

TWO ANCIENT PROVERBS NO. 3080

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*“The fear of man bringeth a snare: but whoso putteth his trust in the LORD shall be safe.”
Proverbs 29:25*

WE have two ancient proverbs here, each of them is true as a separate proverb, but they are equally true when linked together. The independent proposition, that the fear of man brings a snare, is a truth which experience has taught to many. The other proposition, that he that trusts in the Lord shall be safe, has been found most blessedly true by all those who have tested it. Then put the two propositions together—that the fear of man brings a snare, but trust in the Lord is the safe and certain way to avoid that snare—and this also is true.

I. We shall, first of all, consider for a little while the first of the two ancient proverbs, “The fear of man brings a snare.” That is ONE OF THE GREAT EVILS THAT WE HAVE TO AVOID.

What a common evil the fear of man is—the fear of losing human approbation, the fear of incurring human wrath. There are thousands of men, who have no fear of God, who have great fear of man. They break the laws of God without any fear of the consequences that must ensue, yet they are afraid to break the laws of man because they dread the punishment that might possibly follow. They are not afraid of hell, yet they are afraid of an earthly prison. They dread not the arm of the Almighty, yet they are afraid of an arm of flesh.

The fear of man has been thought by some persons to be a very good and salutary thing. Instead of bringing a snare, they think that it is the means of preventing much sin among mankind. Now, I do not doubt that some are hindered by the fear of man from committing great crimes and open acts of wrong, but the utmost that the fear of man can do is to confer a very doubtful benefit.

Try it in your own house among your own children. If your children are kept from wrong-doing only by the fear of you—if they only do that which they are bidden to do because they are afraid to do otherwise—you will have a very poor form of obedience, and you will have, at the same time, an abundant crop of deceit springing up, for when your child has done wrong, his fear of punishment will drive him to a falsehood, and perhaps lead him from one lie to another, and falsehoods may become so common with him that, at last, it shall be as natural to him to tell a lie as to speak the truth, and I think every parent must know that all the faults a child can commit, if put into the scale together, are not equal in criminality and in injury to his spiritual constitution to a lie.

The power to tell a lie is one of the most hideous powers to which man can attain, and some children are kept in such a state of terror that they naturally learn to do it. It is supposed too, that servants cannot be managed without being kept in a state of fear. Yet you all know what an eye-server is. If there is no right principle in servants, they are worth nothing. Those who will only work because the eye of the master or mistress is upon them are of very little value. You only teach them habits of deceit if they live in constant fear of you.

This experiment has been tried on a large scale. Laws have been made with severest penalties for their violation, yet men seemed as if they transgressed all the more. In prison, the sternest forms of discipline have been tried, yet the prisoner has come out determined to sin again, there has been no beneficial change produced in him by fear.

I will not deny that the fear of man has its uses, but I must assert again that it is always a very doubtful good which fear brings to the human mind and heart. Love, my brethren, is the grand cure for the evil of human hearts, especially the love that comes from above, that pure and heavenly flame, which is kindled only by the Holy Ghost burns up sin. But “fear hath torment,”—it does little else save plague and vex the soul.

Having said this much about any possible good that may come of fear, I now remark that according to the text, “the fear of man bringeth a snare.” *It has led many men into very great sins.*

Look at Pilate. I mention him first because there was a peculiar atrocity about his sin. The pure and holy Jesus is brought before him, and after examining Him, he declares, “I find no fault in this man.” He sends Him to Herod, and the result is that he says to Christ’s accusers, “I have found no fault in this man touching those things whereof ye accuse Him: no, nor yet has Herod: for I sent you to him.” Pilate’s wife warns him that she has suffered much in a dream because of Christ and she says, “Have thou nothing to do with that just man.”

Pilate’s own interviews with Christ impressed his mind, and therefore he wanted to set the Savior free if he could, but though he was a Roman governor, and placed in a high position of power, he was a poor slave to the people. He was vacillating, he knew what was the right course, and he wanted to take it, but he feared the consequences. The Jews might appeal to Caesar, and say that he had spared the life of one who pretended to be a king, and then he might lose his post. So this poor, timid, contemptible creature takes water, and washes his hands, and says that he is innocent of the blood of this just person, and the next minute gives up the innocent victim to be nailed on a cross.

It was the fear of man that caused Pilate’s name to become infamous in the history of the world and of the church of God, and it will be infamous to all eternity. The fear of man led him to slay the Savior, take care that it does not lead you to do something of the same kind.

Long before Pilate’s day, there had been a king of Israel who lost his crown through the fear of man. God had chosen Saul to be head over his people, but when he was commanded by God to smite the Amalekites, and to destroy all that they had, he spared King Agag, and the best of the sheep and oxen, and all that was good because he “feared the people, and obeyed their voice.” He was head and shoulders taller than his subjects, a man who, at other times, acted as a despot and had his own way, yet at this particular time he feared the people, and so did that which God had commanded him not to do, and therefore his kingdom was rent from him, and given to one who was better than he.

“Yes,” you say, “those two were bad men who fell into sin through fear of man.” Yes, but I am sorry to say that I must also mention good men who did the same. Look at Aaron, the priest of the Lord, and companion of his brother Moses, Aaron, who had spoken with God, and was His representative to the people. Yet, when Moses was gone up into the mount, and the people came to Aaron and said, “Up, make us gods, which shall go before us; for as for this Moses, the man that brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we wot not what is become of him,”

Aaron bade them break off their golden earrings, and bring them to him, and he, the priest of God, desecrated his sacred hands by making for the people a molten calf before which they might bow in worship. Ah, Aaron! Had you had the courage of your brother, you would not have fallen into that shameful sin.

Turning to the New Testament again, to give an example from it, remember bold Peter, and the words which he spoke so enthusiastically to his Lord, “I am ready to go with thee, both into prison, and to death. Though I should die with thee, yet will I not deny thee.”

Yet see him a little later, warming himself in the high priest’s palace, and first one of the maid servants, and then others that stood by, said to him, “Surely thou art one of them,” and “he began to curse and to swear,” to prove that he was no disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ. Ah, Peter, where is your courage now? Truly, “the fear of man bringeth a snare,” even to the best of men. God save us from it, and make us so brave that we shall never fear any man so as to do a wrong action!

Again, the fear of man brings a snare in this respect, *it keeps many persons from conversion*. Perhaps there are some such persons now present, let me see if I can pick them out. You scarcely dare to go to the place where the Gospel is preached in a way in which God blesses it, because if you were to go there, and it were known, it would be a subject of jest in your family, and would provoke remarks that you would not like. There are many who dare not go to the house where God pours out the blessing, they are such cowards that they dare not come to listen to those who preach Christ's Gospel with power, and others, who do come and hear it, are afraid to receive the truth to which they have listened again and again.

The thought in such a person's mind is, "What would Father and Mother say if I were converted? Oh, what a time I would have of it! What would my fellow workmen say? I should have to run the gauntlet of the whole lot if they once knew that I had become a Christian." Another says, "I don't know how I should endure the persecution I should receive, my life would become intolerable if I were to become a child of God." So they never come to Jesus because the fear of man, which brings a snare, keeps them still as the hopeless slaves of sin.

But young man, do you mean to be damned just to please somebody else? Do you mean to fling away your immortal soul in order to escape the laughter of fools? Remember that they may laugh you into hell, but they cannot laugh you out again. Let not the fear of man be the ruin of your soul. If, for the sake of pleasing men, you choose to forfeit some small trifle, it does not much matter, but when it comes to the forfeiting of Christ, the forfeiting of your soul, and the forfeiting of heaven, I appeal to your own conscience to say if it is worthwhile to be eternally ruined for the sake of pleasing men, whoever they may be.

Is it not better that even father, and mother, and brother, and sister, and every friend you have in the world should be against you, and that God should be yours, than that you should have all these as your friends, and yet remain at enmity against the Most High?

I have no doubt that this same fear of man *keeps a large number of persons who are converted, from making a public avowal of their faith*, and so it brings a snare to them. Nicodemus "at the first came to Jesus by night," and Joseph of Arimathea was "a disciple of Jesus, but secretly for fear of the Jews." I hope you will not try to shelter behind those two good men, for remember that as soon as Christ was put to death, when His cause was at the very worst, they came out boldly, and proved their love of Him, and we do not read that they ever crept back, like snails into their shells. Having owned Christ as their Lord and Master, I have no doubt that they continued to follow Him whatever the consequences may have been.

So far as you are concerned, just now is the time to own Christ, now especially, because skepticism and superstition, the two monstrous evils which threaten to devour true religion, are so rampant, and it needs some moral courage to declare yourself upon the side of the simple Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. Now is the hour for a Christian to play the man for Christ his Lord and Master, yet there are many who are keeping in the background because "the fear of man bringeth a snare" upon them.

Where are you, dear friend? I cannot come round to all those pews, otherwise I would stop, here and there, before some of you whom I know, and before others whom I suspect, and whom I joyfully suspect, of loving my Master. I think you do, by the way you look when His name is extolled in your hearing, yet you have not said so in the way He wishes.

I charge you, by the love which you bear to Him, keep not back. Think that you see Him now before your eyes, and that you hear Him say to you as He hangs upon the cross, "I bore all this for you, and yet are you ashamed of Me? If you love Me, own Me in the midst of this wicked and perverse generation. Take up your cross and follow Me, whatever suffering or reproach it may involve."

The fear of man has brought a snare to some of the greatest believers who have ever lived, and any child of God, whenever he fears the face of man, loses some of the dignity which appertains to that relationship. What a grand man Abraham was! Whenever I read his life, I look up to him with astonishment, and wish I had such faith as would make me resemble him in that respect. He marches

across the pages of history with such quiet stately dignity that kings and princes are dwarfed beside his great figure. How nobly did he say to the King of Sodom, "I will not take from you a thread even to a shoe latchet, lest thou shouldst say, I have made Abram rich." But oh, how small did he look when he said to Abimelech, concerning his wife, "She is my sister." She was his sister, in a sense, there was some truth in what he said, but she was more than his sister, so he was uttering a falsehood, for which he was rightly rebuked by the heathen prince.

You have, in David, another instance of how the fear of man can bring the mighty down. How brave he is as he goes out to slay Goliath, and how grandly he behaves when, twice, he spares the life of his sleeping enemy! Yet see him there at Gath, when the servants of Achish frightened him so that he "feigned himself mad in their hands, and scribbled on the doors of the gate, and let his spittle fall down upon his beard." The fear of man had brought down Israel's future monarch to drivel like a madman.

Equally sad is the case of Elijah, that grandest of men, as I may truly call him. You see him in his grandeur as he cries, "Take the prophets of Baal; let not one of them escape," and as he brings them down to the brook Kishon, and slays them there, and then, as he goes to the top of Carmel, and prays till the rain descends upon the parched land.

Yet, after the excitement is over, he is afraid of a woman, Jezebel, and the great Elijah shrinks down into the puling frightened man who runs away, and cries, "It is enough; now, O LORD, take away my life, for I am not better than my fathers." So you see that "the fear of man bringeth a snare" even to the best of men, it drags them down from their high places, and hurls them into the dust. Therefore may God preserve us from it!

The fear of man keeps some believers in very dubious positions. I have known some believers remain where they knew they were not doing right, and where every day they were dragging a heavy chain behind them because they had not the moral courage to come straight out for God.

If any of you, young people, who love the Lord, want to go the easiest way to heaven—you know that all ways there are rough, but if you want to go the easiest way, take that which looks the hardest, namely, be an out-and-out, thorough-going Christian. "But that will cost me much," says one. It will at first, but it will be the more easy for you afterwards, whereas, if you begin by giving way to the world a little—trimming a little—you will have to give way and trim more and more.

A Christian should be like a steamer that goes straight away to the port it is intended to reach, but many professors are like sailing vessels, the motive power that controls them is outside of them, so they have to tack a good deal, and though they may ultimately get to their destination, there is a good deal of queer sailing to the right and to the left, and their voyage takes a very long while. I hope you, dear friends, will go straight to your mark. "Trust in God, and do the right," and this will, after all, be the very smoothest path that you can follow.

Further, *the fear of man hampers the usefulness of a great many.* There are brethren who ought to be preaching, but who are not because they are afraid of men, and some who ought to go and visit the poor, but they say that they cannot, the reason is that they are afraid of men.

Why, I have known some who were even afraid to give away a tract, they were as much alarmed as though they had to put their hand into a tiger's mouth. I have known some who were afraid to speak to their own children about their souls. Is it not strange that they can speak to other people's children about their souls better than they can to their own? It should not be so, in fact, there is nobody living that any one of us, if he is a Christian, has any right to be afraid of.

We shall never do good to people if we are afraid of them. What would have become of the church of God if the apostles had been such timid, gentle Christians as some whom I know? They would not have gone out to preach in the streets, and as there were no chapels and churches then, they would not have preached at all. As soon as Caesar promulgated an edict that they were not to meet on the first day of the week, they would have said, "Perhaps we had better not meet." When they heard that the crowds shouted in the amphitheater, "Christians to the lions!" they would have said, "We must not expose

ourselves to such a risk, and we must think of our wives and families,” and so they would have been cowards, and soon there would have been no Christianity left in the world.

Just imagine what would have happened if the Reformers had acted thus. Suppose Martin Luther had said, “I shall do as that old monk advised me when I consulted him. He said, ‘Martin, go back to your cell, and live thou there near to thy God, and leave the church and the world alone.’” If Luther had followed that advice, where would the blessed Reformation have been, and what preaching of the Gospel would there have been at this present moment?

I must not continue much longer upon this part of my subject, but I must say that *to a minister of Christ, the fear of man is one of the worst of snares*. Jonah tried to escape from going to Nineveh because he was afraid of man. The Galatians could not bear the full light of the Gospel, and therefore certain teachers among them tried to shut off some of its beams, and if a minister of Christ once begins to be afraid of his hearers, his tendency will be to withhold some doctrine through fear of a wealthy subscriber, or to keep back some rebuke for fear that it should bear too hardly upon an influential person in his congregation.

There is one sin which I believe I have never committed, I think that I have never been afraid of any of you, and I hope, by the grace of God, that I never shall be. If I dare not speak the truth upon all points, and dare not rebuke sin, what is the good of me to you?

Yet I have heard sermons which seemed to me to have been made to the order of the congregation. But honest hearers want honest preaching, and if they find that the preachers message comes home to them, they thank God that it is so. They say, “Is it not right that it should be so? If we err, should not the Word of God, which is quick and powerful, search us, try us and find out our errors?” And the preacher, if he really preaches the truth as it is in Jesus, must often deal out rebuke as well as encouragement. May God deliver all His ministers from the fear of man everywhere, and the whole church of Christ too!

At one time, the fear of man took this form—the geologists had discovered that Moses was mistaken, and that God did not know how He had made the world! Many seemed to think that something dreadful had happened, and they wondered how those objectors were to be answered. Soon after that, somebody discovered that God was mistaken about having made Adam and Eve, for they gradually developed from oysters or some smaller creatures still! Then again there was a great outcry, “Who is to answer these eminent philosophers?”

O, church of God, is every driveling fool to have any answer at all? Stand fast by the inspired Word, and be not ensnared by the fear of man. We have seen scores of systems of philosophy come and go, and we shall probably see as many more before we die. Our business is to stand fast to the truth of revelation, and let philosophies die as the frogs of Egypt died in the days of Moses, for die they will, and when fresh hordes come, they also will die, but the eternal truth of the ever-blessed God will never die, it will live on in its own glorious immortality.

II. Now, in the second place, I want to show you that THE GREAT CURE FOR THIS EVIL IS TRUST IN GOD, “The fear of man bringeth a snare: but whoso putteth his trust in the LORD shall be safe.”

I should have thought that Solomon would have said, “The fear of man bringeth a snare: but whoso feareth the LORD shall be safe.” That would have read very well, and it would have been quite true, but it would not have expressed the special truth that Solomon then had in mind. It is not fear, but faith, that is the cure for cowardice. Trust in the Lord, and you can then cry, “Whom shall I fear?” for you will feel that you have the strength of the Almighty at your back. Trusting in God, we feel that we are one with God, and so we are made strong. That strength breeds courage, and enables us boldly to ask, “If God be for us, who can be against us?”

That courage leads us to count the cost of doing right, and after counting it, we feel that in God’s strength, we can endure that and a thousand times as much if necessary, and therefore we say, “Come what may, we will serve the Lord,” and with the Holy Spirit resting upon us, we march boldly on to

victory in His might. So that trust in God, by giving us God's strength and consequently courage and decision, lifts us up above the fear of man.

But the point of the text may be found in another direction, namely, that trusting in God, *we become safe, not merely from fear, but from the consequences of defying fear*. "Whoso putteth his trust in the LORD shall be safe." By trusting in the Lord, and doing that which is right, he may be a great sufferer, but he shall be safe. He will not be so great a sufferer as he would be if he followed the opposite course.

Suppose that his enemies carry their opposition to extremes, they can only kill the body, and after that they have no more that they can do. But suppose he were to forfeit his faith, then his body and soul would be cast into hell, which would be an infinitely greater and eternal loss. Never imagine that you can be a loser by trusting in God. Whatever risk there is in doing so, the risk of not trusting in Him is far greater, and every sensible man will prefer the smaller risk.

Besides, how often it happens that if a man trusts in God, and acts according to his conscience, he is not a loser at all. Many have been gainers thereby, though that ought not to be an inducement. Many have said, "If we do what we feel is right, we shall lose everything," and yet, when they have dared to run that risk, they have lost nothing at all, for God has helped them in the emergency. But if they should lose by doing the right thing, let this assurance comfort them, "Whoso putteth his trust in the Lord shall be safe." It is much better to be safe than to be wealthy, and infinitely better to be safe for time and for eternity than to have all the comforts of life about you, but to put your soul in jeopardy.

A Christian man need never be afraid of anybody. If you are doing right, you have no cause to fear the greatest man who is serving the devil. Look at Bernard Palissy, the Huguenot potter who produced such wonderful works of art. One day the king of France said to him, "Bernard I am afraid I shall be compelled to give you up to the inquisitors to be burned if you will not change your religion." Bernard's reply was, "I pity your majesty." Only think of that, the potter pitied the king! So his majesty asked, "Why do you pity me, Bernard?" "Because," he answered, "you have said what your majesty and fifty thousand princes cannot make me say, *'I fear I shall be compelled!'*"

Why, sirs, Palissy was the king, and the king was not worthy to be the potter. A truly royal dignity dwelt in that potter's soul. Are any of you young men going to allow anybody to make you say, "I fear I shall be compelled to cease worshipping with the Dissenters," "I fear I shall be compelled to abstain from attending that little country Baptist chapel," or "I am afraid it might not be considered proper for me to make an open profession of religion in the town where I live?" If you talk like that, I can only say, "May the Lord have mercy on your little miserable soul, and give you enough manhood and common honesty to confess what Christ has done for you!"

If you really have been bought with the precious blood of Jesus Christ, and have had your sins forgiven, have been made an heir of heaven, and are on your way to a glorious immortality, surely you cannot act the part of a sneak like that! What, are you who are to dwell among the angels, you for whom there is a mansion in the skies, and a robe of righteousness and a crown of glory, are you going to play the coward like that? Why, if you act thus, you ought to be drummed out of the regiment of the church militant, so how can you expect to be in the church triumphant with such a miserable spirit as that? May the Lord help you to put your trust in Him, that you may be saved from all fear of man!

Now to close. The last sentence of the text is true as an independent proposition. "Whoso putteth his trust in the LORD shall be safe." I have not time to speak about this sentence, but I give it to you to put under your tongue as a sweet morsel as you go your way to your homes. It is not, "He that trusteth in himself," it is not, "He that trusteth in a priest," it is not, "He that performs good works, and trusts in them," but "whoso putteth his trust in the LORD shall be safe."

The man who is trusting in the blood and righteousness of Jesus may not always be happy, but he is safe, he may not always be singing, but he is safe, he may not always have the joy of full assurance, but he is safe. He may sometimes be distressed, but he is always safe, he may sometimes question his interest in Christ, but he is always safe.

I was astonished, the other day, to meet with an expression used by Cardinal Bellarmine, who was one of the greatest Jesuit controversialists. He closes a long argument about being saved by works with the following very remarkable sentences, which I will quote as accurately as I can—"Nevertheless, although the way of acceptance with God is by our own works, there is a danger that men may so trust in their own works as to grow proud, which would quite spoil their works, and therefore *upon the whole*, it is safest for them to rely upon the blood and merits of Jesus Christ alone."

Well done, Cardinal Bellarmine! "*Upon the whole*," I mean to do that as long as I live, and oh that everyone who has ever been deluded by the doctrines of the Church of Rome, would listen to the Cardinal's confession that, *upon the whole*, it is safest to rest upon what Christ has done! *Upon the whole*, it is better to trust in the Savior than to trust in ourselves! *Upon the whole*, it is better to be washed in His blood than to think that we can make ourselves clean!

The cardinal did not say all the truth, but I thank him for what he did say, though the truth is better put by Solomon in my text, "Whoso putteth his trust in the LORD shall be safe." He shall be safe if he is sick, if he is rich, if he is poor. He shall be safe when he dies, safe when he rises again, safe at the day of judgment, and safe throughout eternity. Oh, then, come all of you, and trust in the Lord, for "whoso putteth his trust in the LORD shall be safe" forever! Amen.

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON

PROVERBS 27

Verse 1. *Boast not thyself of to morrow; for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth.*

Let us never boast of future days and years, or what we mean to do when we come to any age, or what shall be our position when we grow grey. Let us never boast of anything in the future, for we cannot tell what even a day may bring forth.

2. *Let another man praise thee, and not thine own mouth; a stranger, and not thine own lips.*

For he who praises himself writes himself down a fool in capital letters.

3. *A stone is heavy, and the sand weighty; but a fool's wrath is heavier than them both.*

One might endure almost any sort of labor sooner than have to live with one who is perpetually and foolishly angry.

4. *Wrath is cruel, and anger is outrageous; but who is able to stand before envy?*

Envy is a snake in the grass. Christians, beware of envy. You will, perhaps, be tempted to have it in your heart when you see another Christian more useful than you are, or when some Christian brother seems to have more honor than you have. Ah, then! cry to God against it. Never let this venomous reptile be spared for a single moment. The best of men will find envy creeping over them at times, it may be envy of the wicked who are rich. We must seek to overcome *that* at once. And even envy of the best of men, what is it but covetousness and hatred, and a breach of two commandments? God save us from it!

5. *Open rebuke is better than secret love.*

That I should love my fellow man is a good thing, but to have love enough to be able openly to rebuke his faults, is a very high proof of affection, and far better than secret love that is silent when it ought to speak. And yet, how many persons there are who are very angry with you if you give them an open rebuke, and how many there are who are foolish enough to prefer secret love to open rebuke, though they have Solomon's wisdom to teach them better! Our Lord Jesus Christ has a secret love to His people, yet He never spares them the open rebuke when He knows that it will be good for them.

6. *Faithful are the wounds of a friend, but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful.*

Beware of the flattering world, believer, beware of the flattering devil, and of the cozening of the flesh. When things go smoothly with you, there may be the greatest danger. Whatever you do in times of storm, keep a good lookout when the sea is calm and the sky is clear.

7. *The full soul loatheth an honeycomb; but to the hungry soul every bitter thing is sweet.*

“The full soul loatheth” (even that luscious thing) “an honeycomb.” No true preaching will go down with him who is full of himself, full of his own importance. Unless there shall be many of the flowers of rhetoric in the discourse, he will not listen to sound doctrine. “But to the hungry soul every bitter thing is sweet.” Happy hunger is it when the soul hungers and thirsts after righteousness. Then there are no hyper-critical observations about the minister’s delivery, and no carping at words and phrases. It is spiritual food that the soul seeks, and if it can get that, though it may not be to its taste in every respect, there will be a sweetness in it that will make it like a honeycomb.

8-9. *As a bird that wanders from her nest, so is a man that wanders from his place. Ointment and perfume rejoice the heart: so doth the sweetness of a man’s friend by hearty counsel.*

The Orientals were known to smear their faces and especially their hair, with ointment and perfume, and those who came near them were pleased with the scent. When you can get a little conversation, especially upon points that help towards godliness, with those of a like frame of mind with you, when you can have sweet communion and fellowship with the people of God, then it is that your hearts are rejoiced as with ointments and perfumes.

10. *Thine own friend, and thy father’s friend, forsake not;*

Have but few friends, but stick closely to them. Above all, cleave closely to that “Friend that sticketh closer than a brother.” If He be your own Friend, and your father’s Friend, never forsake HIM. Forsake all the world for Him, but let not all the world induce you to forsake Him.

10. *Neither go into thy brother’s house in the day of thy calamity: for better is a neighbor that is near than a brother far off.*

It is very sad that it should be so, but sometimes, our nearest relatives are the farthest off, and those who ought to help us the most help us least. Many a man has had kindness shown to him by his neighbor who was but a stranger, when he has had little or no kindness from his own relatives. But there is one Brother into whose house we may always go. So near of kin He is to us, and so loving of heart, that He never thinks a hard thought of us, but the more we ask of Him, the more delighted He is with us, and is only grieved with us because we stint ourselves in our prayers.

11. *My son, be wise, and make my heart glad, that I may answer him that reproacheth me.*

A good son is his father’s honor. If any say of such and such a man that he is a bad man, yet if his children walk orderly, he can answer the slander without speaking a word. Would a bad man have brought up his children in that way? Would they be walking in the fear of God if he had not walked in that way himself? So the sons of God ought to seek, by their consistency, to keep the name of their Father clear of reproach. The consistency of our conduct should be the best answer to the accusations of the infidel.

12-13. *A prudent man foreseeth the evil, and hides himself; but the simple pass on, and are punished. Take his garment that is surety for a stranger,—*

He that takes surety is sure, but he that goes surety for another, and especially for a stranger, will smart for it, perhaps to the day of his death.

13-14. *And take a pledge of him for a strange woman. He that blesseth his friend with a loud voice, rising early in the morning, it shall be counted a curse to him.*

There are some men who always use such sweet words, they are so fond of you that they are up early in the morning to give you their praise, and they continue all day pouring out their flattering unction. Such blessings as these are a curse, and the wise man will loathe these parasitical people who will see no faults, or pretend that they do not see any, but will always be extolling mere trifles as though they were the most sublime virtues. A sensible man is not to be overcome by this flattery.

15. *A continual dropping in a very rainy day and a contentious woman are alike.*

When there is a little leak in the roof, and the rain keeps dropping through, it is very uncomfortable, but it is ten times more comfortable than it is to have to dwell with a contentious woman.

16. *Whosoever hideth her hideth the wind, and the ointment of his right hand, which bewrayeth itself.*

That is to say, if a man puts sweet ointment on his hand, the smell of it would soon be perceived, so, if a woman is of a contentious, angry, quarrelsome disposition, her contentiousness will be discovered, there is no hiding it.

17. *Iron sharpeneth iron; so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend.*

Hence the usefulness of Christian association, and hence also the evil of sinful company, for one sinner sharpens another to do mischief, just as one saint encourages another to righteousness.

18-19. *Whoso keepeth the fig tree shall eat the fruit thereof: so he that waiteth on his master shall be honoured. As in water face answereth to face, so the heart of man to man.*

If I look into water, I see the reflection of my own face, not another man's, and if I look into society, I shall probably see men like-minded with myself. How is it that a drunken man always finds out other drunken men? How is it that lascivious men always have a bad opinion of the morality of other people? How is it that hypocrites always think other people hypocrites? Why, because they can see the reflection of their own faces. When a man tells me that there is no love in the church of God, I know it is because he sees his own face, and knows that there is no love in it. You will generally find that men measure other people's corn with their own bushels. They are sure to mete out to others according to their own measure, and they thus unconsciously betray themselves.

20-21. *Hell and destruction are never full; so the eyes of man are never satisfied. As the fining pot for silver, and the furnace for gold; so is a man to his praise.*

Many a man, who can bear adversity, cannot bear prosperity. The world's censures seldom do a Christian any harm, but it is the breath of applause that often gives us the scarlet fever of pride.

22. *Though thou shouldest bray a fool in a mortar among wheat with a pestle, yet will not his foolishness depart from him.*

No troubles, no afflictions, can of themselves make a fool into a wise man. The sinner remains a sinner, after all providential chastisements, unless sovereign grace interposes.

23. *Be thou diligent to know the state of thy flocks, and look well to thy herds.*

Be not slothful in business, and above all, let the Christian be diligent to know the state of his own heart.

24-27. *For riches are not for ever: and doth the crown endure to every generation? The hay appeareth, and the tender grass sheweth itself, and herbs of the mountains are gathered. The lambs are for thy clothing, and the goats are the price of the field. And thou shalt have goat's milk enough for thy food, for the food of thy household, and for the maintenance for thy maidens.*

Those who are diligent generally prosper, and they who are diligent in spiritual things shall have all that their souls need. They shall be clothed with the robe of righteousness, they shall be well fed, and shall be satisfied.

May the wisdom of these proverbs be given to us in daily life, that we may be wise as serpents, and harmless as doves, but above all, may heavenly wisdom be given to us in all spiritual things, to the praise of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ!

Taken from The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit C. H. Spurgeon Collection. Only necessary changes have been made, such as correcting spelling errors, some punctuation usage, capitalization of deity pronouns, and minimal updating of a few archaic words. The content is unabridged. Additional Bible-based resources are available at www.spurgeongems.org.