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### Ethical Content of Proverbs

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ETHICAL CONTENT  
OF PROVERBS

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A Thesis Presented to  
The Faculty of Concordia Seminary  
Department of Old Testament Theology

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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Bachelor of Divinity

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by  
George A. Thomas  
December 1944

Approved by:

Theo. Luetrich  
George P. Schick



# ETHICAL CONCEPTS OF PROVERBS

(Outline)

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## ETHICAL CONTENTS OF PROVERBS

### (Outline)

**Controlling Purpose:** By defining the various ethical concepts as propounded by modern textbooks on Ethics, it will be the purpose of this thesis to set forth in a clearer light, by illustration and example, the ethical content of Proverbs, in order to show what the heavenly wisdom, God's Word, accomplishes in the believers.

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"In the Book of Proverbs wisdom was not only the combined knowledge of Greek and Roman learning. That's a dogmatic assertion, but yet how profoundly true. Proverbs does contain the very essence of wisdom, not mere secular knowledge either, but divine, spiritual wisdom. It was for the particular purpose of imparting wisdom that God moved King Solomon by divine inspiration, to set down for our spiritual benefit, some of the wisdom which he had been endowed. Solomon, the wisest man that ever lived or ever shall live, wrote Proverbs 'to make wise the simple,' that is, to give the inexperienced, immature believers, thorough instruction and training in the principles of Christian life; 'to enable them to know wisdom and instruction; to perceive the words of understanding; to receive the instruction of wisdom, justice, and judgment, and equity; to give subtilty to the simple, to the young man knowledge and discretion,' Prov. 1:1-4.

The Book of Proverbs is the best manual on good works



## **ETHICAL CONTENT OF PROVERBS**

### **Introduction**

"In the Book of Proverbs resides more wisdom than in the combined monuments of Greek and Roman learning." That's a dogmatic assertion, and yet how profoundly true. Proverbs does contain the very acme of wisdom, not mere secular knowledge either, but divine, spiritual wisdom. It was for the particular purpose of imparting wisdom that God moved wise King Solomon by divine inspiration, to set down for our spiritual benefit, some of the wisdom with which he had been endowed. Solomon, the wisest man that has ever lived or ever shall live, wrote Proverbs "to make wise the simple," that is, to give the inexperienced, immature believers, thorough instruction and training in the principles of Christian life; "to enable them to know wisdom and instruction; to perceive the words of understanding; to receive the instruction of wisdom, justice, and judgment, and equity; to give subtilty to the simple, to the young man knowledge and discretion," Prov. 1:1-4.

**The Book of Proverbs is the best manual on good works**



and holy conduct. Even the unbeliever, by endeavoring to follow the precepts of Proverbs, can attain to a high degree of civil righteousness and thus become a better member of human society. In fact, this book has become a favorite of many moralists, social reformers, and exponents of character education. However, such usage of Proverbs does not make a person a better believer or prove that he is one.

A person may learn good virtues from Proverbs, but unless he is a believer whose conduct is motivated by faith, his good works will not please God; "without Me ye can do nothing," says Jesus, John 15:5. Dr. Luther emphasized this fundamental fact when he pointed out that faith, which is the highest of all works, must be the basis for every other work, for faith alone makes all other works acceptable and pleasing in God's sight. Christ must first give us a new and sanctified heart and the strength to do his will; it is only by fearing the Lord that one can resist temptation and keep from falling into sin. Prov. 8:13; 16:6.

Here we have the one big theme of Proverbs -- "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge," 1:7. The two leading ideas are wisdom and folly. The whole book treats "the blessedness of the truly wise and the misery of the foolish." The wise man is he who lives a holy and upright life according to the Word of God. On the other hand, the fool is he who despises the divine commandments and does as he pleases. Hence Luther summed up the book in the two words obedience and disobedience.



In this connection it is significant to note that Luther begins his explanation of each of the Ten Commandments with the words. "We should fear and love God." Why is it that some of the worst criminals are people who have had a good education? Well, when men do not have the fear of God in their hearts, no amount of secular knowledge will prevent them from falling into sin and living in wickedness, -- "by the fear of the Lord men depart from evil," 16:6.

Wellington said: "Educate men without religion, and you make them but clever devils." And Theodore Roosevelt: "People educated in intellect but not educated in morals and religion will become a menace to the nation." These men realized from personal experience that Prov. 1:7 expresses a fundamental truth. The Word of God puts the fear of God the Lord in our hearts and fills them with true wisdom, the wisdom which leads to eternal life.

Yes, "Search the Scriptures for in them ye think ye have eternal life; and they are they which testify of me," John 5:39. Indeed, the very heart of the Book of Proverbs is Jesus Christ, "who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption, " 1 Cor. 1:30. He is the source of all true wisdom; it is the gift of God; and the more we try to get of it, the more He will give us, 2:6,7; 1 Kings 3:10-12; James 1:5-6. Consequently, whoever makes the word his guide is kept safely on the path of righteousness, 2:8,9.



A person gives evidence of being wise by avoiding the ways of the ungodly, 1:10, cp. Ps. 1. Solomon calls people who live in the service of sin "fools." The Book of Proverbs gives a complete description of the fool and places him in glaring contrast to the wise man. We shall find our own picture in either the one or the other. The Bible teaches that it is the greatest folly to yield to sin; and countless is the number of young men and women who have learned from bitter experience that "the way of the ungodly shall perish," Prov. 11:19; 12:7; 13:15; 20:17; 22:8; Ps. 1:6. Even the man who wrote Proverbs failed to keep on following the wisdom he had once uttered, and fell from faith. However, this fact does not invalidate his inspired words -- "Scripture cannot be broken," John 10:35. The greatest saints (e.g. David, Peter), when they became careless and indifferent, fell into sin. Solomon's fall is a warning to us not to forget or ignore the precepts of his book. "The wise in heart will receive commandments: but a prating fool shall fall." 10:8; 13:1; 14:6; 23:9.

Proverbs covers practically every phase of Christian life just as do the Ten Commandments, which the book virtually expounds and illustrates. It is not only a book for young people but for adults as well. It has much to say to parents, to persons in responsible government positions, and to people in various stations of life. It presents the divine solution of many of our social, political, and economic problems. Proverbs has rightly been called the most practical textbook on ethics.



Therefore, by defining the various ethical concepts as propounded by modern textbooks on Ethics, it will be the purpose of this thesis to set forth in a clearer light, by illustration and example, the ethical content of Proverbs, in order to show what the heavenly wisdom, God's word, accomplishes in the believers, how it fortifies against the enemies of the soul, how it enlightens the understanding, and enables them to avoid the enemies' pits; Moreover, if believers make this book their rule of life and follow its directions, they will know how to put their religion to practice or live their lives to the glory of God. This book shows them just what they need to know to obtain true happiness and success. It shows them how to guard their heart, use their tongue, treat their fellowmen, employ their time and talents, and serve God in a manner well-pleasing to Him. Proverbs contains the instruction, counsel and guidance that believers need for their moral and spiritual development and improvement.

Therefore, as we work through the Bible's own textbook on ethics, Proverbs, may our prayer be:

We pray thee, dear heavenly Father,  
to implant Thy Word, and cause it to  
bring forth in us the wholesome fruits  
of a godly life, making us thoroughly  
furnished unto all good works.



## ETHICAL CONTENT OF PROVERBS

### I. Basis of Ethics as Found in Proverbs

#### A. The Theological Postulate

##### 1. The Nature of God

It is the believer's firm conviction that at the heart of things is a God who is good and whose nature is love. But when we see all the evil of the world staring us in the face, we ask ourselves whether God at the heart of things can really be a God of love. But the very problem of evil presupposes the existence of a good God. It is only when we try to reconcile the existence of a good God with the fact of evil that any problem arises. The problem is overcome for the believer in the doctrine of the atonement. Because of His love, the Son of God Himself suffers because of the evil which sin brought into the world. Of sinful, guilty human beings, the Son of God, Eternal Wisdom says: "My delights were with the children of men," 8:31; He was imbued with an eternal love toward the children of men.

A believer has every reason to rely on a God who controls everything and who hates evil and furthers the good. Thank God, there are good forces in human life battling against the evil forces, and the advantage lies on the side of the good,



because He whose "eyes are in every place, beholding the evil and the good," 15:3, will "Preserve knowledge," 22:12, for "there is no wisdom nor understanding nor counsel against the Lord !" 21:30.

## 2. Jesus, the Revelation of God

The rule that Christ is to be found in every book of the Bible applies also to Proverbs. Chapters 8 and 9, without a doubt, point directly to Christ as the Personal Wisdom who speaks to us in this book. The holy writers wrote by inspiration of "the Spirit of Christ" who speaks to us from the sacred pages of both the Old and New Testaments. Through Christ God has revealed Himself to man. Wherever the Word of God is preached, there Jesus is speaking and pleading with men to accept the divine wisdom, which offers forgiveness of sins, sanctification, and eternal life to all who believe in Christ as their personal Savior.

"Unto you, O men, I call; and my voice is to the sons of man," 8:4; that is the voice of Jesus in the Word. God has this Word, both Law and Gospel, preached so that all may hear it. The Law warns the sinner not to give ear to those who scorn the Word and who show by their rejection of divine knowledge that they are fools, 1:20-28. The Law summons sinners to repent ("turn ye at My reproof") and offers them the Holy Spirit and the knowledge of salvation.

"Wisdom" was a required qualification for those who were to make the priestly garments for Aaron (Ex. 28:3, 35:25).

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Especially did the expression come to mean "moral principle." The wise man was the man who directed his life worthily and well. Wisdom had its roots in religion, and so to be wise meant to estimate the value of life from God's standpoint. It involved spiritual insight and a true discrimination of values. For the wise man God was at the center of life and governed thought, word, deed (1:7). <sup>1</sup>

Throughout the Old Testament, Wisdom is a concept used to designate the Messiah, like the "Angel of the Lord," who often appears as God speaking to man. In the New Testament Christ is expressly called the Wisdom of God. Cp. I Cor. 1:24,30; Col. 2:3. We think of Wisdom in Chapter 8 as the Personal Wisdom, the personal Word of God or as Christ, for Christ is the Word, as John shows, John 1:1-3; 1 John 1:1. What great comfort and joy it is for us to know that Jesus is our Teacher also when we study Proverbs !

The Bible is the Word of Christ, and its contents are "excellent things;" the Gospel brings to us the blessings of eternal salvation, and the Law, the rules which teach the believers how they may serve and please God in a life of happy communion with Him. Every time we hear this Word, we see Jesus opening His lips and telling us things that are wholesome for our souls, that are truth. The whole book of Proverbs shows what the heavenly wisdom, God's Word, accomplishes

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1. A. D. Mattson, Christian Ethics, p. 66.



in the believer. Therefore, to learn God's Word, should not only be our most delightful occupation, but it should also work wonders in our hearts and minds, 6:20-23; 13:14.

In 8:12-21 the whole government of the universe is ascribed to Wisdom (Christ), who controls and governs all things. Nothing escapes His all-seeing eyes. Being the Wisdom and Power of God (v. 14), He knows how to deal with all creatures and how to handle all situations, and has the almighty power to enforce His will. Besides controlling the destiny of the nations, He devotes particular care to the believers, His Church, reveals Himself to them, and assures them of His love, V. 17. To those that love Him He gives the imperishable spiritual treasure: faith, which makes them righteous before God, the power to live God-pleasing lives, and the bliss of heaven as their eternal inheritance.

## B. The Anthropological Postulate

### 1. Sin

Everywhere in Proverbs clear moral distinctions are drawn; there is no blurring of them, as is the case in the ethnic religions and in most of the schemes of human speculation. In Proverbs, righteousness is everywhere commanded and commended; sin is always condemned. Inner purity, not merely outward, ceremonial and conventional morality, is always inculcated. Let us be more specific. After God had finished His creation, including man, He pronounced everything "very



good." (Gen. 1:31) This refers to moral as well as physical good, for it embraces man, who was made a moral agent. Thus the Bible represents the universe as a moral economy from the very beginning. <sup>2</sup>

In the Garden of Eden was placed the "tree of the knowledge of good and evil." Here again is a clear conception of moral distinctions. Abel's offering was accepted because he ~~was~~ righteous; Cain's was rejected because "sin croucheth at the door." (Gen. 4:7). The wicked antediluvians were destroyed in the flood because "the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually, (Gen. 6:5). Noah was saved because God found him righteous, (Gen. 7:1).

It was always on account of their wickedness that nations and peoples were punished and destroyed; no nation was ever dealt with severely when it walked in the ways of righteousness. Notice how Proverbs warns those who blur or obliterate moral distinctions: "Whoso rewardeth evil for good, evil shall not depart from his house." 17:13.

The high moral standard of the Bible is evident throughout. The lofty practical morality of the Ten Commandments have never been excelled. How fundamentally ethical the teaching of Proverbs is, is illustrated by many passages showing that God is inherently righteous. "All the words of My mouth are

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2. Leander S. Keyser, A System of Christian Evidence, pp. 80-81.



in righteousness: there is nothing froward or perverse in them," 8:8. "I lead in the way of righteousness," 8:20. "Riches and honor are with me: yea, durable riches and righteousness," 8:18.

Upright people are always commended by Proverbs and blessed: "The memory of the just is blessed, but the name of the wicked shall rot," 10:7. "He that followeth after righteousness and mercy findeth life, righteousness, and honor," 21:21. The Bible continually exhorts the upright to see that righteousness is practiced: "Open thy mouth for the dumb in the cause of all such as are appointed to destruction. Open thy mouth, judge righteously and plead the cause of the poor and needy," 31:8-9. "To do justice and judgment is more acceptable to the Lord than sacrifice," 21:3. Who can find fault with such ethics?

Furthermore, Proverbs requires inward purity: "Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life," 4:23. "Keep them (Biblical precepts) in the midst of thine heart," 4:21. "Let not thine heart decline to her (harlot's) ways," 7:25.

We know the sad story of man's first disobedience and the fruit of that forbidden tree, whose taste brought sin into the world and all its woe. And sin is one of the chief themes of the Book of Proverbs. Its main purpose is to offer to its readers weapons for combating and overcoming sin by describing sin in its true character, its wickedness and ugliness, its



insidious power of seduction, its alluring temptations, its dreadful consequences. And since the knowledge of sin will not give man this victory over sin nor free him from its guilt and power, the Book of Proverbs points to that true Wisdom, who tells us: "Whoso findeth Me findeth life and shall obtain favor of the Lord," 8:35.<sup>3</sup>

The popular view that sin is nothing but weakness, due to the fact that man is a finite being and, therefore, defective and limited in his capacities (Leibniz 1716), is definitely wrong, for it denies the right to punish sin, even making divine indignation and condemnation of sin reprehensible; sin and sinners are to be pitied rather than condemned and eventually materialism triumphs with its slogan, "To understand all is to forgive all."<sup>4</sup>

That sin is a necessary element in the development of man, a transitional stage through which he must pass in order to advance from unconscious to conscious moral freedom is equally wrong. (Schiller) - Adam's sin was "reason's first venture, the first beginning of his moral existence."

(Goethe -- especially in his Faust). But if sin were really a necessary stage in the development of man toward conscious moral freedom, we should again be compelled to hold God responsible for it.

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3. Theodore Laetsch, "Divine Wisdom from the Book of Proverbs," Proceedings of 20th Convention of S. Wisconsin, p. 31.

4. Johann M. Reu and Paul H. Buehring, Christian Ethics, p. 89.



The contention that sin is essentially nothing but ignorance and that if you do away with ignorance you will automatically do away with sin, (thus Socrates and Plato held that "we fail because we err; improvement of understanding means improvement of morals.") ~~this~~ does not take into account at all what remains an unquestioned fact to the enlightened Christian consciousness, namely, that sin is guilt, that it separates between God and man, and that it provokes God's wrath, 1:24-32.

Yes, sin --  $\aleph \cup \pi$  -- means: 1) 'to miss,' 'not to hit the mark;' also of the feet, 'to miss, to make a false step,' to stumble and fall, Prov. 19,2: "And he that hasteth with his feet sinneth;" so too as opp.  $\aleph \cup \pi$  to light upon, to find. Prov. 8,36:  $\aleph \cup \pi$   $\cup \pi$   $\aleph \cup \pi$  'whosoever misseth me (doth not find me) harmeth his own life.' Its third meaning according to Gesenius is: 'to sin away anything, i.e. 'to forfeit' by sinning, 'to incur' as penalty. Prov. 20,2:  $\aleph \cup \pi$   $\aleph \cup \pi$  'he forfeiteth his life,' i.e. exposes it to danger. <sup>5</sup> Ethically, sin refers to missing the true purpose of life, which is to serve God. Consequently, it follows that sin is a perversion of the highest religious and moral task of man.

Proverbs testifies that not alone the word or deed, but even the intention behind it, the very inclination that works

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5. William Gesenius, Hebrew and English Lexicon, p. 307.



itself out in the external act, is sin: "The thought of foolishness is sin," 24:9. Three things which according to Reu-Buehring, always precede the actual external transgression,<sup>6</sup> are named also in Proverbs: --

A) An inner estrangement from God and an incipient lack of faith in God as the highest good and in his assurances that He always means well with us ("Every way of a man is right in his own eyes," 21:2). "Most men will proclaim everyone his own goodness: but a faithful man, who can find?" 20:6. "Be not wise in thine own heart; fear the Lord and depart from evil," 3:7. "My son, despise not the chastening of the Lord; neither be weary of his correction," 3:11.

B) A false assertion of the personal ego proudly substituting self in the place of God as the goal of one's ambitions ("He that trusteth in his own heart is a fool," 28:26, and

C) A forfeiture of self to the world which takes the place of God in the heart, with the inevitable result that one finally stands disillusioned and empty-handed, inasmuch as the soul can find no lasting satisfaction anywhere outside of God. Thus man, unable successfully to make himself the center of his life, must finally lose himself to the world -- "The man that wandereth out of the way of understanding shall remain in the congregation of the dead," 21:16; 23:31-32. This is what the Scripture means when it speaks of the deceitfulness of sin:

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6. Reu-Buehring, op. cit., p. 94.



bliss and contentment are promised, vacuity, loathing, and misfortune are received. "Stolen waters are sweet and bread eaten in secret is pleasant, but he knoweth not that the dead are there and that her guests are in the depths of hell," 9:17-18; 7:22-23; result of debauchery: -- "Bitter as worm-wood, sharp as a two-edged sword," 5:4. The deceitfulness of sin is clearly emphasized in 14:12-13: "There is a way which seemeth right unto man, but the end thereof are ways of death. Even in laughter the heart is sorrowful; and the end of that mirth is heaviness."

#### a. Development of Sin

Adam's abuse of his free will caused an evil condition, which transmitted through original sin, is now found alike in all natural men. This evil condition manifests itself in these two ways: a total inability toward all that is good and a constant propensity toward all that is evil -- "The way of man is froward and strange," 21:8; 27:20.

From this sinful condition, common to all men from birth, springs first of all the active lust. If this active lust is not resisted, it produces the sinful deed; Prov. 7:21 describes a kind of lust which a harlot induces: "With her fair speech she caused him to yield, with the flattery of her lips she forced him," 7:21.

Then when the active lust has thus gained room in the heart and has again and again brought forth the sinful act in thought, word, or deed, it becomes a sinful habit. King



Solomon says: "His own iniquities shall take the wicked himself, and he shall be holden with the cords of his sins,"

5:22. This sin, once committed, becomes immediately iniquity, guilt, debt; a debt that man cannot pay, that piles up higher and higher day by day, and strange to say, the higher this guilt is heaped up, the less is a man concerned about it. <sup>7</sup>

When a sinful habit has succeeded in breaking down all resistance of the will and the latter becomes a willing tool entirely, an instrument of unrighteousness, then we speak of vice. Once in the clutches of vice, man surrenders to his passion in the most shameless manner without giving any heed to the voice of God, of the world, of his own conscience, or even of common sense. Sin becomes vice because man either underestimates or overestimates its nefarious powers. When he underestimates it, he plays with it, imagines that he can rid himself of it at any time; then presently it has grown out of control and he struggles helplessly against its powers only to be mocked and derided by it. <sup>8</sup> "They would none of my counsel; they despised all my reproof. Therefore, shall they eat of the fruit of their own way and be filled with their own devices," 1:30-31. "Can a man take fire in his bosom and his clothes not be burned?" Can one go upon hot coals and his feet not be burned?" 6:27-28.

When he overestimates sin and sees in it an all too

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7. Laetsch, op. cit., p. 32.

8. Reu-Buehring, op. cit., p. 100.



powerful enemy, he suffers it in dull resignation to drive him on, he gives up the struggle against it without even an attempt to ward it off, in the mistaken notion that this would be a losing struggle anyway.<sup>9</sup> Truly, "Evil pursueth sinners," 13:21. "The backslider in heart shall be filled with his own ways," 14:14. In fact, he that gives up in his struggle against sin is characterized thus in 25:28 -- "He that hath no rule over his spirit is like a city that is broken down, and without walls."

Often the servant of sin knows that he will ruin his health, his reputation, his whole life, often he knows that he is heaping shame and sorrow on himself and on his family. He may even go so far as to make a sincere effort to free himself from the bondage of sin, to rid himself of some evil habit, and he may seem to have succeeded in stripping off some of the cords of sin, or rather, sin may have, for the time being loosened up her cords, until he actually believes that he is free, but sin still has him tied down. She will allow him to go just so far and in the very moment that he imagines to have escaped from the mire of sin and shame, suddenly, violently, she will jerk him back into that selfsame pool of sin, into that selfsame mire of iniquity, from which he had imagined to have made his escape.<sup>10</sup> "As a dog returneth to his vomit, so a fool returneth to his folly," 26:11. "For a just man falleth seven times, and riseth up again, but the wicked shall

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9. Ibid.

10. Laetsch, op.cit., pp. 32-33.



fall into mischief," 24 :16. Why? Because God is not in their heart, because they fear not God; therefore, they have not the power of God to successfully resist sin.

Finally, viciousness is the ultimate degree in the development of sin. Man has given up all moral resistance in one or another respect, when sin has become a vice. Now, when sin reaches the stage of viciousness he abandons all moral resistance altogether; sin is now the element in which he lives and moves and has his being. He desires that which is evil and hardens his face against that which is good. "The soul of the wicked desireth evil," 21:10. "The wicked man hardeneth his face," 21:29, and everything he does "is right in his own eyes," 12:15; "he rageth and is confident," 14:16, and even goes so far as to "mock at sin," 14:9.

#### b. Degrees of Guilt

The actual transgression of one commandment involves potential transgression of all the commandments. The Holy Scriptures make a distinction in various degrees of guilt. The degree of guilt is dependent upon the nature and the character of the sin committed. The man who steals a penny is not as guilty as the man who murders his mother.<sup>11</sup> Similarly, Proverbs draws this distinction: a man who steals because of hunger has not the same degree of guilt as the man who commits adultery. "Men do not despise a thief, if he steal to satisfy

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11. Mattson, op. cit., p. 146.



his soul when he is hungry; but if he be found, he shall restore sevenfold; he shall give all the substance of his house. But whoso committeth adultery with a woman lacketh understanding; he that doeth it destroyeth his own soul," 6:30-32.

These distinctions are quite in order and of importance for moral training and for self-examination; we must, however, be on our guard lest by emphasizing such distinctions we lose sight of the more important truth that all sin, even the least, is truly sin and merits condemnation, for each sin is not only an insult to the majesty of the Law but an insult to God himself, the lawgiver. In other words, man must never ask: "How far may I depart with impunity from the straight and narrow way," because every sin is a deviation from the straight line, even the "smallest" sin <sup>12</sup> -- Prov. 24,9: "The thought of foolishness is sin."

### c. Consequences of Sin

From the moral point of view sin issues in guilt. Guilt and penalty are related terms. The sinner has broken a law and is, therefore, subject to punishment. Remorse and regret are some of the subjective manifestations of guilt.<sup>13</sup>

In his treatise on Proverbs, Dr. Laetsch, gives a graphic description of the immediate and unavoidable consequences of sin-guilt — how it hounds the sinner. Solomon says: "His

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12. Reu-Buehring, op. cit., p. 104.

13. Mattson, op. cit., p. 147.



own iniquities shall take the wicked himself." Sin is here described as a constable or detective hunting down his victim. You have heard of a criminal trying to escape justice, changing his apparel, attempting to cover up his footsteps, fleeing from city to city, crossing the ocean, even while, following from city to city, from country to country, coming closer and closer, is his relentless pursuer, and just as the criminal feels himself safe at last, just as he fancies having successfully eluded his persecutor, he feels a heavy hand upon his shoulders, he hears the words: You are my prisoner. So, man, the sinner, may try to cover up his sin, to escape its consequences, elude its punishment, but that is impossible. Sooner or later his sin will find him out. If not in time, then surely in eternity sin will take the sinner prisoner, lay her heavy hand upon him and shout it in his ear: Thou art the man ! and stare in his face, no longer a sweet mistress, no longer that innocent pet, that darling plaything, but stripped of her mask, black, horrible, hideous, guilt, guilt accusing him, guilt setting all his iniquities in order before his eyes, guilt threatening punishment, guilt oppressing, tormenting, torturing. And from this guilt there is no escape. The wicked shall be holden with the cords of his sins.<sup>14</sup>

It is quite evident, then, that the troubled conscience is the mirror-like reflection of this guilty condition which sin brings on. And the majesty of God demands that guilt

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14. Laetsch, op. cit., p. 33.



result in punishment. Being righteous and holy, God hates sin (the way of the wicked is an abomination unto the Lord, 15:9) and all ungodliness and must banish it from His presence. His fundamental requirement is : "Fear the Lord and depart from evil," 2:7. "Hell and destruction are before the Lord: how much more then the hearts of the children of men?" 15:11. Since the Lord, the omniscient Judge (15:3), "weigheth the spirits" (16:2), therefore every man in this world of sin is subject to the judgment of God -- "every man's judgment cometh from the Lord," 29:26.

The punishment for sin is death. "He that keepeth the commandments keepeth his own soul; but he that despiseth his ways shall die," 19:16. Bodily death is the external evidence of the severance of every vital connection with God, its evil beginning is spiritual death (21:16), its frightful consummation eternal death, 16:17 -- "He that keepeth His way, preserveth his soul;" by following God's will a person keeps his soul from spiritual and eternal death.

Man, on account of his sin, has not only come under the guilt of sin, but also under its dominion, under the tyranny of Satan. It is God who delivers the sinner up to the dominion of sin, who causes sin to enslave him as a punishment for transgression. The oftener the sinner decides in favor of a given sin, the more power will that particular sin exercise over him. Now this is not merely the natural development of sin, but at the same time also it is the punitive reaction of



God against the sinner. For example in 1:31, when men continually despise reproof, then "shall they eat of the fruit of their own way and be filled with their own devices."

Also 5:22.

Another inevitable consequence of sin is suffering and fear: "But ye have set at naught all my counsel and would none of my reproof, I also will laugh at your calamity: I will mock when your fear cometh, when your fear cometh as desolation and your destruction cometh as a whirlwind; when distress and anguish cometh upon you," 1:25-27. So very intimately connected with bodily death are all those bodily evils in a thousand shapes and forms which pave the way for actual death and are a part of the dying process.

The following passages illustrate very strongly what sin terminates in and what consequences the sinner can expect. "The curse of the Lord is in the house of the wicked, surely he scorneth the scorers -- shame shall be the promotion of fools," 3:33-35. "He shall die without instruction and in the greatness of his folly he shall go astray," 5:23. Loss of reputation, wealth, health, bitter regret and remorse, vacuity, years shortened, death are the lot of the unchaste and fornicators. "Lest thou give thine honour unto others and thy years unto the cruel, lest strangers be filled with thy wealth and thy labours be in the house of a stranger, and thou mourn at the last when thy flesh and thy body are consumed, and say, How have I hated instruction and my heart despised reproof,"



5:9-12. "For by means of a whorish woman a man is brought to a piece of bread," 6:26. "He that doeth it (adultery) destroyeth his own soul. A wound and dishonour shall he get and his reproach shall not be wiped away," 6:32-33.

"He goeth after her straightway, as an ox goeth to the slaughter, or as a fool to the correction of the stocks, till a dart strike through his liver; as a bird hasteth to the snare and knoweth not that it is for his life. Many strong men have been slain by her. Her house is the way to hell, going down to the chambers of death," 7:22,23,26,27. "None that go unto her return again, neither take they hold of the paths of life," 2:19.

"But the wicked shall be cut off from the earth, and the transgressors shall be rooted out of it," 2:22. "--but the years of the wicked shall be shortened," 10:27. "When a wicked man dieth, his expectation shall perish and the hope of unjust men perisheth," 11:7. Evil begets evil: "An evil man seeketh only rebellion: therefore, a cruel messenger shall be sent against him," 17:11. "Whose rewardeth evil for good, evil shall not depart from his house," 17:13. "He that soweth iniquity shall reap vanity: and the rod of his anger shall fail," 22:8. "Whoso diggeth a pit shall fall therein and he that rolleth a stone, it will return upon him," 26:27.

### C. Christological Basis as a Prerequisite

#### for the Creation of the New Life

From the agonized heart of the sinner there comes the



despairing cry: Oh, the guilt of my sin, my guilt, my guilt, my enormous guilt ! What shall I do to escape my guilt? Is there, then, no escape from sin and its terrible doom? Must the children of men, holden by the cords of sin, like a vast chain gang go on helplessly, hopelessly on their way to everlasting doom? Is there none to sever the cords, none to procure for them liberty from the bondage and slavery and terrible doom of sin? <sup>15</sup>

One comforting fact remains: corrupted as his nature is, man has not lost the capacity of being renewed to a moral life -- he still retains the capacity of being redeemed and sanctified. Since the Ten Commandments alone could never have produced a new life, God revealed himself anew in His Son, Jesus Christ, sent him into the world to make satisfaction for our sins on the cross, the blessed results of which were reconciliation with God and redemption from sin, death, and the devil.

#### 1. Creation of New Life

So Wisdom does know of a way to escape sin and its dread consequences. Wisdom, the Son of God, tells us: "But whoso hearkeneth unto me shall dwell safely and shall be quiet from fear of evil," 1:33. This Wisdom is that Redeemer whom God promised already in Paradise, when man had become a sinner and fallen victim to Satan and death, Gen. 3:15. It was then that Wisdom proved the truth of its words "My delight is with the

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15. Laetsch, op. cit., p. 33.



sons of men;" as "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life" so the Son of God, eternal Wisdom, was imbued with eternal love toward the children of men whom he had created; His delight was still with them even after Adam had sinned, and in Adam all had sinned. <sup>16</sup>

The new life (regeneration) is worked in the heart of sinful man by the Spirit operating through the Word and the Sacraments. Thus, man's past life of sin is completely washed away by the forgiveness of sin, and by the Holy Ghost, a new man, and new beginning is brought forth, endowed with new powers and faculties which he did not formerly possess.

Prov. 8:35 -- "For whoso findeth me findeth life, and shall obtain favour of the Lord." This promise of spiritual life runs through the whole Book of Proverbs and is offered to all who heed the voice of Divine Wisdom. Cp. 4:22; 9:11. Christ comes to us in the Gospel and we have found Him when we accept him as our personal Saviour in faith. The moment a person is brought to faith, Christ gives Himself and all his blessings of divine grace to him. In fact, it is the very greatest favor God can bestow upon us when He brings us to Christ. This new relation is characterized as blessed ("Blessed is the man, " 8:34) and happy ("Happy is the man," 3:13,18).

Sad to say, man can effectively resist the gracious work

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16. Laetsch, op. cit., pp. 34-35.



of the Spirit and thus frustrate the regeneration intended by God. Those who hate Christ by despising His Word, commit a grievous sin, a sin that brings misery and eternal death. In Prov. 1:24,25 wisdom is pictured as a lovely woman, standing on the principal public thoroughfares, eagerly beseeching one and all to hear her words of truth. But no one pays any attention to her kind invitation and counsel. Because the passers-by refuse to heed her counsel, but rather despise her reproof, therefore 'they shall eat of the fruit of their own way and be filled with their own devices,' i.e., they shall experience the evil consequences of their foolish actions and get their fill of their evil planning, even to the point where it sickens them (vv. 30-32). Did not God through Christ call all men to repentance, faith, and salvation? Wherever the Word of God is preached, there Jesus is speaking and pleading with men to accept the divine wisdom, which offers forgiveness of sins, sanctification, and eternal life to all who believe in Christ as their Saviour. "Unto you, O men, I call; and my voice is to the sons of man," 8:4. That is the voice of Jesus in the Gospel. In Christ alone we can become wise unto salvation. All men are spiritually blind and dead until they have been enlightened by the Holy Ghost through the Gospel, or have become believers in Christ.

## 2. Restoration in Detail

Yes, in order to awaken man who is dead in trespasses and sins to a new life, the Spirit comes to him in the Gospel;



the Gospel points him to Christ and His Saviour — love, and the Spirit working through that Gospel in a mysterious, creative way brings about a new understanding and new powers of the will, new inner emotions. <sup>17</sup>

The organ, which is able to receive Christ the Saviour in the Word, is faith. While the word faith does not occur in Proverbs in the sense of saving faith, yet there are other words used to express it -- thus in chap. 1:33 the word "hearken unto me;" in v. 32 Wisdom had stated that turning away from His words would result in destruction, while in contrast, those that hearken unto Him and accept His invitation in true faith, 'will dwell safely and be quiet from fear of evil.' In chap. 8:35.36 faith in Christ is described as finding Him, and in Him, finding life and the favor of the Lord, while they that hate Him love death. A fruit of this faith is deep contrition at having offended such a gracious God; without this contrition there can be no justifying faith and where this faith has been created in man's heart, there the new life exists. The mind of man is now renewed, repentance, that complete change of mind, has taken place; man has turned away from sin and turned to God, and therefore will receive mercy. "He that covereth his sins shall not prosper; but whose confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy." 28:13. (also, "Turn you at my reproof: behold, I will pour out my spirit unto you, I will make known my words unto you," 1:23.

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17. Reu-Buehring, op. cit., p. 131.



## II. Virtue of a Believer

### 1. Love to God

The primary virtue in a believer's life is love. The Bible tells us that "God is love," 1 John 4:8. Now if love is the highest conception we can have of God, then it is evident that we can think of no higher ideal for man. The character of the believer is formed in faith, but it lives in love. In fact, love includes all the other Christian virtues, which grow out of love to God and man. Just as an apple tree produces fruit by virtue of its nature, so the life of faith issues in love.

The love of a believer manifests itself in three ways: love to God, regard for our bodies as God's work and temple and love to our fellow men. First of all, let us see what Proverbs teaches about the believer's love toward God. When God tells his believing children that they should love Him, He means that He wants to occupy first place in their lives. Solomon teaches in Proverbs that the sum and substance of all wisdom is to "fear, love and trust in God above all things." Solomon considers it self-evident that the believer should love God and find his greatest delight in serving Him. When he says "Love her (Wisdom)" 4:6, he means that we should love God's Word, which is the same as loving God. Christ, the



Personal Wisdom Himself says: "I love them that love Me, and those that seek me early shall find me," 8:17. Of course, only the believer can love God above all things, for the fulfillment of this command can come only from a heart that has been given over wholly to God, 23:26.

The theme that keeps recurring in Proverbs is simply this: You are a wise man only if you fear the Lord. "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge: but fools despise wisdom and instruction," 1:7; 23:17; 24:21; 2:5; 10:27; 19:23. Our reverence of God should flow from hearts filled with love toward him. The believer realizes and recognizes his responsibility and obligation to God and this inspires him with a reverent fear. This fear is not the shrinking fear of the slave or coward, but it is the fear of being disloyal to God and of displeasing Him by committing sin. True fear of God enters our hearts only with faith and becomes the motive power of a godly life. By truly fearing God, we will carefully avoid sin: "Fear the Lord and depart from evil," 3:7. "The fear of the Lord is a fountain of life, to depart from the snares of death," 14:27. This holy fear of the Almighty God is to be the controlling factor of our whole lives.

We prove that we love God by keeping his Commandments. God takes delight in them that love Him and bestows upon them temporal and spiritual blessings. "That I may cause those that love me to inherit substance; and I will fill their



treasures," 8:21. On the other hand, however, He regards those who do not love him as hating Him, 8:36: "But he that sinneth against me wrongeth his own soul: all that hate me love death." Such give evidence of their hate by transgressing his commandments.

We should not only fear and love God, but also "trust in him above all things;" that's true wisdom. By nature, men are inclined to put their trust in money, earthly goods (18:11), men of power (23:1-3), and even in their own abilities (28:25-26). Again, men will worry, be unhappy, and despair when they discover that they have built their hopes on shifting sand and when they see no way of escape from evil, 23:4-8. How many persons have ended their lives in sorrow and misery because they failed to put all their love and trust in God! That full confidence in God and reliance upon his promises should characterize the humble believer. "The Lord shall be thy confidence," 3:26. Children of God have every reason to be happy in this life, because they are always safe in God's loving care, sure of His protection: "Whoso trusteth in the Lord, happy is he," 16:20. "Whoso putteth his trust in the Lord shall be safe," 29:25; 30:5; 18:10.

In this connection, Dr. Luther in discussing the First Commandment, makes some pertinent remarks in regard to this matter. He points out that the First Commandment both gives us the highest good work and sets forth the basis for all other good works. It teaches us that we must have confidence



in God and trust in Him above every other thing, regardless of the circumstances which may surround us. (Similarly Proverbs -- "he that putteth his trust in the Lord shall be made fat. He that trusteth in his own heart is a fool," 28:25-26. "Trust in the Lord with all thine heart, and lean not unto thine own understanding," 3:5; 16:20; 29:25; 30:5.

Without that faith we cannot be justified before God. Luther ably points out the Biblical position of good works in the life of a believer, showing that they do not justify but rather are an expression of the justifying factor, viz. faith. Works are worthwhile and praiseworthy only because of our faith, not on account of their own virtue.

The love of the believer to God constitutes a childlike relationship. Since the Lord stands in such a close personal relationship to every believer, He is very much concerned with the conduct and welfare of His children. Therefore, as wise children we should constantly remember that God sees everything we do and even reads the thoughts of our hearts. No sinful thought, desire, or act can escape His all-seeing eye. "The ways of man are before the eyes of the Lord, and He pondereth all his goings," 5:21; 15:3. "The Lord trieth the hearts," 17:3. If we would at all times be keenly conscious of God's hovering presence, that he reads our heart like an open book, surely the devil would not find it so easy to lead us into sin. And, furthermore, what great comfort and strength would be ours in days of affliction !



## 2. Regard for Our Bodies

Since man's body is the 'temple of the Holy Spirit' he should therefore preserve its health by cleanliness, by the use of proper food and drink, by proper exercise, by taking needed rest, by controlling and regulating the passions. Physical and ethical purity go together.

How many of us are not guilty of excessive eating and drinking? It is not only repellent to bring on indigestion by gluttony -- it is sinful. "Be not among winebibbers; among riotous eaters of flesh. For the drunkard and glutton shall come to poverty; and drowsiness shall clothe a man with rags," 23:20-21. Over-indulgence in food and drink is the cause of much mental sluggishness among students, of much sleepiness in church services, and of much general stupidity, 25:16.

Proper exercise is necessary to conserve health. No person can work or study well and think clearly whose digestion is sluggish, whose whole body is full of lethargy instead of energy or who is suffering from aches and pains. Those who do manual labor need no special advice here, for their employment gives them plenty of physical exercise. But to those who are slothful and lazy and love sleep more than physical exertion, these words of Solomon are very much in place: "Slothfulness casteth into a deep sleep; and an idle soul shall suffer hunger," 19:15. "Love not sleep, lest thou come to poverty," 20:13; 24:33-34. "As the door turneth



upon his hinges, so doth the slothful upon his bed. The slothful hideth his hand in his bosom; it grieveth him to bring it again to his mouth. The sluggard is wiser in his own conceit, than seven that can render a reason," 26:14-16.

Health is also promoted by taking needed rest. Some persons, students as well as others, need no special admonition to secure enough rest, for their chief aim in life seems to be to avoid real strenuous study and work. They dally, lounge and sleep so much that they become both physically and mentally stupid. There are few cemeteries in which you will find the epitaph, "He died from overwork." For loafers the whip of a strong incentive needs to be applied. For them Solomon's counsel would be pertinent: "Go to the ant, thou sluggard; consider her ways and be wise," Prov. 6:6.

The health of the body is further preserved by controlling its passions. In itself, no natural passion is wrong, but is intended for a good and useful purpose. (e.g., sexual love for procreation). It is the perversion and abuse of these passions and appetites that are grossly sinful and injurious. Speaking *from* bitter experience, Solomon could therefore warn: "Give not thy strength unto women," 31:3. "He that loveth pleasure shall be a poor man; he that loveth wine and oil shall not be rich," 21:17. Proverbs highly commends those who keep themselves under control. "He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city," 16:32.



A person should not only strive for a sound body, but also for a sound, well-developed mind. Why should a person seek an education and attempt to raise his cultural level? Those who seek education and culture merely to gratify their pride and ambition are certainly not actuated by worthy motives.

While many people, sad to say, do not appreciate knowledge for its own sake, there are many others who do. They delight in learning and in the exercise and discipline necessary to secure it. This in itself, other motives being pure, is a worthy motive. It is divinely implanted, and therefore it is right to gratify. All knowledge that the human mind acquires must first have been possessed by the divine mind, and thus the pursuit of true learning is simply trying to find out God's thoughts and purposes. To realize this truth vividly is to add an inspiring incentive to the search for knowledge, and no one need ever to fear that God is jealous of man's reverent and sincere pursuit of truth. A great ethical book gives this excellent counsel: "Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom; and with all thy getting, get understanding." (Prov. 4:7) <sup>1</sup> Here we are strongly urged to acquire wisdom, no matter what the cost may be -- even at the price of all our possessions, for wisdom is the highest and most desirable of all possessions. Getting wisdom, we get the prudence and discretion requisite for a virtuous life.

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1. Leander S. Keyser, A System of General Ethics, pp. 168-169.



### 3. Love to One's Neighbor

Some of the most troublesome matters that are confronting us today and which have been especially aggravated during this war-time period, and that are crying for solution, are the so-called "social problems." Just imagine how much less evil there would be in this world of hate if all people could get along with another. Does it not betray a deplorable lack of wisdom that men make life so miserable for themselves and others by being unkind and unsympathetic toward their fellow men? The social, political, and economic conditions are generally very bad, chiefly because people have very little or no regard at all for the welfare of their fellow humans. Selfishly they seek their own interests. The widespread disregard of the Second Table of the Law and of the Fifth Commandment in particular, has brought the curse of God down upon the whole human family. Certainly more happiness would come to people if they would live according to the wisdom which Proverbs teaches when it says: "He that is void of wisdom despiseth his neighbor; but a man of understanding holdeth his peace" (11:12), and would put into practice Jesus' golden rule of human relationships: "All things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them," Matth. 7:12.

Of frequent occurrence in Proverbs are the mention of the sins of hatred and anger. There is a divine purpose in that frequency, for even the believers are prone to fall prey to



these sins. If we harbor hatred and anger in our heart, that makes it impossible for us to be kind to our neighbor and to love him as we should. "He that is slow of wrath is of great understanding; but he that is hasty of spirit exalteth folly," 14:29. A wise person checks his feelings immediately. "When passion is on the throne, reason is out of doors" (Matthew Henry). Yes, an angry person loses control over himself and is very apt to say and do things which he may later regret. "A wrathful man stirreth up strife; but he that is slow to anger appeaseth strife," 15:18; 17:19. A person who cannot control his temper shows that he is a fool. We should remember that it takes two to start a fight. Consequently, the best method of dealing with an angry and quick-tempered person is to remain calm and keep perfect control over one's self. If you on your part treat an angry person with kindness and respect, you'll soon find his anger cooling off. A wise individual is careful to avoid starting quarrels. 17:14; 20:3.

King Solomon gives some wholesome advice on how to get along with people. He warns us against looking down on others and making them feel that we are better than they. "He that despiseth his neighbor sinneth," 14:21. Such an attitude reveals a cold and haughty spirit and naturally others will resent it. Furthermore, the person who wants to make friends won't always think that he is in the right, 17:17; 18:24. "He that is first in his own cause seemeth just; but his



neighbor cometh and searcheth him," 18:17; 25:9-10. People are only too quick in sizing us up. They will readily find out that we, too, have our faults. On the other hand, we will not make friends by taking advantage of people, or forcing ourselves upon them, or intruding into their private affairs. "Withdraw thy foot from thy neighbor's house, lest he be weary of thee," 25:17. The person who becomes a nuisance to his neighbor shows that he lacks common sense.

True love for our neighbor that flows from love to God will lead us to take the right course. "The desire of a man is his kindness," 19:22. The believer's whole heart is filled with eagerness to be kind and loving. "He that diligently seeketh good procureth favor; but he that seeketh mischief, it shall come unto him," 11:27. What a great blessing we would be to others and to ourselves if we would always "diligently seek good !" Even unbelievers have been impressed with the love that believers demonstrated. Said the heathen of the early Christians: "See, how they love one another." If love and kindness would continually flow from every heart, what a vastly different world this would be -- 16:7; 20:3; 16:28,29; 18:19; 22:24; 26:21; 30:33. According to Prov. 16,7: "When a man's ways please the Lord, He maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him." But a fool will foolishly start and promote quarrels: "It is an honor for a man to cease from strife, but every fool will be meddling," 20:3. It is the malicious person who sows enmity and



perpetrates his neighbor's hurt, and the backbiting, slandering individual who causes close friends to separate: "A froward man soweth strife: and a whisperer separateth chief friends." A violent man enticeth his neighbor, and leadeth him into the way that is not good," 16:28.29. 18,19: "A brother offended is harder to be won than a strong city," (for if he has been estranged by some deliberate offence, by a breach of faith, he will look upon every attempt at adjustment with suspicion); "and their contentions are like the bars of a castle" (quarrels between former friends are the most stubborn obstructions to a reconciliation).<sup>2</sup> A man who can not control himself should not be numbered among our associates: "Make no friendship with an angry man, and with a furious man thou shalt not go," 22:24. For "as coals are to burning coals and wood to fire, so is a contentious man to kindle strife," 26:21; 30:33.

Repeatedly Solomon admonishes us to help the poor and needy and also shows how the Lord God will reward the good we do to others. Prov. 3:27-29 is a warning to the selfish and miserly: "Withhold not good from them to whom it is due, when it is in thine hand to do it. Say not to thy neighbor, Go, and come again, and tomorrow I will give, when thou hast it by thee." According to the Fifth Commandment, it is our duty to "Help and befriend our neighbor in every bodily need." "The righteous considereth the cause of the poor; but the

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2. Paul E. Kretzmann, Popular Commentary of the Bible, Vol. II, p. 240.



wicked regardeth not to know it," 29:7. The wicked deliberately shuts his eyes and purse to the sufferings and needs of his fellow men. We should also protect the poor against unscrupulous men who exploit them, take their part, see that they get fair treatment and bring their troubles to the attention of others, if we cannot attend to them ourselves. "Open thy mouth for the dumb; plead the cause of the poor and needy," 31:8-9; 17:17; 18:24.

To encourage us to have pity and mercy on the poor, God has promised us rich rewards of grace. "He that hath pity upon the poor lendeth unto the Lord and that which he hath given will he pay him again," 19:17. "The liberal soul shall be made fat," 11:25; 11:17. "He that hath mercy on the poor, happy is he," 14:21. Caring for the poor not only brings us blessings from God, but we are also blessed by those whom we help. "He that oppresseth the poor reproacheth his Maker; but he that honoreth Him hath mercy on the poor," 14:31. "He that hath a bountiful eye shall be blessed; for he giveth of his bread to the poor," 22:9; 21:21. But men curse the greedy, unsympathetic miser; God will finally punish him. "Whoso stoppeth his ears at the cry of the poor, he also shall cry himself, but shall not be heard," 21:13. "He that giveth unto the poor shall not lack; but he that hideth his eyes shall have many a curse," 28:27. Truly, if men were wise and would only take God at His Word, they would give so much for charity that it would be difficult to find a needy individual.



Two important marks of a believer are giving and forgiving. A believer doesn't ask whether a person is worthy of his love and charity. He loves even those who have wronged him and are his enemies. "Love covereth all sins," 10:12. He that covereth a transgression seeketh love," 17:9; 19:11. That the child of God should not try to get even, when insulted and injured, but rather manifest a forgiving spirit, is shown by the following: "Say not thou, I will recompense evil; but wait on the Lord, and He shall save thee," 20:22; 24:29. Although the believer knows he is not to recompense evil for evil, still he is very apt to gloat over his enemy, if some misfortune should befall him, and point a derisive finger at him and say: "that served you right; you had it coming to you." But Solomon admonishes us in Prov. 24:17-18: "Rejoice not when thine enemy falleth, and let not thine heart be glad when he stumbleth." Rather we should adhere to this line of conduct: "If thine enemy hunger, give him bread to eat, and if he be thirsty, give him water to drink; for thou shalt heap coals of fire upon his head, and the Lord shall reward thee," 25:21-22. The believer should bear in mind that although he may have enemies, yet he should be an enemy to no one.

The most valuable service we can render our fellow men is not merely to supply his needs and to forgive him when necessary, but we do the greatest good to him by bringing him to Christ his Saviour. Our foremost duty as ardent believers toward our fellow humans is to preach the saving Gospel of



Jesus Christ to them, support the mission endeavours of the Church, and to lead men to Christ by word and example.

"The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life; and he that winneth souls is wise," 11:30. Every true believer is a missionary; he is like a good tree which brings forth good fruits. He is a source of blessing to others.

## B. The Believer's Relation to God

### 1. Humility

The believer's relation to God implies a number of virtues, all of which are manifestations of the one supreme virtue -- the love to God. Among these is the virtue of humility.

Humility is a sense of dependence or the absence of a spirit of self-sufficiency and pride. The experience of repentance in the believer's life implies a sense of humility. Humility is one of the virtues most difficult to obtain. The story is told of a man who tried diligently to attain to humility and said he found it the most difficult of the virtues because, when he thought he had attained the goal, he became proud of his humility. <sup>3</sup>

We grow humble as we meditate upon God's omnipotence, holiness, righteousness, greatness, and love, and recognize our smallness, sinfulness, and our lack of perfection. We develop humility in the measure that we realize that all we possess and all our gifts and talents are from God. A rec-

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3. A. J. Mattson, Christian Ethics, p. 229.



Recognition of our complete dependence upon the Almighty God will eliminate boastfulness, vain glory, and a proud sense of superiority over against others.

Men by nature are proud; in fact, pride is the greatest stumbling block in the way of a man's becoming a believer. For the proud individual is blind to his sinful state and considers himself so perfect that he does not need Christ and His grace. However, "everyone that is proud in heart is an abomination to the Lord," 16:5. "A proud heart is sin," 21:4. "Seest thou a man wise in his own conceit, there is more hope of a fool than of him," 26:12. Humility is one of those virtues that is liked by all, preached by many, but practiced by so few. "Pride goeth before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall. Better it is to be of an humble spirit with the lowly than to divide the spoil with the proud," 16:18-19; 15:25. "A man's pride shall bring him low; but honor shall uphold the humble in spirit," 29:23; 18:12.

The cause for many a quarrel, hard feelings, can be laid at the door of pride: "Only by pride cometh contention," 13:10. "Proud and haughty scorner is his name, who dealeth in proud wrath," 21:24. "He that is of a proud heart stirreth up strife" 28:25; 14:3.

A common fault among sinful mortals, which at times is most nauseating, is self-praise and 'boasting of false gifts,' i.e., boasting of a liberality which one does not practise. Proverbs characterizes such thus: "Whoso boasteth himself of



a false gift is like clouds and wind without rain," 25:14. "So for men to search their own glory is not glory," 25:27; 27:21-22. Rather "Let another man praise him and not his own mouth; a stranger, and not his own lips" 27:2. He should remember that "Before honour is humility," 15:33, and that "by humility and the fear of the Lord are riches and honour, and life," 22:4.

## 2. Thankfulness

Thankfulness is a virtue closely related to humility and a sense of dependence, in fact so closely related that we are reminded of the fact that virtue must be looked upon as a unit. Where the sense of dependence upon God is not present and where man becomes proud in his self-sufficiency, the virtue of thankfulness will not be present. Thankfulness develops as we contemplate God's blessings, both temporal and spiritual. To rejoice in what life brings and to receive it with thankfulness to God will also reflect itself in our attitude toward our neighbor.<sup>4</sup>

"Honor the Lord with thy substance and with the first-fruits of thine increase; so shall thy barns be filled with plenty, and thy presses shall burst out with new wine," 3:9-10; 11:24-26. God has given us more than we need for our personal welfare. Therefore, we properly honor and thank him for his blessings when we use part of the temporal gifts He gives us to support the church, help spread the Gospel,

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4. Mattson, op. cit., pp. 232-234.



and take care of the poor and needy.

### 3. Obedience

Luther sums up the Book of Proverbs with these two words: obedience and disobedience. For certainly throughout the entire book, the children of God are exhorted: "Keep my commandments and life; and my law as the apple of thine eye," 7:2. "Hearken unto me now therefore, O ye children, and attend to the words of my mouth," 7:24. "Bind them continually upon thine heart, and tie them about thy neck," 6:21. Why should we keep the Commandments? Because the Holy God wants us to walk before Him and be perfect. Obedience to God is the test of love to him. How are we kept from all manner of disobedience and evil? By fearing God and keeping His Commandments. 16:6: "When thou goest, it shall lead thee; when thou sleepest, it shall keep thee, and when thou awakest, it shall talk with thee. For the Commandment is a lamp; and the law is light; and reproofs of instructions are the way of life," 6:22-23.

"My son, forget not my law; but let thine heart keep my Commandments: for the length of days and long life, and peace, shall they add to thee. Let not mercy and truth forsake thee: bind them about thy neck; write them upon the table of thine heart," 3:1-3. Here we have an admonition to obey God's Word and to make it the rule of our lives. Literally, law means teaching. Solomon warns us not to disregard and neglect what God tells us in His Word. His word is to be deeply impressed in our hearts so as to control all our thoughts and actions.



All the Biblical teachings are included in the broad concepts of "law" and "Commandments." Obedience to the Word of God and happiness are closely related to each other as cause and effect. Just as rain and sunshine produce flowers and fruits, so obedience produces happiness. Materially, there is no difference between obedience and love. Both are possible only when we are children of God through faith in Christ Jesus. While we earn nothing by keeping the Commandments, yet thereby we furnish proof that we have faith in our hearts.

Even though obedience merits no grace in God's sight, it does have blessed rewards (rewards of grace), long life, happiness, success, riches, honor are promised to the godly (3:16; 4:10; 12:28; 13:21; 15:6; 21:21.) All this may not always be apparent to our limited human way of thinking, but it is always a fact in the spiritual sense. The life of a believer, after it terminates here, continues in eternity, 12:28.

We are indeed blessed when God's word lives in our hearts and controls our lives 3:21-26. It has been truly said that "we live in deeds, not years." By faithfully using God's Word, we constantly draw upon these spiritual blessings, 3:4.

#### 4. Joy and Hope

The joy of the believer is no artificial gaiety or boisterous hilarity but consists in serenity and calm of soul. The word "blessed" expresses the idea of the believer's joy. Blessedness is something higher than mere happiness. Happiness depends on outward circumstances, while blessedness is an



inward fountain of joy with its source in the knowledge of God in Christ. The person who knows and trusts in God as revealed by Jesus must rejoice in that knowledge. It is only in such faith that there is true joy.<sup>5</sup> "Whoso trusteth in the Lord, happy is he," 16:20, "The light of the righteous rejoiceth," 13:9.

However, the believer's joy does not exclude the presence of sorrow. But if we evaluate life from God's point of view, then we can even rejoice amidst sorrow, for the believer knows that come what may, God is his friend, that all his sins are forgiven, and that he is to inherit the blessed joys and treasures of heaven. Christ the Eternal Wisdom, rejoices in that glorious eighth chapter of Proverbs: "And I was daily his delight, rejoicing always before him; rejoicing in the habitable part of his earth; and my delights were with the sons of men," v. 30-31; even in eternity, Christ was interested in the sons of men; they were the special objects of His loving care. Ought not this very fact fill our hearts with joy?

A believer who is despondent because of his troubles actually sins against God. When believers wear a sour face, they act as though they had no God who loved them or was able to help them. But we do have a loving God. "I love them that love me, and those that seek me early shall find me," 8:17. With such a loving invitation, have we not every reason for being happy and cheerful? Does that not fortify us with

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5. Mattson, op. cit., p. 235.



courage and hope?

The believer's hope of salvation will keep him from despondency and despair. Therefore we ought not blur this glorious hope of eternal salvation by permitting sorrows to sap the strength of our body and crush our mind and heart. Rather we ought to give proof of the mighty power of the Gospel in our lives and the strength of our faith by radiating a cheerful disposition. Such cheerfulness and hope, will not only promote bodily health, but will also help to ease life's burdens, 13:14, will make life worth living for you and will radiate cheer to others; "A merry heart maketh a cheerful countenance; but by sorrow of the heart the spirit is broken," 15:13. "All the days of the afflicted are evil; but he that is of a merry heart hath a continual feast," 15:15. "The righteous doth sing and rejoice," 29:6. "A merry heart doeth good like a medicine; but a broken spirit drieth the bones," 12:22.

## Duties toward God

### 1. Prayer

Prayer is to the believer what breathing is to life. The believer, by regeneration and justification, has become a child of God, and as such is filled with love for God and trust in Him, and to this he gives most natural expression in childlike conversation with the Father. In prayer, the love of the child speaks to the Father, and where there is no such speech that voice is silent, the child-relationship itself



has ceased to exist. Prayer gives wings to the believer's hope; where that hope fails to soar it is already dead.

In answer to his prayer a believer is given strength and lays hold upon God's gifts of grace. Therefore, as Luther says, a believer ought to call upon the name of God in every need and trouble. But this is particularly difficult since the devil, the world, and our flesh are constantly trying to hinder this in our lives. Solomon's words then are very much in place, when he warns: "The sacrifice of the wicked is abomination; how much more, when he bringeth it with a wicked mind?" 21:27. No amount of mechanical, outward acting will take the place of worship and prayer made in spirit and in truth. If the heart is still filled with wickedness, the outward sacrifice of the lips is intended to cover up a lack of repentance. Here again faith comes in, for through faith in Christ we are able to squelch the enemies that war against us.<sup>6</sup>

Accordingly, when the devil, the world, and the flesh attempt to shake our confidence in the efficacy of prayer, we ought to remind ourselves of both the command and the promises of God, which undoubtedly were recorded in Holy Scriptures for just such occasions; we ought also to recall to mind the many experiences of God's wondrous blessings through Christ in our own past lives and thus always reassure ourselves and overcome all temptations to doubt. "He heareth the prayer of

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6. M. Luther, "Treatise on Good Works," Vol. 1, Holman, pp. 215-216.



the righteous," 15:29, and again in 15:8, "The prayer of the upright is His delight." In the face of such passages who can henceforth doubt that our prayers are spoken in vain?

One fundamentally important consideration which the believer must always take cognizance of is this: the daily study of God's Word can be made fruitful only when we approach it in the spirit of prayer. In fact, the spiritual gifts, which form the chief object of the believer's prayer, are so intimately bound up in the means of grace (the Word of God and the Sacraments) that without them they cannot be obtained. In prayer we stretch forth our hands for these spiritual gifts, and through the means of grace God presents them to us and assures us that we do receive them. It is precisely when we stand pleading before God that He himself directs us to the Word of his promise and thus quiets and reassures our anxious hearts. ("The righteous eateth to the satisfying of his soul," 13:25 -- it is the Word of God that satisfies the soul and supplies all its needs.) Thus the Word is the means by which God bestows these gifts upon us.<sup>7</sup>

Be comforted and encouraged then when Proverbs says: "They that seek the Lord understand all things. The upright shall have good things in possession," 28:5,10. The "how" and "when" of God's answer we cheerfully leave to the wisdom and will of our Heavenly father. God wants to give us that which

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7. Johann M. Reu and Paul H. Buehring, Christian Ethics, p. 187.



will prove to be best for our souls, and we know that in some form or other, whether external or internal, the answer must always come.

## 2. Vows

Vows which are voluntarily made with a view to the promotion of the ethical life, and which constitute a limitation of the Christian liberty which the believer takes upon himself, may be approved. Vows (solemn promises offered to God) are permissible only in the sense of earnest resolutions, made in the presence of God.

There are in general two occasions for such vows. It may be that the believer finds himself in great need or difficulty and as he prays for deliverance he is mindful of the fact that he so easily forgets about such deliverance or neglects to render the proper thank offering: therefore he fixes the contemplated thank offering in his mind in the form of a vow and says, If the Lord will help me out of this great trouble I will give him this definite gift as a sacrifice of love.<sup>8</sup> Deliverance from trying circumstances at times prompted women of the Old Testament days to vow their first-born son unto the Lord as a token of gratitude. Perhaps that is what induced the mother of Lemuel to exclaim in Proverbs 31:2 "-- and what the son of my vows !" She had dedicated her son to the Lord from the moment of his birth.

Or it may be that in contemplating the use of certain

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8. Reu-Buehring, op. cit., pp. 251-252.



material things for his pleasure and enjoyment, things which are not in themselves sinful and which therefore are permitted him, the believer comes to the conclusion that the use of such things does constitute a special danger to his spiritual life, and therefore he vows or pledges himself to abstain from them.<sup>9</sup> But if a believer makes such a solemn vow to God, he should be very diligent in keeping his pledge, and not rashly break it, according to Proverbs 20:25: "It is a snare to the man who devoureth that which is holy and after vows to make enquiry," i.e., when it is too late, the result usually being that the rash vow is broken.<sup>10</sup> However, when they are entered into voluntarily, it goes without saying, that in so solemn a matter, they should be undertaken without haste and only after thoughtful and prayerful consideration.

### 3. Duties to God's Creation

Behind nature is the ever-present God. It is His handiwork. Therefore our duty to these things becomes primarily a part of our duty to God. The conscience of the believer cannot complacently view the wanton destruction of nature's beauties or the natural resources of the land.

The believer also has duties in regard to the animal creation. "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy," is a beatitude that is germane to man's treatment of the sentient creatures around him. The disposition to kill,

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9. Reu-Buehring, op. cit., p. 252.

10. Kretzmann, op. cit., p. 243.



to shed blood merely for wanton pleasure, should be restrained by the quality of mercy. The people of Israel were not to muzzle the ox that trod the corn. Said the wise man: "A righteous man regardeth the life of his beast" (Prov. 12:10).<sup>11</sup>

Domestic animals, accordingly, should be treated with kindly consideration, for to neglect and abuse them betrays a coarse and cruel nature. To unmercifully lash a poor horse, or over-drive it, is almost as great a wrong as to abuse a human being and certainly can not be reconciled with a godly outlook on life.

There is a direct correlation in showing kindness to animals and men. The person who is unmerciful to animals will more likely than not demonstrate the same unmerciful conduct toward the people with whom he comes in contact. On the other hand, the person who is kind and considerate toward animals will be apt to show the same disposition to his fellowmen.

### C. The Believer's Relation to Self

#### 1. Wisdom

Prov. 4:5-13 -- "Get wisdom, get understanding: forget it not; neither decline from the words of my mouth. Forsake her not, and she shall preserve thee: love her, and she shall keep thee. Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom; and with all thy getting get understanding. Exalt her, and she shall promote thee; she shall bring thee to honor,

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<sup>11</sup>. Keyser, op. cit., p. 183.



when thou dost embrace her. She shall give to thine head an ornament of grace: a crown of glory shall she deliver to thee. Hear, O my son, and receive my sayings; and the years of thy life shall be many. I have taught thee in the way of wisdom; I have had thee in right paths. When thou goest, thy steps shall not be straitened; and when thou runnest, thou shalt not stumble. Take fast hold of instruction; let her not go; keep her; for she is thy life." Cp. also 1:8-9, 5:1; 7:1-4; 8:4-5; 19:20; 22:17-18; 23:12; 23:19; 23:23. What a glorious, urgent appeal to get wisdom !

Men chase after wealth, pleasure, honor, power, but what do they finally gain? They reap nothing but bitter disappointment, a condemning conscience, and an empty soul. But how much different is the picture that Solomon paints of a godly wisdom ! "Wisdom," the chief topic which Solomon dwells on in chapters 1-9, is not secular wisdom, but spiritual wisdom. He points out the great need of possessing this wisdom, sets forth its qualities in glowing words, and urges all to seek and attain it. In reality, this long discourse on wisdom is a mighty appeal to everyone to diligently study God's Word; it's a grand paraphrase of Jesus' admonition "Search the Scriptures for in them ye think ye have eternal life, and they are they which testify of Me." John 5:39.

Wisdom is the knowledge which is acquired by the study of God's Word. It consists in this, that we fear the Lord. "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge; but fools



despise wisdom and instruction," 1:7. This fear of the Lord is in a person's heart only when he knows God's Word and has become a child of God through faith in Christ Jesus. To fear the Lord means not to be afraid of Him, but to regard Him as the holy and almighty Being, whom we should know, respect, love, and obey. It means to be conscious of God's continual presence and to go about our everyday life as though God were walking by our side.

"My son, if sinners entice thee, consent thou not," 1:10. The wise man must not be afraid to say No. Pitfalls surround him on every side; he must be constantly on the alert. Many a person has made a fine beginning, but lost everything, not only his reputation, but most important of all, his faith and eternal life. "Resist the beginnings !" wisely warns an old Latin proverb. Watch out for people with slick tongues ! Flee temptation ! Oh, how life is filled with the wreckage of the lives of young men and young women, who listened to seductive stories and ended in lives of shame. Prov. 1:11-19 shows what happens when a person permits himself to be enticed. The evil-minded attempt to catch their prey with honeyed words and rosy promises. But they only use their victims to carry out their own selfish and shameful ulterior motives. To accomplish their ends, they won't even shrink from robbery and murder.

"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; and the knowledge of the holy is understanding," 9:10. "The fear of



the Lord is to hate evil," 8:13. "By mercy and truth iniquity is purged; and by the fear of the Lord men depart from evil," 16:6. So it is only by fearing the Lord that one can resist temptation and keep from falling into sin. "When wisdom entereth into thine heart, and knowledge is pleasant unto thy soul, discretion shall preserve thee, understanding shall keep thee; to deliver thee from the way of the evil man, from the man that speaketh froward things; -- that thou mayest walk in the way of good men, and keep the paths of the righteous," 2:10, 11, 12, 20.

Wisdom speaks to us in Prov. 1:20-23. Here divine wisdom is personified, viewed as a pure and lovely woman standing at the street intersection with outstretched arms, and with eloquent lips, inviting men to turn aside from the hurry and turmoil of the present world, to take time to prepare for the world to come. Here we are to think of God's Word as the voice of wisdom. God has His Word proclaimed to sinful men everywhere. It cries out with a loud voice that men should put an end to their sinful ways, repent, and turn to God.

Wisdom is more than mere earthly knowledge; it is the knowledge of God's Word, both Law and Gospel, of Christ and His blood-bought salvation, a living knowledge, enabling us to do what God demands. It is knowing and then doing. It's true, that a person may know what is right according to the Bible, but nobody is wise until he knows it by doing what



is right. Wisdom must be a matter of the heart, not of the head alone. God's major concern is that we seek and obtain the wisdom which regenerates and saves -- the Word of God. For that reason it is not exaggerating to maintain that true wisdom, the Word of God, is of far greater importance than purely human, secular wisdom -- for the knowledge of God's Word alone is able to benefit us spiritually and eternally. It has the power to preserve and keep us and to save us from the forces of evil. "He keepeth the paths of judgment and preserveth the way of his saints. Then shalt thou understand righteousness, and judgment, and equity; yea, every good path," 2:8-9.

Since heavenly wisdom is of such supreme value to us, ought we not eagerly seek to obtain it? Seek that which brings us the greatest happiness? ("Happy is the man that findeth wisdom, and the man that getteth understanding," 3:13) Seek that which is worth infinitely more than silver and gold or the costliest gems? ("For the merchandise of it is better than the merchandise of silver, and the gain thereof than fine gold. She is more precious than rubies: and all the things thou canst desire are not to be compared unto her.") 3:14-15.

"Length of days is in her right hand; and in her left hand riches and honour. Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace. She is a tree of life to them that lay hold upon her; and happy is every one that retaineth



her," 3:16-18. The greatest gift of wisdom (God's Word) is spiritual and eternal life -- a "tree of life," v. 18. It keeps us spiritually alive (she shall preserve thee -- she shall keep thee," 4:5) and brings us to our final goal in heaven.

May we take Solomon's advice in 2:1-5 and earnestly try to learn as much of God's Word as possible: "My son, if thou wilt receive my words, and hide my commandments with thee; so that thou incline thine ear unto wisdom, and apply thine heart to understanding; yea, if thou criest after knowledge, and liftest up thy voice for understanding; if thou seekest her as silver, and searchest for her as for hid treasures; then shalt thou understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God."

May we storm the heavenly gates with our prayers, and beseech the Author and Source of all true wisdom ("For the Lord giveth wisdom; out of His mouth cometh knowledge, and understanding. He layeth up sound wisdom for the righteous: he is a buckler to them that walk uprightly," 2:6-7) to grant us a rich measure of this spiritual gift -- divine wisdom. When we pray for a temporal blessing, God may not always grant our request, because in His omniscience, He foresees that what we ask, will prove to our hurt. But requests for spiritual blessings necessary for salvation, e.g. faith, divine wisdom, have no such earthly limitations, for they have eternal value, and for that reason God will always unqualifiedly answer requests for such spiritual blessings



("If it be Thy will" -- not necessary). 2:4,5 -- "If thou seekest her as silver, and searchest for her as for hid treasures; then shalt thou understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God." The more we strive to obtain true wisdom, the more God will give it to us.

## 2. Courage

The virtues can be distinguished, but they must not be separated. Courage and wisdom belong together. Courage is that quality of mind which enables the believer to meet difficulties and opposition from the world with firmness. It is that quality which lends manliness, stability, and perseverance to the character. It is the spirit of willingness to bear persecution for the sake of conviction.<sup>12</sup>

Whatever it be, whether we have to bear persecution for the sake of our Biblical convictions, or whether we are called upon to bear the cross in sickness and hardship, or in any other form, let us remember, that in all this, God's intention is to test and strengthen our faith, and draw us closer to Him. As the purity of silver and gold is brought out by heat processes, so the Lord tests the genuineness of His children's faith by such aforementioned trials: "The fining pot is for silver, and the furnace for gold; but the Lord trieth the hearts," 17:3. When our courage is being put to the test, Proverbs chides us: "If thou faint in the day of adversity, thy strength is small," 24:10. No, the believer

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12. Mattson, op. cit., p. 253.



need never faint in the midst of adversity if he trusts in his All-Sufficient Strength, Christ, who loves him -- "I love them that love me; and those that seek me early shall find me," 8:17.

### 3. Temperance

Temperance is that virtue which is characterized by discipline, self control, and self-mastery. All man's instincts, drives, appetites must be subjected to the dominating influence of the Holy Spirit. When indulged in with moderation, some of men's appetites may be legitimate, but become vices when indulged in to excess.

The instinct of sex must be controlled. Such control must assume different forms within and without the married state, but in either case, it must be controlled, or else it will become a vice. In this connection, Solomon speaks this pertinent advice: "Drink waters out of thine own cistern, and running waters out of thine own well. Let thy fountain be blessed; and rejoice with the wife of thy youth. Let her be as the loving hind and pleasant roe; let her breasts satisfy thee at all times; and be thou ravished always with her love," 5:15, 18, 19; 6:26.

Eating is very necessary, but eating to excess or eating unwholesome food to satisfy a craving appetite may become a vice. "Hast thou found honey? Eat so much as is sufficient for thee, lest thou be filled therewith, and vomit it," 25:16. With respect to the use of intoxicating liquor, the



same principle holds. Drunkenness is immorality, for it robs man of his highest faculties and is antisocial in its consequences. The use of intoxicating liquor very easily develops into a habit to which man becomes a slave, (23:25). "Wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging: and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise," 20:1. "For the drunkard and the glutton shall come to poverty; and drowsiness shall clothe a man with rags," 23:21. If we do not play with fire we will not be burned -- "Who hath woe? Who hath sorrow? Who hath contentions? Who hath wounds without cause? They that tarry long at the wine; they that go to seek mixed wine. Look not thou upon the wine when it is red, when it giveth his colour in the cup, when it moveth aright. At the last it biteth like a serpent, and stingeth like an adder. They have stricken me, shalt thou say, and I was not sick, they have beaten me, and I felt it not," 23:29, 32; 35 -- 6:27-28.

The fact that "the eyes of man are never satisfied" (27:20), is the cause for much of his intemperance, and the want that he complains about is often the result of his hastiness in doing the one or the other thing without due consideration. "Everyone that is hasty (tends) only to want," 21:5. "Moderation in all things" is a wise old adage to follow. But "he that loveth pleasure shall be a poor man; he that loveth wine and oil shall not be rich," 21:17.

To keep on the moderate side, and on the paths of all righteousness, we must achieve the mastery over ourselves,



'keep our bodies under subjection' as St. Paul exhorts, with the help of God the Holy Spirit. A person who is unable to rule over himself, Proverbs describes thus: "He that hath no rule over his own spirit is like a city that is broken down, and without walls," 25:28. But a person who succeeds in ruling over himself, Proverbs extols higher than the conquering warrior: "He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city," 16:32.

The subject of temperance also takes in other areas of endeavor, e.g. the striving for wealth, which in itself is legitimate. But when the virtue of thrift is carried to excess it becomes avarice, which is a vice. Proverbs says that "he that is greedy of gain troubleth his own house; but he that hateth gifts shall live," 15:27. Ambition is legitimate, but when ambition assumes the form of domination over others, like when "the rich ruleth over the poor" (22:7) for their own selfish ends, operating on the principle that 'wealth is power,' to be exploited to the fullest, then ambition is a vice. Even the use of the power of speech must be controlled, or it may become an evil, as so often is the case. Proverbs has much to say about speech and the proper use of the tongue. "A soft answer turneth away wrath; but grievous words stir up anger. The tongue of the wise useth knowledge aright: but the mouth of fools poureth out foolishness. A wholesome tongue is a tree of life; but



perverseness therein is a breach in the spirit. The lips of the wise disperse knowledge; but the heart of the foolish doeth not so," 15:1,2.4,7.

#### D. The Believer's Virtues in Relation to His Fellow Men

##### 1. Justice

Justice was one of the four cardinal virtues extolled by the Greeks. In the Old Testament the prophet Amos is the great champion of justice. "Let justice roll down as waters and righteousness as a mighty stream," (Amos 5:24). Likewise Proverbs clearly speaks out: "To do justice and judgment is more acceptable to the Lord than sacrifice," 21:3. "But the path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day," 4:18; 10:6-7; 20: 10:31.

Justice is that virtue which would grant to others their just rights. Justice demands that man conduct himself fairly in dealing with his fellowmen: "A false balance is abomination to the Lord; but a just weight is his delight," 11:1; 2:10; 20:23. Justice also excludes any show of partiality; "These things also belong to the wise. It is not good to have respect of persons in judgment," 24:23; 23:21. Justice implies that prejudice and passion be absent when passing judgment upon others and their deeds; "Also to punish the just is not good, nor to strike princes for equity," 17:26. Rather we should speak up for a person against whom injustice is being practiced; "Open thy mouth for the dumb in the



cause of all such as are appointed to destruction," 31:8.

To gloss over evil and to undermine the righteous in judgment by stooping to accept the false testimony of the wicked, is patently wrong -- "He that saith unto the wicked, Thou art righteous; him shall the people curse," 24:24.

"It is not good to accept the person of the wicked to overthrow the righteous in judgment," 18:5. Of such miscarriage of justice, Solomon emphatically says: "He that justifieth the wicked, and he that condemneth the just, even they both are abomination to the Lord," 17:15.

## 2. Kindness

We may characterize kindness as the spirit of mercy and helpfulness to those in need ("He coveteth greedily all the day long: but the righteous giveth and spareth not," 21:26), of pity for the suffering ("The righteous considereth the cause of the poor; but the wicked regardeth not to know it" 29:7; 14:31), of forgiveness for those who have offended us and a general disposition of loving good-will to others ("He that covereth a transgression seeketh love; but he that repeateth a matter separateth very friends" 17:9). In fact, it is man's "glory to pass over a transgression," 19:11. Again the supreme law of love plays into the virtue of kindness, for kindness is one of those virtues which grows naturally out of love to our fellow men, e.g. in forgiving: "Love covereth all sins," 10:12. We are to treat transgressions in a kind manner by being ready to forgive.



One aspect of kindness is courtesy, which takes into account the other person's feelings. Tact and politeness belong to the essence of courtesy. For example, it becomes necessary at times to speak a truth which hurts, but courtesy and kindness would avoid anything that savors of brutal frankness. Therefore, a believer will show that he is wise by being discreet in his speech: "But he that refraineth his lips is wise," 10:19. "There is that speaketh like the piercings of a sword; but the tongue of the wise is health," 12:18. Of a person who speaks before he thinks, Proverbs bitingly remarks: "Seest thou a man that is hasty in his words? There is more hope of a fool than of him," 29:30. When reproof is necessary, Solomon advises wisdom and tact: "A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in pictures of silver. As an earring of gold and an ornament of fine gold, so is a wise reprover upon an obedient ear," 21:11-12. Yes, "he that handleth a matter wisely shall find good," 16:20. If when contemplating giving reproof, it is feared that blind stubborn resistance will be encountered, then remember that gentleness wears down the most stubborn resistance; <sup>13</sup> "A soft tongue breaketh the bone," 25:15.

In this whole matter of courtesy and tact, it is well to remember that there is a time and place for everything. For instance, it would be the height of folly for a person to sing and be gay in the presence of another who is sorrowing

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13. Kretzmann, op. cit., p. 251.



or in mourning. Such senseless conduct is described thus by Proverbs: "As he that taketh away a garment in cold weather and as vinegar upon nitre, so is he that singeth songs to a heavy heart," 25:20. On the other hand, a word fitly spoken will bring new courage and hope to a person 'down in the dumps' -- "Heaviness in the heart of a man maketh it stoop: but a good word maketh it glad," 12:25.

Kindness also manifests itself in the form of hospitality. This virtue has proved itself a mighty force as it has gone forth into the world. It was the spirit of hospitality that gave birth to hospitals, orphan homes, homes for the aged, and similar institutions, which care for those who are not able to care for themselves. We believers are called upon to exercise this virtue by opening our home and domestic circle to the stranger who has inspired our confidence, by collecting about us those who may be deprived of the advantages of family life, and by inviting friends to social gatherings. That such hospitable action is expected of us and has its attendant blessings is clear from Proverbs: "There is that scattereth and yet increaseth; and there is that withholdeth more than is meet, but it tendeth to poverty. The liberal soul shall be made fat: and he that watereth shall be watered also himself," 11:24-25. He who practices cheerful liberality with the goods given him in life will increase, since the blessing of the Lord more than compensates for the money spent in benevolences. God will reward with a corresponding



refreshing him who refreshes and restores others by deeds of kindness.<sup>14</sup> Yea, "the merciful man doeth good to his own soul," 11:17.

By showing mercy and loving conduct, the believer gives evidence that he has a penitent and believing heart: "By mercy and truth iniquity is purged," 16:6. Mercy and blessing shall be to them who are always planning how they may be of assistance in one capacity or another: "But mercy and truth shall be to them that devise good," 14:22. The worth or genuineness of a person's show of liberality depends upon his good will, but a person who is sincere in desiring to help but is unable to do so is much better than one, who, with riches at his command, professes to be unable to help: "The desire of a man is his kindness; and a poor man is better than a liar," 19:22.

Unkindness begets unkindness: "Whoso stoppeth his ears at the cry of the poor, he also shall cry himself, but shall not be heard," 21:13. But he that constantly demonstrates kindness, friendliness, and charity, shall be blessed: "He that hath a bountiful eye, shall be blessed; for he giveth of his bread to the poor," 22:9.

### 3. Truthfulness

Truth is an indispensable bond of social life. All forms of trust and credit are based on truthfulness. In fact, without some degree of truthfulness, society could not

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14. Kretzmann, op. cit., pp. 229-230.



function. Truthfulness involves not only speaking the truth but honesty in the exchange of goods, honesty in words ("The getting of treasures by a lying tongue is a vanity tossed to and fro of them that seek death," 21:6), honesty in thought, service, etc.: "Deceit is in the heart of them that imagine evil. Lying lips are abomination to the Lord: but they that deal truly are his delight," 12:20-22.

Truthfulness also implies that confidences be respected and kept: "A prudent man concealeth knowledge," 12:23.

"He that goeth about as a talebearer revealeth secrets: therefore meddle not with him that flattereth with his lips," 20:19. "Debate thy cause with thy neighbour himself; and discover not a secret to another," 25:9. "Confidence in an unfaithful man in time of trouble is like a broken tooth, and a foot out of joint," 25:19.

Truthfulness is the very opposite of exaggeration and deception.

A fact which people who are untruthful often fail to realize is that their untruthfulness boomerangs; it reacts negatively upon their own character. Any artificiality or affectation destroy integrity of character. "The wicked is snared by the transgression of his lips," 12:13; 26:27. "A wicked man is loathesome and cometh to shame," 13:5. "Bread of deceit is sweat to a man, but afterwards his mouth shall be filled with gravel," 20:17. What a person gains by deceit and flattery may seem to him pleasant and enjoyable at first,



but afterwards it will be most disagreeable and grievous to him. "He that rebuketh a man afterwards shall find more favour than he that flattereth with the tongue," 28:23. "He that hateth dissembleth with his lips, and layeth up deceit within him; when he speaketh fair, believe him not: for there are seven abominations in his heart. Whose hatred is covered by deceit, his wickedness shall be shewed before the whole congregation. Whoso diggeth a pit shall fall therein: and he that rolleth a stone, it will return upon him," 26:24-27. How much better it is to be open and frank.

"The lip of truth shall be established forever, but a lying tongue is but for a moment," 12:19. Truth, no matter how much it is 'kicked around' will always rise again, but a falsehood is readily exposed and loses its power -- "Lies have short legs." A person who lies reveals that he is a coward afraid to face an issue, or that he is lazy or that he is afraid. Perhaps he hopes to profit from his lying, maybe it's just a habit. At any rate, this fact is certain: every lie is a sin -- "Lying lips are an abomination to the Lord," and hateful to him." "A false witness that speaketh lies, and he that soweth discord among brethren," 6:19.

It is extremely difficult to confine oneself to a single lie. More lies are needed to cover up the first falsehood. People's confidence in us is undermined, after they have detected that we are not strictly truthful. There's much discomforting truth in the saying that he "who once lies is not believed, and if a thousand times he speaks the truth."



And not only does the untruthful person incur his fellow men's distrust and contempt, but also the wrath and punishment of a just God; "A false witness shall not be unpunished, and he that speaketh lies shall not escape," 19:5; 19:9; 21:6; 21:28.

Perhaps no other organ in the body is capable of doing so much harm in the world as our tongue. It has been said that more people have been killed by the tongue than by all other kinds of weapons. Even Solomon says, Prov. 18:21: "Death and life are in the power of the tongue; and they that love it shall eat the fruit thereof," i.e., our tongue will bring us joy or sorrow, happiness or misery; it will make our fellow men happy or miserable, bring life or death to them, according to the way in which we use it.

All too frequently the tongue is used to wound our fellow men's feelings and to injure their reputation. Right here is where the tongue perpetrates its greatest harm, for by speaking evil, we rob others of their precious good name; and the loss of reputation is one of the most serious evils that can befall man: "A good name is rather to be chosen than great riches, and loving favor rather than silver and gold," 22:1. Without a good name a person's livelihood may be jeopardized; at any rate, people will avoid him. Once lost, a good name cannot be restored like money, often not at all. To be held in esteem, to be honored, and respected "is better than silver and gold," 22:1. Therefore, instead of wounding men's feelings and causing them heartache and grief with our tongue,



we should earnestly strive to make it a "wholesome" bodily instrument, one that is truly gentle and soothing and causes others to enjoy life more fully. "A wholesome tongue is a tree of life; but perverseness therein is a breach in the spirit," 15:4.

Gossip and slander constitute another great vice of the tongue -- all of which amounts to "bearing false witness against our neighbor." It has been labeled the great indoor sport of America. It deals in dirt: "An ungodly man diggeth up evil; and in his lips there is a burning fire," 16:27. "A hypocrite with his mouth destroyeth his neighbor," 11:9. It is not a case of merely repeating a slander in a thoughtless manner, but a "lying tongue" is a deliberate expression of hatred. <sup>15</sup> "A lying tongue hateth those who are afflicted by it," 26:28; "whose hatred is covered by deceit," 26:26; 26:24.

If a fellow human has committed any wrong, it is a sin to make it public property, even if we know it to be true: "The words of a talebearer are as wounds, and they go down into the innermost parts of the belly," 18:8. People are only too glad to accept and remember sweet morsels of gossip and slander. "A man that beareth false witness against his neighbor is a maul (club), and a sword and a sharp arrow," 25:18, since his words crush with unmerciful cruelty. Those who indulge in gossip and slander wound and kill with the

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15. Kretzmann, op. cit., p. 252.



tongue. Even the ancient Greeks were well aware of the tongue's treachery. Runs one of their proverbs: "The boneless tongue, so small and weak, can crush and kill." What is the Lord's attitude toward those who bear false witness? "These things doth the Lord hate: a false witness that speaketh lies; and he that soweth discord among brethren," 6:19; 19:5; 21:28. And what if "an ungodly witness scorneth judgment; and the mouth of the wicked devoureth iniquity?" 19:28. Remember, God will not be mocked, for "judgments are prepared for scorners, and stripes for the back of fools," 19:29.

The best way to check gossip is to turn a deaf ear to all gossip, give a reproving look to all slanderers, and close our door to all tattlers. "A wicked doer giveth heed to false lips, and a liar giveth ear to a naughty tongue," 17:4. "He that goeth about as a talebearer revealeth secrets; therefore meddle not with him that flattereth with his lips," 20:19. "Where no wood is, there the fire goeth out; so where there is no talebearer, the strife ceaseth," 26:20. Our duty is plainly brought out in Prov. 25:9-10: "Debate thy cause with thy neighbor himself; and discover not a secret to another; lest he that heareth it put thee to shame, and thine infamy turn not away." If trouble has arisen without a person's fault, he should let the controversy be carried on in an honorable manner and not betray one's confidence to a third person, for a "whisperer" causes close



friends to be separated: "a whisperer separateth chief friends," 16:28. But say the charges made against a person are true and cannot be denied, then what? Here again the supreme law of love must guide us: "love covereth all sins," 10:12. We can speak of the guilty person's good qualities and try to minimize his faults.

It's the wise person who knows when to keep quiet and when to speak: "A man shall eat good by the fruit of his mouth: but the soul of the transgressors shall eat violence. He that keepeth his mouth keepeth his life; but he that openeth wide his lips shall have destruction," 13:2-3. "Even a fool, when he holdeth his peace is counted wise; and he that shutteth his lips is esteemed a man of understanding," 17:28. When the wise man does speak, there's no deceit, no exaggeration, the words he speaks are not even tinged with untruthfulness, but from his tongue emanates "health" (12:18) -- words of wisdom, cheer, comfort, and warning -- always spoken in the best interests of others.

"A man's belly shall be satisfied with the fruit of his mouth; and with the increase of his lips shall he be filled," 18:20. We must keep in mind that whatever comes out of our mouths we'll have to suffer the consequences thereof. It is only by speaking the truth that we give proof of our faith and our life of righteousness: "He that speaketh truth sheweth forth righteousness," 12:17.

"A faithful witness will not lie: but a false witness will utter lies," 14:5. A grave responsibility rests upon a



witness, especially in a court of justice. Therefore, "a true witness delivereth souls: but a deceitful witness speaketh lies," 14:25. Yea, "every man shall kiss his lips that giveth a right answer," 24:26.

## E. The Believer's Duty in the Realm of Family Relations

### 1. Marriage and the Home

Christianity stands for monogamous marriage (Mt. 19:3-9). Monogamy justifies itself psychologically, biologically, historically, eugenically. Psychologically mankind manifests the desire to have one mate and to have that mate alone. Jealousy in sex and marital relations is one expression of this fact (Prov. 6:34-35). From the biologists' viewpoint monogamy is justified because there are approximately as many men as women born. Historically, any other arrangement than monogamy has proved to be a curse, especially to womanhood. Witness the Mohammedan harem, for example. Promiscuity in sexual relations also breeds disease.<sup>16</sup> (This fact is borne out in Prov. 5:11 -- "And thou mo<sup>h</sup>rn at the last, when thy flesh and thy body are consumed"). Polygamy and polyandry might serve if marriage were based simply upon the lust of the flesh. However, if marriage is to be a union of heart, mind, and soul, it can exist only in the monogamous form. It is not possible for a man or a woman to give himself or herself to more than one mate in such loyalty.<sup>17</sup>

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16. Mattson, op. cit., pp. 291-92.

17. Ibid.



For that reason Solomon so strongly urges in Prov. 5:18: "Rejoice with the wife of thy youth," and her only. "Let her breasts satisfy thee at all times. Be thou ravished always with her love."

Marriage should be based upon mutual attraction on the part of the parties for each other, or upon love. The spiritual attitudes and moral ideals of the parties must not differ too widely if marriage is to prove successful. (For example, the attitude toward children. Are they desired, and if they do come as the result of the marriage union, will they be looked upon as blessings from the Lord (5:18), or as unwanted responsibilities by one or the other party?). Physical attraction must be buttressed by common tastes and sympathies. Two comrades through life, must be able to help each other (31:11-19), and without an appreciation of each other's aims and world views physical attraction will not serve to keep them united.<sup>18</sup> Prov. 31:30: "Favor (grace acquired and shown by a woman), is deceitful and beauty is vain;" it has no lasting value. Beauty is no measure of a woman's worth.

Solomon gives to both man and woman important instructions in regards to safeguarding the sanctity of marriage and of the home. It is to be deeply regretted that he failed to act according to the wisdom which he once possessed; he later grossly violated the very principles which he here advises us to follow. Nevertheless, as a wise father, he writes to

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18. Mattson, op. cit., p. 292.



us so that we may profit from his sad experiences and not fall into the same temptations and evils.

In Prov. 5:15-18 he warns husbands against the sin of unchastity and adultery. Marriage is a divine institution and the marriage ties should be kept sacred, and any breaking down of those sacred ties by illicit dealings with other women will result in divine punishment -- incurable diseases, poverty, shame, misery, and death. 5:11-14; 6:25-35, particularly vvs. 32 and 33: "But whoso committeth adultery with a woman lacketh understanding; he that doeth it destroyeth his own soul. A wound and dishonour shall he get; and his reproach shall not be wiped away." "Stolen waters are sweet, and bread eaten in secret is pleasant. But he knoweth not that the dead are there; and that her guests are in the depths of hell," 9:17-18. As a man ought not run after lewd women, so it equally follows that women ought not permit themselves to be led into unchaste deeds by sinful men.

Happy is the man who finds complete happiness and contentment in living with his wife and children. "Let thy fountain be blessed; and rejoice with the wife of thy youth. Let her be as the loving hind and pleasant roe; let her breasts satisfy thee at all times; and be thou ravished always with her love," 5:18-19. In this delightful picture of happy married life, the woman is referred to as being a graceful "loving hind (deer) and a pleasant roe (gazelle)" to her husband. "Drink waters out of thine own cistern, and running waters out of thine own well," v. 15. Here she is pictured



as a cistern or well, -- the pure, sweet, and cool waters which refresh and invigorate.

A man should regard his wife as a direct gift from the Lord, as a gift through which the Lord wishes to bless him: "A prudent wife is from the Lord," 19:14. "Whoso findeth a wife findeth a good thing, and obtaineth favour of the Lord," 18:22.

Solomon not only counsels husbands, but also wives; in fact, he has much more to say to wives. For the good women he has the highest regard, but for the woman that is a shrew and lacks good sense, virtue, and homemaking qualities, he has nothing but contempt. "Every wise woman buildeth her house (is a good homemaker); but the foolish plucketh it down," 14:1. "A virtuous woman is a crown to her husband; but she that maketh ashamed is as rottenness in his bones," 12:4. A wife that behaves in a shameful way, poisons the homelife of her husband. According to Solomon there's nothing worse than having to dwell with an ill-natured, nagging, and foolish woman. "It is better to dwell in a corner of the housetop, than with a brawling woman in a wide house," 21:2; 21:19; 25:24; 27:15; 30:23. "A foolish woman is clamorous; she is simple and knoweth nothing," 9:13.

Solomon treats also the positive side of a woman's character. His ideal of a good wife is described in the last chapter of Proverbs -- 31:10-31 -- aptly called the *A.B.C.* of a good woman. No higher praise has ever been accorded to the estate of womanhood. According to this lengthy passage, a



virtuous woman should acquire and exercise dependability, loyalty, willingness to work; she should be a good manager, thrifty, neat, and manifest a love for the good and beautiful; she should be one who trains her children to love and respect her. Above all, she should 'fear the Lord' (31:30), for only the woman that fears the Lord shall be praised: "A gracious woman retaineth honour," 11:16. Everyone likes a woman of fine character and admires her.

## 2. The Child

Parents have important duties which they should fulfill in regards to their children. Their chief duty is to teach and train their children: "Train up a child in the way he should go; and when he is old he will not depart from it," 22:6. If parents want their children to grow up to be God-fearing men and women, then they must conscientiously teach and train, correct and admonish them from earliest youth until they reach the state of maturity. To keep them on the paths of righteousness, it is prerequisite that parents instruct their offspring in God's Word, "the one thing needful," "the good doctrine." Certainly a thing of such great value as the wisdom which God gives through His Word is well worth getting and holding. Therefore Proverbs solicitously persuades: "Hear, ye children, the instruction of a father, and attend to know understanding. For I give you good doctrine, forsake ye not my law. For I was my father's son, tender and only beloved in the sight of my mother. He taught



me also, and said unto me, let thine heart retain my words; keep my commandments, and live. Get wisdom, get understanding; forget it not; neither decline from the words of my mouth," 4:1-5, 10, 11, 20-22. Luther has these thought-provoking words to say to parents: "Parents can merit heaven because of their children. But on the other hand, their children can also be the cause of their damnation, if they fail properly to provide for their bodily and spiritual needs." "As the twig is bent, the tree is inclined."

When children refuse to obey and do wrong things, the parents are duty-bound to punish them. However, the use of the rod is condemned by today's educators, who consider Solomon's inspired advice out of date. But we are to obey God rather than men. Many children's lives have been ruined because of such "modern" child-training methods. Wise Solomon says to parents: "Chasten thy son while there is hope, and let not thy soul spare for his crying," 19:18. "The rod and reproof give wisdom: but a child left to himself bringeth his mother to shame," 29:15. "Withhold not correction from the child: for if thou beatest him with the rod, he shall not die. Thou shalt beat him with the rod, and shalt deliver his soul from hell," 23:13-14.

"He that spareth his rod hateth his son: but he that loveth him chasteneth him betimes," 13:24; 29:17. Punishment should always be administered in love, not anger. The sinful nature of the child must be curbed; if it is not curbed in time, the child will fall deeper and deeper into sin and may



become a criminal. "Foolishness is bound in the heart of a child, but the rod of correction shall drive it far from him," 22:15. If this inclination to sin in a child is not uprooted like bad weeds, it will grow to a harvest of vice. Of course, the purpose of the rod is not to frighten children out of wrong-doing. Solomon repeatedly insists on "instruction." Consequently, the parent's primary duty is to train their children by word and example, and use the rod only as a last resort.

As Solomon shows what is expected of good parents, so he also makes quite clear what is expected of good children. "A wise child heareth his father's instruction," 13:1. "Hearken unto thy father that begat thee, and despise not thy mother when she is old," 23:22. We can never possibly repay our parents for all their cares and sorrows and self-denial. But this much we can do -- we can show our appreciation by listening to their instruction and advice, respecting and loving them no matter how poor and uneducated they may be, and by serving them in numberless ways.

Good children make their parents happy when they fear God and are obedient, are wise and industrious. "My son, if thine heart be wise, my heart shall rejoice, even mine. Yea, my reins shall rejoice, when thy lips speak right things. Let not thine heart envy sinners, but be thou in the fear of the Lord all the day long," 23:15-17; 27:11. "Whoso loveth wisdom rejoiceth his father: but he that keepeth company with harlots spendeth his substance," 29:3; 23:24-25; 15:20.



But children grieve their parents when they dishonour them and walk in sin. "A foolish son is the calamity of his father," 19:13. "He that wasteth his father, and chaseth away his mother, is a son that causeth shame, and bringeth reproach," 19:26. "Whoso keepeth the law is a wise son: but he that is a companion of riotous men shameth his father," 28:7. "The father of a fool hath no joy. A foolish son is a grief to his father and bitterness to her that bare him," 17:21, 25; 30:11.

Wicked sons and daughters God will severely punish. "Whoso curseth his father or his mother, his lamp shall be put out in obscure darkness," 20:20. In other words, ungodly children can expect no earthly prosperity, success, and happiness. If they do not repent, they will be lost forever. "The eye that mocketh at his father and despiseth to obey his mother, the ravens of the valley shall pluck it out, and the young eagles shall eat it," 30:17.

#### F. The Believer's Duty in the Realm of the State

The state is preeminently an institution of justice. "It lives and is to act to uphold justice in the largest and fullest sense. This is its moral basis that gives it worth and purpose in social life." (Haas, Freedom and Christian Conduct, p. 287) The specific form of government -- state -- is not a divine institution in the same sense as the family and the church. The only exception is the Old Testament theocracy, which was called into being by God for a very



specific purpose. It is therefore a matter of complete indifference to the Scripture whether a government assumes the form of an absolute monarchy, an aristocracy, or a democracy. The form of government is human; the most we can say of it is that it comes into being under divine providence, and that God can and does make use of all the various forms of government to accomplish his purposes in the world. (For example, concerning a kingship, Proverbs maintains: "The king's heart is in the hand of the Lord, as the rivers of water; he turneth it whithersoever he will," 21:1. 8:15-16: "By me kings reign, and princes decree justice. By me princes rule, and nobles, even all the judges of the earth." The thoughts and plans of the mightiest rulers, sovereign as they may seem, are like ditches and canals in which men lead water where they desire. No matter what the mighty may fatuously ascribe to themselves in the way of absolute authority, there is One whose government directs even their actions in agreement with His will).<sup>19</sup> But while the form is human, the idea and principle of government is undoubtedly divine, (Rom. 13:1; I pet. 2:13); that is to say, it is a part of the divinely established world order that governments shall exist and exercise authority.<sup>20</sup>

Consequently, it becomes the primary duty of the government to uphold the right and to curb the wrong. It should

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19. Kretzmann, op. cit., p. 244.

20. Reu-Buehring, op. cit., pp. 323-324.



dispense justice by separating the evil from the good -- "A king that sitteth in the throne of judgment scattereth away all evil with his eyes," 20:8. "A wise king scattereth the wicked, and bringeth the wheel over them," 20:26.

It is also the duty of the government to establish the guilt of apprehended individuals by fair and impartial trial, and then inflict the proper punishment. "It is the glory of God to conceal a thing; but the honour of kings is to search out a matter," 25:2. The government is to make careful inquiry into all cases brought before it. Thus an energetic administration of justice results in a government that is wise and good. "Take away the dross from the silver, and there shall come forth a vessel for the finer. Take away the wicked from before the king, and his throne shall be established in righteousness," 25:4-5.

For it is "righteousness (that) exalteth a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people," 14:34. When crime, vice, lawbreaking, corruption, ungodliness, sweep over a country, these sins bring disgrace, decrease, destruction to its inhabitants. Such national sins compell God to punish a land with wars, grave disasters, droughts, depressions, and many other evils, if the people do not repent and mend their ways. But where true moral uprightness characterizes every department of a nation's activity, God will lift that nation up on high and reward its civil righteousness with material prosperity. "By the blessing of the upright the city is exalted; but it



is overthrown by the mouth of the wicked," 11:11. Where the Word of God is put to little use and men do not properly judge circumstances with relation to their ultimate effects, the people grow wild and beyond discipline: <sup>21</sup> "Where there is no vision, the people perish; but he that keepeth the law, happy is he," 29:18.

During the dark days of the Civil War, Abraham Lincoln, it is said, happened into a church service during which the minister was very solicitous to pray the Lord to be on "our side" and to give the victory to "our side." After the service was over, Lincoln said to a companion: "As for me, I have learned to ask but one thing of the Lord -- not that He may be on our side, but that I may be on His side." To be on the Lord's side is to be on the right, the safe side, the winning side in the end. To be on the Lord's side should be a nation's first concern. (Lenski)

Since the principle of government is of divine origin and is established to exercise authority, therefore it behooves us as private citizens to respect and obey the civil law in so far as it is righteous. "My son, fear thou the Lord and the king: and meddle not with them that are given to change: For their calamity shall rise suddenly; and who knoweth the ruin of them both?" 24:21-22. In other words, we should be loyal to the government under whose protection we live. But when the government is in the hands of corrupt men, then what

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21. Kretzmann, op. cit., p. 256.



should we do? When men, by bribery and scheming, get into political offices, escape punishment for their crimes in corrupt courts of justice, and rob people of good government ("A wicked man taketh a gift (bribe) out of the bosom to pervert the ways of judgment" 17:25. "It is not good to have respect of persons in judgment. He that saith unto the wicked, Thou art righteous; him shall the people curse, nations shall abhor him." 24:23-24; 28:15-16; 29:12) are we to mourn (29:2) and resign ourselves to the deplorable state of affairs?

Emphatically, NO ! There is a solution, at least under our democratic form of government -- we can and should make proper use of our voting privilege. For the only way to divest wicked men of civil positions and power is to put righteous persons into governmental offices. "When the righteous are in authority, the people rejoice; but when the wicked beareth rule, the people mourn," 29:2. This passage also implies that every citizen should take an interest in public affairs. He should inform himself sufficiently to be able to vote intelligently at the polls; for our free institutions depend on the intelligence and morality of the people who exercise the right of franchise. No man has a right to evade his duties to the State, or to shift his political tasks to his neighbor's shoulders. The man who does not go to the polls on election day and cast an honest ballot is not a true patriot, not only because he fails to cast his vote for good officials, but also because his example, if



followed generally would destroy our republican form of government.<sup>22</sup> 28,28: "When the wicked rise (attaining to positions of power and influence), men hide themselves (fearing opposition); but when they perish, the righteous increase, (since they no longer are oppressed by tyrants, they can once more form a numerous and strong party).<sup>23</sup>

The righteous citizen need not despair when the existing government is in corrupt hands, for God is on the side of the good and will dethrone the evil from their seats of power to humbling, beggaring positions: "The evil bow before the good and the wicked at the gates of the righteous," 14:19. If a nation openly countenances sin, God will bring disgrace and destruction upon that nation, but the nation that exercises moral uprightness in all its activities will be rewarded with material prosperity by God: "Righteousness exalteth a nation; but sin is a reproach to any people," 14: 34.

If private citizens are to be obedient subjects, it is all-important that public officials set them a good example, formulate just laws, execute them faithfully, and endeavor in every way to instil the principles of patriotism and respect for law in the country far and wide. First, the public official is not to look upon himself as a kind of lord or autocrat for whom people are to slave, but should regard himself as a servant of the people and be concerned about

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22. Keyser, op. cit., p. 214.

23. Kretzmann, op. cit., p. 255.



attending to the just needs and wishes of the people. Therefore "the king that faithfully judges the poor, his throne shall be established forever," 29:14. "Mercy and truth preserve the king: and his throne is upholden by mercy," 20:28.

Secondly, the public official should conscientiously carry out the terms of his office. Sad to say, the oath which officials take upon assuming office, has largely become a perfunctory matter. They will enforce some laws and others they will simply ignore. Naturally, such practices lead to a spirit of general lawlessness and corruption, inculcating disrespect for law. Officials, who set aside right and justice, cause both God and man to despise and loathe them: "It is an abomination to kings to commit wickedness: for the throne is established by righteousness," 16:12.

Thirdly, public officials should not cater to the moneyed interests, on the one hand, nor to the base elements of society, on the other, but should administer their duties strictly according to the principles of righteousness. "The king by judgment (by a fair execution of the law) establisheth the land," 29:4. He who rules for the benefit of a favored few and lets the rest of his subjects suffer wrong is a curse to a land. According to Proverbs 24:23 there should be no "respect of persons in judgment" Prov. 28:15. "As a roaring lion, and a ranging bear; so is a wicked ruler over the poor people. The prince that wanteth understanding is also a great oppressor." Good citizens must ever be on their guard.



"Eternal vigilance is the price of liberty." Therefore if intelligent, wise, and experienced counselors are always available to the government, a nation will be greatly benefited. Having counselors assist a ruler in governing has its advantages, especially if the ruler should prove to be incapable; they then can somewhat compensate and offset his weaknesses and prevent a country from going to decay and ruin completely: "Where no counsel is, the people fall; but in the multitude of counselors there is safety," 11:14. For public men, anxious for re-election, to truckle to the majority, without regard to the moral character of the issues at stake, is certainly unethical; that is moral cowardice. Proverbs very aptly describes such political goings-on when it states: "Scornful men bring a city into a snare (literally: "Men of mockery set on fire a city," namely, by exciting the passions and party spirit of the people upon every occasion),<sup>24</sup> but wise men turn away wrath," 29:8.

Solomon lays down some qualifications which a king should possess. These qualifications apply equally as well to any other type of ruler. "Mercy and truth preserve<sup>the king</sup> and his throne is upholden by mercy," 20:28. "By a man of understanding and knowledge the state thereof shall be prolonged," 28:2. The reign of a ruler possessing foresight and wisdom, will continue long. In Prov. 31:3-5 Solomon warns against sins which particularly beset rulers: "Give not thy strength unto women,"

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24. Kretzmann, op. cit., p. 256.



nor thy ways to that which destroyeth kings. It is not for kings, O Lemuel, it is not for kings to drink wine; nor for princes strong drink: lest they drink, and forget the law, and pervert the judgment of any of the afflicted."

In the critical matter of engaging in war, Proverbs gives this wise advice to rulers: "Every purpose is established by counsel: and with good advice make war," 20:18; 24:6. War should not be declared unless competent men have carefully looked into every detail of the emergency and conclude that it is expedient to do so. "Without counsel purposes are disappointed: but in the multitude of counsellors they are established," 15:22. Plans are sure to fail if they have not been considered carefully from every angle in advance. Concerning wars, Luther says: 'Also in wars the good of the land must be kept in mind. A prince should not wage war against his overlord. But if the attacker is equal or inferior to him, he should first try arbitration; if that fails, he should defend his land by force. The people must support their prince in a just war; in case the prince is wrong, the people are not bound to obey his summons. Where they cannot know what is right, obey the ruler.'<sup>25</sup> When warring, we should not be too confident of victory, but bear in mind that it is in the Lord's hand to give victory or defeat: "The horse is prepared against the day of battle, but safety is of the Lord," 21:31.

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25. Luther, "On Secular Authority," Holman, Vol. III, p. 201.



## Relation of the State to Property and Wealth

### 1. Capitalism

Capitalism has been an efficient economic system in the production of wealth. It has developed the application of machine power to production and has thus lowered the cost of production and raised the standard of living. It must be freely admitted that there are many good people who engage in production and distribution within the capitalistic framework. Unemployment and recurring severe depressions have, however, caused many to question the basis of the capitalistic system, and many believers have come to challenge that system at some point.<sup>26</sup>

The outstanding feature of the capitalistic system is undoubtedly the profit motive. If the profit motive is removed, capitalism is no more. Profit is net surplus after the cost of production has been met. We would not deny the legitimacy of adequate returns for service rendered or compensation for risks and responsibilities involved, but profit is benefit enjoyed without service rendered commensurate with it. (Mattson seems to go a bit too far here in his definition of "profit," making the big businessman and manufacturer guilty of motives and intents, that are not entirely warranted. Surely, it can not be gainsaid, that the "profit" of the industrialist may be the compensation for the money invested, time spent, worries endured, in giving employment

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26. Mattson, op. cit., pp. 317-18.



to men, thus affording them an opportunity to make an honest and profitable living). In general, profit motivated enterprises are run with an eye single to maximum profits and with little regard for social ends or human welfare.<sup>27</sup>

One of the evils often met within the capitalistic system is the promotion of scarcity in the field of consumption in order to keep up or raise prices; this was even practiced in Solomon's time -- Prov. 11:26. "He that withholdeth corn (dealing in so-called "futures" and in "Corners in wheat" -- common practices today), the people shall curse him (because such speculative manipulations raise the price of the necessities of life); but blessing shall be upon the head of him that selleth it." Another evil of the capitalistic system is that it allows the most capable or acquisitive (e.g. unions) to accumulate great wealth and power. To such the following passages from Proverbs have particular import: "He that oppresseth the poor to increase his riches, and he that giveth to the rich, shall surely come to want," 22:16; 22:22,23. "He that by usury and unjust gain increaseth his substance, he shall gather it for him that will pity the poor," 28:8, i.e. he will pass it on to better men. Capitalists and labor will go to almost any length to accumulate as much wealth as they possibly can. How well Prov. 30:14 applies to present economic conditions in our country!-- "There is a generation, whose teeth are as knives, to devour the poor from off the

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27. Ibid.



earth, and the needy from among men."

The Bible favors neither the capitalistic, nor the socialistic, nor the communistic system. It does not attempt to prescribe some thing which is not a matter of faith but of the practical wisdom of those who are responsible for the material well-being of society. In keeping with the ethical principles outlined above, however, Christianity does oppose the moral wrongs that may develop under any economic system, such as the extreme, selfish individualism of the capitalistic organization, the class-hatred of socialism, and the complete suppression of the human personality in communism. Above all, Christianity opposes the tendency to complete secularization in all three of these systems as they are found today, which would rule God out entirely from this work-a-day world and enthrone either the human individual or human society as the master of its own fate. It is the duty of Christian citizens as "salt" and "light" to exert such influence everywhere that the economic organization deal fairly and justly with all, the rich as well as the poor, <sup>28</sup> for Proverbs 22:2 reminds us: "The rich and poor meet together; the Lord is the Maker of them all." But how shall we reconcile ourselves to this divine distinction, and <sup>come</sup> to a better understanding of the situation? The following solutions are very feasible as well as Biblical: "Mutual conferences between capital and labor might bring about a common understanding.

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28. Keyser, op. cit., p. 378.



In the Church of God rich and poor meet on common ground. But the spirit that this distinction suggests is not so easily exercised. Christian brother<sup>hood</sup> should bring all together in a common family spirit. It was so in early ages, when the slave might be a privileged communicant, while the master was a humble catechumen on the threshold of the Church. Death levels all class distinctions. Rich and poor meet together in the grave. After death new distinctions emerge. Dives cannot scorn Lazarus in Hades. The motive for overcoming social distinctions is to be discovered in a consideration of the common relation of men to their Maker. Nothing short of religion will heal the fearful wounds of society. forcible methods will not succeed, e.g. in the French Revolution. A universal redistribution of property would soon be followed by the old distinctions. Socialism would destroy virtues of independence and energy. But faith in God will work inwardly towards a reconciliation. All classes are equally low before God. The highest earthly mountains vanish in astronomy. Our common relation to God is the ground of our mutual relations with one another. All men have one Father; therefore all men must be brethren. The recognition of the Fatherhood of God will lead to the admission of family duties and claims among men. Christ, who teaches the Fatherhood of God, inspires the "enthusiasm of humanity." 29

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29. Pulpit Commentary, Proverbs, Vol. 20, p. 428.



So it is God's will that these two classes should exist side by side. Therefore the Socialists and Communists contradict God's will when they maintain there should be no rich people. While God wants no one to be greedy (15:27), yet He does not enjoin an equal distribution of material possessions. Look at some of the illustrious saints of the Bible who were rich, e.g., Abraham, Job, King David, King Solomon; others were poor, e.g., Lazarus, Paul, the Mother Mary -- "The Lord is the Maker of them all;" it's in accordance with His divine will, wisdom, and purpose that some have more of this world's goods than others.

The making of laws, the definition of property rights, the setting up of economic systems, etc., all belong to the sphere of the state and not to the sphere of the church, which deals exclusively with spiritual things. Only insofar as the possession of material things may affect man's spiritual life and only to the extent to which material things are necessary for the accomplishment of the purposes of the kingdom of God on earth, does the Bible teach a specific doctrine concerning property. This doctrine may be summed up in a series of ethical principles, which should guide the believer in all questions pertaining to material wealth and property:

A. The striving for material things must always be subordinated to seeking the Kingdom and His righteousness. It's impossible to serve God and mammon. "The rich man's wealth is his strong city, and as a high wall in his own



conceit," 18:11. "He that trusteth in his riches shall fall; but the righteous shall flourish as a branch," 11:28.

Placing confidence in outward possessions is a species of idolatry.

B. Great wealth is not worth striving for. It is dangerous to the soul, for it exposes the soul to peculiar temptations, especially to false security and sinful pride. For that reason a wise man by the name of Agur asked God, Prov. 30:8-9: "Give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with food convenient for me; lest I be full and deny thee and say, who is the Lord? or lest I be poor and steal and take the name of my God in vain."

C. All property and wealth, regardless of whether it has been acquired by personal effort, gift, or inheritance, is a sacred trust committed to the holder by God, who in the final analysis, is the Owner of all things. "The blessing of the Lord, it maketh rich," 10:22. "The rich and poor meet together; the Lord is the Maker of them all," 22:2. In agreement with God's world-order, the rich and poor are found side by side. Everything that we may rightfully call our own has been received from God's hands; we are merely stewards over our possessions.

D. Accordingly, the wealthy are duty-bound to use their riches in such a way as to "be rich in good works," particularly, to aid those in need. "He becometh poor that dealeth with a slack hand: but the hand of the diligent maketh rich," 10:4.



"Honor the Lord with thy substance and with the firstfruits of thine increase; so shall thy barns be filled with plenty, and thy presses shall burst out with new wine," 3:9-10; 11:24-26; 9:17; 22:9.

E. The believer is to be content with such things as he has: "Better is little with the fear of the Lord than great treasure and trouble therewith," 15:16. Riches are a heavy responsibility and a source of anxiety. After all, riches are not to a person's advantage on the Last Great Day: "Riches profit not in the day of wrath: but righteousness delivereth from death," 11:4. The "treasure" in the house of the righteous is not money, but "righteousness," which keeps a person rich in God's eyes, even though he suffers the loss of all things. If one's poverty is not the result of ungodly living, it's no disgrace to be poor, (19:1). The poor man may be happy as well as the rich man: "He that is of a merry heart hath a continual feast. Better is a dinner of herbs where love is, than a stalled ox and hatred therewith," 15:15,16,17. A good name is better than riches (22:1). This should be remembered, too, that the poor man who steals or is envious of the rich is just as bad as the rich man who hoards his wealth: "Fret not thyself because of evil men, neither be thou envious at the wicked," 24:19.

If a person should succeed in gaining the wealth of the whole world, such an acquisition could not even compare with that of heavenly wisdom: "How much better is it to get



wisdom than gold ! and to get understanding rather to be chosen than silver !" 16:16. The possession of true wisdom makes the poorest of individuals rich in God's sight, resulting in spiritual and eternal blessings.

### Labor

The Oxford Conference on Life and Work took this position: "Labor has intrinsic worth and dignity, since it is designed by God for man's welfare." <sup>30</sup> That is a thoroughly Biblical position. God created man for work and useful activity. No one has a right to live a life of inactivity, that is, of course, unless God has so determined it. It's tragic enough when a person is physically unable to work and earn his own livelihood, for a life of inactivity is very trying and tiresome, to say the least. But if such a person is a believer, he has the comfort that God is training him for a higher purpose. However, it is certain that a downright lazy person is not a child of God; believers are not to live as parasites on others. They should work and pray for their daily bread. Idleness is a curse and is the heaviest burden any man can bear. It is Satan's opportunity to lead man into sins that will harm both his body and soul. Luther maintained that "to be well fed and idle is one of the greatest plagues on earth."

Proverbs contains many passages in regard to slothfulness

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30. Mattson, op. cit., p. 327.



and its effects. "Yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep: so shall thy poverty come as one that travelleth," 24:33,34. Slothfulness causes a man to sink into lethargy, sapping the last bit of his energy: "Slothfulness casteth into a deep sleep; and an idle soul shall suffer hunger," 19:15; 19:24; 20:13. A rather humorous description of a sluggard is given in 26:14-16: "As the door turneth upon his hinges, so doth the slothful upon his bed. The slothful hideth his hand in his bosom; it grieveth him to bring it to his mouth. The sluggard is wiser in his own conceit than seven men that can render a reason." A lazy person is like a door -- he goes nowhere; he squirms on his bed and goes off to sleep again when others are off working. Everyone despises such a shiftless person; he's no better than a worthless tramp. Even the lowly ants and other small creatures are far wiser than he -- 6:6-11; 30:24-28. It serves him right that people despise him; 'he's a pain in the neck' -- "As vinegar to the teeth and as smoke to the eyes, so is the sluggard to them that send him," 10:26. He can trot out the silliest excuses for getting out of work (22:13; 20:4). As a matter of fact, a sluggard sins both against God and against society. He sins against the Seventh Commandment because he takes what he has not earned ("if any would not work, neither should he eat." II Thess. 3:10). By refusing to labor he wastes his God-given talents and the property of others: "He also that is slothful in

service to our fellowmen. Therefore, the recompense of a



his work is brother to him that is a great waster," 18:9. Therefore, it is not surprising that a slothful man meets with poverty and disgrace throughout life: "The way of the slothful man is as an hedge of thorns: but the way of the righteous is made plain," 15:19. It is not surprising that he will be obliged to hold a subordinate position all his life: "The hand of the diligent shall bear rule: but the slothful shall be under tribute," 12:24. The sluggard has only himself to blame when his material possessions begin to slip through his fingers and when his physical and mental faculties begin to degenerate as the result of his idleness: "I went by the field of the slothful, and by the vineyard of the man void of understanding; and, lo, it was all grown over with thorns, and nettles had covered the face thereof, and the stone wall thereof was broken down. Then I saw, and considered it well: I looked upon it, and received instruction. Yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep: So shall thy poverty come as one that travelleth; and thy want as an armed man." 24:30-34.

On the other hand, Proverbs shows how highly God values and rewards honest labor. "The labor of the righteous tendeth to life," 10:16. The righteous man uses his income in such activities as will bring him true happiness. The best means for keeping well and happy is to work, for labor shortens the hours and lengthens life. By working, we not only provide for our bodily needs, but at the same time, we render service to our fellowmen. Therefore, "The recompense of a



man's hands shall be rendered unto him," 12:14. "He that tilleth his land shall be satisfied with bread," 12:11; 28:19. If we are not willing to work, we are hypocrites when we pray the fourth Petition of the Lord's Prayer; God wants us to pray and work (16:26). That is the kind of labor he rewards. "In all labor there is profit," 14:23; 13:11. "The soul of the sluggard desireth, and hath nothing: but the soul of the diligent shall be made fat," 13:4; 27:23-27. "The thoughts of the diligent tend only to plenteousness," 21:5. It is quite evident that working hard makes for success in life.

Everyone, therefore, should choose a calling and prepare for it, for God wants us to use our talents to the best advantage and in a sphere where we can do the greatest amount of good with them. True success in life comes only as a result of hard and faithful labor. Solomon would remind us then "that a faithful man shall abound with blessing: but he that maketh haste to be rich shall not be innocent," 28:20. "Prepare thy work without, and make it fit for thyself in the field; and afterwards build thine house," 24:27.

All legitimate callings and occupations have a social value, for each contributes something to the common ends and aims and to the satisfaction of the common wants of humanity. Only by the association and cooperation of many is the individual enabled to pursue his calling and only by such association and cooperation is the progress of the human race



made possible. In this service which he thus renders to the community and to humanity the believer finds the ethical value of his calling, for in the service he renders to his fellow men he sees a service rendered to his God. By being faithful in the performance of our duties, we serve God and do His will. "He that gathereth in summer is a wise son; but he that sleepeth in harvest is a son that causeth shame," 10:5.

"Seest thou a man diligent in his business? He shall not stand before mean men," 22:29. The person who is always willing to work and who has an intense desire to perform every task assigned to him with the utmost care and perfection -- that person is sure to acquire a fine reputation and will always be wanted when important things are to be done.

Unfortunately, many make the serious mistake in life of working only for money. Solomon has this warning for such: "Labor not to be rich; cease from thine own wisdom. Wilt thou set thine eyes upon that which is not? For riches certainly make themselves wings; they fly away as an eagle to heaven," 23:4-5; 13:7; 11:2-8. A believer is not to perform his duties merely for the sake of keeping his job, earning money, or gaining praise, but his chief interest in his occupation is the privilege and opportunity it offers him to render valuable service to God and man. As a godly life evidences a believer's faith, so likewise the faithful discharging of the duties of one's earthly calling. Therefore, may we as truly wise children of God, heed the admonition of the world's wisest man, King Solomon, who strongly urged: "Be thou diligent !"



### Conclusion

"Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life," 4:23. There's nothing that needs such constant watching as the heart. Not only is the heart a source of defilement, but it is also a treasure house for the believer's knowledge, good thoughts, emotions, conduct.

By not keeping our hearts we can destroy both our temporal and eternal welfare. Satan is quick to find an opening into our hearts in our off-moments. Therefore, our only safety against his insidious attacks lies in consecrating ourselves entirely to God, putting all our trust in Him, and making faithful use of the means of grace -- the Word of God and the Sacraments through which Wisdom speaks to us and gives us spiritual strength and willingness. "Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct thy paths. Be not wise in thine own eyes: fear the Lord, and depart from evil," 3:5-7. "My son, give me thine heart, and let thine eyes observe my ways," 23:26. God desires to take our hearts and purify and renew them so that He can dwell in us. A consecrated heart is one that is set apart, dedicated to His service. And a person who possesses such a purified heart will walk the ways of God's Commandments and endeavor to do His will in everything (16:3).



"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge," 1:7,  
"and by the fear of the Lord men depart from evil," 16:6.

There is one outstanding feature of Proverbs, namely, the revelation of the true Source and Fountain of wisdom, the Son of God, true Wisdom. He who knows and accepts the Son of God, Jesus Christ, by faith, will bring his entire conduct in life in agreement with the true reverence and fear of the Lord over against the foolishness and blindness of such as despise this true wisdom, the sum of all instruction in the Word of God.<sup>31</sup> Therefore --

"Get wisdom (the knowledge which we acquire by a study of God's Word), get understanding: forget it not; neither decline from the words of my mouth. Forsake her not, and she shall preserve thee: love her, and she shall keep thee. Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom: and with all thy getting get understanding. Exalt her, and she shall promote thee: she shall bring thee to honour, when thou dost embrace her. She shall give to thine head an ornament of grace: a crown of glory shall she deliver to thee," 4:5-9.

"My son, if thou wilt receive my words, and hide my Commandments with thee; so that thou incline thine ear unto wisdom, and apply thine heart to understanding; yea, if thou criest after knowledge, and liftest up thy voice for understanding; if thou seekest her as silver, and searchest for her as for hid treasures; then shalt thou understand the fear of

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31. Kretzmann, op. cit., p. 214.



the Lord, and find the knowledge of God. For the Lord giveth wisdom: out of His mouth cometh knowledge and understanding.  
 He layeth up sound wisdom for the righteous: he is a buckler to them that walk uprightly. He keepeth the paths of judgment, and preserveth the way of His Saints," 2:1-3.

**Soli Deo Gloria !**



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