own position as sons of God, justified through the precious blood and called to be heirs of God and joint-heirs with Jesus Christ our Lord, with a clearness and distinctness that before was unknown. And yet all this light, this increasing light, as we near the perfect day, is coming from our Lamp which God provided, – the Bible.

But while the Bible lights the pathway of the true Body of Christ, the consecrated "little flock," it sheds no particular brilliancy upon the world's pathway: that is to say, no light that the world can specially profit by. What light may be reflected to the world's pathway is perhaps fully counteracted by shadows which rather confuse and perplex them. And this also is set forth [R2390 : page 341] in our lesson: "The way of the wicked is as darkness; they *know not* at what they stumble."

In the light of our path the Body of Christ now sees that we are in the "Day of Vengeance," that a testing is taking place with those who have named the name of Christ, – to test, to prove, to separate the true from the untrue; and again, to separate amongst the true, the consistent "wise virgins," who faithfully follow the Lord in self-sacrifice, from the "foolish virgins" who attempt to please both the Lord and the world, and make a failure of both. Our lamp shows us that as soon as this testing in the nominal Church is completed a great time of trouble will break out: "a time of trouble such as was not since there was a nation." Our lamp shows us the great *stumblingstone* in the path of the world's progress in its present course. It shows us that the Christian world is about to stumble over that Stumblingstone and Rock of Offence over which the typical Israel stumbled eighteen centuries ago, – that the Christian world is to stumble over the second presence of Christ, as the Jewish nation stumbled over his first advent; and that the stumbling here will mean the wreck of Christendom, as the stumbling there meant the wreck of Judaism.

The light upon the path of the Just – the path of the Christ – shows that the present social order of Christendom is to stumble and be wrecked in a time of anarchy, because the time has come for the establishment of God's Kingdom, and because the world is not in the condition of heart to be ready to receive it, and hence are kept in darkness respecting it: "They know not *at what* they stumble," altho they realize that we are living in peculiar times, and that there is great danger of stumbling over *something* in the darkness with which they realize they are surrounded.

In harmony with this is the statement in our Lord's Word, respecting the testing of this day of the Lord: "It shall come as a thief and as a snare upon all *them* that dwell upon the earth [the world in general, especially the Christian world who, having made a covenant with the Lord, are living contrary thereto, and therefore are styled "wicked" – as was that servant who hid his Lord's money in the earth, and returned it to him unused]." (Luke 21:35.) "But *ye, brethren*, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief." Of these same classes the Prophet declares, "None of the wicked shall understand; but the wise shall understand." – 1 Thes. 5:2-4; Dan. 12:10.

Let us, dear brethren, as sons of God, heed our Father's Word most carefully, that we take not the wrong paths, but that we follow strictly and carefully and watchfully the "narrow way" of consecration, self-denial, humility, love, in which shines the light of the Lamp of Truth, and which alone leads to the Kingdom.

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