

**Prose
From
Proverbs**

Prose From Proverbs

Begin Here

One of the marks of a smug, decaying society is that there is no fear of God. The individuals in such societies generally have no goal but gratification, no pursuit but pleasure. Worshiping at the twin golden calves of lust and luxury, they, in the words of the apostle Paul, do “not honor Him as God, or give thanks” (Romans 1:21). As a result they are plunged into darkness and destruction; professing to be wise, they are governed by groundless speculation and superstition, and, as fools, are delivered over to a depraved mind.

In contrast to the swaying jungle of darkness comes steady enlightenment from God. “From Your precepts, I get understanding,” noted the psalmist. “Therefore I hate every false way” (Psalm 119:104). But as enlightening and informative as the Old Testament is, it is but a candle held to the sun in comparison to the New Testament. He who spurned the Old and he who rejects the New have a common bond: “There is no fear of God before their eyes” (Romans 3:18). The writer of the psalm and the opener of Proverbs basically agree on the solution. “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom,” says one, and “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge,” says the other (Psalm 111:10; Proverbs 1:7).

- **The fear of the Lord** - While there is a certain element of terror connected with the fear of the Lord, His character is such that the adherent is compelled to come near. The result of this divinely designed push-pull is that the one who begins to hear to words of the Lord has a healthy respect for the Almighty and His Son, and judiciously hustles to carry out His instructions.
- **The beginning of knowledge** - The world is filled with books. While there is good information on everything from how to tie a fly for fishing to programming computers, the world has no knowledge on pleasing God or how to live a truly spiritual life. The proper reverence for God will drive the seeker to the Bible for his source of information, and he will now begin to learn how to walk in the way of the Lord.
- **Humility** - The reader of the words, brought to an awareness of the power and majesty of Him who sits on the eternal throne, is now conscious of his sin and shortcomings in the sight of the Omnipotent. Thus humbled, he is now prepared to “receive instruction in righteous behavior” (Proverbs 1:3).
- **What those who fear the Lord receive** - When the man is humble enough to submit to the Lord’s counsel, quite a list of learning opportunities open for him. He gets “to know wisdom and instruction,” and “to discern the sayings of understanding.” Information on “righteousness, justice, and equity” is sent his way. To the young, who are just becoming aware of the stark reality about them, the instruction from the Lord will “give prudence to the naive,” and “to the youth knowledge and discretion.” Even the experienced will benefit: “A wise man will hear and increase in learning, and a man of understanding will acquire wise counsel.” For those who in step-by-step fashion, beginning from the fear of the Lord, increase in wisdom and knowledge, the ability is given to understand a proverb and a figure, the words of the wise and their riddles” (Proverbs 1:2-6).
- **What is for fools** - “Fools,” said the wise Solomon, “despise wisdom and instruction.” “When your dread comes like a storm,” cries Wisdom, to those who spurn her, “and your calamity like a whirlwind... then they will call on me, but I will not answer...because they hated knowledge and did not choose the fear of the Lord” (Proverbs 1:27-29).

Here, then, is the great promise for those who fear the Lord and learn wisdom and knowledge from the mouth of the Almighty and All Knowing: “But he who listens to me shall live securely, and shall he at ease from the dread of evil” (Proverbs 1:33).

Prose From Proverbs

Seeking For Silver

Life on earth is so short and eternity is so long. The wise considers those fundamental truths and keeps them in the forefront of his mind, using them as the basis on which he makes his life's decisions. The foolish live for this life only. "They would not accept my counsel," said wisdom. "They spurned all my reproof, so they shall eat the fruit of their own way, and be satiated with their own devices. For the waywardness of the naive shall kill them, and the complacency of fools shall destroy them" (Proverbs 1:30-32). By contrast the one who desires wisdom is not complacent. "If you cry for discernment," says the sage of Proverbs, if you "lift your voice for understanding, if you seek her as silver, and search for her as for hidden treasures; then you will discern the fear of the Lord, and discover the knowledge of God" (Proverbs 2:3-5).

- **Seeking as for silver** - Silver and gold have intrinsic value. A chunk of silver or a hunk of gold have value based on weight, regardless of shape, as contrasted to paper, which is not real money and has value only because there is a number printed somewhere on the bill. Many was the man who, looking for real treasure, scoured the vast regions of the American West or stomped through the creek beds of Alaska in search of gold nuggets or silver outcroppings. The quest was not easy; the wanderers were scorched by the western sun, scourged with 100mph winds, pelted with rain and sleet smothered by deep snows, and frozen by sudden winter blasts. Then there were problems with hostile Indians, road agents, bandits, claim jumpers, and sickness and disease, to say nothing of the dangers and difficulties of mining the claims themselves. The point of this is to illustrate, in as graphic a form as possible, what drive and desire must underlay those who searched for silver. "If you seek her," said Solomon of wisdom, "as silver..." Those who have this yearning for wisdom - to search for her through the wastelands of confusion and the blazing heat of controversy - will find her. Those who sit back and expect wisdom to come to them will join the rest of a complacent, "dumbed-down" society.
- **Positive motivation** - A person has to be motivated to search for wisdom. For those who slogged the dusty trails in quest of silver, the motivation was the potential of getting rich. Those who lay it on the line for finding wisdom are motivated by the positive things, which she provides. Those who pin-point the wisdom of God come under the protection of God; "He is a shield to those who walk in integrity - guarding the paths of justice - and He preserves the way of His godly ones (Proverbs 2:7,8). "Discretion will guard you," says the writer, and "understanding will watch over you" (Proverbs 2:11).
- **The downward path** - Those who reject wisdom end upon a darkened path of misery, heartache, and destruction. Without sufficient insight into human nature, they are marks for men more evil and cunning than they. Apart from the prudence of morality, they are delivered over to "the strange woman, the adulteress who flatters with her words." "Her house sinks down to death," intones wisdom, "and her tracks lead to the dead. None who go to her return again, nor do they reach the paths of life" (Proverbs 2:16-19). Those with a modicum of understanding are driven forward in their pursuit of wisdom by the glimmer of knowledge they have about "the tracks of the dead."

"How blessed is the man who finds wisdom, and the man who gains understanding. For its profit is better than the profit of silver and its gain than fine gold. She is more precious than jewels, and nothing you desire compares with her. Long life is in her right hand; and in her left are riches and honor. Her ways are pleasant ways, and all her paths are peace" (Proverbs 3:13-17). Raise the dust, boys, and get on the boom town trail. There's something greater than gold in the water and better than silver in "them thar hills."

Prose From Proverbs

Trust In The Lord

Trust requires an up-front commitment. The one to be trusted must have demonstrated his trustworthiness; the one who trusts must first trust, and then wait for the results. One of the major purposes of the written scriptures is to demonstrate the faithfulness of God; the record of His up-front commitment to the well-being and salvation of man is unbroken and unblemished. Indeed all the ancients testify as to the goodness and greatness of God, and James in the New Testament notes that there is no variation or shifting shadowy effect from the Father of lights. "It is a trustworthy statement," Paul informed Timothy. "For if we died with Him, we shall also live with Him; if we endure, we shall also reign with Him; if we deny Him, He will also deny us; if we are faithless, He remains faithful; for He cannot deny Himself" (II Timothy 2:11-13). One of the great attributes of the great God is that He is steady and dependable even if mankind is not.

- **Trust in God** - God has already made the up-front commitment. Jesus Christ was sent as the Emissary from heaven and was offered as the great sacrifice, that He might man redeem. "Trust in the Lord with all your heart," is the invitation offered from the realm of glory, followed with the corresponding advice, "and do not lean on your own understanding" (Proverbs 3:5). Trusting God is synonymous with trusting His word. When the exhortation is given from the Holy Writ, the test for the Christian is whether he actually does what God has said. It did not make any earthly sense for Abraham to offer Isaac as a sacrifice to the Lord, but rather than lean on his own understanding, Abraham willingly strapped his only begotten son down on the altar and proceeded to cut his throat. Abraham, trusting in the command of God, did as he was told, and in effect received Isaac back from the dead. The Christian, instead of offering a son on a physical altar, offers his own body as a living and holy sacrifice, and views himself as already dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.
- **Give credit to the Father** - The child of the King is aware that he has nothing which he did not receive, that his wisdom comes from God, and that all his financial resources and physical accomplishments are as a result of the backing of the Almighty. He heeds the advice: "In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight. Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the Lord and turn away from evil. It will be healing to your body and refreshment to your bones" (Proverbs 3:6-8).
- **Tithe from the top** - One of the areas where the talkers are separated from the doers, where those who lean on their own understanding parted from those who trust the Lord, is in giving. "Honor the Lord from your wealth, and from the first of all your produce," stated wisdom from God, "so your barns will be filled with plenty, and your vats will overflow with new wine" (Proverbs 3:9,10).
- **Accept God's discipline** - "We had earthly fathers to discipline us...as seemed best to them," the author of Hebrews pointed out, but the heavenly Father "disciplines us for our good, that we may share His holiness" (Hebrews 12:9,10). "My son," intones Solomon, "do not reject the discipline of the Lord, or loathe His reproof for whom the Lord loves He reproves, even as a father, the son in whom he delights" (Proverbs 3:11,12). Shall we accept the blessings of the Lord and reject His discipline?

Brethren can trust God. "He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things?" (Romans 8:32). The saints, then, need to move ahead, in accordance with what is written, and trust God. Trust God in acknowledging His contributions. Trust God in giving the top 10%. And continue to trust God in the midst of His discipline and reproof.

Prose From Proverbs

Wisdom With Neighbors

Not one of us lives for himself, said the great apostle Paul, not one of us dies for himself. The point of the apostle's statement is that no man is an island, and that each person on earth has duties and responsibilities to those with whom he has contact. And those with whom man has contact, even very casually, are called *neighbors*.

Wherever people interact, there are problems. Sometimes people react wrongly to the challenge life in general offers and take their frustrations out on others around them. Sometimes individuals are just plain hard to get along with; they are often selfish, self-centered, and like to cause problems among others in their circle of acquaintances. So the second greatest commandment - to love your neighbor as yourself - is not necessarily easy to keep. Wisdom dictates that the believer in God will conduct himself intelligently in regard to his dealings with his fellow man.

- **Doing good to all men** - The Lord God expects His children to be somewhat aggressive in looking for opportunities to go the extra mile in helping their fellow men. Doing good opens the door for conversation about the Lord Jesus, and is gratifying to God the Father. "And do not neglect doing good and sharing," noted the writer of Hebrews, "for with such sacrifices God is pleased" (Hebrews 13:16). Wisdom from Proverbs set the stage: "Do not withhold good from those to whom it is due, when it is in your power to do it" (Proverbs 3:27).
- **Do not make extra work** - There are among us those of a contrary and fickle nature, who do not seem to mind causing extra and unnecessary work and hassle for others. The Almighty is aware, because of the strictures He imposed upon creation, that the real energy crisis has nothing to do with fossilized fuels, but is centered about the bounce, efficiency, and effectiveness of His people. Extra work and extra hassle are major energy drains as well as costing time and money. "Do not say to your neighbor, 'Go, and come back, and tomorrow I will give it,' when you have it with you" (Proverbs 3:28).
- **Do not be a troublemaker** - "We hear that some among you. Paul informed the Thessalonians, "are leading an undisciplined life, doing no work at all, but acting like busybodies" (II Thessalonians 3:11). Undisciplined lives are intimately connected with undisciplined mouths and undisciplined passions. The wisdom of Proverbs records: "Do not devise harm against your neighbor while he lives in security beside you. Do not contend with a man without cause if he has done you no harm" (Proverbs 3:29-30).
- **Follow the example of the upright** - People around us pressure us. We may or may not yield to the pressure, but the coercion is there nonetheless. In a time of frustration or caught in a weak moment, a brother may lose heart in doing good and take a step down the wrong road. Solomon sets forth the curse on those who step into the rough and the blessing upon those who follow God's upward call. "Do not envy a man of violence and do not choose any of his ways. For the crooked man is an abomination to the Lord, but He is intimate with the upright. The curse of the Lord is upon the house of the wicked, but He blesses the dwelling of the righteous" (Proverbs 3:31-33).

The Christian is to let his light shine among men, that they might see his good works and glorify the Father in heaven. That light is going to shine through the little ways in which the disciple of Christ conducts himself among his neighbors. If he is "cussed and contrary," then his Christianity is nothing more than dry leaves rattling in the wind. But the one who uses wisdom in personal interactions is blessed of God and a light to the world.

Prose From Proverbs

The Love of Learning

Some people die at thirty but are not buried until they are seventy. They decided that learning was too much work for their brains, and shifted off into semi-retirement mode. Died at thirty, buried at seventy.

The sages of the ages are unanimous on at least this one thing: Keep learning! The members of the human race who are “veg’n out” are “edging’ out” of responsibility and duty, and abdicating their trust to the forces of tyranny and darkness. The inspired writer of Proverbs is likewise adamant in his exhortation for the sons of God: “Acquire wisdom! Acquire understanding!” says he. “The beginning of wisdom is: Acquire wisdom, and with all your acquiring, get understanding” (Proverbs 4:5,7). The men and women who follow God’s upward beckonings have always been exhorted to listen, read, and learn. “Listen to me, all of you,” said the Lord Jesus Himself, “and understand” (Mark 7:14).

- **Discipleship** - The essential thrust of Christianity is to take the ignorant and apathetic from the world and transform them into those who eagerly thirst for spiritual knowledge and understanding. “Make disciples of all the nations,” emphasized our Lord in what is styled *The Great Commission*. And once those disciples are immersed, they are to continue to learn all that Jesus has commanded. Only *disciples* of Jesus are going to be saved.
- **Teaching to learn** - A basic practical point is that, unless the saint can teach a lesson to others, he has not really learned it himself. The teacher has to have the concepts crystallized in his mind so that he can ask cogent questions, begin at the true beginning point, or put points in clear logical sequence. The instructor often must go over the material several times to be sure he himself has mastered the concepts and understood the scriptures. He is often driven to do more research to develop “reserve fire power” so that he can better anticipate and answer the queries of those being taught. Once the fires of teaching are stoked, the teacher is stirred to “acquire wisdom.” The teacher is the most motivated among learners.
- **Setting a good example** - People learn fastest by imitation. “Be imitators of me,” encouraged Paul, “just as I also am of Christ” (I Corinthians 11:1). “Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children,” he exhorted in another place (Ephesians 5:1). The teacher, knowing that he will be imitated, desires to be like Christ, the perfect example, and knows he needs wisdom to execute as Jesus would. “Prize her,” were the words of Solomon about wisdom, “and she will exalt you; she will honor you if you embrace her” (Proverbs 4:8). “Watch over your heart with all diligence,” notes Proverbs’ author, knowing that all outward actions and examples are derived from within, “for from it flow the springs of life” (Proverbs 4:23).
- **Focus** - The basic game of Satan is *distraction*. His purpose in so doing is to misdirect the holy one of God and in short order have him so far off the “straight and narrow” that he is in thick darkness. Wisdom directs: “Let your eyes look directly ahead, and let your gaze be fixed straight in front of you. Watch the path of your feet, and all your ways will be established. Do not turn to the right nor to the left; turn your foot from evil” (Proverbs 4:25-27).

Committed Christians are conscious that they are the salt of the earth and lights to the world. Wanting to be good examples to the lost and teachers of the blind, they strive to learn the principles of the oracles of God. They are not so much interested in gold and silver as they are in pursuing the wisdom of God and the understanding of His ways. While the rest of the world is “vege’n out” Christians are “stretchin’ out.”

Prose From Proverbs

Dangers In The Adulteress' Lair

Human sexuality is hard to handle. The fires of passion are necessary for the procreation of the race, but, like steam for the engine, are explosively dangerous outside the confines of the design. So the word of God - the instructions from the maker of the machine - has red warning labels dispersed all through it. "Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled," are among the words of the kind and loving new covenant, "for fornicators and adulterers God will judge" (Hebrews 13:4). It is fitting, then, that the wisdom of Proverbs should have some poignant points to thrust at the reader's mind on this issue.

- **Dangerous and beautiful women** - The scripture is generally expressed to the male of the species. Apparently the Almighty feels He has to talk directly to men, while women are smart enough to draw the appropriate conclusions. So men are warned about dangerous and beautiful women: women need to draw the appropriate conclusions about handsome, sensitive, and witty men. "For the lips of the adulteress drip honey," says wisdom, and "smoother than oil is her speech; but in the end she is bitter as wormwood, sharp as a two-edged sword. Her feet go down to death, her steps lay hold of Sheol" (Proverbs 5:3-5). "Do not desire her beauty in your heart, nor let her catch you with her eyelids. For on account of a harlot one is reduced to a loaf of bread, and an adulteress hunts for precious life" (Proverbs 6:25,26). "With her many persuasions," she entices the man who is open to her temptations. "With her flattering lips she seduces him. Suddenly he follows her, as an ox goes to slaughter, or as one in fetters to the discipline of a fool, until an arrow pierces his liver; as a bird hastens to its snare, so he does not know it will cost him his life" (Proverbs 7:21-23).
- **The discipline of the Lord** - The Mighty God is not asleep and unaware of the proclivities of predatory men and sultry women. Even nations as a whole come under His righteous scrutiny, and are dumped in the discard bin over sexual immorality. "'When I had fed them to the full,' stated Jehovah God to Judah, 'they committed adultery and trooped to the harlot's house. They were well-fed lusty horses, each one neighing after his neighbor's wife. Shall I not punish these people,' declares the Lord, 'and on a *nation* such as this shall I not avenge Myself'" (Jeremiah 5:7-9). Nor can the individual hide behind the wall of the masses. "For the ways of a man are before the eyes of the Lord, and He watches all their paths" (Proverbs 5:21). The Lord notes, and then the Lord brings the discipline. The sexually foolish man will give his vigor to others and his "years to the cruel one." Strangers will be filled with his strength, his hard-earned goods will go to the house of the alien, and at the end he will groan in his condition - when his flesh and body are consumed - and he will then say, "How I have hated instruction! And my heart spurned reproof!" (Proverbs 5:9-12). Venereal diseases, AIDS, and who knows what else are brought on members of the human race because of their refusal to learn the discipline of God.
- **The solution** - "Drink water from your own cistern," notes wisdom, "and fresh water from your own well," (Proverbs 5:15). God made man male and female at the beginning, and knew what He was doing when He joined them together as man and wife, He also knew what He was doing when He warned against violating the marriage. "Should your springs be dispersed abroad?" He asked. "Streams of water in the streets?" (Proverbs 5:16). "Let your fountain be blessed, and rejoice with the wife of your youth" (Proverbs 5:17).

Human sexuality within the confines of marriage is a good thing; outside the bonds it is one of the most destructive forces unleashed in the race. "Can a man take fire into his bosom, and his clothes not be burned?" (Proverbs 6:27). But the blessings of God are on the man who will keep to his wife and "be exhilarated always with her love" (Proverbs 5:19).

Prose From Proverbs

Things Which The Lord Hates

God is love, but there are some things He hates. It is right for the Holy God to hate the destructive works of the devil and effects of sin in fallen man. It is right for Him who is light to abhor darkness. Certainly there are offensive acts and attitudes which ascend as a putrid stench to the nostrils of the righteous Judge. "There are six things which the Lord hates," is the introductory statement of Solomon, gently getting into his rhythm. "Yes, seven which are an abomination to Him" (Proverbs 6:16). Wisdom dictates a serious examination of these seven.

- **Haughty eyes** - The eyes are the source of much non-verbal communication. Consequently we speak of downcast eyes for one expressing shyness or reserve, flashing eyes for someone angry, hooded eyes for someone veiling their thoughts, and shining eyes for someone in love. The lamp of the body truly is the eye, the means by which the inner man shines into the outer world. So the Lord adds an abomination to our list: haughty eyes. Haughty eyes reveal a proud, proud, proud inner person who is selfish "to the max," constantly communicating that it is far above the vermin surrounding it, and always looking to put the other person down. Christians need to have eyes that say, "I am here to help you."
- **A lying tongue** - Jesus said that the devil is a liar and the father of lies (John 8:44). All interpersonal relationships are built on trust, and a lying tongue destroys trust above all else. A lying tongue is used to cover all deceptions; and one who lies is a broken reed which pierces the hand of one who leans on it. The saint, by contrast tells the truth.
- **Hands that shed innocent blood** - Capital crimes such as murder and rape require capital punishment. When Noah climbed down from the ark, God instituted capital punishment with these words: "Whoever sheds man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed" (Genesis 9:6). When a murderer is put to death, that is the shedding of guilty blood. Hands that shed innocent blood are those which put to death innocent people (like unborn babies), and God is rightly angry about such violence.
- **A heart that devises wicked plans** - There are connivers out there in the world. Some hatch plans to manipulate others so that they can get their own way in their small circles of acquaintances; others plan massive schemes of deception, fraud, and tyranny on a scale that would make "The Godfather" gasp. A small scale heart that devises wicked plans is just as much an abomination to the Lord as a large scale schemer.
- **Fret that run rapidly to evil** - In the fleshly side of man runs something that might be called "lust for blood." There are those who like fights in the parking lot or blood flowing in the gladiators' rings. There are those who are there to encourage rebellion, who enjoy the push toward anarchy, who delight in sexual license, and to who like to see the distribution of pornography. God hates those whose feet run, and run rapidly to evil.
- **A false witness who utters lies** - A nation can only have some measure of freedom as long as the justice system hold together. When the basic assumption is that every witness who takes the stand is lying, then the destruction of that society is imminent. God hates lying witnesses.
- **One who spreads strife among brothers** - When brethren (and their sisters) work as a team, great things are accomplished. Satan's greatest glee is to have someone spreading strife in the midst of Jesus' brethren and thus impeding progress they make in the war against the forces of darkness. And God hates those who set spiritual brother against spiritual brother.

God has a legitimate reason to hate these abominations. The one making a claim to godliness will look these over very carefully, and repent where necessary.

Prose From Proverbs

Christ, The Wisdom of God

The wisdom of the Old Testament is pictured as a woman begging mankind to pause in the rush of daily activity and consider her wares. Wherever the traffic is going to be heavy and wherever she can have high visibility, she stations herself, seeking to find even one who will listen. "On the top of the heights beside the way, where the paths meet, she takes her stand," says Solomon. "Beside the gates, at the opening to the city, at the entrance of the doors, she cries out" (Proverbs 8:2,3). Rather than turning aside to the harlot's house, the man would do well to spend time in the tent of wisdom. "Wisdom has built her house, she has hewn out her seven pillars...She calls from the tops of the heights in the city: 'Whoever is naive, let him turn in here!'" (Proverbs 9:1-4). "Forsake your folly and live," she says, "and proceed in the way of understanding" (Proverbs 9:6).

- **Advantage of wisdom** - Wisdom offers many earthly advantages. "Riches and honor are with me," says she, "enduring wealth and righteousness. My fruit is better than gold, even pure gold, and my yield than the choicest silver" (Proverbs 8:18,19). "Counsel is mine," she claims, and sound wisdom; I am understanding, power is mine. By me kings reign and rulers decree justice. By me princes rule, and nobles, all who judge rightly" (Proverbs 8:14-16). But far above the earthly accomplishments that wisdom can bring are the eternal blessings. Wisdom began her soliloquy by emphasizing that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, and approaches the close by noting, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding" (Proverbs 9:10).
- **Passing on wisdom** - Those who possess wisdom have a recognition that the days of man's sojourn are fleeting,, and therefore have an earnest and sensible desire to pass the wisdom onto those who should follow. But the perverse nature of man is such that not all are interested in wisdom. "He who corrects a scoffer gets dishonor for himself, and he who reproves a wicked man gets insults for himself. Do not reprove a scoffer, lest he hate you" (Proverbs 9:7,8). That is why the truly wise speak in proverbs, figures, and riddles. But there are those who will learn. "Reprove a wise man, and he will love you. Give instruction to a wise man and he will still be wiser; teach a righteous man, and he will increase his learning" (Proverbs 9:8,9).
- **Wisdom at creation** - God has a plan, and that plan is to bring redemption and fellowship to the very soul of man who has a heart to be obedient to the gospel. One of the things the All Wise does is to set up patterns in the Old Testament which clearly point to Jesus and the New Covenant. All the sacrifices under the law of Moses, for example, showed the way to the day when the sprinkled blood of Jesus should cleanse the true tabernacle and be available to cleanse the conscience of the obedient believer. Thus the wisdom at creation points to the wisdom called Christ. "When He established the heaven," says wisdom, "I was there. When He inscribed a circle on the face of the deep...when He marked out the foundations of the earth; then I was beside Him, as a master workman; and I was daily His delight rejoicing always before Him, rejoicing in the world, His earth, and having my delight in the sons of men" (Proverbs 8:27-31).
- **Christ the wisdom of God** - A search for truth in any area will ultimately lead to God. A search for wisdom will ultimately lead to Christ, in whom are all the treasures of God. "For indeed," said Paul, "Jews ask for signs and Greeks search for wisdom; but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block, and to the Gentiles foolishness, but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God" (I Corinthians 1:22-24).

Christ was there at the creation, and He is certainly the refuge the fear of the Lord will cause the wise to seek. "But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption" (I Corinthians 1:30). The real wisdom!

Prose From Proverbs

Wise And Foolish Sons

In writing his proverbs Solomon often introduced them with the expression, “My son.” “My son,” said he, “keep my words, and treasure my commandments within you” (Proverbs 7:1). “Hear, O sons,” he appealed in another place, “the instruction of a father, and give attention that you may gain understanding” (Proverbs 4:1). The older generations have some wisdom they have picked up along the way and they desire that this wisdom be passed on to the upcoming generation so that members of the up-coming generation can be smarter, more productive, and more happy than their forebears.

But not all listen. “A foolish son is a grief to his father, and bitterness to her who bore him” (Proverbs 17:25). Every action or inaction has its consequences, and foolishness results in a lot of nasty messes. The apostle Paul, for example, noted the effects of someone’s being sucked into the craving to be wealthy: “But those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a snare and many foolish and harmful desires which plunge men into ruin and destruction” (I Timothy 6:9). The wise pays close attention to such precepts; the foolish ignores them, charges into foolishness, and pays the price extracted by folly (often eternal damnation in the lake of fire). A wise son makes a father glad,” emphasized Solomon, “but a foolish son is a grief to his mother” (Proverbs 10:1).

- **A wise son accepts discipline** - “All discipline,” commented Hebrews’ author “for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful” (Hebrews 12:11). The physical side of man has to be brought into subjection to the spiritual, and the physical basically learns through pain. “The pain of the doing the job over must exceed the pain of doing it right the first time.” Hence it is that fatherly discipline comes with that which is “sorrowful”; the pain produces the change. The *pain* may be physical, coming in the form of a rod to the backside or the Biblical scourge to the back; or the pain may be more mental, coming as a rebuke or expression of disappointment. A wise son accepts his father’s discipline, but a scoffer does not listen to rebuke” (Proverbs 13:1). The scoffer avoids accountability; the wise son is willingly accountable to his dad.
- **A wise son has a heart for spiritual things** - To those who have been trained by discipline, appended the author of Hebrews, “afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness” (Hebrews 12:11). A father’s discipline results in self-control and a disciplined individual is confident and therefore peaceful. A son who has sought for knowledge and prayed for wisdom in Christ experiences the blessing of God; the foolish son has charged headlong and has found himself embroiled in senseless convolutions due to his folly. “My son, if your heart is wise, my heart also will be glad” (Proverbs 23:15). “Listen, my son, and be wise, and direct your heart in the way” (Proverbs 23:19). “The wise of heart will receive commands, but a babbling fool will be thrown down” (Proverbs 10:8).
- **A wise son is diligent** - Those who lack discipline often have good intentions, but when it comes time to execute, they “bail out” because the pain imposed on their bodies during performance is too much for them to bear so they choose the easy way rather than the right way. A wise son has listened to his father and mother (and otherwise people in the church) and has accepted the discipline when it has been meted out. Thus he has “what it takes” to carry out his good intentions. “He who gathers in the summer is a son who acts wisely but a son who sleeps in harvest is a son who acts shamefully” (Proverbs 10:5). The wise son swings into motion when it is critical and important to act, even if he does not feel like it right at that moment; the undisciplined and foolish individual couldn’t bring himself to get the harvest in during the summer, and would therefore starve in the winter.

At first, there may not seem to be much difference between a wise and foolish son. But the fruit of the wise or foolish decisions piles up, and the gap widens considerably. “Wise men store up knowledge, but with the mouth of the foolish ruin is at hand” (Proverbs 10:14). “Be wise, my son and make my heart glad, that I may reply to him who reproaches me” (Proverbs 27:11).

Prose From Proverbs

Blessings For The Diligent Hand

The body naturally resists movement and work. The body has to be pushed to perform; it would rather coast along or do nothing. Even the people of the world recognize the problem, stating it in terms such as “Mind over matter.” The flesh may be compared to a balky mule. “For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit,” remarked the apostle Paul, “and the Spirit against the flesh, for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please” (Galatians 5:17). When the body does what it good-and-well-pleases, then it does not work or come under discipline but lapses into the destructive deeds of the flesh.

Even Christians, indwelt by the Holy Spirit have to fight this battle. Because the body is a part of the physical creation, it is subject to the law of gravity and the law of death and decay. “For we know,” stated the apostle, “that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now” (Romans 8:22). After noting the groaning and the continual pain, comparable to the travail of childbirth, that the creation is subject to because of the strictures imposed by God, Paul asserts that the bodies of Christians are not exempt from this creaking and groaning as the physical side of man goes through its challenges. “And not only this,” he declared, regarding the material creation, “but also we ourselves, having the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body” (Romans 8:23). Thus the wisdom of God from the beginning promised blessings for the diligent hand, and curses for the slackard.

- **Poverty for him who is slack** - For anyone to accumulate financial resources honestly, he is going to have to work. The Lord has set up human economics so that on a long-term basis, “Ill-gotten gains do not profit, but righteousness delivers from death” (Proverbs 10:2). So the shameful son “who sleeps in harvest” is driven into poverty or crime because of his lack of discipline; when he was to take up the winnowing fork, he chose the fishing pole instead. The man who is a poor workman or sloppy performer is also destined for the bottom of the economic heap: “Poor is he who works with a negligent hand” (Proverbs 10:4). Likewise the man who loves the pleasures of recreation or the delights of the table: “He who loves pleasure will become a poor man; he who loves wine and oil will not become rich” (Proverbs 21:17). “Do not love sleep,” asseverated the sage, “lest you become poor” (Proverbs 20:13).
- **The evil of slackness** - When an individual continually falls prey to the body’s desire to be sluggish, a deep pall of despair, excuse-making, and inactivity lays like a dark cloud over the man and all his surroundings. “Laziness casts into a deep sleep,” recorded Solomon, “and an idle man will suffer hunger” (Proverbs 19:15). “The sluggard buries his hand in the dish,” he also stated, “and will not even bring it back to his mouth” (Proverbs 19:24). “As a door turns on its hinges, so does the sluggard on his bed” (Proverbs 26:14). Then the excuses begin: “The sluggard says, ‘There is a lion outside; I shall be slain in the streets’” (Proverbs 22:13). Yeah, right! And when the slackard doesn’t do his job correctly (“Close is good enough.”), then airplanes come apart, things break loose, and people are injured or killed. “He also who is slack in his work is a brother to him who destroys” (Proverbs 18:9).
- **Slackness destroys civilizations** - When the general tenor of society becomes lax, then that country or civilization is headed for oblivion and slavery to a stronger people. “If you are slack in the day of distress,” says the Word, “your strength is limited” (Proverbs 24:10). A sluggish nation that will not rise to handle crises is in deep trouble: “The hand of the diligent will rule, but the slack hand will be put to forced labor” (Proverbs 12:24).

Will America as a whole listen to the teaching of God’s word on diligence and sluggishness? More importantly at this juncture. will Christians heed the teaching and begin to practice discipline in their own lives and impose accountability and diligent follow-through in their own families? The body must be overcome by the Spirit. “Poor is he who works with a negligent hand, but the hand of the diligent makes rich” (Proverbs 10:4). Apply diligence to reap true riches!

Prose From Proverbs

Watch Your Mouths

The taming of the tongue is a life or death matter, eternally. The One who was wiser than Solomon said, “For by your words you shall be justified, and by your words you shall be condemned” (Matthew 12:37). And His bondservant James observed that the tongue “sets on fire the course of our lives” (James 3:6). In fact, a major characteristic of the perfect man is that he “does not stumble in what he says,” and is therefore “able to bridle the whole body as well” (James 3:2). He who is interested in making spiritual progress is therefore interested in all the insight that the word of God provides on the tongue, the mouth, and the lips. He also listens carefully that he might become increasingly aware of the wiles of those who work on Satan’s side and how they use the tongue.

- **From the overflow of the head the mouth speaks** - Sooner or later what is in the heart of a man is going to be evidenced in what comes out of his mouth. The discerning will pay close attention - first to his own speech, and then that of others. “The tongue of the righteous is as choice silver,” was one of the writer of Proverbs’ comments, but “the heart of the wicked is worth little” (Proverbs 10:20). “The lips of the righteous,” he added, “bring forth what is acceptable, but the mouth of the wicked what is perverted” (Proverbs 10:32). “The heart of the wise teaches his mouth and adds persuasiveness to his lips” (Proverbs 16:23). A Christian who wants to improve his mouth is going to first have to improve his heart by making sure that only “good stuff” is going in.
- **The mouth can destroy and be used to conceal a destroyer** - “How great a forest” emphasized James, elder in the church at Jerusalem, concerning the tongue, “is set aflame by such a small fire” (James 3:5). Those who work against the plan of God do much of their damage by the rumors they spread and their misrepresentation of the truth. “The mouth of the wicked conceals violence,” Solomon says (Proverbs 10:6). “He who conceals hatred has lying lips,” he also noted, “and he who spreads slander is a fool” (Proverbs 10:18). This wickedness can work to destroy a whole society, as Solomon also brings forth: “A rascally witness makes a mockery of justice, and the mouth of the wicked spreads iniquity” (Proverbs 19:28). And in a long (for Proverbs) section is a warning for those in the church: “For lack of wood the fire goes out and where there is no whisperer, contention quiets down. Like charcoal to hot embers and wood to fire, so is a contentious man to strife. The words of a whisperer are like dainty morsels, and they go down into the innermost parts of the body. Like an earthen vessel overlaid with silver dross are burning lips and a wicked heart. He who hates disguises it with his lips, but he lays up deceit in his heart. When he speaks graciously do not believe him, for there are seven abominations in his heart. Though his hatred covers itself with guile, his wickedness will be revealed before the assembly” (Proverbs 26:20-26).
- **The mouth can edify, and thus exhibit a follower of Christ** - “The mouth of the righteous flows with wisdom,” is the judgment of the Holy Spirit (Proverbs 10:31). “The lips of the wise spread knowledge,” the writer says, “but the hearts of fools are not so” (Proverbs 15:7). Thus there are *words* of encouragement, *words* that edify, and *words* that give direction. “Like apples of gold in settings of silver is a word spoken in right circumstances” (Proverbs 25:11). Young men were therefore encouraged to be “sound in speech which is beyond reproach” (Titus 2:8). And Timothy was exhorted to show himself as an example of those who believe by his speech (I Timothy 4:12).

The channels of our lives have been grooved by the myriads of chisel thrusts of our own tongues. Let us then work on our hearts so that the direction of our speech is upward. “The perverse in heart are an abomination to the Lord, but the blameless in their walk are His delight” (Proverbs 11:20).

Prose From Proverbs

Rich And Poor

There is a God in heaven. There is a God who raises up, and a God who casts down. There is a God who feeds the hungry and sends the rich away empty handed. But this God often moves slowly from the perspective of man-the-vapor, and oft it seems that His justice is not done. He progresses on His own time schedule, and most of His reward or punishment is meted out in the realm of the unseen. “He who mocks the poor reproaches his Maker; He who rejoices in calamity will not go unpunished” (Proverbs 17:5), so while the rich may gain his wealth and position unjustly, at his death his is as he was at his birth. “As he came naked from His mother’s womb, so he will return as he came. He will take nothing from the fruit of his labor in his hand” (Ecclesiastes 5:15). God allows some of the wicked to be rich; He makes some of the righteous rich; all this goes on so that man might put value on “the riches of His glory,” and so that God’s people might have the resources to execute His will on earth.

- **All wealth comes from God** - The Almighty is emphatic: “‘The silver is Mine, and the gold is Mine,’ declares the Lord of hosts,” (Haggai 2:8). He Is the One who causes the sun to shine on both the good and evil and sends His rain on the just and the unjust. He gives fruitful harvests, satisfying the peoples’ hearts with food and gladness. Inside the walls of the Father’s framework men play the silly game of rich and poor, and God has some things to say about it.
- **God is the righteous Judge** - “The rich and the poor have a common bond,” stated the wisdom of Solomon. “The Lord is the Maker of them all” (Proverbs 22:2). The Lord, the righteous Judge, makes a number of statements to let rich and poor alike to know that they are accountable to the Creator. “The righteous,” says He, “is concerned about the rights of the poor; the wicked does not understand such concern” (Proverbs 29:7). The rich man tends to trust in his wealth, thinking it can be used to buy him “justice” on earth, and therefore is more likely to forget about his own judgment at the eternal throne. “The rich man’s wealth is his fortress”; whereas for the down-trodden, “the ruin of the poor is their poverty” (Proverbs 10:15). “A rich man’s wealth is his strong city, and like a high wall in his imagination” (Proverbs 18:11). By contrast, “what is desirable in a man is his kindness, and it is better to be a poor man than a liar” (Proverbs 19:22). Solomon keeps on laying it on: “Riches do not profit in the day of wrath, but righteousness delivers from death” (Proverbs 11:4).
- **The Lord often blesses materially those who walk in His ways** - The Lord God does not let the outer form be the substance. Riches in and of themselves do not bless. “Bread obtained by falsehood is sweet to a man,” posits Solomon, “but afterward his mouth will be filled with gravel” (Proverbs 20:17). In contrast, for the righteous, the sage states, “It is the blessing of the Lord that makes rich, and He adds no sorrow to it” (Proverbs 10:22). And the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ will make sure that the resources of the proud economic scions will eventually be used for His glory and kingdom: “He who increases his wealth by interest and usury gathers it for him who is gracious to the poor” (Proverbs 28:8).
- **The Lord honors diligence, intelligence, and persistence** - “Know well the condition of your flocks,” says the writer of the proverb, “and pay attention to your herds; for riches are not forever, nor does a crown endure to all generations. When the grass disappears, the new growth is seen and the herbs of the mountains are gathered in. The lambs will be for your clothing, and the goats will bring the price of a field, and there will be goats’ milk enough for your food, for the food of your household, and sustenance for your maidens” (Proverbs 27:23-27). The man who pays attention to these details will be able to ride out the ups and downs, and the Lord will bless his efforts.

“But let the brother of humble circumstances glory in his high position; and let the rich man glory in his humiliation, because like the flowering grass he will pass away” (James 1:9,10). Rich and poor, great and small; the Lord Almighty, He made them all.

Prose From Proverbs

Righteousness and Wickedness

In decaying Western civilization, the term wicked is no longer in vogue. To be certain, when Oceania and Eastasia have combined against Eurasia, then the visible leader of Eurasia is a power-hungry madman and is *wicked*; but that is purely a propaganda term and has nothing to do with the Biblical concept of wickedness. A man is wicked in the sight of God when he rebels against God's standards of righteousness; a man who lies while on trial, a man who commits adultery without remorse, and a man who leaves a string of murdered corpses in his wake is a wicked man, regardless of how "compassionate" the lap-dogs in the media may portray him to be. God and His preachers have always condemned the wicked and extolled the virtues of the righteous, those willing to walk in the ways of the Almighty.

- **The head of the wicked** - A wicked man is a selfish, selfish individual who has no regard for the feelings and rights of other people; they are merely objects to be used and discarded or obstacles to be trampled down. "The righteous is concerned for the rights of the poor," says the inspired record, but "the wicked does not understand such concern" (Proverbs 29:7). "The soul of the wicked desires evil," states the writer (Proverbs 21:10). In his grasping to please himself, the man has sold his soul to the devil, and thus begins to take on Satan's characteristics. "You are of your father the devil," Jesus told some Jews trapped in their own wicked lusts, "and you want to do the desires of your father" (John 8:44). "The heart of the wicked," therefore, "is worth little" (Proverbs 10:20). "The compassion of the wicked is cruel" (Proverbs 12:10).
- **The head of the righteous** - Those whom the great God calls righteous are, not surprisingly, those who have a deep desire to please Him, who delight in His delights. "The desire of the righteous is only good," observes Solomon (Proverbs 11:23). "The thoughts of the righteous are just" (Proverbs 12:5). "A righteous man hates falsehood," he adds, "but a wicked man acts disgustingly and shamefully" (Proverbs 13:5). "The righteous live by faith," is the eternal decree (Romans 1:17). They are the ones who by doing the good will of the Father seek for glory, honor, and immortality (Romans 2:5-9).
- **No joy for the wicked** - While the wicked puts on a show of happiness and good times (like the beer commercials), he experiences misery; the righteous overflows with joy even in the midst of oppression. "A wicked man shows a bold face," notes the writer, "but as for the upright, he makes his way sure" (Proverbs 21:29). "The getting of treasures by a lying tongue is a fleeting vapor, the pursuit of death. The violence of the wicked will drag them away, because they refuse to act with justice" (Proverbs 21:6,7). Sooner or later, the wickedness of the wicked comes upon them. "The Lord has made everything for its purpose, even the wicked for the day of evil" (Proverbs 16:4). "When the whirlwind passes, the wicked is no more, but the righteous has an everlasting foundation" (Proverbs 10:25).

The *righteous scepter* is the scepter of the Lord Jesus' kingdom. "You have loved righteousness and hated lawlessness," it is said of the Christ. "Therefore God, Your God has anointed You with the oil of joy above Your companions" (Hebrews 1:8,9). Christian, take warning. Jesus hates lawlessness and loves righteousness so much that this is what He 's going to do *inside the church* at the end: He will have the angels "gather out of His kingdom all stumbling blocks, and those who commit lawlessness; and will cast them into the furnace of fire...Then the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He has ears, let him hear"(Matthew 13:41-43).

Prose From Proverbs

Abominations and Funny Money

It's only a stupid thief who will try to rob a bank or mug someone in a supermarket parking lot. The smart thieves are chairmen of the board of the big banks and collect interest on the money loaned to build new prisons for the dumb thieves. Preachers know they are supposed to preach against dumb thievery, but are often unaware of a banking scam so intelligent that, in the words of Lord Maynard Keynes (father of "Keynesian economics"), "not one man in a thousand" knows what is going on. God knows, and He has long since classed it with other high crimes as an abomination. But to understand the application of the Proverbs to modern economic times requires a little background.

- **A primitive economy** - A barter economy is very simple. Object is traded for object; chickens are traded for yams, for example. The farmers are conscious of the work which went into the production of the chickens and the harvesting of the yams, and are essentially haggling over how much labor each is willing to trade for the other's product. A barter economy, because the trade is goods for goods, is of necessity a primitive economy because it is an exchange of bulk for bulk. But it is also a comparatively honest economy; each of those engaged in the trade has been able to second hand what he is trading for. "Bad, bad," says the buyer; but when he goes his way, then he boasts" (Proverbs 20:14).
- **Metals as media of exchange** - The barter system is unwieldy; it is difficult to trade 27,000 chickens for a piece of property. So most economies gravitated to a system where gold and/or silver became the media of exchange, wherein a shekel of silver, for instance, would actually represent a certain number of days worth of labor. Because the economy is no longer a barter economy, the possibility for dishonesty in trade increases; one individual is trading actual goods and services for a measure of labor, and if there is something wrong with the gold or silver, the seller of goods and services is cheated. When Abraham purchased the burial ground for his deceased wife, Sarah, "Abraham weighed out for Ephron the silver which he had named in the hearing of the sons of Heth, four hundred shekels of silver, commercial standard" (Genesis 23:16). If the weights in Abraham's bag had been crooked or the balance beam off, then Ephron the Hittite (who put up the tangible property in the exchange) would have been "ripped off." God had numerous warnings about such thievery: "A false balance is an abomination to the Lord, but a just weight is His delight" (Proverbs 11:1). Another proverb adds, "Differing weights are an abomination to the Lord, and a false scale is not good" (Proverbs 20:23).
- **Coins of standard weight** - The weighing out of metals was also unwieldy, so the ancients developed metal coins of standard weight. This system worked well as long as the government which minted the coins was honest; the possibility of deception shifts from the buyer or seller to the government which mints the coins. The coin can be impure or weigh slightly less than claimed; Caesar would be skimming off the difference.
- **Paper "money", electronic commerce, and inflation** - With the invention of paper as a substitute for real money (specie) and the development of computer entries instead of gold in the banking system, the framework for massive fraud is now in place. In the U.S.A. the Federal Reserve System creates the "money" out of thin air, using essentially the word of the U.S. government as a sort of collateral. This "money" gets its value by stealing some of the value from currency already in circulation; this is what inflation truly is, and we note the loss in the value of the currency by saying that prices rose.

Modern bankers in conjunction with the national governments (and global entities such as the United Nations and the International Monetary Fund) are stealing the labor of productive men and women through inflation. This is a modern form of having "differing weights in the bag," and is a great abomination to the God of justice and righteousness.

Prose From Proverbs

Pride and Fall

Pride is one of the big three, but it is sometimes hard to pin down. “For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life,” wrote the inspired apostle John, “is not from the Father but is of the world” (I John 2:16). The various lusts of the flesh and the eyes are generally obvious, but this thing called “the boastful pride of life” can be hard to identify in self or to prove to others that they have this problem. But because “all that is in the world” fits into one of the three listed categories, it is critical that the saint of God first examine himself to see if pride is resident within himself, and then, when necessary to recognize it in others.

- **The nature of pride** - There is a good kind of pride, which involves such things as “taking pride in your work,” as contrasted to a false or evil pride. “We are not again commending ourselves to you,” wrote Paul to the beloved brethren in Corinth, “but are giving you an occasion to be *proud* of us, that you may have an answer for those who take *pride* in appearance, and not in heart” (II Corinthians 5:12). Both types of pride are here illustrated: the brethren could rightly be proud of Paul and those who labored with him because of their manifest love and suffering on behalf of the Corinthian Christians, whereas the evil pride of the false apostles was simply an attempt to look good rather than to be good. The boastful pride of man is his attempt to elevate himself on false pretenses by “putting down” others and his stubborn refusal to deal with the facts of his own case. Ultimately this translates into man’s unwillingness to yield to the will of the Lord and his stubborn refusal to acknowledge the truth of God’s word as it applies to himself. “The fear of the Lord is to hate evil,” sagely stated Solomon on behalf of the Almighty. “Pride and arrogance and the evil way, and the perverted mouth, I hate” (Proverbs 8:13).
- **Rooting out pride** - Suffering is God’s way of exposing and eliminating pride. Because of the excessive greatness of the vision Paul had seen of Paradise, he had to suffer what he called “a thorn in the flesh” (II Corinthians 12:7). “He who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin,” was the annotation of Peter, from which the brethren recognize that pride is removed through the anguish each of the faithful experiences while standing firm for Christ. The record of the scripture is that God’s temporal judgments are for the purpose of helping sincere disciples to recognize and overcome sin. “A man’s pride will bring him low, but he who is lowly in spirit will obtain honor” (Proverbs 29:23). “Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before stumbling” (Proverbs 16:18).
- **Recognizing pride in those who wrongfully aspire to leadership** - There are certain prideful individuals who aspire to positions of prominence without experiencing the legitimate servitude God requires of those who would be leaders. There are still those who desire “the chief seats in the synagogues,” the “respectful greetings in the market place,” and the significance granted by such titles as “Reverend” and “Doctor.” The apostle Paul appealed to his track record to expose those who “measured themselves by themselves,” the proud who had position ambition.
- **The judgment of God** - Ultimately the temporal judgments of God against the pride of man will be replaced by the final judgment. “For the Lord of hosts will have a day of reckoning,” prophesied Isaiah, “against everyone who is proud and lofty, and against everyone who is lifted up” (Isaiah 2:12). “The Lord alone will be exalted in that day” (Isaiah 2:17).

Pride is somewhat difficult to identify, but each Christian must joyfully welcome the fiery trials of the day to refine his character and to remove the dross of pride. Each son of God must learn to recognize pride when it comes in others, when it approaches as the skeleton of ambition covered with the skin of flattery and false concern. “When pride comes, then comes dishonor, but with the humble is wisdom” (Proverbs 11:2). Let the Lord alone be exalted now, as He shall be on the final and great day.

Prose From Proverbs

Eating Humble Pie

The opposite of pride is humility. *Pride* to a large degree sums up the character of Satan; *humility* similarly sums up the character of Jesus Christ, Pride is justly condemned, whereas humility is rightly commended. Our Lord Jesus humbled Himself by taking the form of man, and so demonstrated the right spirit that He submitted to death on the cross. "Therefore," explained the apostle Paul, "also God highly exalted Him" (Philippians 2:9). All who would follow in the footsteps of Jesus must humble themselves in this life with calm assurance that they will be exalted in the age to come. "If anyone serves Me, let him follow Me," our Lord exhorted, "and where I am there shall My servant also be; if anyone serves Me, the Father will honor him" (John 12:26).

It is a false humility that says, "I can't do anything very well." True humility is a willingness to lay aside selfishness and *do well* whatever God needs done, whether it is speaking to the multitudes in the Temple or washing the feet of the disciples.

- **There is wisdom in humility** - "When pride comes, then comes dishonor, but with the humble is wisdom" (Proverbs 11:2). God is infinitely wiser than man, and those who in humility will submit to the will and wisdom of the Father are greatly blessed. "That which proceeds out of man, that is what defiles the man," said Jesus, describing man in his unregenerated state. "For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries, deeds of coveting and wickedness, as well as deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride and foolishness" (Mark 7:20-22). The prideful man rushes headlong into foolishness; the humble seeks the wisdom of God, and walks in the ways of the wise. "The fear of the Lord is the instruction for wisdom, and before honor comes humility" (Proverbs 15:33).
- **The humble associates with all men** - Prideful man is focused on the position he can attain on earth. He therefore associates with those whom he finds useful to his ambition; once he has gained leverage to the next "upper level," he tosses his old associates aside as dried up husks along the roadside of his experience. In contrast, Jesus recognized the eternal intrinsic value of each son of man, and intermingled with the lowly harlots and ate with the tax-gatherers and sinners. "It is better to be of a humble spirit with the lowly," Solomon observed, "than to divide the spoil with the proud" (Proverbs 16:9). "Be of the same mind toward one another," prompted Paul. "Do not be haughty in mind, but associate with the lowly. Do not be wise in your own estimation" (Romans 12:16).
- **God honors and rewards humility** - The underlying principle of any man's fellowship with God is *faith*. Faith requires that each saint must act before God grants His blessing; first the cross, then the crown. God requires an up-front investment called humility, then grants honor from the right sources both in this age and also in the one to come. "A man's pride will bring him low, but the humble in spirit will retain honor" (Proverbs 29:23). "The reward of humility and the fear of the Lord are riches, honor, and life" (Proverbs 22:4). "Before destruction the heart of man is haughty, but humility goes before honor" (Proverbs 18:12). The picture is clear.

Humble pie is the best dessert. It has its bitter moments when it has its first taste on the tongue, but from then on its fruit exhibits its increasing sweetness. "Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time" (I Peter 5:6).

Prose From Proverbs

Wisdom and Revelation

Someone has asked, “Why is youth wasted on the young?” There is a certain exuberance and a sense of good feeling associated with young bodies, but this is often accompanied by poor judgment due to lack of experience. Hence there is a need for wise counsel; rare indeed is the young man who can “keep his own counsel” and succeed. The world is full of pitfalls and traps, and there are certain experiences of life which give wisdom to those who have piloted their way to levels of success following their youth. They “because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil” (Hebrews 5:14).

- **Get some advice when making big plans** - The more information an individual has before he makes a decision, the more likely he is to make the right decision. One of the advantages of involving other brethren in planning is that they often have valuable experiences, which enable them to point out potential problem areas and the smoother surface of clear sailing. “Without consultation, plans are frustrated,” commented Solomon, “but with many counselors they succeed” (Proverbs 15:22). And the Holy Spirit through Solomon also recommended, “Prepare plans by consultation, and make war by wise guidance” (Proverbs 20:18). It is good to bounce ideas off someone of experience before charging into a major disaster.
- **Nations need guidance** - Not only do individuals need advice and counsel, but nations must have wise guidance or they will end up down the tubes of history. “A wise man is strong,” says the proverb, “and a man of knowledge increases power. For by wise guidance you will wage war, and in abundance of counselors there is victory” (Proverbs 24:6). When a nation has gone into sin so that God has to destroy her (“on a nation such as this, shall I not avenge Myself?” - Jeremiah 9:9), He smears over the eyes of her counselors so that they cannot give good direction. The life of David and the future of Israel hinged on whose counsel David’s rebellious son Absalom followed; by the mercies of God Absalom listened to the false counsel of Hushai the Archite, David’s friend, rather than to the shrewd counsel of Ahitophel.
- **The truly wise gets help from God** - While there have been many wise advisors over the centuries, no one is in the same ball park as the All Wise and All Knowing God. The individual who looks to God’s word will find great wisdom and understanding in its precepts. “Your commandments,” praised the psalmist, “make me wiser than my enemies” (Psalm 119:98). “But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God,” encourages James, “who gives to all men generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him” (James 1:5).
- **Nations must look to God for counsel** - God’s ways are higher than man’s ways and His thoughts are far above man’s thoughts. So the nation which turns its back on the God of the Bible is cursed, but “blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord” (Psalm 33:12). [Spiritual Israel is the prophetic nation ultimately looked to here, but there is a general principle, which applies.] “Where there is no guidance, the people fall” (Proverbs 11:14). “Where there is no vision [revelation from God, in our time the Bible], the people are unrestrained” (Proverbs 29:18).

Guidance into eternal life and true enlightenment come only From God through the written word, and the prayers of the saints for wisdom. “For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who became His counselor?...For from Him and through Him and for Him are all things. To Him be the glory Forever. Amen” (Romans 11:34,36).

Prose From Proverbs

On Going Surety

Slavery in Western Civilization did not die with the War Between The States. To be sure, the direct outward ownership of individuals has perished for more than a century, but indirect ownership has never ceased. The proverb is true: “The rich rules over the poor, and the borrower becomes the lender’s slave” (Proverbs 22:7). In matters of men, if you want to know what is happening, follow the money trail. And the money trail leads to the house of slavery.

- **The lure of easy credit** - The lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes make mankind as a whole open to the seductive siren song of easy money. “Have your pleasure now,” is the subtle or often not-so-subtle message, “and figure out how to pay for it later.” Thus the salivating man joyfully gives up his noble birthright for a mess of pottage, bought on credit. When a member of the human race goes into debt to purchase consumer goods, he is like the proverbial dumb ox obediently plodding to his own slaughter. “The borrower becomes the lender’s slave,” and the smart lender is patient enough to let this slavery develop slowly, so that the borrower is unaware of the disaster that is about to befall him. Easy credit is the bait, and the trap is eventual slavery.
- **Dangers of co-signing** - Every lending institution has some means recovering debt. The pawn shop, the poor man’s bank, puts the collateral on the shelf and sells it if the money loaned and interest are not repaid on time. The ruthless among loan sharks have tended to take advantage of the poor, and extract the necessities of survival from them. God therefore told those who had money in Israel, “If you lend money to My people, to the poor among you, you are not to act as a creditor to him; you shall not charge him interest. If you ever take your neighbor’s cloak as a pledge, you are to return it to him before the sunsets, for that is his only covering; it is his cloak for his body. What else shall he sleep in?” (Exodus 22:25-27). The dignity of each man was to be preserved in Israel; God did not want His people to go back into slavery through debt. But people do, and when they run out of collateral themselves, then they need a co-signer, someone to “go surety” for them. “Do not be among those who give pledges,” instructs the wisdom of Proverbs, and do not be “among those who become sureties for debts” (Proverbs 22:26). If an individual does not have the collateral to finance his own foolishness, it is a major fool who will back continuing folly with his own substance. “He who is surety for a stranger will surely suffer for it, but he who hates going surety is safe” (Proverbs 11:15). The scripture gives no quarter for mercy in this matter: “A man lacking in sense pledges, and becomes surety in the presence of his neighbor” (Proverbs 17:18).
- **The super-rich own the house of slavery** - The scions of the moneyed houses have always been trained to manipulate the common man so that he “owes his soul to the company store..” Skilled in the art of bait and trap, credit and enslavement, they add house to house, and land to land. To prevent that from happening in Israel, God owned the land, and every 50 years the property reverted back to the original family of caretakers. But in the rest of the world, and in Israel gone rebellious, it was and is the rich who are the oppressors and enemies of God and Christianity (James 2:6).

The message of the scriptures on this matter is simple. Don’t buy on credit. And don’t co-sign for someone who wants to.

Prose From Proverbs

He who is wise Wins Souls

“There is precious treasure and oil in the dwelling of the wise,” says the proverb, “but a foolish man swallows it up” (Proverbs 21:26). The wise man and the prudent wife are smart enough and disciplined enough to make provision for earthly needs and to anticipate the occasional unexpected expense and economic down turn. They have the sense to set priorities for what must come first; the crops must be sown and harvested in their season, and the other necessities of life must come in their order, “Prepare your work outside, and make it ready for yourself in the field,” is some basic counsel, “Afterwards, then, build your house” (Proverbs 24:27).

But there is a step up from making sure survival and earthly living priorities are in order, and that has to do with *righteousness*. It is wise for people to leave their financial houses in order, but that will only last for the years of a man’s earthly sojourn. The righteous not only have the blessings of a better life on earth but also the blessings of eternity. “The righteousness of the blameless will smooth his way,” opined Solomon, “but the wicked will fall by his own wickedness” (Proverbs 11:5). He adds, “The righteous is delivered from trouble, but the wicked takes his place” (Proverbs 11:8). And, looking to eternity, Solomon writes, “Riches do not profit in the day of wrath, but righteousness delivers from death” (Proverbs 11:4). Underlying all is the great statement from both the Old and New Testaments: “The righteous shall *live* by faith” (Romans 1:17). Because they follow the Biblically defined faith in the glorified Lord, brethren live for all eternity. “He who trusts in his riches will fall, but the righteous will flourish like a green leaf” (Proverbs 11:28).

But there is even another step up from personal righteousness and a yearning to go to heaven. Those who desire to live by faith desire to walk in the very footsteps of Jesus, and thus end up greatly concerned for the souls of others. “The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life, and he who is wise wins souls” (Proverbs 11:30). The righteous have a Biblical lifestyle that shows others how to set their lives in order, how develop love, joy, peace, and patience, and how to win souls for Jesus.

- **Systematically meet new people** - Not everyone is interested in eternity and following Jesus. Before long many brethren have essentially worked over their circle of acquaintances and there are no immediate prospects. The wise who wins souls systematically finds ways of meeting new people and expanding his list of contacts for the gospel.
- **Systematically make disciples of contacts** - There is only one Bible, only one set of truth, and only one way of salvation. The wise who wins souls has a systematic way of establishing the authority of the scripture for people, and bringing them to an understanding of repentance and immersion into Christ.
- **Systematically show disciples how to make disciples** - The wise who wins souls recognizes that his time, energy, and resources are limited. So a portion of his effort goes to showing others how to get the job done.
- **Systematically trains others who can show disciples how to make disciples** - Our Lord Jesus, who through the training literature called His Word, is the One who has won all the souls to ever be won. Those who share His vision and wisdom learn from Him how to train trainees.

The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life. The teaching of the word of God and the winning of souls is not carried out in the sterile air of the classroom, but where the righteous contact the farmer in the field or the man on the street. Be wise.

Prose From Proverbs

Favor From The Lord

God so arranged the foundations of the material realm, the realm of earthly existence, so that it teaches man many eternal lessons. Were it not for earthly kings, mankind would not understand the desirability of favor or grace from the Lord. King Solomon himself paints the picture: “The king’s wrath,” says he, “is like the roaring of a lion. but his favor is like dew on the grass” (Proverbs 19:12). “The wrath of a king is as messengers of death,” he noted elsewhere, “but a wise man will appease it. In the light of the king’s face is life, and his favor is like a cloud with spring rain” (Proverbs 16:14,15). The worldly wise know how to secure the favor of a king or dictator; the spiritually wise know how to secure the favor of the Absolute Monarch of the universe.

- **The word of God discerns who is good** - The word of God is so perfectly designed that it separates those who desire good from those who prefer evil; it winnows the chaff from the wheat. “The word of God,” stated Hebrews’ author, “is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart” (Hebrews 4:12). Unlike earthly kings, whose wrath and favor tend to be somewhat arbitrary, the Great King is righteous and fair, and has given His word as the standard of justice and favor. In His infinite wisdom, His word is brought, in preached and printed form, to the lost and dying race of man.
- **The good come to the light** - God, says He in His written word, “will render to every man according to his deeds.” The Holy Spirit assures every honest soul of man that those “who by perseverance in *doing* good seek for glory and honor and immortality” will indeed inherit eternal life. There will be “glory and honor and peace to every man who does *good*” (Romans 2:6-10). And Jesus, in His divine and unerring analysis, put it this way: “For everyone who does evil hates the light and does not come to the light lest his deeds should be exposed. But he who practices the truth comes to the light, that his *deeds* may be manifested as having been wrought in God” (John 3:20,21).
- **The struggle of the honest man in his lost state** - The promises of glory’ and immortality are to those who seek them by “doing good.” The problem that the honest man faces is that he is trapped in a form of slavery, as the apostle Paul comments on his own condition before he was immersed into Christ: “For we know that the Law is spiritual; but I am of flesh, sold into bondage to sin” (Romans 7:14). The truthful man in this lost condition desires to do good, but finds himself up against a barrier he personally cannot conquer because he is in slavery to sin. “The wishing is present in me,” the apostle writes, “but the doing of good is not. For the good that I wish, I do not do; but I practice the very evil that I do not wish” (Romans 7:18,19). In that sense, then, there is no one good but One.
- **Walking in the light** - The man who really wants to do right asks, “Who will set me free from the body of this death?” The answer comes “through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Romans 7:24,25). In immersion the body of sin is crucified with Christ, and a new creation is raised to walk in newness of life. This is how the one who perseveres in doing good comes to the light; he finds the scriptural means by which he might find favor with the Great King.

This was all previously spoken of in the wisdom of Solomon. “A good man will obtain favor from the Lord,” he asseverated, “but He will condemn a man who does evil” (Proverbs 12:2). Again, “He who diligently seeks good seeks favor, but he who searches after evil, it will come to him” (Proverbs 11:27). “For we are His workmanship,” says Paul of Christians, “created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them” (Ephesians 2:10).

Prose From Proverbs

The Ways of the Wise Wife

Women are either wise or foolish, according to their own choice. The wise woman will be greatly honored; the foolish will continue to hold only the shards of disaster in her hands. The wisdom of God has something to say to women, and the Designer and Maker of all assuredly knows whereof He speaks. So, be still and listen!

The writings of the new covenant are consistent with the foundation set forth in the scriptures of the old, that there is a distinct gender difference between man and woman. While each is on an equal spiritual plane, there are roles to be executed, in order that the relationship between Christ and the church might be more clearly understood and that the name of God might not be blasphemed among the Gentiles. "Wives," reads one of the sacred new covenant passages, be subject to your husbands, as to the Lord" (Ephesians 5:22). "But I do not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man," states another, "but to remain quiet" (I Timothy 2:12). The divine distinctions are there, and the wife who tries to ignore them is just as she who tries to ignore gravity. But she who honors the Lord by observing the truthfulness of His instruction will be a happy homemaker and helper.

- **Control the tongue** - Women, by nature, are more vocal than men. While men in general need to be encouraged to talk about and listen to important spiritual and familial matters, a woman's very volubility requires restraint and control. "A constant dripping on a day of steady rain," was Solomon's avouched position, "and a contentious woman are alike; he who would restrain her restrains the wind, and grasps oil in his right hand" (Proverbs 27:15,16). "The contentions of a wife are a constant dripping," is another such statement (Proverbs 19:13). The wise wife will have a gentle and quiet spirit and address her husband as lord. "It is better to live in a corner of the roof than in a house with a contentious woman" (Proverbs 25:24).
- **Walk in race and dignity** - The wise wife learns how to conduct herself in a manner befitting queens of the kingdom; she carries herself with dignity and aplomb, and dispenses her grace and courtesy. The poor bride who has never learned from her sensible sisters may fall into this category: "As a ring of gold in a swine's snout, so is a beautiful woman who lacks discretion" (Proverbs 11:22). By contrast, "A gracious woman attains honor" (Proverbs 11:16). "An excellent wife is the crown of her husband, but she who shames him is as rotteness in his bones" (Proverbs 12:4).
- **Priority on prudence** - The sensible wife is, first of all, a spiritual woman. She recognizes the truthfulness of the adoring words from a grateful husband: "Charm is deceitful and beauty is vain; but, a woman who fears the Lord, she shall be praised" (Proverbs 31:30). But she is also practical. She saves for a rainy day, she keeps the home fires warm; as such she is a gift from God to her man. "House and wealth are an inheritance from the fathers, but a prudent wife is from the Lord" (Proverbs 19:14).

The Father's intention is that His children love life and see good days. The Christian marriage is designed as a place of continual joy, where the man rejoices with the wife of his youth. "He who finds a wife finds a good thing," states wisdom, "and obtains favor from the Lord" (Proverbs 18:22). But great power lies on the female side for the success of the marriage and the happiness of the home. "The wise woman builds her house, but the foolish tears it down with her own hands" (Proverbs 14:1).

Prose From Proverbs

Answers for Anxiety

“Anxiety in the heart of man weighs it down, but a good word makes it glad” (Proverbs 12:25). Who among the sons of man has not been anxious? Who has not been worried about a loved one traveling over difficult roads, or a house deal that has not yet come through? Who has not fretted over the outcome of a doctor’s exam, or had “butterflies in his stomach” over an upcoming speech or confrontation? And who has not needed encouragement and prayer support from a brother or sister at such a time? Even the great apostle Paul, having difficulty in making contact with Titus, said, “I had no rest in my spirit” (II Corinthians 2:13).

Heavy hearts are a big burden. So what are some ways to overcome anxiety?

- **Fear of the Lord** - One of the major sources of anxiety is fear, in one form or another, of men. Fear of the boss might cause the Christian to compromise his principles, or fear of the loss of a customer might cause a businessman not to take a stand for righteousness. The writer of Proverbs points out the solution: “The fear of man brings a snare, but he who trusts in the Lord will be exalted” (Proverbs 29:25). “And do not fear those who kill the body, but are unable to kill the soul,” said Jesus Himself. “But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell” (Matthew 10:28). The secret to overcoming all earthly fear is to learn, on a step-by-step basis, to fear and therefore trust God. “The Lord is my helper, I will not be afraid. What shall man do to me?” (Hebrews 13:6).
- **Power in prayer** - “Be anxious for nothing,” stated Paul, “but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God” (Philippians 4:6). By prayer Christians can handle, through the strength which God supplies, the anxieties which come their way. But these prayers are not of the simple “God bless our food. Amen!” variety, nor are they a mere string of petitions to the Almighty. Prayers from the Biblical models are larded with scripture and scriptural precepts, and are heavily weighted toward praise and thanksgiving. Before supplications are offered, often the mighty deeds of God are recounted before Him. Praise indeed is the protocol which swings open the portal of heaven. Then, when the requests of the saint are presented before the throne, “the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, shall guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:7).
- **Peace in humble acceptance** - Most of the brethren tend to be “control freaks” in one form or another; it is natural for an individual to want to be in the driver’s seat in directing his life. The problem is that there are many events and circumstances in life which are totally beyond the control of the saint, and here is where the disciple of Christ encounters his anxiety. Now he must humbly accept the will of God. “Humble yourselves, therefore,” commanded Peter, “under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time, casting all your anxiety upon Him, because He cares for you (I Peter 5:6,7). Here is where God tests the faith of the follower; does he really believe that God cares for him? True trust in the love of the Father calms the anxious heart.

“Anxiety in the heart of a man weighs it down, but a good word makes it glad.” The encouraging word can come from friend, family, or fellowship in Christ. But the ultimate “good word” comes from the Friend “who sticks closer than a brother” (Proverbs 18:24). Trust in Him, and be glad!

Prose From Proverbs

Hope For The Heart

These two words, when joined together, paint a picture of the blackest hole: *utter hopelessness*. It is the visage of an old woman whose entire family has been lost in an earthquake; it is the countenance of an aged man contemplating suicide rather than stare into another bleak day of totalitarian repression. And such, really, is the end condition of the Gentile, “having no hope and without God in the world” (Ephesians 2:12). I have seen hope in the faces of the young Russians - hope for a better life and hope for love. But I have seen what the grinding wheel of oppression does to those hopes, how they are shattered like crystal glasses under the crunch of a rumbling wagon. “Hope deferred makes the heart sick” (Proverbs 13:12).

By contrast, one of the three great abiding characteristics for the Christian is hope. So how does God produce hope in those who are willing to walk in the footsteps of Christ?

- **A new beginning** - The string of failures and stack of past sins crash the hopes of millions. Mental asylums are filled with those who could not face the reality of their shortcomings and the difficulty of their situations. Normal society is suffused with those who constantly put others down in a false and futile attempt to build themselves up. In the midst of this, here comes the great God with the great solution, offering a fresh start for the former sinner. “For we also once were foolish ourselves,” was Paul’s appraisal, “disobedient, deceived, enslaved to various lusts and pleasures, spending our life in malice and envy, hateful, hating one another. But,” the apostle counterpoints, “when the kindness of God our Savior and His love for mankind appeared, He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of *“generation and renewing* by the Holy Spirit (Titus 3:3-5).
- **Movement from the physical to the spiritual** - This earth and physical universe are bound by the second law of thermodynamics - the law of death and decay - and therefore subject to total futility; the physical realm is ultimately hopeless. The gospel is designed to alter the focus of man, to move him from being fixed on buying, selling, marrying, etc. to having his attention directed to the spiritual realm, the realm of things above. Paul expresses the concept succinctly in his second letter to the Corinthian brethren: “Therefore *we do not lose heart*, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day. For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison, while we look not at the things which are seen but at the things which are unseen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are unseen are eternal” (II Corinthians 4:16-18).
- **Lengthening hope** - The heavenly Father provides systematic discipline for each of His children. He often offers lesser hopes in preparation for the ultimate of all hopes, the resurrection from the dead; and in those lesser hopes He generally requires increasing persistence for each hope to be realized. This “stretching out” of the Christian’s faith and hopeful trust eventually readies him for being able to hope in his bodily resurrection. “Even we ourselves groan within ourselves,” observed the apostle, “waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body” (Romans 8:23)

“Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but desire fulfilled is a tree of life” (Proverbs 13:12). The saint of God is excited because he has been spiritually disciplined and uplifted by God, and, because he knows that he is guaranteed the resurrection unto life at Jesus’ return, He can joyfully endure anything earth has to offer. “But if we hope for what we do not see, with perseverance we eagerly wait for it” (Romans 8:25).

Prose From Proverbs

The Strength of the Ox

Oxen are bulls “broke” to work. And bulls, like all animals, are living machines which leave the waste products of their combustion engines all over their surroundings. So, oxen are polluters, they are often hard to handle, and they are sometimes dangerous or deadly to work with. When 2000 pounds of old bull gets to snortin’ and stompin’... In simple terms, oxen are a hassle. “Where no oxen are, the manger is clean” (Proverbs 14:4).

Why, then, would anyone keep oxen around? For pets? (If you think it costs a lot to feed a dog, try feeding an ox!) The answer comes: “But much increase comes by the strength of the ox” (Proverbs 14:4). An ox is a tool, and without that tool, much work could not get done. In one simple proverb, the only wise God injected much economic wisdom. Let us learn, then, that we may instruct others.

- **An ox requires capital investment** - Oxen are not stones to be picked up freely alongside the road; an ox has to be purchased or raised from birth. In either case, up-front capital is required before the ox does a lick of productive work. An ox has to be fed while it is growing into maturity, and it has to be fed while it is being trained. For a small scale farmer in Israel, this purchase or training of an ox would consume a significant portion of the capital resources of the Israelite who worked the land. If the ox died, was crippled, or was the tenth to pass under the rod for the Lord’s tithing, much of the capital of the farmer vaporized, and the loss of the animal was a great hardship or a major sacrifice.
- **Tools require capital investment** - The smart farmer would figure out all kinds of ways to work that ox. Grinding mills and other simple machines would be concocted to maximize the use of the ox investment. As the ox and accessories were tools in a primitive economy, so tools in a complex economy require much up-front capital to develop and to find ways to use them more effectively.
- **Much increase comes through the ox** - The ox was the means by which grain was ground to flour; hence the exhortation to Israel to take good care of the work bull: “You shall not muzzle the ox while he’s threshing” (Deuteronomy 25:4). Any time that tool needed fuel, he could dip his nose down into the grain and “chew” on a mouthful. So much increase came through the ox that a portion of the grain would be willingly granted to the bull.
- **Much increase comes through tools** - Tools are the only means by which an economy can become more efficient. There is much hassle - trial and error - and cost in the development and maintenance of tools, but these implements multiply the effectiveness of the worker thousands of times.

Because oxen and tools require capital, taxation beyond the minimum exacted for the protection of life, liberty, and property strikes a major blow at their acquisition and development. When a small farmer cannot purchase an ox, he and his family are going to have to grind their grain by hand, and to be able to do only those tasks, which can be done by human strength alone. The farm will suffer, the family will barely survive (maybe!), and starvation and famine will lay near the door of that whole society.

Make no mistake about it: The “Global Warming and Greenhouse Gases” treaty at Kyoto, Japan, is designed to destroy Western Civilization’s ability to use the tools which make for a productive economy. Implicit in the proverb about oxen is that God favors the strength, which comes through the ox; it is the devil which is in favor of the reduction to slavery and starvation.

Prose From Proverbs

It Often Seems Right To A Man

Man has a glimmer of spiritual truths, but he really needs guidance from God to know what goes on in the spiritual realm. Because his eyes can only see those things, which have material substance, and his other sense gates only open to the physical universe, he is subject to deception from evil spiritual entities. A man who had opportunity, by revelation, to look into the realm of the unseen - the great apostle Paul - brought forth this warning for even the church from the Holy Spirit: "But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons, by means of the hypocrisy of liars seared in their own conscience as with a branding iron" (I Timothy 4:1,2). Because of those deceitful spirits, man has to find and rely on the information which comes from God. "There is a way which seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death" (Proverbs 14:12).

- **The Ways of the East** - There is Western Civilization, based on the scripture and rational thought, and the East. In the words of Rudyard Kipling, "East is East, and West is West, and never the two shall meet." Hinduism, Buddhism, and Taoism, from the East all have common threads of vague mysticism and no absolutes. The invasion of the West by Eastern Thought carries the propaganda name "New Age," and the convergence of this with the "diversity movement" and American Indian paganism is being orchestrated by Satanic cunning. Backed by the big publishing houses such as Time-Warner, and promoted on television by such programs as a Shirley MacLaine mini-series, New Age deception is twisting the thinking of millions in the West, altering their perceptions of the nature of the earth and spiritual realities. "There is a way which seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death."
- **The pull of pleasure** - There is a "passing pleasure" connected with sin. When a man wants to engage in sinful pleasure, he has to conjure up some way to justify himself and salve his guilty conscience. Hence, when man has most cogently expressed his rationalizations along this bent, he becomes a "humanist"; he worships himself, "But realize this," Paul informed Timothy and us, "that in the last days difficult times will come. For men will be lovers of self, lovers of money...lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God (II Timothy 3:1). "There is a way which seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death."
- **The counterfeit of denominationalism** - The desire to schismatize is a reflection of the carnal side of man. "Enmities, strife, ...disputes, dissensions, factions..." are listed by the Holy Spirit as those which will send someone to hell. The deceitful workers who infiltrated the congregations of the first century church brought with them a desire to divide and conquer, and the false ways of salvation connected with their false doctrines. Nearly every epistle in what constitutes the writings of the New Testament warns the brethren about such dangerous and destructive false teachings. "Beloved," appeals the aged John, "do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God" (I John 4:1). "There is a way which seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death" (Proverbs 16:25).

Man needs revelation from God to know spiritual truth. Ultimately this truth can only come from one Teacher. "And no one has ascended into heaven," said lie, "but He who descended from heaven, even the Son of Man" (John 3:13). He is God's beloved Son; listen to Him!

Prose From Proverbs

The Quicksand of a Quick Temper

A person who flies off the handle may find himself sizzling in the fire. Make no mistake about it; the Lord will not accept into the courts of the eternal kingdom those who keep going ballistic on earth. The words of Paul are very clear: those who have “outbursts of anger...shall not inherit the kingdom of God” (Galatians 5:20,21). “A quick-tempered man acts foolishly,” posited Solomon, “and a man of evil devices is hated” (Proverbs 14:17). “He who is slow to anger has great understanding,” is another notation, “but he who is quick-tempered exalts folly” (Proverbs 14:29). When a man loses his head in anger, he does a lot of fool things that he later wishes he hadn’t done, and says a bunch of fool things he later wishes he could take back. Like the golfer who had an outburst of anger and threw his clubs in a pool of water on the golf course. When he cooled down and went back to retrieve them he drowned trying to get them out.

Those who have to live around others who have bad tempers are constantly walking on eggshells; they don’t know what tremor is going to trigger the next eruption. To produce peaceful homes and convivial working relationships, the word of God instructs: “Let all bitterness and *wrath* and *anger* and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice” (Ephesians 4:31). How can this be done?

- **Recognize it’s a matter of a new picture** - People act in accordance with the inner picture of themselves. Jesus called it the “treasure,” and said that out of the treasure the mouth speaks (Matthew 12:33-37). So if our man has the picture that Italians always get angry and yell, and he is of Italian descent, he will be a quick-tempered man who hollers at his family and breaks stuff in his wrath. When someone becomes a Christian, the picture is changed. No longer is he of Italian descent, for example, but he has arisen from the waters or immersion with his past life hidden in Christ and now walks in a totally new life. Now he is kind to others, tender-hearted, forgiving others, always conscious that Christ also has forgiven him.
- **Recognize it’s a matter of developing new thought patterns** - The new picture is developed by a process of reprogramming the mind, sometimes termed “internalizing the word of God.” The Holy Spirit instructs: “And do not be conformed to this world, but be *transformed* by the renewing of your mind” (Romans 12:2). Rearranging entrenched thought patterns is not necessarily a simple task, and thoughts cannot be redirected with a systematic, disciplined approach. Those who are serious about overcoming unrighteous anger will find ways to incrementally alter their responses to situations which tend to torch them off, pre-programming their actions by a lot of mental, positive roll-playing.
- **Recognize the consequences if change is not made** - Fear may not be the best long-term motivator, but it is a major motivator nevertheless. “The fear of the Lord,” annotated Solomon, “is a fountain of life, that one may avoid the snares of death” (Proverbs 14:27). A serious contemplation of the fires of hell will cool the hottest temper.

“But let everyone be quick to hear,” is the exhortation from James, in contrast to having a quick temper, and “slow to speak and slow to anger, for the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God” (James 1:19,20). The man who loses his temper had best make it a major priority to get that temper under control with disciplined, systematic reprogramming of his mind.

Prose From Proverbs

Beware, O Backslider

Individuals can become apostate; they can fall away from the one faith of Christianity. “Take care, brethren,” cried the writer of Hebrews, “lest there should be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart, in falling away from the living God” (Hebrews 3:12). If it is not possible to fall away, why would God so explicitly warn against it?

The Lord desires that all men be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth. And He desires likewise that they stay saved. But not all hearts are good and honest, so the great God allows for a time of testing that each heart might be exposed as evil or good. God knows each heart: “Sheol and Abaddon lie open before the Lord,” stated Solomon, “how much more the hearts of men!” (Proverbs 15:11). Backsliding is therefore allowed, so that the fruit of the true heart might be brought to light before the sons of men. “The backslider in heart will have the fill of his own ways, but a good man will be satisfied with his” (Proverbs 14:14).

- **The fast flame-out** - Jesus, knowing the hearts of men, recognized that a certain percentage of those who would obey the gospel would backslide when pressured. Of the rocky soil in the parable of the sower, the Lord noted, “This is the man who hears the word, and immediately receives it with joy.” Well begun is half done. But it is only half done. “Yet he has no firm root in himself but is only temporary, and when affliction or persecution [or temptation] arises because of the word, immediately he falls away” (Matthew 13:20,21). The heart of this person is shallow; it has no firm root, no staying power. This backslider buckles under pressure, and quickly gets the fill of his own ways. The remorse of such a Judas is often obvious.
- **The creeping choke-out** - A more thorny issue is that of the man who is faithful, or appears to be faithful, for a number of years. These are those who, according to Jesus, “have heard, and as they go on their way they are choked with worries and riches and pleasures of this life, and bring no fruit to maturity” (Luke 8:14). This individual did not hack away at the weeds of destruction taking root in his heart, and at some point the jungle of the world overwhelmed the village of the Christianity in his life. This type of backslider too has his fill, only to find his merry way suddenly shocked by his descent into fiery oblivion.
- **The merchandising make-out** - And there are those who deliberately seek to destroy the faith of others. “Now I urge you’ brethren,” was the appeal - of the wise apostle, “keep your eye on those who cause dissensions and hindrances contrary to the teaching which you learned, and turn away from them. For such men are slaves, not of our Lord Christ but of their own appetites; and by their smooth and flattering speech they deceive the hearts of the unsuspecting” (Romans 16:17,18). “In their greed they will exploit you with false words,” appended Peter (II Peter 2:3). These men merchandise a false gospel, and traffic in treachery. These backsliders get their fill: “Their judgment from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep.”

Faithful till death is the hallmark of the righteous. “And the seed in the good soil, these are the ones who have heard the word in an honest and good heart,” was the assessment of the Christ, “and hold it fast, and bear fruit with perseverance” (Luke 8:15). Ah, yes, the backslider in heart will reap the fill of his ways, “but a good man will be satisfied with his” (Proverbs 14:14). But “a man who wanders from the way of understanding will rest in the assembly of the dead” (Proverbs 21:16). Beware, O backslider.

Prose From Proverbs

Liar, Liar, Soul on Fire!

The tongue is a powerful weapon for evil or for good. Even the world recognizes its potency in the proverb, “The pen [the written tongue] is mightier than the sword.” And the tongue is most destructive when it tells lies. “A truthful witness saves lives,” is a Biblical proverb, “but he who speaks lies is treacherous” (Proverbs 14:25).

Lying is a big problem. When most of the witnesses tell lies on the courtroom stand, then the justice which upholds free society collapses and tyranny rises to fill its place. When most of the businesses lie about their products and provisions for meeting customer needs, and when most consumers lie about the supposed inadequacies of the goods and services from market outlets, then commerce will grind to a crunching standstill. When husbands and wives are untruthful with each other, trust is broken; when children are allowed to lie to their parents, or parents set a poor example by their lack of veracity with their children, then destruction of the family unit is on its way. Lying is majorly destructive, and is a signal characteristic of the great destroyer, Satan himself. “He was a murderer from the beginning,” explained Jesus of the shadowy spirit, “and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own nature; for he is a liar, and the father of lies” (John 8:44).

- **Lies are used to unfairly destroy opposition** - The unregenerate human heart can plot at deep levels to destroy an enemy. A lying tongue hates those it crushes,” is an illuminating statement from Proverbs, “and a flattering mouth works ruin” (Proverbs 26:28). The carrier of canards has an unseen agenda in working his devastation, and often is found in the innards of the church. These spies of Satan cover the poison of their talk with the candy of pleasant-sounding words, and they prey upon the weak and unsteady in the congregations of the saints. The apostle Paul warned of “the smooth and flattering speech” by which these sneaks operate amongst God’s people (Romans 16:18). “They speak arrogantly,” says Jude, “flattering people for the sake of gaining an advantage” (Jude 1:16). “He who conceals hatred has lying lips” (Proverbs 10:18).
- **Those who listen to lies reveal their own character** - Like it or not, people seek out others of their own bent. The greedy are attracted to the greedy, and are used by each other. “An evildoer listens to wicked lips,” is this nugget of wisdom, and “a liar pays attention to a destructive tongue” (Proverbs 17:4). The truth-seeker sorts his way through the garbage of human verbiage, but the liar himself is satisfied with lies. “You are of your father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father,” is the judgment of Jesus (John 8:44).
- **The worst liars are scripture-twisters** - Regardless of the patina of concern and a smile that can be exhibited by any skeleton, those who tell others a twisted way of salvation are *anathema* to the Lord, and the worst of all liars. “Every word of God is tested; He is a shield to those who take refuge in Him,” is the encouragement from The Collector of Proverbs. And he adds a warning: “Do not add to His words, lest He reprove you, and you be proved a liar” (Proverbs 30:5,6).

Even the revelation of God cannot come to a close without a serious admonition: “But for the cowardly and unbelieving and abominable and murderers and immoral persons and sorcerers and idolaters and *all liars*, their part will be in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death” (Revelation 21:8). “Fear Him who is able to destroy both body and soul in hell,” and “laying aside falsehood, speak truth” (Matthew 10:28; Ephesians 4:25).

Prose From Proverbs

Power In People

There is nothing a wicked ruler fears more than having his people revolt *en masse* against him. So such a king uses intimidation tactics and downright terror to keep his subjects paralyzed. “Like a roaring lion and a rushing bear,” is the simile of Solomon, “is a wicked ruler over a poor people” (Proverbs 28:15). “Divide and conquer,” is the old axiom; and wicked rulers know the value of their extended maxim, “Keep divided and keep conquered.” A totalitarian ruler, then, fears his people’s uniting against him.

Wise rulers also recognize the necessity of the people’s backing. David, who as the king served as the great foreshadow of Jesus the Messiah, found favor with the people. As the armies of Israel returned victoriously, the women met them with dancing and the sound of tambourines, and saying, “Saul has slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands” (I Samuel 18:7). Saul recognized the importance of this sort of backing, and commented. “They have ascribed to David ten thousands, but to me they have ascribed thousands. Now what more can he have but the kingdom?” (I Samuel 18:8). David continued to be conscious that he was a servant of the people, and through the wisdom of the Spirit of God he progressively united the sons of Israel behind his effort. At a moment when tensions were high during the uniting of Israel, when Joab (David’s general from Judah) has assassinated a rival from Israel, David fasted in honor of the slain. “Now all the people took note of it, and it pleased them, just as everything David did pleased all the people” (II Samuel 3:36).

- **Jesus built His base among the people** - Even the great God, to begin the distribution of the gospel, needed to establish a base of support among the Jews. The first stage was to send John the Immerser as His forerunner, to begin to prepare the way for the Lord. Christ Himself followed the efforts of John by concentrating His ministry in the region of Galilee. “And Jesus was going about all Galilee,” recorded Matthew, “teaching in the synagogues, and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every kind of disease and sickness among the people” (Matthew 4:23). By traveling and preaching, traveling and preaching, traveling and preaching coupled with the advertising His miracles provided, the Lord was able to establish a solid base among the people.
- **Crescendoing the movement** - As Jesus approached the time of His crucifixion, He carefully crafted events to maximize His impact. Deliberately letting Lazarus die, He then raised him from the dead in such a way as to set the crowds coming in for Passover to buzzing. Thus, when He rode into Jerusalem on the donkey, the multitude thronged the route, and the shock of His subsequent crucifixion reverberated throughout the masses of the Jews.
- **The importance of the people** - Christ Himself could have come with all His great teachings on life and life eternal, and it would have had no impact on the world. What caught the attention of the Jewish authorities was the number of people who were attentive to the message of Jesus, as the apostle John noted when he recorded the Lord’s appearance before Caiaphas: “The high priest therefore questioned Jesus about his disciples and about His teaching” (John 18:19).

The Lord, the Maker of man, knows how man operates, and allowed the establishment of earthly kings to communicate the principle of the importance of the people. Noting the “stately march” of the strutting cock and the male goat, the writer of Proverbs adds as a parallel, “And a king when his army is with him” (Proverbs 30:31). “In a multitude of people is a king’s glory,” is the observation, “but in the dearth of people is a prince’s ruin.” (Proverbs 14:28).

The great King is desirous of being surrounded by His people, and has chosen to move forward in the midst of His army. The psalmist in Israel therefore prophesied that a “people yet to be created” would praise Him. Each Christian is therefore of critical importance; even the Lord generates His multitudes one at a time.

Prose From Proverbs

The Eyes of the Lord

God hears without ears, speaks without a mouth, and thinks without a brain. Those pieces are machinery designed for the body of man to connect that which does hear, speak, and think with the material universe. So, when the scripture refers to the “eyes of the Lord,” it is alluding to His ability to see, even in the darkness, all that happens on His creation. “The eyes of the Lord,” cautioned Solomon, are in every place, watching the evil and the good” (Proverbs 15:3).

- **Man’s accountability before God** - The conscience of man gives the same testimony as was written on stone for Moses and Israel. Every man knows it is wrong to commit murder, to commit adultery, to steal, to bear false witness and/ or to covet. Every individual who violates those commandments has to throttle his conscience deliberately in order to wrong his fellow man and sin against God. Furthermore, the character of man has not changed since Adam and Eve hid from the Lord in the Garden of Eden; when man does wrong, he generally tries to cover it up or misdirect the attention of others while the transgression is being committed. Thus the nature of man is such that he will most often carry out his evil deeds under the cover of darkness, “Men loved the darkness rather than the light,” was the emphasis of our Lord, “for their deeds were evil” (John 3:19). “For those who sleep do their sleeping at night,” added Paul, “and those who get drunk get drunk at night” (I Thessalonians 5:7). But every man, in spite of his attempt to run from God, is still accountable to the Almighty, and nothing is going to be hidden. “Sheol and Abaddon lie open before the Lord,” stated Solomon, “how much more the hearts of men!” (Proverbs 15:11). “And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do” (Hebrews 4:13).
- **God’s carrying out His plan** - In the days of Zerubbabel, one of the ancestors of Jesus, and one of the great foreshadows of the Lord, the temple of God in Jerusalem was to be rebuilt. The work had come to a stop due to intense opposition from the enemies of Judah and litigation filed in the courts of the Persian Empire. But the great God was adamant: “The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this house, and his hands will finish it.” And the word of the Lord went on to say, “But *these seven* will be glad when they see the plumb line in the hand of Zerubbabel - these are *the eyes* of the Lord which range to and fro throughout the earth” (Zechariah 4:9,10). The eyes of the Lord make sure that God’s long term plan is indeed executed on earth.
- **God’s watching over His word** - When Jeremiah was just getting into the prophet business, the Lord called to him and gave him an object lesson. “And the word of the Lord came to me, saying, ‘What do you see, Jeremiah?’ And I said, ‘I see the rod of an almond tree.’ Then the Lord said to me, ‘You have seen well, for I am *watching over My word* to perform it.’” (Jeremiah 1:11,12). Those words were encouraging to Jeremiah and to anyone else who proclaims the word of God; God’s eyes are watching to make sure that what He has proclaimed will be executed.

The saint of God, who works assiduously to build the kingdom and publish abroad the glad tidings, is greatly encouraged to learn about the ranging eyes of the Lord. He is glad to note that evil men do not slip past the Almighty unnoticed; he rejoices that the eyes of the Lord see that God’s long term plan is executed; and he is excited to know that God watches over His word, ensuring that those things preached by His spokesmen will take place. “The eyes of the Lord preserve knowledge,” is the encouraging proverb, “but He overthrows the words of the treacherous man” (Proverbs 22:12).

Prose From Proverbs

Hearts and Faces

The Lord said to Cain, “Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen?” (Genesis 4:6). Cain knew that he did not want to do the will of God; he was already harboring sin in his heart, and the evil waiting to strike therein was already showing on his *face*. “As in water face reflects face,” commented Solomon, “so also the heart of man reflects man” (Proverbs 27:19). Since “the heart of man is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick,” then man in general is going to be deceitful and sin-ridden, and this ultimately is going to show up on his countenance (Jeremiah 17:9). But Christians have a new heart, and this likewise will be reflected in their faces. “The lamp of the body is the eye,” was the teaching of the Lord at the sermon on the mount. “If therefore your eye is clear, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in you is darkness, how great is that darkness” (Matthew 6:22,23).

- **The false front** - “Like an earthen vessel overlaid with silver dross are burning lips and a wicked heart” (Proverbs 26:23). The wicked man or woman attempts to cover the evil nature, but the earthen or profane nature cannot cover itself with silver, only silver dross. “A wicked man shows a bold face,” is another observation (Proverbs 21:29). But sooner or later what lies behind the mask will be exposed. “Though his hatred covers itself with guile, his wickedness will be revealed before the assembly” (Proverbs 26:26).
- **The rebellious heart** - “Cursed is the man,” said the Lord through Jeremiah, “who trusts in mankind and makes his flesh his strength, and whose heart turns away from the Lord” (Jeremiah 17:5). When a man knows the way of the Lord and hardens his heart, he becomes very evil. “This people has a stubborn and rebellious heart,” was the analysis of the Holy Spirit. “They have turned aside and departed” (Jeremiah 5:23). Their spiritual descendants listened to the preaching of Stephen as he recounted their rebellious history. “You men who are stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears are always resisting the Holy Spirit; you are doing just as your fathers did” (Acts 7:51). And it is easy to picture their countenances as Luke describes this event: “Now when they heard this, they were cut to the quick, and they began gnashing their teeth at him” (Acts 7:54). The rebellious heart produces a twisted visage and a fallen face.
- **A broken spirit** - When Nehemiah heard of the broken down condition of Jerusalem’s walls and the distress of his people, he wept and mourned for days. When he came into the presence of the king of Persia, the emperor queried, “Why is your face sad though you are not sick? This is nothing but sadness of heart” (Nehemiah 2:2). A sad heart and a broken spirit can be seen in the countenances of those who are so suffering. “When the heart is sad, the spirit is broken” (Proverbs 15:13).
- **A joyful heart** - “All the days of the afflicted are bad,” was the conclusion of the sage, “but a cheerful heart has a continual feast” (Proverbs 15:15). When a Christian is truly filled with the Spirit, and his enthusiasm and joy are radiating from his presence, then his countenance shines also. “A joyful heart makes a cheerful face” (Proverbs 15:13).

The Christian, as an imitator of Christ, has joy even in the midst of earth’s turmoil and troubling situations. “These things I have spoken to you,” stated the Lord Himself, “that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be made full” (John 15:11). May God’s children never exhibit a false face of hypocrisy nor the set and twisted countenance of rebellion. When their hearts have a tendency to be broken and the faces tending to be downcast, may they instead focus their attention upward, and may their joyful hearts be reflected in their cheerful faces.

Prose From Proverbs

Some Things That Are Better

Natural man has a tendency to think that more is better. Happiness, in his vain imagination, is a bigger house, softer beds, and thicker steaks. "If I can just achieve my next goal," he thinks to himself, pondering more of this life's goodies, "then I'll be happier." But the matters of substance in the life of one of God's children are not found in his properties, as Jesus Himself noted: "For not even when one has an abundance does his life consist of his possessions" (Luke 12:15).

What man needs to realize is that joy and misery are internal conditions, and the circumstances that really connect with both joy and misery are relationships - relationships with people initially, and ultimately man's relationship with God. Many is the family whose home life is wretched, filled with alternate days of shouting or silence. But there is a better way.

- **Quiet and calm at home** - A man's home is his haven, his domicile, his castle, where the felicities and peace of domestic life provide rest from the wars. His children are to grow up in this nurturing environment, and here the good wife reigns as queen, beloved by all her subjects, adored by her noble husband. "Better," said, Solomon, who would have known, "is a dry morsel and quietness with it than a house full of feasting and strife" (Proverbs 17:1). One of the great sources of tension is strife. And when there is strife at home, it doesn't matter how perfect the meal is. But peanut butter sandwiches are great when all is quiet on the home front.
- **Love as the home atmosphere** - There is a difference between love and tolerance. Many are those who live under the same roof and generally put up with each other. What a difference in the house when husband and wife really love each other, enjoy spending time with one another, and when the children in the house appreciate the company of their siblings. "Better," said the sage once again, "is a dish of vegetables where love is, than a fattened ox and hatred with it" (Proverbs 15:17). The fare may be boiled cabbage, but that is better than always having spoken words thrown back into the teeth.
- **Tough going** - "It is better," marked the proverb, "to live in a desert land, than with a contentious and vexing woman" (Proverbs 21:19). Presumably it is not so easy to dwell with an ignorant and boorish husband either. Prayer is in order for the Christian spouse, so that true repentance can take place in the marriage partner, and home life upgraded.
- **Integrity and Peace** - In a world where deals are cut with kickbacks and traffic on the merchandise lane is greased with bribes, the honorable man often seems to be at a disadvantage. But inner peace and a clean conscience far outweigh a few extra dollars and creature comforts, "It is better," was the proverbial annotation, "to be a poor man than a liar" (Proverbs 19:22).
- **Blessings for the God-fearing** - Only true fellowship between a man and his God can satisfy the deep longings of the heart. "He who comes to Me shall no longer." was the matter-of-fact statement by Jesus. "The fear of the Lord leads to life," was the comment of Solomon, "so that one may sleep satisfied, untouched by evil" (Proverbs 19:23). "Better," said he, "is a little with the fear of the Lord than great treasure with turmoil with it" (Proverbs 15:16).

The things which produce joy and happiness on earth and eternity in heaven have little to do with dollars and cents. The great joys come from the "better" ways delineated by God's word. "And I show you," stated the apostle Paul, "a still more excellent way...Pursue love" (I Corinthians 12:31;14:1).

Prose From Proverbs

The Power of Positive Words

The importance of words and their effect on people cannot be overemphasized. Reason rides upon the carrier of words; and words are the emissaries of love, the transport of joy, and the pleadings of desired forgiveness. Let us focus again, then, on the importance of edification and encouragement eschewing the destruction attendant to deceiving words and bad attitudes with their poison-tipped comments. “Like a madman who throws firebrands, arrows, and death,” was the observation of Solomon, “so is the man who deceives his neighbor, and says, ‘was I not joking?’” (Proverbs 26:18,19). By contrast the instruction of the Holy Spirit through the apostle Paul is clear and concise: “Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification” (Ephesians 4:29).

- **Healing power in words** - Relationships are torn asunder by careless words, or words spoken in anger. Not only does this happen in the normal social intercourse among people who work or associate together, but there are those who seek to split open wounds which have begun to heal, who delight in seeing the blood of broken fellowship flow. “A worthless man digs for evil, while his words are as a scorching fire. A perverse man spreads strife, and a slanderer separates friends” (Proverbs 16:27,28). But there are those who know how to build, how to inspire confidence, and how to seal the ragged rent between brother and brother. “Pleasant words are a honeycomb, sweet to the soul and healing to the bones” (Proverbs 16:24).
- **Transition power in words** - In the course of daily conversation, it is not unusual to encounter an uncomfortable pause. This can be due to insensitivity on the part of one of the conversants, a crude or off-color remark, or irrelevant statements. There are those who know how to gradually bridge those gaps, put everyone in the party at ease, and steer the talk in the right direction. “Like apples of gold in settings of silver,” states the transcription, “is a word spoken in right circumstances” (Proverbs 25:11).
- **Power in motivating words** - Brethren need to be motivated, and the charge is going to come through the right words spoken at the right time. “Encourage one another day after day,” was one exhortation from the letter to the Hebrew brethren (Hebrews 3:13). “Consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds,” was another (Hebrews 10:24). Solomon noted, “Anxiety in the heart of man weighs it down, but a good word makes it glad” (Proverbs 12:25). The wise one continued in his comments on the importance of proper wording: “A man has joy in an apt answer, and how delightful is a timely word” (Proverbs 15:23).
- **Power in the word of God** - As golden as may be the nuggets of wisdom from the mouths of the sages, they are but dross in comparison to the words spoken by the Almighty. When God came as the Teacher of men, even those sent to arrest Him returned empty-handed, remarking, “Never did a man speak the way this man speaks” (John 7:46). In the words of Agur the oracle, “Every word of God is tested; He is a shield to those who take refuge in Him. Do not add to His words, lest He reprove you, and you be proved a liar” (Proverbs 30:5,6). The power of God to save is resident in His word. The power of God to sustain the Christian is in His word, as well as the power to increase his wisdom, cause him to grow spiritually, give him words to use in his prayers, direct him in the ways of the church, provide him with the fellowship of the brethren, and resurrect him from the dead. “He who gives attention to the word shall find good,” was Solomon’s notation. “And blessed is he who trusts in the Lord” (Proverbs 16:20).

There is power in words; power to save or to destroy, power to build up or tear down. God wants His children to be of disciplined tongue that they might exhibit the character of Christ and spread His word. “The heart of the wise teaches his mouth, and adds persuasiveness to his lips” (Proverbs 16:23). “The wise in heart will be discerning, and sweetness of speech increases persuasiveness” (Proverbs 16:21).

Prose From Proverbs

The Path of the Upright

Life is a journey. For most, rather than being a short burst, it is a long trek, of traversing through wastelands of despair, plunging through jungles of adversity, wading through rivers of sickness and weakness, crossing high ridges infested with entrenched opposition, and occasionally passing through fruitful fields of high productivity. The key question has not to do so much with the adventures of the journey as where the trail comes to its end. “The path of life leads upward for the wise,” as the proverb, “that he may keep from Sheol below” (Proverbs 15:24). A little reflection establishes that the wisest thing a man can do is to finish in heaven, and the stupidest thing he can do is to end up “in Sheol below.”

- **Recognition of personal sin** - The pride of man is brought to naught by the gospel of the righteous God. “Who can say,” asks Solomon, “I have cleansed my heart; I am pure from my sin?” (Proverbs 20:9). Hence it is that God, in His wisdom and mercy, established the perpetual High Priestly ministry of Jesus, whose sprinkling of His own blood offers cleansing for the obedient. While the best of the Old Testament greats could but desire such cleansing, the least of the New Testament saints possesses such a purification. Praise be to Jesus Christ.
- **Following the counsel of the Lord** - “Many are the plans in a man’s heart,” was Solomon’s observation, “but the counsel of the Lord, it will stand” (Proverbs 19:21). The whole counsel of God tells a man what to do to be saved, and what to do to stay saved. By obeying the gospel, the pilgrim is granted remission of past sins and the continued assistance of the indwelling Spirit. With a clean conscience and increasing power from God, the saint is now prepared to trek on victoriously in his following the upward call of God. “The name of the Lord is strong tower,” recounted the sage, “The righteous runs into it and is safe” (Proverbs 18:10).
- **Fellowship in the church** - The man who decides to follow the teachings of Jesus Christ develops a new lifestyle. “The highway of the upright is to depart from evil” remarked Solomon in his wisdom. “He who watches his way preserves his life” (Proverbs 16:17). One of the key ingredients in this new life is fellowship in the church of the living God, by the design of the Lord Himself. Indeed, those who made the kingdom of God the highest priority in the first century were collectively called “the Way” of life. Some Christians have a more difficult time integrating into the body of Christ than others, and, when faced with some of the personal and emotional challenges of social interaction with the brothers and sisters in Christ lust withdraw rather than work through the situation in light of the word of God. Here is the Lord’s analysis: “He who separates himself seeks his own desire; he quarrels against all sound wisdom” (Proverbs 18:1). “The refining pot is for silver and the furnace for gold,” was the object lesson, “but the Lord tests the hearts” (Proverbs 17:3). The church constitutes a major portion of the crucible in which the disciple’s character is reformed. Do not fail the test!

Ultimately the sojourning on earth is designed to produce and increase the faith of God’s followers. “He who walks blamelessly will be delivered,” was the perception of Solomon, “but he who is crooked will fall all at once” (Proverbs 28:18). As the observing saint moves through his earthly existence, he will note the blessings of God for those who honestly strive to please Him, and the curses which come upon those who plunge on in their own way. “He who leads the upright astray will himself fall into his own pit,” was the annotation, “but the blameless will inherit good” (Proverbs 28:10). The saint will press on, then, following the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. “The fear of man brings a snare, but he who trusts in the Lord will be exalted” (Proverbs 29:25).

Prose From Proverbs

The Prayer of the Righteous

The things that are impossible for men are possible for God. And projects which are too much for men are but slight things in the eyes of the Almighty. But in His omnipotence and omniscience, He often chooses not to move unless borne on the wings of the saints' prayers.

The apostle Paul was particularly conscious of the importance of the brethren's prayers. Writing to the church in Corinth, he referred to his trials in the Roman province of Asia, where his work was centered in Ephesus. "For we do not want you to be unaware, brethren, of our affliction which came to us in Asia," he wrote, "that we were burdened excessively, beyond our strength, so that we despaired of life." Further describing the situation, the apostle mentioned the full extent of their extremity, "indeed, we had the sentence of death within ourselves in order that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God who raises the dead." Paul then noted the coming rescue from God, and the participation of the saints in that rescue. "And He will yet deliver us, you also joining in helping through your prayers" (II Corinthians 1:8-11). Somehow, in the sovereign will of God, the saints' prayers were necessary for Paul's deliverance.

- **Man's plans** - It has been well said that the man who fails to plan actually plans to fail. God expects sons of the new covenant to be mature enough to exercise initiative and good judgment in working within His guidelines to carry on the junctions of the church and the promulgation of the gospel. "The plans of the diligent lead surely to advantage," commented Solomon, "but everyone who is hasty comes to poverty" (Proverbs 21:5). The follower of Christ, however, also recognizes that, even when he makes the best and most "air-tight" of strategies, unless the Lord works with him, it will come to naught. "The mind of man plans his ways, but the Lord directs his steps" (Proverbs 16:9).
- **Prayer for wisdom** - Man in general has an air of arrogance, a bit of bullheadedness, a pinch of pride. God will do what He can, within limits He has prescribed, to pull down the pride of man. "A man's pride will bring him low," was the terse note of Solomon, "but a humble spirit will obtain honor" (Proverbs 29:23). So when a Christian plans, his first consideration should be his dependence upon the Almighty. "You ought to say," was the exhortation from James, "If the Lord wills, we shall live and also do this or that." (James 4:15). Therefore the Christian humbly prays for wisdom before charging into his endeavors. "But if any of you lacks wisdom," was another point from James, "let him ask of God, who gives to all men generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him" (James 1:5).
- **When God will answer** - The Father will not universally heed even the prayers of those immersed into Christ. The prayer for wisdom must be asked "in faith and without any doubting." If there are doubts, then the individual has demonstrated his lack of faith, and James notes the results of such faithlessness: "For let not that man expect that he will receive anything from the Lord" (James 1:7). And a brother who hardens his heart to the word loses his ability to be heard in heaven also: "He who turns away his ear from listening to the law, even his prayer is an abomination" (Proverbs 28:9).

God wants regular communication from those who claim to be a part of His family. So He has chosen, in His infinite wisdom, to work His mighty works when exhorted on by the prayers of the saints. "Evil men do not understand justice," asseverated sagely Solomon, "but those who seek the Lord understand all things" (Proverbs 28:5). And those who understand, pray "The Lord is far from the wicked, but He hears the prayer of the righteous" (Proverbs 15:29).

Prose From Proverbs

Good News From Heaven

It is exciting, for all people for all times, to hear good news! The birth of a child, the sound of wedding bells, the word of a son safely home from war—all these stir the heart with warmth from the fires of joy. “Bright eyes gladden the heart; good news puts fat on the bones,” was the way Solomon phrased it (Proverbs 15:30). But as heartwarming as news of any of earthly messages may be, their purpose is to set the stage for the dawning of comprehension of the joy in the message from heaven.

- **Jesus came from heaven** - Jesus did not just go “next door” or across the street to deliver His message; He had to traverse from heaven to earth. “And no one has ascended to heaven,” said He, “but He who descended from heaven even the Son of Man” (John 3:13). As the envoy from glory; Jesus was the great Missionary, the great Apostle. “Therefore, holy brethren, partakers of a heavenly calling,” was the exordium of Hebrews’ author, “consider Jesus, the Apostle and High Priest of our confession” (Hebrews 3:1). When the brethren consider Jesus, they must consider that as the Apostle of our confession (our total system of belief), He was the One sent from heaven with the message to be delivered on earth.
- **The good news was prophesied in the Old Testament** - God promised Jerusalem a messenger, but when He looked among the men of Israel His analysis was, “All of them are false.” But then His attention shifted from earth to heaven and He saw His Son: “Behold, My Servant, whom I uphold, My chosen One in whom My soul delights. I have put My Spirit upon Him...” This is the One to whom the Almighty looked when He said, “I will give a messenger of good news” (Isaiah 41:29-42:1).
- **The incarnation of Christ** - The Jews had long expected the coming of the Messiah. But when the angel heralded the birth of Jesus to the shepherds, he made an amazing pronouncement: “Behold, I bring you good news of a great joy which shall be for all the people; for today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord” (Luke 2:10,11). The good news was that Jesus would be the Savior for all peoples, not just the Jews, in accordance with Old Testament prophecies.
- **Jesus announced good news on earth** - Early in the Lord’s ministry, He returned to His home synagogue in Nazareth. In accordance with His custom, He was the one teaching that day, and when the scroll of Isaiah was handed to Him, He found where these words were written, and read them out loud: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He anointed Me to preach the *good news* to the poor. He has sent Me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free those who are downtrodden, to proclaim the favorable year of the Lord” (Luke 4:18,19).
- **Jesus announced the good news from heaven** - The ascended Lord was privileged to be the first to preach the good news from His exalted position on heaven’s throne. The apostle Paul phrased the announcement in these terms before King Agrippa: “The Christ was to suffer, and ... by reason of His resurrection from the dead He should be first to *proclaim light* both to the Jewish people and to the Gentiles” (Acts 26:23).
- **The good news from heaven continues to be heralded** - “These things have been announced to you,” stated the apostle Peter, “through those who preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven” (I Peter 1:12). Thus, in stages, the good news from heaven has been announced on earth and set down in written form that the good news of great joy might indeed be for all peoples.

“Like cold water to a weary soul,” was the parallel of Solomon, “so is good news from a distant land.” (Proverbs 25:25). The greatest of news - the gospel of God’s Son - has come from the most distant of lands, from heaven itself. Believe and obey!

Prose From Proverbs

“Your Plans Will Be Established”

“Who has ascended into heaven and descended?” is the opening salvo of Agur the oracle. “Who has gathered the wind in His fists? Who has wrapped the waters in His garment? Who has established the ends of the earth? What is His name, or His Son’s name? Surely you know!” (Proverbs 30:4). Any serious contemplation of God brings a man to a recognition of his own smallness, weakness, and senselessness by comparison. The wise man, therefore, looks to God for wisdom and guidance, and lets the Lord instruct him in setting his priorities.

- **God weighs the motives** - Why a deed is done is often more important than the deed itself. Good deeds can hide an evil agenda or can be used to further the gospel of God. “All the ways of a man are clean in his own sight,” was the commentary of Proverbs on the nature of man. Man tends to decide what it is that he will do, then goes to work to come up with reasons to legitimize his actions. These words bring the rationalizer up short, if he will go back and consider just who God is: “But the Lord weighs the motives” (Proverbs 16:2). The importance of underlying motive’s thusly emphasized by the apostle Paul. “To the pure,” he noted, “all things are pure; but to those who are defiled and unbelieving, nothing is pure, but both their mind and conscience are defiled. They profess to know God, but by their deeds they deny Him, being detestable and disobedient, and worthless for any good deed” (Titus 1:15,16). Impure motives render any accomplishment worthless; pure motives render the action pure.
- **The counsel of the Lord stands** - Man in his hubris tends to forget that there is a God in heaven and makes his plans without regard to the involvement of the Almighty. Pharaoh and his chariots, for example, charged thoughtlessly over the beach’s edge and onto the exposed floor of the Red Sea. Pharaoh failed to consider the problem God could cause for the chariot wheels or the timing of the sea walls’ collapse. “There is no wisdom and no understanding and no counsel against the Lord,” was Solomon’s observation of those who would try to run athwart of God and His ways. “The horse is prepared for battle, but the victory belongs to the Lord” (Proverbs 21:31). “Many are the plans in a man’s heart he further remarked, but the counsel of the Lord, it will stand” (Proverbs 19:21). The wise man learns the counsel of the Lord, then makes his plans accordingly.
- **All actions to be fueled by faith** - “Man’s steps are ordained by the Lord,” propounded the sage. “How can a man understand his way?” (Proverbs 20:24). When a Christian follows in the ways ordained by God, he must walk by faith rather than by sight. All Biblical faith, from the patriarchs to today’s Christian, begins with a picture given by the words of God; no one gets to imagine his own picture and then expect God to have to honor it. Following the example of Abraham, the disciple of Christ must not grow weak in faith, but must believe that what God has promised, God is able to perform. The apostle Paul would then emphasize that everything that a Christian does must be an outgrowth of that faith: “Whatever is not from faith,” he wrote, “is sin” (Romans 14:23). “A faithful man will abound with blessings,” is the promise (Proverbs 28:20).

The disciple of Christ, even though he often does not understand his circumstances, will follow God’s word absolutely and resolutely. He will make certain that his motives are pure, that he is following the counsel of God’s will, and that he is pressing on with all effort to be conformed to the image of God’s Son. “The fear of man brings a snare, but he who trusts in the Lord will be exalted” (Proverbs 29:25). “Commit your works to the Lord, and your plans will be established” (Proverbs 16:3).

Prose From Proverbs

Honor and Respect the Aged

“You shall rise up before the gray-headed,” commanded Moses, “and honor the aged, and you shall revere your God; I am the Lord” (Leviticus 19:32). Honor and respect for the aged are tied to reverence for the one and only God; a society which refuses to honor God and grant proper respect for the old is a society on the verge of destruction. The modern lack of respect for the aged has roots in a philosophy and attitude about life on earth that is anti-God. The nature of man and the economics of Karl Marx combine to produce a utilitarian view of other people; others have value to “me” only so long as they can be “used by me.” Since the hoary-headed have oft outlived much of their physical usefulness, particularly as far as the young and impatient are concerned, then they can be ignored or trashed. Of such a heartless generation, the sacred writings of the New Testament speak: they are “without understanding, untrustworthy, unloving, unmerciful” (Romans 1:31). But to bring families out of such a destructive atmosphere is one of the purposes of the church of God, retraining them in the ways of the Lord.

- **Respect for the aged** - “Rise up before the gray-headed,” is the decree from God. Such a requirement forces the young and self-centered to become others-centered, and to begin to appreciate the contributions of older generations, on whose shoulders they stand. “A gray head is a crown of glory,” was the declamation of Solomon. “It is found in the way of righteousness” (Proverbs 16:31). The general point communicated here is that the older individual who has lived righteously and blamelessly, as did the parents of John the Immerser, is worthy of respect and is to be listened to very carefully. Wise men of some years often give little advice, knowing that most of the education of younger men is going to have to come by their own experience in the school of hard knocks. So when they speak, it is critical for younger men to heed their advice. Such was the basis of the imploration of Paul the apostle to Philemon: “For love’s sake I rather appeal to you - since I am Paul the aged (Philemon 9).
- **Respect for parents** - Coupled with respect for the gray-headed is respect for parents, who generally turn into the gray-headed over the lifetimes of their children. “Listen to your father who begot you,” exhorted Solomon, “and do not despise your mother when she is old” (Proverbs 23:22). The first commandment with its promise - “Honor your father and your mother.” - had, as one is its key components, the care and respect for aged parents.
- **Respect for God** - “We had earthly fathers to discipline us, and we respected them,” was the observation of Hebrews’ author. “Shall we not much rather be subject to the Father of spirits, and live?” (Hebrews 12:9). Respect for parents leads to respect for God, and general disrespect for parents leads to general disrespect for God. More than all others, the God who gives to everyone life and breath and all things is worthy of the utmost of respect and approbation. “Honor the Lord from your wealth, and from the first of all your produce” (Proverbs 3:9). And a person who fails to honor God with a tithe from the top generally will not provide proper care for his aging parents either.

Satan is hard at work to destroy the family unit because that breakup results in a general loss of honor toward God, the One from whom every family derives its name. One very powerful but simple habit that family heads can produce in their children is respect for others, and one of the true tests of whether that is being accomplished is their demeanor before senior citizens. If they rise up before the gray-headed, then they are well on the way to revering the Lord.

Prose From Proverbs

The Cost of Quarrels

The key to any offensive thrust, be it athletics or war, is for the offensive unit to work smoothly, like a well-oiled machine. The smart defensive units, be it athletics or war, do their nastiest and most effective work when they get right in the middle of the offensive units, and break up the offensive salvos from the inside. When the church of the living God is engaged in serious warfare - fighting the good fight of faith, spreading the message of the good confession, and rescuing sinners from the fires of hell - then the devil works to break up the offensive thrust.

But how will Satan be able to get inside the church of God? The apostle Peter knew, and warned Christians about the warfare: "Beloved, I urge you as strangers and aliens to abstain from fleshly lusts which wage war against the soul" (I Peter 2:11). The war is being waged from as close quarters as it can, working through any remnants of fleshly-mindedness in the saints. "What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you?" asks James. "Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members?" (James 4:1) The Destroyer likes for the church to be quarreling among itself; then no offensive forward moves against the dark domain can be accomplished. By contrast, "How good and how pleasant it is for brothers to dwell together in unity!" (Psalm 133:1).

- **Killing time** - "Do not be foolish," said Paul to the Ephesian brethren, "but understand what the will of the Lord is" (Ephesians 5:17). The will of the Lord clearly is to make the most of time. But the lazy and unproductive (which are characteristic of those who have undisciplined flesh) look for ways to kill time instead of being good stewards of time, and often provoke a fight or argument to accomplish that purpose. The devil is gleeful over such unspiritual action because it furthers his cause. The wisdom of God says, "Keeping away from strife is an honor for a man, but any fool will quarrel" (Proverbs 20:3).
- **Big fights come from little fights** - How often has a friendly living room scuffle between two older lads escalated to something serious! How often has a feud between Fuodia and Syntyche spread so that the whole congregation takes sides, and now incapable of carrying out a united effort in spreading the gospel to the lost? "The beginning of strife is like letting out water, so abandon the quarrel before it breaks out" (Proverbs 17:14).
- **Quarrels redirect the discussion** - One of the tactics members of the fallen race use when feeling the pressure of complying with scripture is to provoke a quarrel so as to divert attention from themselves and their need for repentance. The Christian, working to save such a one, is given this instruction: "But refuse foolish and ignorant speculations, knowing that they produce quarrels. And the Lord's bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged, with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth, and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, having been held captive by him to do his will" (II Timothy 2:23-26). Carnal Christians often fall into this same quarreling diversion, and thus can be used by Satan.

The solution is for the Christian to crucify the flesh with its passions and desires. "For since there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not fleshly, and walking like mere men?" (I Corinthians 3:3). "And beyond all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity" (Colossians 3:14).

Prose From Proverbs

Any Country's Best Citizens

The strength of a nation is the moral fiber of her people. When there is rot in the warp and woof of society's fabric, then the bonds, which hold her together are thin and frayed, and the slightest stress will rend asunder her free institutions. A characteristic of what the Bible calls "the wicked" is that they are "lawless"; by definition they are both moral and political anarchists, and in exhibiting the same traits as their spiritual father, the devil and Satan, they come only to steal and kill and destroy. By contrast, those who walk humbly with their God love kindness and "do justice" (Micah 6:8). "But let justice roll down like waters," cried the voice of another prophet, "and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream" (Amos 5:24). "When the wicked increase, transgressions increase," was the evaluation of Solomon (Proverbs 29:16). As righteousness ceases to flame from the pulpits of America's churches, in the words of French observer de Tocqueville, America will cease to be good. And as America ceases to be good, she ceases to be great.

- **Wickedness in high offices** - Men in high office are "men of influence." Unless checked by stable institutions and rule by law, corrupt men in high office therefore corrupt entire societies. "The prince asks, also the judge, for a bribe," was Micah's observation. "And the great man speaks the desire of his soul; so they weave it together" (Micah 7:3). What they weave is not good for the freedom of the common man. "The king gives stability to the land by justice, but a man who takes bribes overthrows it" (Proverbs 29:4). "A wicked man receives a bribe from the bosom," was another comment from wisdom, "to pervert the ways of justice" (Proverbs 17:23).
- **God delights in justice** - "And the strength of the King loves justice," were the words of the Psalmist (Psalms 99:4). Justice is a characteristic of the goodness of God, and is in direct conflict with those who desire to serve evil. "An unjust man is abominable to the righteous," remarked Solomon, "and he who is upright in the way is abominable to the wicked" (Proverbs 29:27). Herein is the source of eternal conflict: the upright, in whom God delights, is a total abomination to the wicked, and any progress toward a God-ordained, peaceful society is violently opposed by those who do not intend to follow God's standards of justice and morality. "He who justifies the wicked and condemns the righteous, both of them alike are an abomination to the Lord" (Proverbs 17:15).
- **The case for moral outrage** - "Abhor what is evil," was the charge of the apostle Paul. "cling to what is good" (Romans 12:9). Christians, therefore, are not to be neutral in issues of right and wrong. The writer of proverbs notes the character of the godly: "Those who forsake the law praise the wicked, but those who keep the law strive with them" (Proverbs 28:4). The saints work hard to provide a sense of moral justice and uprightness in their communities and nations, knowing that immoral nations cannot long remain free and that the gospel would therefore be hindered. "If you are slack in the day of distress," perceived Solomon, "your strength is limited" (Proverbs 24:10).
- **The solution** - The long-term solution is for all people to be turned to God by being taught the Bible. "Where there is no vision," was Solomon's statement regarding the revelation of God's message to men, "the people are unrestrained, but happy is he who keeps the Law" (Proverbs 29:18). The lack of moral restraint sinks nations.

Christians are any nation's best citizens. Because they hold a higher citizenship than any that earth's realms can offer, disciples of Christ teach others to observe all that Jesus commanded, and they are not afraid to die in spreading the word of righteousness.

Prose From Proverbs

Finding A Wife

“He who finds a wife finds a good thing,” stated Solomon, “and obtains favor from the Lord” (Proverbs 18:22). Later the sage poses a question: “An excellent wife, who can find?” (Proverbs 31:10). The theme of “finding a wife runs like a mighty river throughout all aspects of human life. It is the underlying current in romance novels, its waves lap along the edges of adventure stories and “flicks, and its magnetic power is bent and twisted by Satan to serve perverted and political ends. Indeed, the theme pervades even “the greatest story ever told,” the Bible itself.

- **An emphasis on “find”** - A wife is very valuable. She is a treasure, a precious jewel, and as such, she must be sought with diligence and fervency. A single man has to search through many prospective “situations” to locate his match; if he lacks the confidence or desire to seek, he will not find.
- **A prudent wife** - Both Christian men and women of marriageable availability need to remember Solomon’s injunction: “Charm is deceitful and beauty is vain (Proverbs 31:30). There are many women who are stunning in their appearance, and who know how to turn on the charm when attracting their prey. But such women can be extremely dangerous to a man who would desire to keep his spiritual focus. A woman who puts an inordinate amount of attention to externals neglects internals, and ends up a beautiful but hollow ornament; from such women the smart Christian man flees! The counsel of the Almighty is: “House and wealth are an inheritance from fathers, but a prudent wife is from the Lord” (Proverbs 19:14). A wife who is spiritually on track, who can handle finances, who has discipline and mental toughness, and who has a realistic perspective on life and its vagaries is a prudent wife; such a woman is of inestimable worth and to be sought after by intelligent men seeking Christian marital companionship.
- **The prudent wife as a gift** - House and wealth, in the context of the proverb, are an inheritance; a prudent wife is a gift from God. When a faithful man finds such an excellent wife, he must be continually thankful to the Father for such a gift and treat his wife with more care than could be awarded a valuable and sentimental treasure. And the lady making the claim to godliness, if she desires to be presented as a precious gift to the right God-fearing man, must prepare herself in the matter of being prudent. She must discipline herself in financial matters, and prepare herself as a practical repository of love.
- **A prudent woman knows about men** - A prudent woman, by definition, is one who uses her head when it comes to being romantically involved with a man. Just because a man is a Christian, or claims to be a Christian, does not mean that he has developed the discipline and character necessary to be a good husband. A truly prudent woman will recognize when a man is not ready to take on husbandly responsibilities as the Lord directs, and will run from that situation as fast as her legs will carry her.
- **Finding the lost** - Those who have ever taken the trip down the romantic trail have an understanding of the intensity of the nature of “the search” for a wife or husband. The goal of God is that brethren use that experience to understand the intensity with which Christ looks to find his bride, and which is to be translated into the fervor with which the saint seeks for the lost.

The words of the Lord still ring with encouragement: “Seek, and you shall find” (Matthew 7:7). If a man wants a wife, he must seek with the assurance that he will find. If a saint wants to seek the lost, he must seek with the assurance that he will find.

Prose From Proverbs

Developing Disciplined Children

Raising up children who are a glory to God is no small task or minor accomplishment. Parents who successfully guide their children through the teenage years and on in to productive and godly lives are not only to be commended, but imitated. Ultimately, the children are the Lord's and He is therefore able to issue this diction from on high: "Train up a child in the way he should go, even when he is old he will not depart from it" (Proverbs 22:6). Parents - especially Christian parents - have a responsibility given to them by God, and they are therefore answerable to Him in regard to how well they carried out this responsibility.

- **Disciplined minds and bodies** - The road to success, in both the material and spiritual realm, is the road of discipline. Because, in the wisdom of God, a child is not an adult and needs training, it is the parents' responsibility to help their offspring develop control over their emotions, attitudes, and actions. The wise parent justly and unflinchingly imposes controls and corrections from the moment of birth. In wisdom he provides much praise in the midst of the child's struggling attempts to throw off the molted skins of earlier childhood, tempering punishment with intelligent grace. "Discipline your son while there is hope," were the words of Solomon the wise, "and do not desire his death" (Proverbs 19:18). The goal is to produce young people who have the inner strength to withstand temptation, overcome challenges, and carry out the gospel of God.
- **The flesh tends to be undisciplined** - The body, when it gets to do what it pleases, does the opposite of what it is supposed to do. The word of God is full of warnings in Proverbs about such lack of discipline: "Do not love sleep," says one, "lest you become poor" (Proverbs 20:13). "Laziness casts into a deep sleep," says another, "and an idle man will suffer hunger" (Proverbs 19:15). Not only must the mind overcome the body's laziness, but also its desire for pleasure. "He who loves pleasure will become a poor man; he who loves wine and oil will not become rich" (Proverbs 21:17). Discipline in priorities and use of time is enjoined: "Prepare your work outside, and make it ready for yourself in the field," were the words to an agricultural people about making the ground ready for planting. "Afterwards, then, build your house" (Proverbs 24:27). "Like a city that is broken into and without walls is a man who has no control over his spirit" (Proverbs 25:28).
- **Parents help children discipline themselves** - The goal of true parental discipline is self-discipline, so that as the child moves into adulthood, he has the self-control necessary for a good attitude and high performance. "The rod and reproof give wisdom," noted Solomon, "but a child who gets his own way brings shame to its mother" (Proverbs 29:15). "Do not hold back discipline from the child," encourages wisdom, "although you beat him with the rod, he will not die. You shall beat him with the rod, and deliver his soul from Sheol" (Proverbs 23:13,14). All discipline is not mere corporal punishment: "Cease listening, my son, to discipline," wisdom continues, "and you will stray from the words of knowledge" (Proverbs 19:27).

The wisdom of good Christian parents is exhibited in their unwavering consistency in enforcing the rules and providing positive praise and incentives. Inconsistent moms and dads, who praise and punish for a little while and then quit - who don't have the personal discipline themselves to withhold reward when the child hasn't earned it - confuse their children and produce uncurried tendencies in their offspring. "Correct your son, and he will give you comfort; he will also delight your soul" (Proverbs 29:17).

Prose From Proverbs

Wine Is A Mocker

There are those who love their wine. There are those who love their social drinking. And there are those who wish they had never seen or heard of alcoholic beverages because of the destruction wrought in their lives and their loved ones. "Listen, my son, and be wise," was the advice of Solomon, "and direct your heart in the way. Do not be with heavy drinkers or wine, or with gluttonous eaters of meat; for the heavy drinker and glutton will come to poverty, and drowsiness will clothe a man with rags" (Proverbs 23:19-21). Poverty is not the only calamity to befall the heavy drinkers; families come apart, domestic violence is rampant, and crime and misery increase. So who thinks wine is a good thing?

- **Alcohol has claws** - From the earliest history of man, alcohol has been a problem. Old Noah got drunk with wine from one of the early gatherings of his grape crop, made a fool of himself, and ended by pronouncing a curse on his grandson, Canaan. "Wine is a mocker, strong drink is a brawler," noted Solomon, who had conducted experiments on himself with alcohol, "and whoever is intoxicated by it is not wise" (Proverbs 20:1). Those parties, where the television ads show everyone happy together, end with a few passed out on the floor, others brawling outside, and still others leaving with someone else's wife. A brief look at the police reports in any daily newspaper will show the web of trouble following the night's partying. Alcohol has claws.
- **The velvet covering** - The points on alcohol's claws do not appear immediately. The velvet of pleasure precedes the reign of pain, and booze's short-term effects slowly pull its imbibers into long-term destruction. "Who has woe?" asks the proverb of party-goers. "Who has sorrow?" is the question for revelers. "Who has contentions? Who has complaining? Who has wounds without cause? Who has redness of eyes?" The answer comes for people who rationalize their participation in social drinking. "Those who linger long over wine, those who go to taste mixed wine." The inspired advice now arrives: "Do not look on the wine when it's red, when it sparkles in the cup, when it goes down smoothly; at the last it bites like a serpent, and stings like a viper." As the claws dig in, bleary-eyed confusion takes over the mind of the drinker. "Your eyes will see strange things, and your mind will utter perverse things. And you will be like one who lies down in the middle of the sea, or like one who lies down on the top of a mast." Now a fallen-down drunk who lies in a stupor on the street, our once-proud hero in mixing drinks is easy prey for vandals. "They struck me, but I did not become ill; they beat me, but I did not know it." Crawling out of the gutter, the drunk starts the cycle all over again, "When shall I awake?" he asks from his fogginess. "I will seek another drink" (Proverbs 23:29-35).

Boozers are losers. King Lemuel recalled the wise words of his mother: "It is not for kings, O Lemuel, it is not for kings to drink wine, or for rulers to desire strong drink, lest they drink and forget what is decreed, and pervert the rights of all the afflicted" (Proverbs 31:4,5). If mere earthly kings were exhorted not to drink wine, what about spiritual kings of heavenly citizenship? "It is good not to eat meat or drink wine or do anything by which your brother stumbles," stated Paul (Romans 14:21). In America, where beer costs less than water and wine coolers crowd grocery store and mini-market shelves, the Christian can be a positive force by abstaining from all alcoholic beverages. Wine is a mocker, and its laughter is hollow and fiendish at the end.

Prose From Proverbs

A Correct Answer

Words are used to tell the truth. But words can also be used to promote lies, schemes, and massive fraud. The god of confusion, Satan, twists the straight rod of truth to produce a web of distortion and a labyrinth of mesmerization so intricate that often only the very astute among honest men are able to keep their bearings. It is critical, therefore, that such men and women be able to communicate true understanding and expose the objections of those who oppose the truth. The affairs of nations rise or fall based on the populace's having a general understanding of important political and economic truth and a willingness to follow that understanding; how much more significant are the eternal truths which produce salvation? "Have I not written to you excellent things of counsels and knowledge," queried Solomon, "to make you know the certainty of the words of truth that you may correctly answer to Him who sent you?" (Proverbs 22:20,21).

- **Civilization must be built on truth** - A general honesty must pervade the justice system of any country; corruption in the judicial process produces disorder in the political arena and chaos in the market place. "If a ruler pays attention to falsehood," was the comment of Solomon, "all his ministers become wicked" (Proverbs 29:12). When the crooks can operate with impurity in commerce, then honest men have no incentive to produce. When the claims of advertisers can no longer be regarded as true, and quality workmanship ceases to be guaranteed, then the brakes of corruption are applied to the fly-wheel of economic production, and a return to a primitive economy is looming on the horizon. When legalized plunder is the driving force of the political system, then various echelons of thugs move into the governmental arena, and honest men and able statesmen are driven into obscurity. Without the men who stand for righteousness and justice, the political system rapidly decays into a giant series of kangaroo courts, the more ruthless and savage of men govern for personal profit, and the law of the jungle replaces the peace of orderly civilization.
- **Salvation must be built on truth** - The deceiver, the father of lies, brings falsehood to the world, and this pressures those who would tell the truth about salvation. During the days of our Lord's earthly sojourn, His character, teaching, and miracles convinced even the leaders of some of the synagogues that He was the Messiah and Savior. "Nevertheless," wrote the apostle John, "many even of the rulers believed in Him, but because of the Pharisees they were not confessing Him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue; for they loved the approval of men rather than the approval of God" (John 12:42,43). The same pressure is on today to persuade men not to tell the truth about immersion being for forgiveness of sins, and that the Spirit be granted in that immersion.
- **Practices of the church must be built on truth** - Jesus did say that He would build His church (Matthew 16:18). The practices of the church, to use the language of Paul (I Corinthians 11:16), are dictated by the writings of the New Testament. The pressure is on to make the church conform to the world rather than follow the teachings of Jesus and the apostles (the role of women, for example).

What is needed is men who have the knowledge and the courage to expound upon the counsels of God in these areas, and bring in the certainty of truth and explode Satan's realm. Who will give the correct answers?

Prose From Proverbs

Don't Move The Boundary

Each family in Israel had its property. God said that He really owned the land, and, when Israel took control of the property, God apportioned the land by lot to the various tribes, and distributed the acreage family by family. To ensure that the property stayed with the family in perpetuity, the Almighty even had provisions for a man to raise up children for his brother if that brother died childless. Thus each family had its inheritance in Israel, and marked the boundaries of the property. In that connection, the sage, the son of David, wrote: "Do not move the ancient boundary which your fathers have set" (Proverbs 22:28). Since God allocated the property, man did not have the right to change the boundary.

- **Ahab and Jezebel** - Ahab, the rotten king of Israel, married Jezebel, the daughter of the king of Sidon, and she brought with her the worship of Baal. Having thus really rejected God, it was comparatively easy for them to mess with the ancient boundaries. Wanting the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite for their own garden, they became upset with Naboth because he could not and would not give up the property. Jezebel conspired to have him killed; so when Ahab went to take possession, Elijah the prophet met him. "In the place where the dogs licked up the blood of Naboth," he said, "the dogs shall lick up your blood, even yours" (I Kings 21:19). God doesn't like people messing with the boundaries - the ancient boundaries.
- **Boundaries of morality** - The Father has written the standards of right and wrong on every human heart. Those boundaries were set in the days of Adam and Eve, emphasized in the flood of Noah, codified in the law of Moses, and preached to the world through the gospel of Christ. Every mouth has been shut, and all mankind is without excuse before God. But there are those who want to move the boundaries. There are those who want to remove the limits placed on the sexual relationship between men and women, who want to promote every kind of immorality and perversion, who even want to abolish the family. "Woe," He says, "to those who call evil good, and good evil" (Isaiah 5:20). God doesn't like people messing with the boundaries - the ancient boundaries.
- **Boundaries of doctrine** - "All scripture," stated the apostle Paul, "is inspired by God and is profitable for doctrine" (II Timothy 3:16). Man-made doctrine, according to this same apostle, is designed to tickle the ears of the hearers. Over and over the scripture emphasizes what it calls "sound doctrine". Again there are those who want to move the boundaries, who do not want the church to function within the confines of the scripture. There are those who couldn't really care less about what God's word says about elders, the role of women in the church, or a whole host of other topics. But God doesn't like people messing with the boundaries - the ancient boundaries.
- **Boundaries of salvation** - Salvation is a doctrine, but we wanted to break it out of the pack for special emphasis. God's terms for salvation are clearly given in the teachings of Jesus and the apostles. It is clear: each hearer must believe in Jesus and all the teaching concerning His life, crucifixion, and resurrection; each must be moved to repent; each must confess Christ as Lord; and each must be immersed by the authority of Jesus for the forgiveness of sins and to receive the Holy Spirit. But there are those who want to move the boundaries and change the terms of pardon, who want to broaden the narrow gate that leads to salvation. God doesn't like people messing with the boundaries - the ancient boundaries.

If God was concerned about the boundaries of Naboth's property, He is infinitely more concerned about the teaching of the boundaries on moral standards, doctrines governing the church, and the way of salvation. And God has sent His spokesmen to pronounce judgment upon the modern Ahabs and Jezabels who in arrogance move those ancient boundaries.

Prose From Proverbs

The Work Ethic

“Do you see a man skilled in his work?” asked Solomon. “He will stand before kings; he will not stand before obscure men” (Proverbs 22:29). This is a great promise to any craftsman or skilled laborer; men will notice the quality of workmanship and will bring the workmanship to the attention of kings and those in prominence. This proverb, and the other teachings of the Word of God concerning quality work, produces a Biblical work ethic, a hard working, do-it-right atmosphere in individuals, families, and whole societies.

- **Working for the glory of God** - The Biblical work ethic results when individuals have the maturity and responsibility to take pride in their work. When they show initiative and hustle, when they take extra pain to make sure the “little things” are done right, then increased efficiency and quality products are on their way. Providing the foundation for such initiative and care are the Biblical teachings that all Christians, even slaves, are to do their work for the notice of God. “Slaves, in all things obey those who are your masters on earth,” was the directive from Paul the apostle, “not with external service, as those who merely please men, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord” (Colossians 3:22). When a man is conscious that God is the quality inspector for the job, then his perspective as a God-fearing man is that the details had better be done correctly and the work done in a timely fashion.
- **Effect of the Biblical work ethic** - With the distribution of the Bible in the language of the common man, western civilization developed, along with what has been called *the industrial revolution*. The industrial revolution was possible because of the comparative political freedom that came as a result of the desire for religious freedom, the concomitant development of a free enterprise economic system, and the personal morality connected with the Biblical work ethic. This industrial revolution made possible the production of high quality manufactured items at low cost. Western Europe and her offspring, particularly the United States of America, were thus lifted from the squalor of a third world existence to produce the marvels of modern manufacturing.
- **Loss of Biblical work ethic threatens modern production** - With the Bible ridiculed in modern society, and God relegated to his box in heaven, the upcoming generations have no reason to produce quality work in a timely fashion. Businesses try to compensate for this general incompetence by having machines and computers bridge the gap. This can work for a period of time, but the increasing loss of incentive due to the replacement of the free enterprise system with socialism and the rapidly eroding moral base will soon override the stop gaps business has instituted.
- **Workmen in the scriptures** - The loss of quality workmanship in the physical realm impacts the spiritual realm as well. It is a basic scriptural principle that man has to learn the lessons in the physical before he can understand the application to the spiritual. Christians and congregations the world over need to establish the Biblical work ethic among their people so that this scriptural imperative can be carried out: “Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, handling accurately the word of truth” (II Timothy 2:15).

The greatest work in which to be skilled is handling accurately the word of truth. And a man (or woman) who does this will not be left in obscurity; he will stand before the King.

Prose From Proverbs

Advice on Men and Money

All is not always as it seems. The masters of illusion sometimes perform their tricks on stage; most of the outstanding masters tend to perform in the business arena or in the places where political levers are pulled. Hence King Solomon and the Holy Spirit cooperated to give some advice on illusion and the masters of illusion.

- **When the good times roll** - When big business decisions are on the line or when big political deals are to be struck, those who arrange the setting often create the “proper” atmosphere by staging a meal. “When you sit down to dine with a ruler,” was the wisdom of Solomon, “consider carefully what is before you; and put a knife to your throat if you are a man of great appetite. Do not desire his delicacies, for it is deceptive food” (Proverbs 23:1-3). The movers and shakers put the “delicacies” out in front of their victims as false incentives. When the victim is sufficiently lulled into euphoria by the wine, women, and song, then they strike the deal and, as they say, the sheep is sheared.
- **Sitting with a selfish man** - When the scripture says not to judge lest you be judged, it is talking about putting a final condemnation upon people without considering that they might change. But the word of God always indicates that a careful analysis of the character of others should be made. In the passage where Jesus talked about not giving a final condemnation or critical judgment, He also stated, “Do not give what is holy to dogs, and do not throw your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you to pieces” (Matthew 7:6). Some are dogs and some are swine, and the Christian has a scriptural injunction to perceive who they are. Solomon also warned: “Do not eat the bread of a selfish man, or desire his delicacies. For as he thinks within himself, so he is. He says to you, ‘Eat and drink!’ But his heart is not with you. You will vomit up the morsel you have eaten, and waste your compliments” (Proverbs 23:6-8). The selfish man knows nothing of cooperation; anything in which he participates is going to serve his purposes, regardless of how ruthless and heartless he may have to be.
- **Money has wings** - The scripture emphasizes that no man can serve both God and mammon, and that close personal relationships are far more important than money. Natural disasters can destroy carefully built up assets in a moment of time, and all property is subject to robbery and confiscation. It is not even profitable to be a thief: smart thieves are working to steal on both small-scale and large-scale scams, smarter thieves are working to steal from the smart thieves, and the smartest thieves (who have been stealing from everyone) suddenly die. “Do not worry yourself to gain wealth; cease from your consideration of it. When you set your eyes on it, it is gone. For wealth certainly makes itself wings, like an eagle that flies toward the heavens” (Proverbs 23:4,5).
- **Not all need to hear** - A man can have intelligence and still be a fool. When a man chooses to say in his heart, “There is no God,” then he has become a fool, and he then tends to ridicule the wisdom of God. “Do not speak in the hearing of a fool,” was Solomon’s counsel, “for he will despise the wisdom of your words” (Proverbs 23:9). Choose the time and place to give advice carefully.

Money and position are illusory. Few can climb the ladder of deception to wealth and power, and most of those who do die violent deaths. Skilled in the use of smoke and mirrors, glitz and promotion, they can, however, deceive the unsuspecting saint. Take God’s advice on men and money.

Prose From Proverbs

“As a Man Thinketh...”

A profound truth in a simple statement: “For as he thinks within himself, so he is” (Proverbs 23:7). The writer of Proverbs uses this point to establish that a man who views himself as selfish is selfish. This general truth applies to all aspects of a man’s nature; if a man views himself as a failure, he must fail, and if a man truly views himself as a success, he must succeed. The performance of an individual is based on his self-image; the key to changing behavior is to change the image.

- **Man’s initial image** - Man from the beginning was different than the animals. Animals consist at most of body and soul, whereas man is also a spirit being. “Let us make man in our image, according to our likeness,” said God (Genesis 1:26). God is Spirit, and man then is to be a spirit-being in God’s image.
- **Satan trifled with the image** - Satan told a big lie at the beginning. “You will be like God,” he said, “knowing good and evil” (Genesis 3:5). The exact opposite was true; now children of flesh took on Satan’s image, becoming liars and murderers. “You are of your father the devil,” Jesus told a group of hostile Jews, “and you want to do the desire of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own nature; for he is a liar, and the father of lies” (John 8:44). Man, to be in the image of God, has - through deception and rebellion - taken on the image of the devil. As he thinks within himself, so he is. “With their tongues they keep deceiving,” quoted Paul. “Their feet are swift to shed blood” (Romans 3:13,15).
- **God more than restores fallen man** - Not only does God redeem man from his transgressions, but He recreates him, this time in the image of Jesus the triumphant rather than Adam the failure. “The first man [Adam] is from the earth, earthy,” noted Paul. “The second man [Jesus] is from heaven. As is the earthly, so also are those who are earthly, and as is the heavenly, so also are those who are heavenly. And just as we have borne the image of the earthly, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly” (I Corinthians 15:47-49).
- **Sinner or saint** - Adam was a sinner. Jesus, the Holy One of God, was the ultimate saint. Those in the image of Adam are sinners; those reformed in the image of Christ are saints. The letter of I Corinthians, for example, is not addressed “to the sinners in Corinth;” it is addressed “to those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, saints by calling” (I Corinthians 1:2).
- **Renewing the mind** - The testing ground of an earthly sojourn is for the saint of God to learn to walk by faith through the wilderness of sin. He must - through scripture memory, prayer, teaching the lost, and contemplating the word of God - keep his mind focused on his image in Christ, or Satan will use the world to destroy that which God has formed. “My children,” Paul pleaded with the Galatians, “with whom I am again in labor until Christ is formed in you” (Galatians 4:19). “Be renewed in the spirit of your mind,” exhorted the apostle, “and put on the new self which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth” (Ephesians 4:23,24).

The Christian has been given a new image, the image of Christ in glory. But this image must be constantly held and worked on by the follower of Christ or it too will fade. As a man thinks, so he is.

Prose From Proverbs

The Temporal Judgments of God

All men will stand before the great white throne in judgment on the last day. But God does not wait until the last day to execute all His judgments. He has the means in place to call men and nations to account long before Jesus returns with trumpet blast and archangel voice. God's witness Stephen noted the temporal judgment of God against the nation of Egypt would be executed. Quoting from Moses, he commented that God's people "would be enslaved and mistreated for four hundred years." And the Almighty noted his upcoming judgment on Egypt, "And whatever nation to which they shall be in bondage I Myself will judge" (Acts 7:6,7). Ancient Egypt was judged in 1446 BC; God does not necessarily wait to the end of time to execute wrath.

- **God watches over those who cannot defend themselves** - The Father of the spirit of all flesh watches over all the earth and executes His justice. He is slow-moving, from man's perspective, but He ultimately executes His temporal justice, righting wrongs, filling the poor with good things, and sending away the rich empty-handed. "Do not move the ancient boundary," was the reminder, "or go into the fields of the fatherless; for their Redeemer is strong; He will plead their case against you" (Proverbs 23:10). God has a basic principle which He imposes on the sons of men: what you give out is what comes back to you. Those who trample the rights of the poor and fatherless will be trampled in turn.
- **God watches over attitudes** - The Almighty wants those who claim His name to have good and merciful attitudes toward all men. "Do not rejoice when your enemy falls," was the advice from heaven, "and do not let your heart be glad when he stumbles, lest the Lord see it and be displeased, and He turn away His anger from him" (Proverbs 24:17,18). If the Lord has someone in His "doghouse" on account of you, and if you display gloating attitudes toward him, then the Lord will let him out of the doghouse. Instead, "if your enemy is hungry, give him food to eat; and if he is thirsty, give him water to drink; for you will heap burning coals on his head and the Lord will reward you" (Proverbs 25:21,22).
- **God watches troublemakers** - There are those who for some reason love to stir up strife, and there are those who just have to "get even." The Omnipotent says, "Do not be a witness against your neighbor without cause, and do not deceive with your lips. Do not say, 'Thus I will do to him as he has done to me; I will render to the man according to his work'" (Proverbs 24:28,29). Implicit is the temporal judgment of God, who said, during the days of His earthly sojourn, "By your standard of measure, it will be measured to you" (Matthew 7:2). "And just as you want people to treat you," was Luke's rendition of the Golden Rule, "treat them in the same way" (Luke 6:31).
- **God watches for justice** - The rewards and punishments for doing right or wrong are built into the workings of man. "How blessed is the man who fears [the Lord] always, but he who hardens his heart will fall into calamity" (Proverbs 28:14). "A man who is laden with the guilt of human blood will be a fugitive until death; let no one support him" (Proverbs 28:17).

The guilty ones try to pervert justice and twist the scriptures to justify themselves. But God is not necessarily going to wait until judgment day to sicken or even put them to death. "Their judgment from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep" (II Peter 2:3).

Prose From Proverbs

“Buy Truth”

The writer of Proverbs keeps coming back to his original theme. “Buy truth, and do not sell it,” he says. “Get wisdom and instruction and understanding” (Proverbs 23:23). The members of the human race as a whole are selfish; they have a tendency to want what they want when they want it, and will shove others aside, trample people in the mud, and compromise principle to get it. A violent and bloody race, they will in general choose the easy way rather than the right way. When something called *truth* stands as an obstacle in their course, they will shove it off the road as an outmoded husk, moving on and motioning others onward also. Hence Solomon cycles back to his theme: “Buy truth and do not sell it.”

- **Truth as a foundation for all relationships** - All working relationships are built on trust; destroy trust and the relationship is severed. And one of the quickest ways to destroy trust is for someone to lie. “Therefore, laying aside all falsehood,” was the urging of Paul, “speak truth each one of you with his neighbor, for we are members of one another” (Ephesians 4:25).
- **Satan works to destroy truth** - Satan is a liar, and is the driving impetus behind all lies. Crafty and subtle that he is, he has gone to work, even attacking the idea that there is truth. Functioning through highly positioned college professors in big name universities, Satan has posited Post-modern and Deconstructionist philosophies, which in essence deny the existence of truth. As this deception works its way from the intellectual community outward into the general populace, the public will have a pre-disposition that anyone who claims he knows the truth (about anything important) is automatically highly suspect.
- **God upholds truth through the church** - Week after week the church assembles, through the Lord’s Supper proclaiming Christ’s victory through His death and resurrection, making proclamation until He comes. This regular assembly of the saints, coupled with mid-week assemblies and other teaching and preaching meetings of the church, contributes mightily to the momentum that there is truth and morality, and that Jesus is Lord.
- **Truth about the sovereignty of Jesus** - The deceiver, the god of this world, has a vested interest in keeping mankind ignorant of the absolute sovereignty of Jesus. The prophetic second Psalm, noting that God had installed His Anointed on Zion’s throne, warned the kings and judges of the earth to “do homage to the Son” (Psalm 2:12). In giving the great commission, the foundational remark of Jesus was: “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth” (Matthew 28:18). The church, as the pillar and support of the truth (I Timothy 3:15), always establishes, as its first point, the Lordship of Jesus.
- **The truth about salvation** - Jesus the King took on the flesh of man to rescue the captives from Satan’s domain. The ruler of darkness has no more desire to see the release of the prisoners than did Pharaoh desire to see the release of Israel under Moses. Therefore he always does his utmost to deter the captives from repentance, and to confuse people on the meaning of immersion and its relation to salvation. The church, as the pillar and support of truth, always establishes, without qualification, the terms of pardon revealed in scripture.
- **Worlds in conflict** - The worlds of truth and falsehood have collided, and battle is engaged. There is nowhere to go to avoid the battle, and no one can be uninvolved. “He who is not with Me is against Me,” were the words of the Christ, “and he who does not gather with Me scatters” (Matthew 12:30).

“Buy truth and do not sell it.” Never before in the history of the world have so many forces combined with the sole objective of obliterating truth. So buy, buy, buy truth, brother, and do not sell it!

Prose From Proverbs

More on Wisdom and Folly

Foolishness is one of the evil things that proceed from an unregenerate heart. It ranks right there with others in this rank list: fornication, theft, murder, adultery, sensuality, envy, and slander, among others. Because foolishness is a product of the flesh, then it like the others has to be overcome for one who wants to follow God. Hence Solomon the sage had much to say about foolishness, especially to the young, and appealed to God's people to be wise. "My son," he said, "eat honey, for it is good; yes, honey from the comb is sweet to your taste." Having generated the appropriate positive sensation in the taste buds, the writer goes on to recommend wisdom. "Know that wisdom is thus for your soul. If you find it, then there will be a future, and your hope will not be cut off" (Proverbs 24:13,14).

- **Making the time lag connection** - One of the major problems that fools have is that they fail to see the end result of their initial follies. The fool looks for the pleasure of the minute and ignores the years of misery coming as a consequence. The young are easily sucked in at "party time"; the beer and booze commercials paint an indelible picture in the minds of the gullible that fun and ethyl alcohol go together. So our fun-loving fool is pulled into the habit of drinking, not thinking about the end result: "Who has woe? Who has sorrow"... Those who linger long over wine" (Proverbs 23:29,30). Similarly a young man is allured by the beauty and sensual appeal of a woman (or *vice-versa*). A few minutes of "pleasure" changes the moral character of the participants and produces untold misery down the road. "Give me you heart, my son," says wisdom, "and let your eyes delight in my ways. For a harlot is a deep pit, and an adulterous woman is a narrow well. Surely she lurks as a robber, and increases the faithless among men" (Proverbs 23:26-28). Deep pits and narrow wells are restrictive and constrictive; those entrapped have a very difficult time in extracting themselves. The fool doesn't make the time lag connection; he makes a loud noise in the joy of the minute, and then can't figure out why he is engulfed in an avalanche of troubles following his racket. The wise, however, heeds the warning of scripture, and rides quietly through the pass of temptation.
- **Selecting what has value** - Building a life is much like building a home. As a home must be blue-printed and well thought out, so a life must be visualized and sketched out in the mind. And just as there are almost an infinite number of selections of furniture and knick-knacks to be used in decorating a home, so also are there an infinite number of choices to be made for life in a free society. But the selection must be narrowed down; "You can do anything, but you can't do everything." So, "By wisdom a house is built, and by understanding it is established; and by knowledge the rooms are filled with precious and pleasant riches" (Proverbs 24:3,4). The life of the foolish is a claptrap structure, thrown together on the spur of the moment without plan; the wise has his act together.
- **Understanding quiet strength** - When the Soviets would stage their May Day parades, a percentage of the weaponry was often dummy equipment, intended to produce a more ostentatious display of power than was really there. Just so the man of folly often puts on a false front, but when faced with an actual challenge, he must back down. "A wise man *is* strong, and a man of knowledge increases power" (Proverbs 24:5).

From beginning to end the book of Proverbs derides folly and fools and extols the virtues of wisdom. "Get wisdom and instruction and understanding" (Proverbs 23:23).

Prose From Proverbs

One More Time

Even the world recognizes the general differences between a success and a failure. The man or woman who is a failure, after some disappointment or difficulty, says, "I quit." The success is the person who picks himself up one more time, dusts himself off, and presses on to victory. Solomon expressed the issue thusly: "For a righteous man falls seven times, and rises again, but the wicked stumble in time of calamity" (Proverbs 24:16). The word of God is at work within believers to produce those who have the will to win in the face of tremendous disappointment and external opposition.

- **The grace of God** - "We have," said Paul, "obtained our introduction by faith into this grace in which we stand" (Romans 5:2). Grace from God has some encouraging and strengthening components which move the descendant of Adam from being a stumbling sinner to a triumphant trend-setter. The basic initial effect of grace is that it allows the saint to be absolutely honest with God. When he has fallen in abject failure, the disciple can admit it without fear of condemnation rather than engage in a delusion wherein he pretends to be walking in victory when he in fact is bogged down in the mud of despair. The grace of the King allows the Christian then to set up incremental steps for improvement in character, rather than requiring the all or nothing leap characteristic of the law. All of this combines to put all-important hope into the breast of the pilgrim, and thus encourages him to continue onward and upward.
- **The word of God** - Just because the word is now written does not mean that it is without potency. The scripture itself equates the written word with the spoken word; when the writer of Hebrews quotes the written word from Psalm 95, he prefaces the quote, noting, "Therefore, just as the Holy Spirit *says* ..." (Hebrews 3:7). When God spoke in Genesis chapter one, the whole material universe was brought into existence. When God spoke from Mt. Sinai, the Ten Commandments were set in place as the core of Israel's law. When a new creature comes into existence but being born again of the living and abiding word of God, the Almighty exerts more power than He did from Sinai or at the creation. Just because it cannot be seen in the physical realm does not mean it is not real, and just because it resulted from the written word does not mean it is without the power of God. And the same written word which creates the new creature in Christ also sustains him; the word, which is called *living and active*, can strengthen the saint and keep him from stumbling. "You received from us the word of God's message," Paul wrote the Thessalonians, "... the word of God, which also performs its work in you who believe" (I Thessalonians 2:13).
- **The Spirit of God** - One of the great overall lessons of the scripture is that man by himself is pretty weak and pretty incapable of accomplishing the important victories. Man, does not, by himself, have a good track record of defeating sin and Satan; God Himself as the Spirit within is the One who steps into the fray. Paul prayed, "that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man" (Ephesians 3:16).

All these points and more combine to give the stumbling sinner the strength and hope to pick himself up one more time and to lay aside the sin which so easily besets him, and enable him to now run with patience the race that is set before him. This is true faith *in God*. "It is God who is at work in you," emphasized Paul, "both to will and to work for His good pleasure" (Philippians 2:13). He is "able to keep you from stumbling" (Jude 24). So get up, and start running the victory race!

Prose From Proverbs

“Friend, Move Up Higher”

“Let another praise you,” were the words of wise old Solomon, “and not your own mouth; a stranger, and not your own lips” (Proverbs 27:2). The natural tendency of man is to aggrandize himself and his family. A mother would actually switch the places of a daughter and a daughter’s friend in a final line at a 5 kilometer run, just so the daughter’s name would appear before the friend’s name in the printout of 5000 runners in the next day’s local paper. A small thing, perhaps, but what is the difference between that and the continual “self-promotion” that goes on at the highest levels of government? The wisdom of God warns against this natural tendency, calling for humility on the part of each imitator of God.

- **Jesus teaching the apostles** - When James and John tried to use their mother to get themselves special spots in the what they considered to be the upcoming physical kingdom of Jesus, the other ten were bent out of shape because they thought the sons of Zebedee might have gotten a step ahead of them. (These guys were still fighting over who was going to be first in the kingdom when Jesus was instituting the Lord’s Supper immediately before His betrayal.) The Christ told them, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them. It is not so among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave; just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and give His life a ransom for many” (Matthew 20:25-28). The Christian does not “budge” himself to the front of the line; he is happy to stand back and serve.
- **Wisdom from Solomon** - Solomon also cautioned against this type of self-promotion. As a king, he no doubt had occasion to note those who were always working to be up in the front, to keep their names right before the king so that he would notice them. “Do not claim honor in the presence of the king,” was his advice. “And do not stand in the place of great men. For it is better that it should be said to you, ‘Come up here,’ than that you should be put lower in the presence of the prince, whom your eyes have seen” (Proverbs 25:6,7). The message to the saint is: your works, your attitudes, and your fruit will recommend themselves to others; you do not have to blow your own horn.
- **Parallel words of Jesus** - The inspired historian Luke sets the stage for us, describing what was going on at the house of one of the leaders of the Pharisees. Jesus began “speaking a parable to the invited guests when He noticed how they had been picking out the places of honor at the table.” It is always the same, the scramble by little people for some little advantage or position. “When you are invited by someone to a wedding feast,” the Lord instructed these scramblers, “do *not* take the place of honor, lest someone more distinguished than you may have been invited by him, and he who invited you both shall come and say to you, ‘Give place to this man,’ and then in disgrace you proceed to occupy the last place.” O, what ignominy for the now red-faced scambler, to whom position is so important! “But when you are invited, go and recline in the last place, so that when the one who has invited you comes, he may say to you, ‘Friend, move up higher’; then you will have honor in the sight of all who are at table with you. For everyone who exalts himself shall be humbled, and he who humbles himself shall be exalted” (Luke 14:7-11).

True exaltation comes to those who have so humbled themselves that any glory to them would automatically be deflected toward God, as exemplified by the Lord Jesus Himself. And thus it will be when many come from east and west and recline at table with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven.

Prose From Proverbs

Tongues of Contention

For good reason, Solomon just won't lay off. As his majestic wisdom sweeps like a beacon over the vagaries of humanity and the principles of God, periodically the beam strikes the issue of the tongue and its fruit. The tongue is the instrument which brings the saving good news to men, but that which is designed to do the most good can also be the major implement of destruction. So, Solomon, lay it on us one more time:

- **The backbiting tongue** - During the Vietnam War, a practice developed among some of the troops known as "fragging the lieutenant." If the unit did not like the lieutenant, or orders were given which the soldiers did not want to follow, at the opportune moment the officer was shot by his own troops. Imagine what that practice did for armed forces morale! But the same principle applies within the church of the living God. "The north wind brings forth rain," said Solomon, "and a backbiting tongue, an angry countenance" (Proverbs 25:23). The backbiting tongue is equivalent to "fragging the lieutenant"; it stabs at the leadership from within. But even if no one listens to the backbiter, look what happens to the complainer himself. As surely as the rain rides the storm winds from the north, so the countenance of the backbiter will be twisted into a grimacing gargoyle.
- **The whisperer** - The whisperer spreads destructive untruths or half-truths, usually about someone in a position of responsibility. "For lack of wood the fire goes out," was Solomon's illustration, "and where there is no whisperer, contention quiets down" (Proverbs 26:20). Contention is a severe problem; it greatly hinders the forward progress of the gospel in that it ties up the time of those who want to spread the word, and in some cases it brings the whole train to a crunching halt. "Like charcoal to hot embers and wood to fire," runs the parallel proverb, "so is a contentious man to kindle fire" (Proverbs 26:21). A contentious man does not want to solve a problem; a contentious man wants to use the problem to further his agenda. The natural tendency of man is to want to believe in salacious details even if they are not true (Exhibit A — all the magazines staring customers in the face at the grocery store check out line). The contentious prey on this fleshly tendency and use it to drive untruths and nasty rumors into the hearts of those who stick around to listen. "The words of a whisperer are like dainty morsels, and they go down into the innermost parts of the body" (Proverbs 26:22).
- **The flattering mouth** - The writings of the New Testament contain warnings about flatterers. Paul gave the church in Rome a "heads-up" about those who would come in and cause dissensions contrary to the teachings of the New Covenant. "By their smooth and flattering speech," were the words of the apostle, "they deceive the hearts of the unsuspecting" (Romans 16:18). "These are grumblers," added Jude, "finding fault, following after their own lusts; they speak arrogantly, flattering people for the sake of gaining an advantage" (Jude 16). These workers of iniquity are there for some selfish motive, and ultimately destroy much of the work of the church. "A lying tongue hates those it crushes, and a flattering mouth works ruin" (Proverbs 26:28).

Brethren must learn to guard the tongue at all times. In those private, intimate conversations, in the presence of children, amongst friends, or in public, the tongue must be carefully directed so that it does not strike with any of those contentious, destructive, weaseling tactics. Let the tongue be edifying, a glory to God and a blessing to man.

Prose From Proverbs

Green Gills of Jealousy

There is a proper time to be jealous about proper things. God, for example, is a jealous God. Paul wrote the church of Corinth, “For I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy; for I betrothed you to one husband, that to Christ I might present you as a pure virgin” (II Corinthians 11:2). *Jealous* and *zealous* have the same Greek root, and both convey a burning intensity. Positive jealousy has an intense desire to protect the flock from the wolves of false doctrine, and to help the sheep be spiritual and moral.

But there is a jealousy which is ungodly and which is evilly destructive. Jealousy may be the driving motivation for Satan’s hatred of God and his desire to destroy all of God’s good work. “Wrath is fierce and anger is a flood,” observed David’s wise son, “but who can stand before jealousy?” (Proverbs 27:4).

- **Personal jealousy** - Being jealous of another person - angry because of his spouse, his position, his following - is one of the deeds of the flesh listed by the apostle Paul (Galatians 5:20). Closely allied with its evil twin *envy*, jealousy produces a perspective of another individual in which no good is seen. The jealous person slaps a filter over his sense gates, and everything which comes through that filter casts a mustard-green light on anything the object of jealousy does. The leaders of the Pharisees, Sadducees, and Herodians were clearly jealous of Jesus; His ability to perform miracles, His marvelous teachings, and His true concern for each of the lost sheep of the house of Israel rapidly attracted a following which no other could match. “The scribes and Pharisees were watching Him closely,” recorded Luke of one gathering in a synagogue where there was a man with a withered hand. They were checking to see “if He healed on the Sabbath, in order that they might find reason to accuse Him.” And when He in fact healed the man, instead of rejoicing with the one who was healed, “they themselves were filled with rage,” and “counseled together against Him as to how they might destroy Him” (Luke 6:7-10; Matthew 12:14). Notice the blind rage, oblivious of reason, which results from harbored jealousy. The saint needs to learn to praise God for any positive performance or possession of any son or daughter of Adam and Eve.
- **Expect the jealousy** - All high performance individuals, in any walk of life, experience jealousy from a percentage of people in their influence circle. Men who fail, or feel as if they had failed, often - instead of accepting responsibility for their failures - turn jealous of others who have succeeded. The disciple of Christ, as he picks up his cross and marches forward in the footsteps of Jesus, becomes a high level performer. And some of those in his circle of influence will become jealous as they are confronted thusly by their own lack of performance. Paul and Barnabas preached in the synagogue in Antioch of Pisidia: “And the next Sabbath nearly the whole city assembled to hear the word of God. But when the Jews saw the crowds, they were *filled with jealousy*, and began contradicting the things spoken by Paul, and were blaspheming” (Acts 13:44,45). Was there any good reason for contradicting Paul? No; the hidden driving force was jealousy.

Jealousy is, like a stream of water out of control, a powerful destructive force. “Who can stand before jealousy?” was Solomon’s probing question. Be on guard for those who incite jealousy in others, and use them to feed the fires that would destroy those who proclaim the word of truth.

Prose From Proverbs

Handling Criticism

There are two sides to criticism: giving it and taking it. The scripture does not speak of criticism *per se*, but generally uses words such as *rebuke* and *reprove* instead. “Better is open rebuke,” observed Solomon, “than love that is concealed. Faithful are the wounds of a friend, but deceitful are the kisses of an enemy” (Proverbs 27:5,6). Many of the major blow-ups among the members of the human race (even among members of the body of Christ) occur in this matter of giving/receiving criticism. Husband-wife relationships often break down because of the highly charged emotional atmosphere connected with giving and receiving rebukes and corrections in “working things out.” As expected, the word of God has sound advice both for those who need to pass on some constructive criticism and for those who need to accept it.

- **Constructive criticism** - The phrase *constructive criticism* has come into existence because of its counterpart identified as *destructive criticism*. The person who engages in *destructive criticism* is angry and/or hurt, who is often defensive, and who leaves a tornado-like path of wreckage in his swath. “These are grumblers,” Jude said, “finding fault” (Jude 16). *Constructive criticism*, by contrast, is going to come from someone who is looking for a way to solve a problem and to preserve the dignity of each of the others involved. The words of Paul to the Ephesians still ring as great instruction: “Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, that it may give grace to those who hear” (Ephesians 4:29). Every word and every setting for the words of rebuke or edification need to be thoughtfully considered and carefully weighed out. Appreciation for the other person needs to radiate from the one offering words of constructive criticism, and a sense of “we’re in this together” is very helpful. The great example is that of our Lord who did not come to tear down people, but to edify them and join in partnership with each willing person.
- **Accepting criticism** - Adam and Eve hid in the garden, avoiding the expected rebuke from God, and Cain killed his brother upon being remonstrated by the Lord. Mankind naturally is defensive when its actions are about to be scrutinized or criticized. But the Christian is no longer a natural man. So each follower of Christ must be objective when analyzing the criticism. Constructive criticism is easier to handle. Here, at least, is a sense of building and working toward the achievement of some goal. Destructive criticism is more difficult because of the personal attack lying in the vituperation. To be able to listen to the pointed barbs, and to sort out what is legitimate and what is not, and still to maintain a cool and gracious attitude is a great challenge. “While being reviled,” Peter said of the Christ, “He did not revile in return; while suffering He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously” (1 Peter 2:23). Peter himself suffered public reproof from Paul in Antioch of Syria, Paul exposing the hypocrisy of Peter (Galatians 2:11-21). Did Peter split the church? Did he trump up some imaginary fault of Paul, to “fight fire with fire”? Did he go around afterward bad-mouthing Paul? No. Indications are clear that Peter humbly accepted the word of God and altered his action.

The kisses of a Judas are deceitful. By contrast, well-meaning friend, a brother in Christ, or a spouse may have something important of a somewhat critical nature to say, but he may not say it well or handle the situation perfectly. Remember the scripture: “Faithful are the wounds of a friend.” “Consider how,” wrote the author of Hebrews, “to stimulate one another to love and good deeds” (Hebrews 10:24).

Prose From Proverbs

Wanderers and Drifters

The curse that came upon Cain was that he would be a vagabond. “When you cultivate the ground,” announced God, “it shall no longer yield its strength to you; you shall be a vagrant and a wanderer on earth” (Genesis 4:12). Cain, former tiller of the ground, was now rootless, with nothing to hold him in any one place for any length of time. Pointless wandering is truly a curse, and how miserable indeed are those who, in a series of bad decisions, have ended up homeless and purposeless in the streets and byways of the earth. “Like a bird that wanders from her nest,” states the proverb, “so is a man who wanders from his home” (Proverbs 27:8).

- **Home is where the heart is** - The great God who designed man engineered him to be a creature with a home. Home is the place of security for children; home is the happy headquarters for the scripturally domesticated wife; and home is the husband’s castle, refuge from the wars of the world and location of relaxed felicity. Even our own poets have said that the common man does not go to war for the high-sounding phrases of patriotism or for the furling flag snapping in the breeze; he goes to war to protect a house with flowers planted in the front yard and the wondering eyes of children peeking through its windows. “It is not good for the man to be alone,” was the analysis of the Creator; “I will make him a helper suitable for him” (Genesis 2:18). Adam and Eve were the first family, and established the first home, and all who bear their image have the same nesting need. A man who wanders from his home is as disoriented as a chick separated from its nest; the man who maintains his attachment to home is more secure and directed.
- **Man goes to his long home** - This earth, however, is not man’s final home. From the tombs of the ancient kings to the jokes of modern conversation, it is clear that man is conscious of an afterlife, that something about man lives on while the body moulders. “For man goes to his eternal home,” solemnized Solomon, “while mourners go about in the street.” Man is to remember his God before the machinery that is his body shuts down, and “then the dust will return to earth as it was, and the spirit will return to God who gave it” (Ecclesiastes 12:5,7). “I have seen the task which God has given the sons of men with which to occupy themselves,” noted the Preacher. “He also set eternity in their heart” (Ecclesiastes 3:10,11).
- **Cut loose from the eternal home** - If the perception of emptiness is great when a man is distanced from his earthly home, think of the sense of loss those will experience who are cut off from eternal dwellings. What a feeling, to plunge on and on and on in eternal darkness, crying in agony because there will never again be contact with anyone at “home”; no letters, cards, or phone calls will ever come or ever be received; and no one will ever send out a tracer to find a lost loved one. Those who go astray from the will of God, and those who preach destructive heresies “are springs without water, and mists driven by a storm, for whom the black darkness has been reserved” (II Peter 2:17). Jude says that these are “*wandering stars*, for whom the black darkness has been reserved forever” (Jude 13).
- **Do not drift away** - When men are cut loose from their moorings, then they drift and wander. To prevent Christians from plunging into darkness, the writer of Hebrews exhorted, “For this reason we must pay close attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away” (Hebrews 2:1). The drifter at first has no consciousness of movement; everything in the immediate surroundings is moving at the same speed and in the same direction as he. But before long a curve is rounded, and the home and moorings are lost to view. How shall we escape awesome judgment, was the query to the Hebrews, “if we neglect so great a salvation?” (Hebrews 2:3).

“My punishment is too great to bear!” was the pleading of Cain when he was pronounced a wanderer on earth. Too late! He had committed the crime without considering the consequences. May each of us secure his salvation before it is too late, or we become wandering stars in the black darkness forever!

Prose From Proverbs

Common Sense Relationships

There are challenges in all person-to-person relationships. Husbands and wives, for example, have had their difficulties to work through ever since mankind was created. When the Pharisees asked the Lord if it was lawful for a man to divorce his wife “for any cause at all,” the Lord responded with a short commentary on Genesis chapter 2. Noting that God created mankind male and female from the beginning, and that the two were to become one flesh, He added, “Consequently, they are no longer two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate” (Matthew 19:6). In other words, it was never God’s intention that man and wife should divorce, although He made a provision for such in the Law because of the hardness of their hearts. The obvious difficulties in marriage relationships were on the apostles’ minds as they contemplated this essentially “no divorce” clause in upcoming Christianity: “If the relationship of the man with his wife is like this,” they said, “it is better not to marry” (Matthew 19:10). There are challenges in husband-wife relationships, and by extension, to all person-to-person interaction.

So, how are the challenges to be handled? A lot of wisdom is tucked away in the words of this proverb: “Do not forsake your friend or your father’s friend; and do not go to your brother’s house in the day of calamity; better is a neighbor who is near than a brother far away” (Proverbs 27:10).

- **Use 'em and lose 'em** - For many life is a stage on which they continually play in the limelight, and other people are simply viewed as props, backdrops for their own performance, plastic mannequins to be trotted out for use and then shelved until needed again. The classic example is the “modern” career-type woman who has a child or children to make her own life more complete. She uses the children when she wants them for one of her own personal experiences, then shoves them off on a nanny who has the real relationship with the kids. Or the man who establishes relationships with people only to use them for extending his business contacts. Such users of other people dump them in the memory holes when they calculate that they are done using them. Scripture warns: “Do not forsake your friend or your father’s friend.” Each individual is precious, made in the image of God, and when people are “dumped” or “forsaken” just because they are no longer useful, then scripture is violated and relationships are trashed.
- **Running from problems** - The human race as a whole has never had a good track record of facing its responsibilities, most of which are relational. One of the techniques used in ducking responsibility is anger, and using that anger to intimidate others into avoiding making the angered one accountable. Of course, the situation is always the other person’s fault; “You make me mad,” are the underlying words. Another technique for shifting responsibility is to just walk out on the conversation wherein issues are being settled. “I don’t have to listen to this,” are the key words here. In either case, the situation is not resolved and the barrier exists between neighbors. Now when the day of “calamity” comes, the neighbor who caused the rift cannot go for help to the folks close by; he can only go to his brother who is far off.
- **Mending fences** - “If possible, so far as it depends on you,” was the inspired injunction of Paul, “live at peace with all men” (Romans 12:18). Other people are sometimes in such moods as it is not possible to make reconciliation with them. But the Christian is to live in such a way that he can be at peace with the neighbor who is near.

The natural tendency of man is to have his emotions blot out common sense in building and maintaining relationships with other people. Hurt feelings and pettiness must be set aside, and mature conversation needs to take place to secure friendships. In a day of calamity the neighbor who is near can be of help; the brother who is far off cannot often even be contacted.

Prose From Proverbs

The Iron Sharpeners

Truth has no fear of questions. Fool's gold fears the fire, sputtering and smelling sulfurous in the crucible, but pure gold knows it will pass through the refiner's fire with its purity intact. So when the iron sharpeners come to town, iron is ready and willing to be sharpened. "Iron sharpens iron," was the wisdom of Solomon, "so one man sharpens another" (Proverbs 27:17).

- **Sharpening doctrine** - There was a ruckus in the early church when the Gentiles started becoming Christians in measurable numbers. When the teaching of the apostle Paul was not sufficient to settle the issue of Gentile acceptance without circumcision and observance of Jewish customs, representatives of the church in Antioch were sent to Jerusalem "to the apostles and elders concerning this issue" (Acts 15:2). So how did the apostles and elders handle this? First, open discussion of the issue was allowed: "And after there had been much debate ..." was what the scripture records. Then the issue was settled by God's standard *modus operandi*: the eyewitness account (given by Peter on the falling of the Spirit upon Cornelius), the verifying miracles (account given by Paul and Barnabas of signs accompanying the Gentiles' becoming Christians without circumcision, *et. al.*), and Old Testament prophecy (given by James). These men were allowed by God to sort out a major doctrine by debate and discussion. Iron was used to sharpen iron. That not all agreed or understood is evident from the history recorded in the rest of Acts and in the doctrinal discussions in the epistles. But that is the method God has chosen, and brethren today need to be of a mind to calmly carry out such discussions in the Spirit of Christ to get to God's truth in important matters.
- **Sharpening procedures** - What to believe is one thing; how to execute is another. The elders in the church in Jerusalem, for example, knew they had a problem when the apostle Paul showed up in town. The brethren from the ranks of the circumcision had been given some false information regarding this apostle to the Gentiles, saying "that you [Paul] are teaching all the Jews who are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children nor to walk according to custom" (Acts 21:21). So the leadership had to come to some kind of consensus, agreeable to Paul, as to what positive procedure was to be implemented. Iron sharpened procedural iron, and Paul entered the temple to take purification vows with four other brethren as a demonstration that he walked "orderly, keeping the law" (Acts 21:24).
- **Sharpening enthusiasm** - The word of God contains numerous illustrations about overcoming discouragement, which the scripture often calls "losing heart." Here again, the sharpening influence of the brethren for developing enthusiasm cannot be overemphasized. "But encourage one another day after day," is the record of the Writ, "as long as it is still called 'Today,' lest any one of you be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin" (Hebrews 3:13). "Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering," is another recommendation, "for He who promised is faithful; and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together as is the habit of some, but *encouraging one another*, and all the more, as you see the day drawing near" (Hebrews 10:23-25).

When iron sharpens iron, there is a piercing noise that really grates on people's nerves. But without the grating of iron against iron, there is no sharpening. Let the grating, then, be accepted, that the brethren may be sharpened in sound doctrine, that they may be tempered for correct and specific procedures, and that they may be honed to a high pitch of enthusiasm.

Prose From Proverbs

God's Use of Wealth

God is opposed to men's charging their fellow countrymen interest. "He who increases his wealth by interest and usury," were the words of Solomon the wise, "gathers it for him who is gracious to the poor" (Proverbs 28:8). This re-emphasized the instructions given to Israel in the Pentateuch, as exemplified in this quotation from Deuteronomy: "You shall not charge interest to your countrymen: interest on money, food, or anything that may be loaned at interest. You may charge interest to a foreigner, but to your countryman you shall not charge interest, so that the Lord your God may bless you in all you undertake in the land which you are about to possess" (Deuteronomy 23:19,20).

Because of these scriptures, Roman Catholicism forbade the collecting of interest between Catholics. The Jews (not, most likely, descended from those who lived in ancient Israel) who resided in Western Europe were under no such compunction, and, in lending to the Catholics, developed their big banking houses, such as the Bank of Rothschild. Eventually controlling the economies of Europe, they then set their sights on the New World, especially in the developing United States of America. Before the British Colonies in America even became free from England, these same financial interests had worked to set up the equivalent of a national bank for the colonies. After the United States became an independent republic, the 1st U.S. Bank and then the 2nd U.S. Bank were national banks controlled by these same international banking houses of Western Europe. Andrew Jackson, in his campaign for the Presidency in 1828, ran on a platform of abolishing the national bank, and, after being elected, actually kept his campaign pledge to the people. So the United States was without a national bank from 1829 to 1913, and the nation went from a third-world backwater to the world's most robust and advanced economy.

But with the sad mis-education coming with the development of the "public" school systems following the Civil War, the American people accepted a national bank in the form of the Federal Reserve System in 1913, also controlled by those same Western European banking interests. The Federal Reserve System has a monopoly on paper and electronic currency and is able to expand or contract the economy at will. With this monopoly on currency, the Fed is the only institution that can create inflation, and it is an absolute lie for their officers and their lackeys in the national media to pretend that they are going to slow down inflation by interest rate increases. In the meantime, they have persuaded Americans to go into debt somewhere above their gills, are collecting interest and compound interest, and slowly reducing the citizenry to the level of slavery. God, knowing the ability of these types of shysters to eventually extract their pound of flesh, forbade the collecting of interest in Israel, eliminated all debt every seven years, and called for the return of landed property to the original families every fifty years.

Christians need to recognize that these banking interests are virulent, though subtle, enemies of the gospel. "Is it not the rich who oppress you," James reminded his readers, "and personally drag you into court? Do they not blaspheme the fair name by which you have been called?" (James 2:6,7). Of those rich this bond-servant of the Lord notes, "You have condemned and put to death the righteous man" (James 5:6). It is instructive that God does not necessarily protect the Christian from being dragged into court or even put to death by these forces of evil. The Christian must remain faithful, especially in these circumstances.

Just as the wealth of Egypt was taken by Israel and used to build the tabernacle of the Lord in the wilderness, so the Almighty will plunder the banking houses at the most strategic time, in His own way and for His own purposes. "He who increases his wealth by interest and usury gathers it for him who is gracious to the poor."

Prose From Proverbs

Blotting out Transgressions

The great God is quite interested in restoring fellowship with fallen man. “God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself,” were some poignant words from the former Saul the persecutor, “not counting their trespasses against them” (II Corinthians 5:19). It is a munificent One indeed who will forgive the transgressions of His enemies, and, furthermore, pay the price for their iniquities Himself!

But is this great forgiveness indiscriminately distributed, ladled out upon the entire race without regard to their individual responses to the mercies tendered by His Majesty? Both the Old and New Covenant writings are conclusive that man must be an active participant in the remission process. “He who conceals his transgressions will not prosper,” was the statement from the wisdom of Proverbs, “but he who confesses and forsakes them will find compassion. How blessed is the man who fears always, but he who hardens his heart will fall into calamity” (Proverbs 28:13,14).

- **Concealing transgressions** - From the sneaking maid who cleans motel rooms to the very office of the Presidency of the United States, mankind does not want to get caught in its indiscretions. Often the motive for concealment comes from the desire of the individual to do what he wants to do and yet not suffer the consequences. Occasionally, however, one of the race recognizes his guilty conscience and is willing to acknowledge this to the Almighty and All-knowing. “If we say that we have not sinned,” was the admonition of John the aged, “we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us” (I John 1:10).
- **Confessing and forsaking** - When men are in the process of becoming Christians, they are required to recognize that “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23), and the confession they make focuses their attention past their sins and on to the Lordship of Jesus. Following their immersions to wash away their sins, then confession of sin is a requirement for continued forgiveness. “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (I John 1:9). “He who confesses and forsakes [his sins] will find compassion,” were the words of Solomon, and with this the apostles agree. “God raised up His Servant,” stated Peter, “and sent Him to bless you by turning every one of you from your wicked ways” (Acts 3:26). The new covenant is the “perfect law,” allowing Christians to pick off his bad habits one by one, but the “forsaking” must be under way.
- **Fear the Lord always** - A healthy fear of the Lord is a positive requirement for all action for those who live godly in Christ Jesus. “Therefore knowing the fear of the Lord,” commented Paul, “we persuade men” (II Corinthians 5:11). Those who want to emphasize only the “positive and palatable” aspects of the word have really lost their fear of the Lord, and thus start down the slippery slope of pleasing men rather than God. Biblical fear of God will bring a person into compliance with whatever He requires for remission of sins, and with whatever He requires to be preached and taught.
- **A hardened heart** - Some will continue to be spoiled brats, even in the face of the clear word of God. “God must forgive me on my terms,” is their thought. Whether this supposed forgiveness is rooted in some denominational sprinkling rite or an unscriptural “accepting Jesus into your heart,” the individual has hardened himself against the Almighty.

The great God is willing to blot out the transgressions of the humble in heart. If they will truly repent and submit to Him in immersion for the forgiveness of their sins and receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit, He will forgive to the uttermost. If they will continue to confess and forsake their sins, He will grant the greatest of clemency. But if they continue to try to play games, He will execute His wrath and then they will experience the greatest of all calamity.

Prose From Proverbs

This Present Evil Age

The leaders of Western Civilization have deliberately turned their backs on God. Western Civilization has gone through the Bible with a fine-toothed comb; from the soaring music of Handel's *Messiah* to the Biblical truths underlying the formation of the American republic to the conversation of the common man, larded with expressions derived from both the Old and New Testament writings, it is clear that the shout of the King was heard among them. As the applied principles of scripture produced wealth in accordance with the blessings of God, the monetary powers-that-be in their arrogance set to work to finance the destruction of Western Civilization and Christianity, calling their coming age the *novus ordo seclorum* or the *new world order*. When the gates of Satan's abyss were thus voluntarily opened, legions of evil spirits ascended like bats out of a cave at evening, and the hellish events of the 1900's transpired. You see, the century just past was the bloodiest in the history of the world since Noah's day; those put to death in Hitler's holocaust (the numbers of which are often exaggerated) were but a trifle compared to the hundred million plus exterminated by the likes of Lenin, Stalin, Mao Tse Tung, the Khmer Rouge, and Fidel Castro. And, as mankind perches on the cliff of the twenty-first century, there is a black, frowning, foreboding that much worse is to come.

But there is the great God who is still able to rescue the Noah, the Daniel, and the Moses among men, and cause the bodies of modern Herods to be eaten with worms while the crowds are directed by Nashville-style cue cards to shout, "The voice of a god, and not a man."

- **Driven by guilt** - Those who get to the top stay at the top in today's political climate get there by god-father style executions of their opposition and those who have important information (check out the Clinton body count, for example). While those men (or women) try to ignore the existence of God, they cannot totally suppress the nagging pricks of the guilty conscience which the Almighty placed within them. "A man who is laden with the guilt of human blood," is the position of Proverbs, "will be a fugitive until death; let no one support him" (Proverbs 28:17). Hitler became increasingly crazed, and Stalin, it is said, died in abject terror as his soul went to meet his Maker.
- **The fate of oppressors** - Unhappy is the land which has rejected the foundations of truth, morality, and freedom. "Like a roaring lion and a rushing bear," is Solomon's analogy, "is a wicked ruler over a poor people" (Proverbs 28:15). When a government has achieved the power to become pervasive, then the crooks come in and take over the government. These guys are short-sighted and interested only in personal gain, and thus subjugate the people to get what they the rulers want. The long arm of God's justice eventually catches them, but in the meantime, the people are still oppressed. "A leader who is a great suppressor lacks understanding, but he who hates unjust gain will prolong his days" (Proverbs 28:16).
- **The rescue of the righteous** - The Lord knows how to rescue the righteous and to deliver the godly. But He works slowly, developing faith and persistence in His followers, in many cases not exonerating them until the age to come. The disciple of Christ needs to be faithful until death, firm until the end, not following trendy rushes to destruction. "How blessed is the man who fears *always*, but he who hardens his heart will fall into calamity" (Proverbs 28:14). "He who walks blamelessly will be delivered, but he who is crooked will fall all at once" (Proverbs 28:18).

When the signs of the times shake the nations, then the son of God will want to crank his faith up several notches. In the face of increasing pressure to conform to the world, he must resolutely determine to serve God regardless of cost. "He who turns away from listening to the law, even his prayer is an abomination. He who leads the upright astray in an evil way will himself fall into his own pit, but the blameless will inherit good" (Proverbs 28:9,10). Now is the time to steel the will and strengthen determination; when the crisis comes, it is too late.

Prose From Proverbs

Doing the Basics

There is a natural tendency in man to get excited about the flamboyant. Moderns are often not so different from the ancient Athenians, wanting to hear or tell something new. It reminds me of a presentation I once saw by a man who was extremely skilled in blowing bubbles. He had developed a soap film which was very strong, which would hold its shape and would not pop. The magnificent high point of his demonstration was his blowing twelve bubbles of precisely the same size and positioning them perfectly so that within was a regular dodecahedron, made to stand out by the cigarette smoke which he blew into the internal bubble with a straw. Flamboyant? Perhaps. Worthless? Absolutely!

Working on the old farm can be pretty routine. Audiences don't gather in awe at the planting of the crop, and crowds don't roar in repeated standing ovations at the bringing in of the last load of the harvest. The proverb contains a great and pervasive lesson: "He who tills his land will have plenty of food, but he who follows empty pursuits will have plenty of poverty" (Proverbs 28:19). Doing the solid basics is productive; following the flamboyant is trivial and destructive.

- **Basic doctrine** - Most preaching and teaching most of the time needs to concentrate on basic, sound doctrine. Once in awhile it is good to explore the nuances of Revelation 17 and 18, or discuss the ramifications of Zechariah 3 in relation to the church, but the tilling of spiritual ground is going to come in the basics concerning Christ, the church, salvation, and the work of the Holy Spirit. Among young men there is sometimes a tendency to want to preach on something new, different, or out of the ordinary. While I would not want to be one to quell burbling enthusiasm, I would just remind each of them that the harvest of souls is going to come from routine tilling the ground rather than empty by unusual spiritual trivial pursuit.
- **Basic assembling** - The assemblage of the saints is designed and demanded by God for the benefit of the brethren and the construction and spread of the kingdom. Since the regular assembly for the breaking of the loaf has been in effect for nearly 2000 years, there is nothing particularly "new or exciting" to be done to improve the Lord's design. The mega-church movement's attempt to produce a weekly professional entertainment special without "dead air" does nothing to enhance true spirituality; indeed, it actually hinders spiritual progress in truth-seeking individuals. God wants brethren to continue to till the ground with the regular assembly, breaking bread and thus proclaiming the Lord's death until He comes.
- **Basic evangelism** - The Lord has never rescinded or modified His instructions for evangelism, stated very clearly at the close of Matthew's gospel account. Any substitute for training, equipping, and motivating the saints so that each of them can make disciples is, in the long run, a trivial exercise and will result in spiritual poverty, the church being desolate of any true disciples of Christ. Regular tilling the ground with individual Bible studies will reap a harvest for the Lord; the playing of a harmonica on a busy street to try to attract others to Christ is fruitless action.
- **Basic lifestyle** - Christianity is referred to as "the way" and "this life" in the scriptures. Brethren are exhorted to pray that they "may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity" (I Timothy 2:2). A solid, steady lifestyle is much more effective and efficient than the flamboyant which seems to attract so much attention.

God really honors the routine, consistent, practical efforts of spiritual men. Discard the tendencies toward attention-getting, and instead get down to steady business.

Prose From Proverbs

Reason vs. Emotion

The young lady who follows her heart instead of her head is generally in for a long and miserable life. The tall and handsome stranger who captures her emotions can be a dangerous man who makes his way through the world preying on females who can be played like a bass fiddle. These are “those who enter into households and captivate weak women weighed down with sins, led on by various impulses” (II Timothy 3:6). The men are dangerous; the women follow their emotional impulses rather than carefully thinking the situation through.

But the charlatans are not limited to men who captivate weak women for use in the physical realm. There are those who play on the emotions of others in the realm of religion, jerking their heart strings so that they will reject sensible truth and follow the sweet siren song to hell. “He who trusts in his heart is a fool,” was Solomon’s observation, “but he who walks wisely will be delivered” (Proverbs 28:26). The great God, as is fitting for Him who communicates His truths to man in written form, appealed for men to use their heads! “Come now, and let us reason together,” was His call, “though your sins are as scarlet, they will be as white as snow” (Isaiah 1:18).

- **The problem with the heart** - The heart of man is often directed by vain hope and unreasonable fear. Anyone who has ever listened to the “Dr. Laura” radio program for even a few phone calls cannot but notice the almost unbroken regularity of callers whose emotions are directing them into that which can never be and blinding them to the reality that is. The words of Jeremiah are worth repeating and remembering: “The heart of man is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick; who can understand it?” (Jeremiah 17:9).
- **Emotions and sound doctrine** - Sound doctrine has to be endured and its truths run counter to the desires of man in general (II Timothy 4:3). The individual who seeks for truth has to command his emotions to stand at attention off to the side and apply his reason to ascertain the facts of scriptural doctrine. The modern “Alexander coppersmiths” skillfully manipulate the emotions of their hearers, directing them away from the truth of the gospel and persuading them to accept false teaching. A classic example is the so-called “death-bed confession”; the emotional jerkers prey on the highly charged emotions of people who have lost loved ones in order to get them to reject the idea that each person must be scripturally immersed to have their sins forgiven.
- **Wisely walking** - The descendants of Adam who follow their emotions rather than truth are wicked persons. They are willing to come under the spell of a deluding influence. They “believe what is false, in order that they may all be judged who did not believe the truth, but took pleasure in wickedness” (II Timothy 2:12). By contrast, “he who practices the truth comes to the light” (John 3:21). “If we walk in the light as He Himself is in the light,” stated the aged John, “we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin” (I John 1:7). The one who thus walks wisely will be delivered.

Emotion misapplied is the technique most used by Satan to block the public’s mind in understanding the gospel. That is why the Lord’s bond-servants, in working with people on a personal basis, “must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged, with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth” (II Timothy 2:24,25).

Prose From Proverbs

The Danger of Stiff Necks

Some people are S-T-U-B-B-O-R-N. When it comes to doing the will of God and following the teaching of scripture, they can become as balky as a recalcitrant donkey or immovable as an ox. But hear the wisdom of Solomon: “A man who hardens his neck after much reproof will suddenly be broken without remedy” (Proverbs 29:1). Bow to the will of God voluntarily now, or be broken and bow to the will of God later.

- **The need for reproof** - Learning to do God’s will instead of our own is a *process*. “If by the Spirit,” said Paul, “you are *putting* to death the deeds of the body, you will live” (Romans 8:13). *Being saved* is the way brethren are described in the scripture (Acts 2:47). Because doing God’s will is a learning process, the brethren need a lot of reproof along the way. “Preach the word,” was Paul’s instruction to Timothy. “Be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction” (II Timothy 4:2). Translation: *each of us* is the one who needs a lot of reproof along the way. “All scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work” (II Timothy 3:16,17).
- **The hardening process** - The writer of Hebrews is trying to prepare the Judean brethren of 65-66 AD for the oncoming Roman armies which would destroy Judaism and totally disrupt the lives of Christians caught in the foray. Those brethren would need to be spiritually prepared to face this massive disruption. “But encourage one another day after day,” he wrote, “as long as it is still called ‘Today,’ lest any one of you be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin” (Hebrews 3:13). What hardens a person is the continuing willingness to participate in sin. Understanding God’s plan of salvation and mechanism for overcoming sin is not a matter of intellect so much as it is a matter of morality. As the individual continues to harden his neck against the word of God, the habit is more entrenched and the fleshly mind-set is more determined.
- **Breaking the neck** - In spite of man’s protestations, there is a God who governs all aspects of the universe, even letting Satan do his thing so that men have a choice of whom they will serve. The All-knowing has therefore set in motion all sorts of disciplining situations whose purpose is to work in conjunction with the word of God so that the disciplined makes straight paths for his feet. The discipline comes through preaching, through teachers of the word, through sowing and reaping, and through the vicissitudes of daily living. The great God even determines the appointed times and boundaries for each of the nations that men may seek Him. But if the man continually hardens himself in spite of the discipline, God eventually breaks him. When the twelve spies returned from Canaan in the days of Moses, ten of the twelve brought back a bad report. “As for the men whom Moses sent to spy out the land and who returned and made all the congregation grumble against him by bringing out a bad report concerning the land, even those men who brought out the very bad report of the land died by a plague before the Lord” (Numbers 14:36,37).
- **Without remedy** - There is a point where the opportunity for repentance passes (Hebrews 6:4-6); and where there is no opportunity for repentance, there is no remedy for the sin-hardened castaway who must now face Jesus the Judge.

The warning from scripture is clear: be open to the reproofs which God sends through scripture and circumstance. The man whose neck is hardened will surely perish; the man whose heart is open to the preachments of God will live.

Prose From Proverbs

The Troubler in Israel

Ahab and Jezebel put to death the prophets of Jehovah in Israel. When, by the word of the Lord, Elijah went to confront Ahab, Ahab's words to Elijah were, "Is this you, you troubler of Israel?" (I Kings 18:17). Elijah's response is obvious to us who can stand 2800 years away and have all history in which to look back on the days of this conversation. But to someone standing there at that time, all he could have seen was the controversy between the prophet and the king. Elijah replied, "I have not troubled Israel, but you and your father's house have, because you have forsaken the commandments of the Lord ..." (I Kings 18:18). Who really was the problem here?

"When a wise man has a controversy with a foolish man," says the proverb, "the foolish man either rages or laughs, and there is no rest" (Proverbs 29:9). The reason the conflict is not resolved because the foolish man really refused to deal with the issues; his rage or his laughter is his means of ducking out without directly appearing to do so. Elijah and Ahab? Ahab raged while Elijah continued to press home the issues of righteousness and the worship of the only true God. Which one of those was wise would be clear from the way in which each handled the controversy.

- **Continuing controversy** - So long as earth exists, there will be controversy. The real troubler of Israel is the outcast angel of darkness, and he will not quit until he has been cast into the eternal fire. So the wise brother recognizes this and factors it into his expectations when he considers the progress of the gospel. Where will the controversy come from? It will come from every direction — up-front and from the blind side, from the outside and from the inside. Our Lord, who was the most controversial figure ever to tread this sod, continually tried to warn His apostles about the controversy concerning Him and how it would end: "The Son of Man is to be delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill Him; and when He has been killed, He will rise three days later" (Mark 9:31). However, "they did not understand this statement, and they were afraid to ask Him" (Mark 9:32).
- **Conduct of the foolish man** - When it comes to "show time," the foolish man is all show and no substance. He therefore uses anger to drive his opposition from the stage and cast a brooding pall over all further discussion. Or he may use the tactic of roistering laughter, trying to diffuse and confuse the issues with an apparently humorous but irrelevant series of comments. In either case the foolish man has avoided the issue, there is no resolution, and the conflict must go on.
- **How the wise handles himself** - "The wisdom from above is first pure," said the half-brother of the Lord (James 3:17). The truly wise has, as his pure motive, only the salvation of the other individual and the bringing of truth to light. Without purity of motive, there is no wisdom from above. The wise man presses on to the resolution of the conflict, being reasonable and reasoning clearly. He is a peaceable man, willing to forgive and dealing gently with his opposition, but unwavering in his stance. And he must be entirely without hypocrisy. Such a man is a formidable foe to the foolish opposition, for the *ad hominem* attacks of raging or laughing will fall upon the deaf ears of those who know the character of the wise.

"Scorners set a city aflame, but wise men turn away anger" (Proverbs 29:8). Those who are driven by personal ambition really don't care what they tear down; the wise men are edifiers.

Prose From Proverbs

Correct Your Son

The family is the training ground of the future elder. The patience and intelligent guidance required to help young people through their early years and on into savvy and spiritual adulthood is the same as that required of Biblical elders in helping Christians under their charge grow into maturity in Christ. When children are very small, parents can dictate; when children are older, parents can direct; but, at some point, all parents can do is to stand back, give advice when asked, and trust that their good example stands as the type of life-style their children would want to choose. An elder has a proven track record of knowing "how to manage his own household," and will therefore know how to take care of the church of God (I Timothy 3:5). The elders, pastors of the sheep, have learned in this process not to lord it over those allotted to their charge, but to prove "to be examples of the flock" (I Peter 5:3).

But the process of raising children up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord is best started early on. Mom and dad have to work as a unified and communicating unit, and pray for lots of wisdom as well as studying the scriptures and seeking advice from those who know how to get it done. The book of Proverbs therefore continues to speak about that wisdom: "The rod and reproof give correction," is one statement, "but a child who gets his own way brings shame to his mother" (Proverbs 29:15). Following on those heels is this jewel: "Correct your son, and he will give you comfort; he will also delight your soul" (Proverbs 29:17).

- **The child who gets his own way** - "Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child" (Proverbs 22:15). The natural tendency of anything in the physical realm is to resist movement or change of direction. A body at rest tends to stay at rest, and it takes the application of force to change the direction of a body in motion. Because of these natural laws, horses have to be "broke," dogs have to be disciplined, and children have to be trained. The difference between children and the animals is that children's training encompasses moral and intellectual training, with the idea that as adults, they will have the capacity to direct their own bodies. A child who gets his own way is like an unbroken horse or undisciplined dog in some senses. But because people have an infinitely greater capacity for good, they also have an infinitely greater capacity for evil when they stray from the disciplined principles of God's goodness and justice. Children who are used to getting their own way have a great challenge as adults when they now have the maturity to truly desire to be obedient to God.
- **Correct your son** - The scripture uses words like "rod" and "reproof." Stupid use of the rod produces anger and frustration in children; they have a pretty good sense of when punishment matches the crime. The primary "force" parents apply in providing direction is the force of reproof; always building the proper images in children, always inculcating the direction they should go, sometimes showing the children that they are pointed in the wrong direction, and using the rod as a last resort when the child is clearly defiant or rebellious. Again, the main thrust of scripture is to "train up a child in the way he should go" (Proverbs 22:6). The emphasis is by far on the positive as contrasted with the negative.
- **Delight your soul** - The scripture is consistent; a mother, whose heart is bound up with her child always, will feel intense shame when the fruit of letting a child have his own way is evidenced in his adult life. By contrast, the adult who lives an upright life in Christ is a joy and comfort to his parents, especially if they have the proper Biblical focus.

Ultimately, the Father sets forth the principles of what He calls the "new creation" to bring His spiritual children into conformity with the image of His Son. Those same principles apply to parents who are raising children in their images; and false religious principles as a basis for rearing families are guaranteed to be destructive. Learn from God and from godly examples. And be a delight to the Father's soul.

Prose From Proverbs

Loss of Vision

When someone is blinded in an accident, his life changes. No longer able to see for himself, he must depend upon other people for many things; he must be driven by someone else, and someone else must provide his surroundings so that he can function with some degree of self-sufficiency. But what would happen if everyone were struck blind at the same time? There is an old saying something to the effect that a one-eyed man is king in the colony of the blind.

The scripture uses blindness in the physical realm to bring an understanding of blindness in the spiritual realm. The Gentiles of this world, according to the apostle Paul, “walk, in the futility of their mind, *being darkened in their understanding*, excluded from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart” (Ephesians 4:17,18). Thus it is written, that “the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving” (II Corinthians 4:3,4). Men need enlightenment from God, or their whole civilization perishes. “Where there is no vision,” was the proverb of Solomon in reference to the prophets’ receiving revelation from God to guide the children of Israel, “the people are unrestrained, but happy is he who keeps the law” (Proverbs 29:18).

- **Blessed are those whose God is the Lord** - The first century church, by the plan and hand of God, left behind a historical legacy and the set of written documents known as the New Testament. The suffering which those saints underwent is a matter of historical record, and their lives and preaching swept the man-made idols of the Greeks and Romans into the trash heap of the past. But with the ascendancy of Catholicism and the non-distribution of scripture, tradition and superstition obscured the word of God, and the West was plunged into the Dark Ages. “Where there is no vision, the people are unrestrained.” Through the invention of movable type and the printing press about 1450 AD, the word of God began to spread throughout Europe. In a lecture given in Cincinnati in 1836, Alexander Campbell is summarized by Robert Richardson as connecting “the rapid march of improvement with the spirit of inquiry produced by the Protestant Reformation” (*Memoirs of Alexander Campbell*, p. 422). The enlightenment which comes with the Bible restrains the unbridled passions of the people, and provides a moral base for the development of a self-governing, orderly society. But the continued trashing of the Bible by the intellectual elitists and the left-leaning media is producing loss of vision in western culture, and with the restraints of Biblical morality disappearing, it’s “Katie-bar-the-door.”
- **Keeping the faith** - As western culture becomes increasingly corrosive, Christians have a tremendous obligation to be morally pure, and to keep the moral filth out of their homes. The fare on television and in the movie houses will continue to be increasingly raunchy and will increasingly promote the immoral and homosexual agendas. Sports will become more and more violent, and the crowds will get rowdier and rowdier. The public is being entertained into debauchery and slavery. Each Christian, then, must make those decisions to flee from immorality and not to be led into temptation. The saint must learn to focus his attention on the King in His beauty and learn how to please Him in all respects.

The modern church is built on the foundation of those nameless (to us) brethren in the first century who lived morally pure lives and who died rather than to yield to the culture of their day. Their combined legacy is the basis for modern faith in Jesus, as a mountain is no more than a mass of individual stones. The Christian keeps the revelation of God alive, and “happy is he who keeps the law.”

Prose From Proverbs

Do Not Alter God's Words

“Every word of God is tested,” were the words of Agur the oracle. “He is a shield to those who take refuge in Him. Do not add to His words lest He reprove you, and you be proved a liar” (Proverbs 30:5,6). The Almighty stands like a sentry, guarding His word, preserving it through the centuries. Those who have raged against it and beat on its monolithic consistency have withered, and in the end will be judged by its unadulterated contents. The mockers with their mocking pass like a flitting shadow through history, a flicker in the sunlight of eons; by contrast, as Jesus said, “Heaven and earth shall pass away, but My words shall not pass away” (Matthew 24:35). The smart guys, like Moses, choose “rather to endure ill-treatment with the people of God than to enjoy the *passing* pleasures of sin; considering the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt” (Hebrews 11:25,26).

- **Every word is tested** - The great God is a great communicator, but He does it in such a way as to develop faith in the communicatee. The Bible, penned by the hand of man, with none of the original copies extant, is often discounted by snooty intellectuals who can't see the forest of God's revelation for their own figmentary trees. Old Testament prophecies of history overwhelmingly establish that God wrote the Old Testament; Old Testament prophecies of the Messiah, including His resurrection to a heavenly throne, clearly establish that Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John are authored by God; and Old Testament prophecies of the church establish that Acts through Revelation are the word of God. Those who try to hide from the force of the raising of Jesus from the dead by quibbling over the dimensions of the laver before Solomon's temple are in for quite a surprise on the day of judgment. Every word of God, coming ultimately from Jesus Himself, has stood the test. “The word I spoke,” He said, “is what will judge [each person] at the last day” (John 12:48).
- **Do not alter His words** - “You shall not add to the word which I am commanding you,” were words to Israel from Moses, “nor take away from it ...” (Deuteronomy 4:2). The hackers are definitely out there, chopping away at the parts of the Bible which don't appeal to them. At the same time masters of confusion are busily stitching their “revelations” on to the word of God and trying to sell the public on the legitimacy of their false teachings. The truth-seeker will sort his way through the hackers and stitchers, and be content with the sixty-six books of the Bible. Those who subtract as well as those who are proven liars.
- **A shield for believers** - “By faith we understand,” noted the writer of Hebrews, “that the worlds were prepared by the word of God ...” (Hebrews 11:3). The physical creation was brought into existence by the word of God, and it is upheld “by the word of His power” (Hebrews 1:3). In the spiritual realm “He brought us forth by the word of truth ...” (James 1:18), and we are sustained first by the “milk” then by the “meat” of the word. There is no such thing as trusting God apart from belief in and obedience to God's word, a word that is living, active, and powerful. Through His word God is a shield to those who take refuge in Him.

Preach and teach, then, the whole counsel of God. Do not shrink from declaring anything that is profitable, and do not hide from declaring the whole purpose of God. Do not throw in an admixture of human contrivance, and tell the whole truth about salvation, that men may take refuge in God.

Prose From Proverbs

Two Wise Requests

Agur the son of Jakeh was wise enough for his words to be included by the Holy Spirit in the book of Proverbs. “Two things I asked of You,” he recorded of his requests to God. “Do not refuse me,” he added, “before I die” (Proverbs 30:7). Those two things are worthy of each Christian’s consideration as he contemplates his own eternity.

- **Deception and lies** — The first request is a simple statement: “Keep deception and lies far from me” (Proverbs 30:8). Often some of the best targets for salesmen are other salesmen; they work so hard to be positive that sometimes they are positively good buyers because they sympathize with the other salesman. Similarly, liars can be lied to, and deceivers can be deceived. “But evil men and imposters,” was one of Paul’s warnings to Timothy, “will proceed from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived” (II Timothy 3:13). The deceivers are deceived by Satan, and the liars are lied to by the father of lies. So the prayer for being kept away from deception and lies is two-fold; the individual himself is asking to be protected from falling into those character weaknesses, and he is petitioning to be barricaded from their influences.
- **Riches** — “Give me neither poverty nor riches,” was Agur’s second request. Having too much is a problem. “Truly I say to you, it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven,” said our Lord Jesus Christ. “And again I say to you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God” (Matthew 19:23,24). When a member of the human race has an abundance, his natural tendency is to forget his dependence upon God, and become, as James put it, a “rich man in the midst of his pursuits” (James 1:11). “Feed me with the food that is my portion,” Agur requested, “lest I be full and deny You and say, ‘Who is the Lord?’ ” (Proverbs 30:8,9). Not only do individuals fall into the prosperity trap, but nations as a whole tend to take the plunge. The Lord speaks of Judah’s ungratefulness when He had “fed them to the full”: “Why should I pardon you?” says the great Judge through His servant Jeremiah. “Your sons have forsaken Me and sworn by those who are not gods. When I had *fed them to the full*, they committed adultery and trooped to the harlot’s house. They were *well-fed* lusty horses, each one neighing after his neighbor’s wife” (Jeremiah 5:7,8). The American Christian should take serious warning; is there a possibility that material abundance is dulling his spiritual appetite?
- **Poverty** — Poverty has its problems also. When a man has sunk to subsistence level or less, he is so concerned about mere survival that his natural tendency is to forget about God and not take any time for spiritual pursuits. Agur requested not to be placed into poverty, “lest I be in want and steal, and profane the name of my God” (Proverbs 30:9). Trust in God is learned, and many in poverty weaken, and have already stolen before they have come to have sufficient faith in God. The modern Christian also needs to recall that all the social welfare programs are “legitimatized stealing” wherein the government takes the money from someone’s wallet and gives it to the cooperating gang member, the welfare recipient. Whole countries have sunk into poverty because of socialism; God help many of those people to become Christians!

Man’s material welfare has an impact on his overall spirituality. The Christian would do well to ponder Agur’s words about not having too much nor too little. “I have learned,” recorded the apostle Paul, “to be content in whatever circumstances I am. I know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity” (Philippians 4:11,12).

Prose From Proverbs

There Is A Kind of Man

The Bible not only teaches man about God, but it also teaches man about men. “There is a kind of man,” says scripture, “who curses his father, and who does not bless his mother. There is a kind who is pure in his own eyes, yet not washed from his filthiness. There is a kind — oh how lofty are his eyes! And his eyelids are raised in arrogance.

There is a kind of man who teeth are like swords, and his jaw teeth like knives, to devour the afflicted from the earth and the needy from among men” (Proverbs 30:11-14). These are kinds of men which exhibit different forms of rebellion against the kind, just, and loving God. A Christian needs to examine himself first of all, to make sure he has expunged such tendencies from his own thinking. Secondly, these men are dangerous to the body of Christ when they come in, and each follower of Christ needs to recognize them when they darken the doors of the saints’ fellowship. Believers, and especially church leadership, must figure out how to be proactive in bringing these men to repentance, or to protect the body of Christ from them.

- **Ungrateful souls** - The first commandment with a promise requires the sons of men to honor their parents. The kind of man who curses his father and does not bless his mother is an ungrateful wretch. This mind-set produces bitterness and destruction, backbiting and complaining, wherever it goes.
- **Dishonest rationalizers** - The kind who is “pure in his own eyes” has set himself up as the standard. This is the root of all legalism (a strict adherence to the New Testament is *not* legalism). The Pharisees were examples of this kind of man; they had, in the words of Jesus, “seated themselves in the chair of Moses” (Matthew 23:2). By setting themselves up as the standard, they tied up heavy loads and laid them on men’s shoulders, doing all their deeds to be noticed by men. As whitewashed sepulchres, they looked good on the outside, but inwardly they were full of hypocrisy and lawlessness (Matthew 23:28). Their spiritual descendants, the Judaizers who came into the churches of Galatia, were of the same caliber; they wanted “to make a good showing in the flesh” by carrying out and imposing certain outward conformities, but they were in fact unwashed within and dead in their sins (Galatians 6:12).
- **The lofty lordships** - Those who raise their eyelids in arrogance are actually small men who, lacking character themselves, take refuge in their names, inherited socio-economic status, or in diplomas in order to put other people down. These are destructive within the church, and can usually be found vying for positions of influence and authority without following the scriptural principles of sacrifice and humility.
- **The ruthless swordfish** - There are certain men driven by overweening ambition. Intelligent, dangerous, ruthless, and cunning, they have no compassion for others at all, willing to use the poor and down-trodden as cannon fodder for their revolutions and quest for power. “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them,” explained Jesus, “and their great men exercise authority over them” (Matthew 20:25). No wonder the propounder of the proverb described this kind of man as having teeth like swords and knives. These enemies of Christ of are most likely to be found outside the church, working Satan’s plan to destroy Christianity by suppression, using their control of government to grind the human face with the jackboot of tyranny.

These types of unregenerate man, whether found inside the dragnet of the church or not, have a fleshly mind-set and are therefore hostile to God, regardless of their protestations to the contrary. The saint of God must learn to be wise, recognizing that not all men are what they claim to be. “By their fruit you shall know them,” was some very wise counsel. Those who walk by the Spirit do not come to be served but to serve, and to give their lives as a ransom for many.

Prose From Proverbs

Hard To Satisfy

Treaties are like pie crusts, said Lenin, made to be broken. In other words, a Communist has no intention of ceasing his revolutionary and incendiary activities; he agrees to a peace treaty to put his opposition to sleep while he proceeds apace with his agenda. Never satisfied. That is why negotiations with the Palestine Liberation Organization in Israel will come to naught, why peace accords with the Irish Republican Army will be broken, and why the stationing of “peace keepers” in the midst of territory claimed by the Kosovo Liberation Army will accomplish nothing. They can never be satisfied, only temporarily appeased.

Agur the oracle, retrospectively on his experience with men, produced a list of those, similar to Lenin, who cannot be satisfied. The child of God will take note, and conduct himself with wisdom, learning the lessons and knowing how to handle these situations as they arise.

- **Dealing with the leech** - “The leech has two daughters,” were words driven by the sage. Their names? “Give,” and “Give,” (Proverbs 30:15). Some people have learned to be very productive, but some have learned the art of playing on people’s sympathies, working the public’s emotions like a maestro churning away on a violin. When the bands preventing the Republic from stealing from the productive citizen to give to the leeches were snapped, the whines of those who now think they have “welfare rights” have been orchestrated, and the second, third, and fourth generations of welfare families will never be satisfied. “Work or starve” is the scriptural solution for the leech and his daughters.
- **Sheol’s maw** - “There are three things that will not be satisfied,” states Agur, as he gets into his rhythm, “four that will not say, ‘Enough’: Sheol, and the barren womb, earth that is never satisfied with water, and fire that never says, ‘Enough’ ” (Proverbs 30:15,16). Sheol, the Old Testament word for the realm beyond the grave, has opened wide her mouth. In the United States of America alone, the Armed Forces can no longer participate in military burials for WWII vets for a very simple reason: 1000 vets *per day* are passing from this life into Sheol’s maw. And she is never satisfied.
- **The barren womb** - It is frustrating when a married woman want to be a mother and cannot conceive. “Give me children, or else I die,” were Rachel’s words to Jacob (Genesis 30:1). There is an intense longing there that the sage is using to make his point.
- **Dry earth** - Some of the ground I used to help irrigate when I was a teenager was gravel, with lots of rocks. When the dam was placed in the ditch and 75 “miners’ inches” of water flowed out onto the pasture, the flood would sweep into the field and sink. Earth that was never satisfied with water.
- **Spreading fire** - When a fire is burning in dry timber or grassland, it cries for, “More, more!” One stand of trees will break out in raging fire, sparks will fly into a new section, smolder for awhile, then erupt into a new blaze. The fire never says, “Enough.”

The fleshly-minded man is never contented for very long. Like the leech’s daughters and the big four which cannot be satisfied, yesterday’s dosage of sensuality was not enough. Today’s portion of heroin has to be a bit more than yesterday’s to produce the same high. Yesterday’s party has to be supplanted by something new and unusual in today’s to crank up the same level of excitement; yesterday’s envelope has to be pushed a bit further to produce the same “rush.” Ah, but Jesus through His Spirit can be enough, if the man will on turn to Him on His terms. “Why do you spend money for what is not bread?” asks the Lord through His prophet. “And your wages for what does not satisfy?” (Isaiah 55:2).

Prose From Proverbs

Wise and Wonderful

The sagacious Agur was an observant man, with a bit of dry humor glistening in his eye as he put forth his droll proverbs. “There are three things too wonderful for me,” he said, speaking in his cadence, “four things which I do not understand: the way of an eagle in the sky, the way of a serpent on a rock, the way of a ship in the middle of the sea, and the way of a man with a maid” (Proverbs 30:18,19). All of these have to do with movement. It is an inspiring sight, to stand on a mountain peak and see the great bald eagle soaring in the breeze, searching in sweeping circles for his prey. There is a hypnotic effect in the sinusoidal movement of a snake working his way across a rock, and a sense of wonder and longing is generated by a ship as she tacks her way to the edge of the horizon. But the humor of Agur comes in the observance of a young man trying to make his moves on the young lady of his proffered affections. Like an eagle soaring - elevation! Like a serpent over a rock - caution! Like a ship tacking her way over the sea - direction!

But it isn't only the men who make their moves toward the maidens; there can be sinister stuff from the female side as well. “This is the way of an adulterous woman: she eats and wipes her mouth, and says, ‘I have done nothing wrong.’” (Proverbs 30:20). Boredom, emptiness, love hunger, or misguided desire to build self-esteem all contribute to the way of an adulteress as she makes her inroads on her target. The real message for the Christian here is to be aware of the spiritual adulteress' working, appealing to fleshly desires and pulling the targets away from devotion to God, and turning the bride of Christ into a sensual harlot. “You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God” (James 4:4).

“Four things are small on the earth,” is one of the parallel pictures of Agur, “but they are exceedingly wise: the ants are not a strong folk, but they prepare their food in the summer; the badgers are not a mighty folk, yet they make their houses in the rocks; the locusts have no king, yet all of them go out in ranks; the lizard you may grasp with the hand, yet it is in king's palaces” (Proverbs 30:24-28). Wise folk, eh? *Exceedingly* wise folk! Ants prepare their food during the summer when they can. Do those much superior humans make their preparations ahead of time? And those engineering badgers know how to build houses in the rocks of cliffs and mountains. Do those *homo sapiens* know how to build a happy home out of some rocky situations? Locusts go out in ranks voluntarily; can those of the race of men take their places and march together to get might projects done? The panting lizards, no matter how lizard-proof the building, get in somehow. Do those descendants of Adam know the principle that where there is a will, there is a way?

The ones who really need to be wise and wonderful in their movements are the sons of God. The ants prepare; the saints have their feet shod with *the preparation* of the gospel of peace. The badgers build houses in the rocks; Christians build their “houses” on the Rock. Locusts go out in ranks; the disciples of Jesus do in fact have a King, and function in harmony within the body of Christ. Lizards are found in king's palaces; the brethren are like leaven, leavening the whole earth. As far as wonderful is concerned: the way of a teacher of the word of God as he works to establish a disciple of Christ exceeds the flight of an eagle on the wing. And there is a *way of life*, which is more wonderful than the movement of a ship at sea. But the most wonderful of all is the way of the Lord Jesus with His bride, greatly overshadowing the way of a man with a maid

Prose From Proverbs

Quaking and Strutting

Even when they grow up, members of the human race don't get very far from the playroom. In the playroom a pecking order has to be established among the children, and there is a lot of squabbling until that issue is sorted out. Then there is the kid who makes a lot of racket when everyone is supposed to be quiet and take his nap. Of course there is the continual scramble over toys, there are the temper tantrums, and there is the shunting aside of some children as outcasts. The adult playroom is a little larger and encompasses a few more people; but it is essentially the same small world.

Agur the oracle, looking at the pettiness of the bubblespheres of his day, noted: "Under three things the earth quakes, and under four it cannot bear up: under a slave when he becomes king, and a fool when he is satisfied with food, under an unloved woman when she gets a husband, and a maidservant when she supplants her mistress" (Proverbs 30:21-23).

- **A slave becoming a king** - The idea here is that the individual in servitude smolders with resentment at the treatment endured. Plotting, planning, progressing with his revolution, he finally becomes king. Driven by revenge, he is going to show all the other kids in the playroom what it is like to be a slave, and he becomes a despotic tyrant under which the earth quakes.
- **A fool satisfied with food** - Picture a castle of medieval Europe. The lord of the castle comes in, sits down, and bangs on the table for FOOD. Snorting, guzzling, and snuffing his way down the trough, he finally has enough. Then he begins to bellow at the underlings in the playroom to go get this, to bring him that, and to provide him with some entertainment. Night after night the table monster breaks out, under which it is hard to bear up.
- **The unloved getting a husband** - With women, more so than with men in general, things are *so* personal, particularly in "romantic matters," or matters of the heart. When a woman is "unloved," or has gone through a couple of failed relationships ("hell hath no fury like a woman scorned" is the old quotation), she can get mighty green around the gills when her associates are being married off one by one. But look out when she finally gets a husband. She parades him around the playroom; and, of course, there is nothing else in the world to talk about; and the earth quakes having to bear this burden.
- **The serving girl supplants her mistress** - In the playroom there is jockeying for the hunk of a husband or the bodacious bride. Once the bodacious bride has passed her prime, men of "power and influence" have a tendency to dump the old girl in exchange for some fresh, flowering wench. If the wench is the handy maidservant, and thus has her ambition realized, she has now become the squealing superior in the female section of the playroom. And since these things tend to be *so* personal, the earth quakes under the burden.

Agur the oracle is not going to let the spectacle of the playroom pass without one other illustration of petty pomposity. "There are three things which are stately in their march," he notes, "even four when they walk: the lion which is mighty among beasts and does not retreat before any, the strutting cock, the male goat also, and a king when his army is with him" (Proverbs 30:29-31).

Christians must recognize that they are now citizens of the heavenly realm. There is no need for them to engage in petty playroom games, and if they should sink so low as to participate, recognize it and change their behavior so that their comport is befitting mature sons of the great King.

Prose From Proverbs

Help for the Helpless

“For the wrath of God,” says Paul, “is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness” (Romans 1:18). God, after all, is a God of justice, and is rightly incensed when justice is suppressed by the unrighteous of the earth. “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees!” was the excoriation of our Lord Jesus. “For you tithe the mint and dill and cummin, and have neglected the weightier provisions of the law: *justice* and mercy and faithfulness; but these are the things you should have done without neglecting the others” (Matthew 23:23). God always regarded the seeing the execution of justice as a high priority, much more so than making sure that one out each ten tiny seeds was set aside as a tithe for the storehouse.

Such a principle was foremost in Paul’s mind when the commander of the Roman cohort, Claudius Lysias, had the apostle brought before the Sanhedrin in an attempt to find out why the Jews were so violently upset at his gospel preaching. “Brethren,” Paul stated, “I have lived my life with a perfectly good conscience before God up to this day.” The high priest, Ananias, a younger pup than the original Ananias of the days of Jesus’ crucifixion and early persecution of the church, commanded those standing near to strike him on the mouth. The apostle, knowledgeable of the justice required in the Law, responded, “God is going to strike you, you whitewashed wall! And do you sit to try me according to the Law, and in violation of the Law order *me* to be struck?” (Acts 21:1-3).

“Open your mouth for the dumb,” said King Lemuel of Proverbs’ fame, “for the rights of all the unfortunate. Open your mouth, judge righteously, and defend the rights of the needy” (Proverbs 31:8,9). Wherever the Bible goes - including wherever it is taken by God’s people - it teaches how to establish governments, setting forth, as first of all, the principles of righteousness and justice.

- **The rights of the unfortunate** - Do people really have a right to medical care from the largesse of government? Old age pensions? Free education, etc.? Justice requires the government only to do in the collective what the individual may do for himself. If I, for example, cannot steal \$1000 from my neighbor to pay for my mother’s operation, then the government likewise cannot steal from my neighbor to pay for my mother’s operation. A “just” government is defined as one which executes justice in meeting out “just” punishment for clearly defined crimes such as theft, murder, perjury, etc. Government only acts after a crime is committed; otherwise, by being so-called pro-active, it moves progressively into the realm of tyranny. The basic rights of the individual - the collection of Biblical teaching on this subject - boil down to what is well-expressed in the Fifth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution: life, liberty, and property.
- **Open your mouth** - The evil and rapacious of this world have always grabbed for power at the expense of justice for the poor and needy. “Can I justify wicked scales,” cried the Lord through the prophet Micah to a sinking Jerusalem, “and a bag of deceptive weights? For the rich men of the city are full of violence, her residents speak lies, and their tongue is deceitful in their mouth” (Micah 6:11,12). So what do God’s spokesmen do? They speak out! Yes, in the past it cost them their lives, but God still wanted them to speak out for justice. The call today: open your mouth!

God brought Christians into existence as new creatures with a sort of *noblesse oblige* on behalf of the down-trodden of the earth. Saints of God are not afraid to die physically; therefore they bring God’s standards of justice and righteousness to the attention of the world; they open their mouths.

Prose From Proverbs

His Heart Trusts Her

Marriage must be built on trust. Destruction of trust is what destroys marriages. Hence it is that any couple who really desire a happy and successful marriage must place their highest priority on the development of trusting in each other; each must work hard to demonstrate that he/she is trustworthy and faithful.

“An excellent wife,” queries the king, “who can find?” Where would a man look to find an excellent wife? At a saloon, perhaps, where the faithful and responsible characteristics of the bar crowd are well known? At a beach party, maybe, where his future bride has laid the foundation for trust by her modest apparel before all those other men? Over at the gambling casino, possibly, where her trustworthiness in finances can be firmly assured? A man has to remember that for poison to sell, it must be attractively packaged.

The worth of an excellent wife, says the author of this section of Proverbs, “is far above jewels. The heart of her husband trusts in her, and he will have no lack of gain. She does him good and not evil all the days of her life” (Proverbs 31:10-12). Who is she, and what does she do that makes her husband’s heart trust her?

- **She knows what she is worth** - One of the major reasons women get into trouble with a man is that they sell themselves too cheaply. A woman who consents sexually outside of marriage or who co-habitates with a man outside the bounds of wedlock is a woman who assigns herself the value of used furniture. Since she does not perceive herself as having high value, she allows herself to be knocked around and not handled carefully, and she is more likely to be discarded in the trash when a newer model comes along. The excellent woman, however, knows that she is a high value item, and whoever wins her favor is going to have to demonstrate his willingness to pay a high price, just as Christ was willing to sacrifice Himself for the sake of His bride. She is not about to grant sexual favors cheaply; she is an honorable woman with high spiritual standards and would be highly offended at some jerk for even making the wrong suggestion. She therefore dresses modestly at all times, being quite content that a sensible, spiritual man will be rightly attracted to her for her gentle and quiet spirit, being able to detect the precious value of the hidden person of her heart.
- **She does no evil to her husband** - This woman knows that anything evil is instantly destructive to the elevation of trust. One of the first things she does is to guard her tongue from evil, knowing that sharp barbs wound the soul; she does not say embarrassing things about her husband in public or in private. She does not engage in malicious gossip, nor does she go on spending sprees. She does not try to manage her husband, nor does she try to set aside the God-ordained role of being a helper and a homemaker.
- **She does him good all the days of her life** - She stands with her husband in all that is right and godly. She works beside him when necessary, and for him when necessary. She encourages him through the hard times, always expressing her confidence in him. She communicates to him in her wide and creative variety of ways that he is and always has been the one for her. She coordinates her plans with his, and jointly works to stay within the financial plan. She is a great mother to her children, operating under her husband’s general oversight of all family things. She is a great team player, and puts the kingdom of God first as befits a spiritual woman.

Such a woman! The heart of her husband would joyfully trust her, and as a result the two really could become one flesh as God intended. This is joy and bliss worth whatever discipline is necessary to achieve it.

Prose From Proverbs

Hard-working Lady

Some women “eat the bread of idleness.” The apostle Paul warned of this tendency in young widows, encouraging them to marry and get busy. “And at the same time they also learn to be idle, as they go around from house to house; and not merely idle, but also gossips and busybodies, talking about things not proper to mention” (I Timothy 5:13). Not the Proverbs 31 woman! She’s up before dawn, getting stuff done.

- **Feeding the family** - In modern America, it is possible to get everybody fed without expending a great deal of effort. There are microwaves and electric ovens; there are gas stoves, electric stoves, and instant grills. Food comes fresh, frozen, or convenience-packed. And if all that is not easy enough, there are plenty of fast-food restaurants. But in other countries and in other times, this feeding the family is not or has not been so easy. So the Proverbs 31 woman isn’t going to be able to buy her fruits and veggies at the nearby supermarket. She “considers a field and buys it; from her earnings she plants a vineyard.” In the household of the Proverbs 31 woman, the woman not only has to take charge of feeding her own family, but all the household servants have to be provided for as well. “She is like merchant ships; she brings her food from afar. She rises while it is still night, and gives food to her household, and portions to her maidens.”
- **Clothing the crew** - Modern clothing by comparison is also cheap. Big mills run out cloth by the hundreds of yards, and manufacturers produce all grades of variegated wear. But in the days of the Proverbs 31 woman, all clothing was essentially home-spun. Not only did this lady have to do all the work to make sure her household was fed, but she had to produce clothing from wool and linen from flax. “She looks for wool and flax, and works with her hands in delight.” “She stretches out her hands to the distaff, and her hands grasp the spindle.” This gal is on top of things, prepared ahead of time. “She is not afraid of the snow for her household,” observes the writer, “for all her household are clothed with scarlet.” And the lady has put enough aside to have some finery when she needs it. “She makes coverings for herself; her clothing is fine linen and purple.”
- **Enterprise for the entity** - The system of economics commended by the Bible is known as *the free enterprise system*. Profit is regarded as the wages of the person who engages in business, the result of hard work, good service, and good business judgment. The lady buys fields, and from her profits she plants vineyards. “She makes linen garments and sells them, and supplies belts to the tradesmen.” “She senses that her gain is good; her lamp does not go out at night.” When the free enterprise system is allowed to operate, then there are resources for sharing with those who could use some assistance. Our heroine of Proverbs 31 has these extra resources due to her industry, integrity, and the blessing of the Lord. So she “extends her hand to the poor; and she stretches out her hands to the needy.”
- **Vigor for vicissitudes** - This hard-working woman is on the go from sun-up to sun-down. Overseeing her family operation, she is not afraid to get her hands dirty. “She works with her hands,” and she “stretches out her hands to the distaff.” No need for her to go the gym every day to stay in shape. “She girds herself with strength, and makes her arms strong.” But her external puissance is merely a reflection of what is within; it is her inner character and trust in the Lord which help her to carry on through the trials of life. “Strength and dignity are her clothing, and she smiles at the future.”

Again, we say, “Such a woman!” She deserves respect and emulation from her sisters. “Give her the product of her hands, and let works praise her in the gates” (Proverbs 31:31).

Prose From Proverbs

Wisdom and Blessing

The book of Proverbs begins with teaching on wisdom and the blessings that come from being wise. The book likewise ends with the example of the wise and blessed Proverbs 31 woman. “She opens her mouth in wisdom,” states the good King Lemuel, “and the teaching of kindness is on her tongue” (Proverbs 31:26). As one “who looks well to the ways of her household,” she passes her wisdom on to her children and to other members of the household. This, of course, is the greatest wisdom of all - to pass the wisdom on to succeeding generations. Thus God, to communicate His wisdom even to the Gentiles, sent the Christ, “who became to us wisdom from God” (I Corinthians 1:30). Wherefore, “we preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block, and to Gentiles foolishness, but to those who are the called, Christ the power of God and *the wisdom* of God” (I Corinthians 1:23,24). The modern Proverbs 31 woman accordingly will help all within her influence to know this Christ, in whom are hidden all the wisdom and treasures of the great God.

- **Wisdom in knowing God as Creator** - “The Lord by wisdom founded the earth,” was the asseveration of Solomon. “By understanding He established the heavens. By His knowledge the deeps were broken up, and the skies drip with dew” (Proverbs 4:19,20). “The Lord possessed me at the beginning of His way,” said Wisdom, “before His works of old. From everlasting I was established, from the beginning, from the earliest times of the earth. When there were no depths I was brought forth, when there were no springs abounding with water. Before the mountains were settled, before the hills, I was brought forth; while He had not yet made the earth and fields, nor the first dust of the world. When He established the heavens, I was there; when He inscribed a circle on the face of the deep; when He made firm the skies above; when the springs of the deep became fixed; when He set for the sea its boundary, so that the water should not transgress His command; when He marked out the foundations of the earth; then I was beside Him, as a master workman; and I was daily His delight, rejoicing always before Him, rejoicing in His world, His earth, and having my delight in the sons of men” (Proverbs 8:23-31). Knowing that God is Creator of all, and that all are accountable to Him is the beginning of wisdom, and the Proverbs 31 woman passes that knowledge on by precept and practice.
- **Wisdom in knowing God as Savior** - “He who finds me finds life,” says Wisdom, “and obtains favor from the Lord” (Proverbs 8:35). This favor is earnestly to be desired, for without it a man will certainly perish for all eternity. “A truthful witness saves lives,” is another of wisdom’s nuggets. So it is not unexpected that Jesus Christ is “the faithful witness, the first-born of the dead, and ruler of the kings of earth.” It is He “who loves us; and released us from our sins by His blood” (Revelation 1:5). His gospel produces the obedience of faith among the Gentiles, and the wise woman knows that all must repent and be immersed in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of their sins in order to receive the indwelling Spirit, and to thus know God as Savior.
- **Wisdom in following God’s morality** - The wise woman shows filial fidelity, loving her husband, and being a repository of love for him. She is the “fountain” by which he is “blessed”; she is the wife of his youth with whom he rejoices. She is aware of the ways of the wicked woman, and conscious of the dangers of handsome strangers. She knows it is better for both she and her husband to be exhilarated always in each other’s love; and this wisdom, too, she passes on to her household.

“Her children rise up and bless her; her husband also, and he praises her, saying, ‘Many daughters have done nobly, but you excel them all.’ ” (Proverbs 31:28,29). Excel still more, ladies, excel still more!

Prose From Proverbs

The Proverbs 31 Woman & The Church

When God first found Israel, she was squirming in her blood. God rescued Jerusalem, helped her to grow up, clothed her nakedness, and prepared her as a bride for Himself. But she was unfaithful and played the harlot with her neighbor's gods, so the Almighty divorced her. Because the promise in Israel was by physical inheritance rather than by the faith of the individual, devotion to God was lacking; Jerusalem of earth was sent into slavery with her children.

When God first found the church, she was already dead, her sins and her trespasses having carried her into darkness. But God had a plan for His Son to marry the deadened orphan girl. Jesus Himself had to die to bring her to life; He had to put away His life in exchange for hers, to take her sinfulness upon Himself and give her His righteousness in its place. And she is *faithful*, for only those who are righteous *through faith* are a part of her. "For this reason," says Paul of the justification which comes to true saints, "it is by faith, that it might be in accordance with grace, in order that *the promise may be certain* to all the descendants, not only to those who are of the Law, but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all" (Romans 4:16). As a faithful bride for the Son, her devotion to her Lord is evident in the foreshadows of the Proverbs 31 woman.

- **Food for the family** - The family of God needs spiritual food. Brethren therefore are exhorted to "long for the pure milk of the word" (I Peter 2:2). But who shall supply? Like the woman of Proverbs 31 who "brings her food from afar," so the teachers and preachers of the church bring the message of salvation of the Lord to the lost throughout the world. "How shall they hear without a preacher?" is the plaintive query from Paul. "And how shall they preach unless they are sent?" So the church sends out her preachers and teachers into the world of the lost, calling them from darkness into the King's marvelous light. They then follow up that message with solid meat of the word to sustain the saved. The church has her shepherds to feed the flock, as Paul exhorted the elders in Ephesus to follow his example in bringing to the brethren "the whole purpose of God." "I did not shrink," he said, "from declaring to you anything that was unprofitable" (Acts 20:27,20).
- **Clothing the crew** - The church does not hold the distaff nor do her hands cleave to the spindle, but she is concerned about providing proper clothing nonetheless. Her adherents are first "clothed with Christ" in the waters of immersion. She continues to help her offspring to be clothed with "the armor of light" and to put on "the whole armor of God." Thus adorned, "she smiles at the future."
- **Enterprise for the entity** - Like the Proverbs 31 woman, her members are noted for their good work ethic. They do not work just so that the job looks good, "by way of eyeservice"; they do their work for the glory of the Lord. Her businessmen give good service at competitive prices, being entrusted with a stewardship from the King Himself. Her offspring do "not eat the bread of idleness"; they rather look well to the ways of the household, doing "good to all men, and especially to those who are of the household of faith" (Galatians 6:10).
- **Vigor for vicissitudes** - The Proverbs 31 lady was a strong, vibrant woman, capable of handling stress and difficulty. But the bride of Christ must be several magnitudes stronger, for her character is forged in her suffering. The apostle points out that Christians are "heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we *suffer with Him* in order that we may also be glorified with Him" (Romans 8:17). Because of what she endures, she "is strengthened with power through the Spirit" (Ephesians 3:16), and meets her trials in the strength of her Lord.

The Proverbs 31 lady stands as a foreshadow of the greatest lady of all, the church of the Lord Jesus Christ. Many daughters have done nobly, but she indeed excels them all, and will thus be greatly honored at the marriage supper of the Lamb.