

## Adam Clarke:

## Introduction

The design of the proverbs, Proverbs 1:1-6. An exhortation to fear God, and believe his word, because of the benefit to be derived from it, Proverbs 1:7-9; to avoid the company of wicked men, who involve themselves in wretchedness and ruin, Proverbs 1:10-19. Wisdom, personified, cries in the streets, and complains of the contempt with which she is treated, Proverbs 1:20-23. The dreadful punishment that awaits all those who refuse her counsels, Proverbs 1:24-33.

## Verse 1

The proverbs of Solomon - For the meaning of the word proverb, see the introduction; and the dissertation upon parabolical writing at the end of the notes on Matthew 13: Solomon is the first of the sacred writers whose name stands at the head of his works.

## Verse 2

To know wisdom - That is, this is the design of parabolical writing in general; and the particular aim of the present work.

This and the two following verses contain the interpretation of the term parable, and the author's design in the whole book. The first verse is the title, and the next three verses are an explanation of the nature and design of this very important tract.

Wisdom - חכמה (chochmah) may mean here, and in every other part of this book, not only that Divine science by which we are enabled to discover the best end, and pursue it by the most proper means; but also the whole of that heavenly teaching that shows us both ourselves and God, directs us into all truth, and forms the whole of true religion.

And instruction - מוסר (musar), the teaching that discovers all its parts, to understand, to comprehend the words or doctrines which should be comprehended, in order that we may become wise to salvation.

## Verse 3

To receive the instruction - חסל (haskel), the deliberately weighing of the points contained in the teaching, so as to find out their importance.

Equity - משרים (mesharim), rectitude. The pupil is to receive wisdom and instruction, the words of wisdom and understanding, justice and judgment, so perfectly as to excel in all. Wisdom itself, personified, is his teacher; and when God's wisdom teaches, there is no delay in learning.

## Verse 4

To give subtilty to the simple - The word simple, from simplex, compounded of sine, without, and plica, a fold, properly signifies plain and honest, one that has no by-ends in view, who is what he appears to be; and is opposed to complex, from complico, to fold together, to make one rope or cord out of many strands; but because honesty and plaindealing are so rare in the world, and none but the truly religious man will practice them, farther than the fear of the law obliges him, hence simple has sunk into a state of progressive deterioration. At first, it signified, as above, without fold, unmixed, uncompounded: this was its radical meaning. Then, as applied to men, it signified innocent, harmless, without disguise; but, as such persons were rather an unfashionable sort of people, it sunk in its meaning to homely, homespun, mean, ordinary. And, as worldly men, who were seeking their portion in this life, and had little to do with religion, supposed that wisdom, wit, and understanding, were given to men that they might make the best of them in reference to the things of this life, the word sunk still lower in its meaning, and signified silly, foolish; and there, to the dishonor of our language and morals, it stands! I have taken those acceptations which I have marked in Italics out of the first dictionary that came to hand - Martin's; but if I had gone to Johnson, I might have added to Silly, not wise, not cunning. Simplicity, that meant at first, as Martin defines it, openness, plaindealing, downright honesty, is now degraded to weakness, silliness, foolishness. And these terms will continue thus degraded, till downright honesty and plaindealing get again into vogue. There are two Hebrew words generally supposed to come from the same root, which in our common version are rendered the simple, פתאים (pethaim), and פתאים or פתאים (pethayim); the former comes from פתא (patha), to be rash, hasty; the latter, from פתח (pathah), to draw aside, seduce, entice. It is the first of these words which is used here, and may be applied to youth; the inconsiderate, the unwary, who, for want of knowledge and experience, act precipitately. Hence the Vulgate renders it parvulis, little ones, young children, or little children, as my old MS.; or very babes, as Coverdale. The Septuagint renders it ἄφρονοι, those that are without evil; and the versions in general

understand it of those who are young, giddy, and inexperienced.

To the young man - **נָעָם** (naar) is frequently used to signify such as are in the state of adolescence, grown up boys, very well translated in my old MS. yunge fulwaxen; what we would now call the grown up lads. These, as being giddy and inexperienced, stand in especial need of lessons of wisdom and discretion. The Hebrew for discretion, **מִזְמָה** (mezimmah), is taken both in a good and bad sense, as **זָמָה** (zam), its root, signifies to devise or imagine; for the device may be either mischief, or the contrivance of some good purpose.

#### Verse 5

A wise man wilt hear - I shall not only give such instructions as may be suitable to the youthful and inexperienced, but also to those who have much knowledge and understanding. So said St. Paul: We speak wisdom among them that are perfect. This and the following verse are connected in the old MS. and in Coverdale: **By hearyinge the wyse man shall come by more wysdome; and by experience he shall be more apte to understonde a parable and the interpretation thereof; the wordes of the wyse and the darke speaches of the same.**

#### Verse 6

Dark sayings - **חֲדָשִׁים** (chidoth), enigmas or riddles, in which the Asiatics abounded. I believe parables, such as those delivered by our Lord, nearly express the meaning of the original.

#### Verse 7

The fear of the Lord - In the preceding verses Solomon shows the advantage of acting according to the dictates of wisdom; in the following verses he shows the danger of acting contrary to them. The fear of the Lord signifies that religious reverence which every intelligent being owes to his Creator; and is often used to express the whole of religion, as we have frequently had occasion to remark in different places. But what is religion? The love of God, and the love of man; the former producing all obedience to the Divine will; the latter, every act of benevolence to one's fellows. The love of God shed abroad in the heart by the Holy Spirit produces the deepest religious reverence, genuine piety, and cheerful obedience. To love one's neighbor as himself is the second great commandment; and as love worketh no ill to one's neighbor, therefore it is said to be the fulfilling of the law. Without love, there is no obedience; without reverence, there is neither caution, consistent conduct, nor perseverance in righteousness.

This fear or religious reverence is said to be the beginning of knowledge; **רֵשִׁית** (reshith), the principle, the first moving influence, begotten in a tender conscience by the Spirit of God. No man can ever become truly wise, who does not begin with God, the fountain of knowledge; and he whose mind is influenced by the fear and love of God will learn more in a month than others will in a year.

Fools despise - **עֲוִילִים** (evilim), evil men. Men of bad hearts, bad heads, and bad ways.

#### Verse 8

My son, hear - Father was the title of preceptor, and son, that of disciple or scholar, among the Jews. But here the reference appears to be to the children of a family; the father and the mother have the principal charge, in the first instance, of their children's instruction. It is supposed that these parents have, themselves, the fear of the Lord, and that they are capable of giving the best counsel to their children, and that they set before them a strict example of all godly living. In vain do parents give good advice if their own conduct be not consistent. The father occasionally gives instruction; but he is not always in the family, many of those occupations which are necessary for the family support being carried on abroad. The mother - she is constantly within doors, and to her the regulation of the family belongs; therefore she has and gives laws. The wise man says in effect to every child, **Be obedient to thy mother within, and carefully attend to the instructions of thy father, that thou mayest the better see the reasons of obedience; and learn from him how thou art to get thy bread honestly in the world.**

#### Verse 9

An ornament of grace unto thy head, and chains - That is, filial respect and obedience will be as ornamental to thee as crowns, diadems, and golden chains and pearls are to others.

Political dignity has been distinguished in many nations by a chain of gold about the neck. Solomon seems here to intimate, if we follow the metaphor, that the surest way of coming to distinguished eminence, in civil matters, is to act according to the principles of true wisdom, proceeding from the fear of God.

#### Verse 10

If sinners entice thee, consent thou not - **אַל תִּבֶּה** (al tobe), Will-not. They can do thee no harm unless thy will join in with them. God's eternal purpose with respect to man is that his will shall be free; or, rather, that

the will, which is essentially Free, shall never be forced nor be forceable by any power. Not even the devil himself can lead a man into sin till he consents. Were it not so, how could God judge the world?

#### Verse 11

If they say, Come with us - From all accounts, this is precisely the way in which the workers of iniquity form their partisans, and constitute their marauding societies to the present day.

Let us lay wait for blood - Let us rob and murder.

Let us lurk privily - Let us lie in ambush for our prey.

#### Verse 12

Let us swallow them up alive - Give them as hasty a death as if the earth were suddenly to swallow them up. This seems to refer to the destruction of a whole village. Let us destroy man, woman, and child; and then we may seize on and carry away the whole of their property, and the booty will be great.

#### Verse 14

Cast in thy lot - Be a frater conjuratus, a sworn brother, and thou shalt have an equal share of all the spoil. Common sense must teach us that the words here used are such as must be spoken when a gang of cutthroats, pickpockets, etc., are associated together.

#### Verse 16

For their feet run to evil - The whole of this verse is wanting in the Septuagint, and in the Arabic.

#### Verse 17

Surely in vain the net is spread in the sight of any bird - This is a proverb of which the wise man here makes a particular use; and the meaning does not seem as difficult as some imagine. The wicked are represented as lurking privily for the innocent. It is in this way alone that they can hope to destroy them and take their substance; for if their designs were known, proper precautions would be taken against them; for it would be vain to spread the net in the sight of those birds which men wish to ensnare. Attend therefore to my counsels, and they shall never be able to ensnare thee.

#### Verse 18

They lay wait for their own blood - I believe it is the innocent who are spoken of here, for whose blood and lives these lay wait and lurk privily; certainly not their own, by any mode of construction.

#### Verse 19

Which taketh away the life - A covetous man is in effect, and in the sight of God, a murderer; he wishes to get all the gain that can accrue to any or all who are in the same business that he follows - no matter to him how many families starve in consequence. This is the very case with him who sets up shop after shop in different parts of the same town or neighborhood, in which he carries on the same business, and endeavors to undersell others in the same trade, that he may get all into his own hand.

#### Verse 20

Wisdom crieth - Here wisdom is again personified, as it is frequently, throughout this book; where nothing is meant but the teachings given to man, either by Divine revelation or the voice of the Holy Spirit in the heart. And this voice of wisdom is opposed to the seducing language of the wicked mentioned above. This voice is everywhere heard, in public, in private, in the streets, and in the house. Common sense, universal experience, and the law of justice written on the heart, as well as the law of God, testify against rapine and wrong of every kind.

#### Verse 22

Ye simple ones -  $\text{x}\text{æ}\text{x}^{\text{a}}\text{x}^{\text{TM}}\text{x}^{\bullet}$  (pethayim), ye who have been seduced and deceived. See on Proverbs 1:4 (note).

#### Verse 23

Turn you at my reproof -  $\text{x}\text{œ}\text{x}^{\text{a}}\text{x}^{\text{TM}}\text{x}^{\text{TM}}$  (lethochacti), at my convincing mode of arguing; attend to my demonstrations. This is properly the meaning of the original word.

I will pour out my spirit unto you -  $\text{â}\text{œ}\text{el}$  wil expresse my mynde unto you;  $\text{â}\text{œ}$  Coverdale. Loo I shall bryngen to you my Spirit; Old MS. Bible. If you will hear, ye shall have ample instruction.

#### Verse 24

Because I have called - These and the following words appear to be spoken of the persons who are described, Proverbs 1:11-19, who have refused to return from their evil ways till arrested by the hand of justice; and here the wise man points out their deplorable state.

They are now about to suffer according to the demands of the law, for their depredations. They now wish they had been guided by wisdom, and had chosen the fear of the Lord; but it is too late: die they must, for their crimes are proved against them, and justice knows nothing of mercy.

This, or something like this, must be the wise man's meaning; nor can any thing spoken here be considered as applying or applicable to the eternal state of the persons in question, much less to the case of any man convinced of sin, who is crying to God for mercy. Such persons as the above, condemned to die, may call upon justice for pardon, and they may do this early, earnestly; but they will call in vain. But no poor penitent sinner on this side of eternity can call upon God early, or seek him through Christ Jesus earnestly for the pardon of his sins, without being heard. Life is the time of probation, and while it lasts the vilest of the vile is within the reach of mercy. It is only in eternity that the state is irreversibly fixed, and where that which was guilty must be guilty still. But let none harden his heart because of this longsuffering of God, for if he die in his sin, where God is he shall never come. And when once shut up in the unquenchable fire, he will not pray for mercy, as he shall clearly see and feel that the hope of his redemption is entirely cut off.

#### Verse 27

Your destruction cometh as a whirlwind - כְּסִוְפָה (kesuphah), as the all-prostrating blast. Sense and sound are here well expressed. Suphah here is the gust of wind.

#### Verse 29

They hated knowledge - This argues the deepest degree of intellectual and moral depravity.

#### Verse 32

For the turning away of the simple - This difficult place seems to refer to such a case as we term turning king's evidence; where an accomplice saves his own life by impeaching the rest of his gang. This is called his turning or repentance, מְשֻׁבָּה (meshubah); and he was the most likely to turn, because he was of the מְשֻׁבָּיִם (pethayim), seduced or deceived persons. And this evidence was given against them when they were in their prosperity, שְׁלָוָה (shalvah), their security, enjoying the fruits of their depredations; and being thus in a state of fancied security, they were the more easily taken and brought to justice.

#### Verse 33

But whoso hearkeneth unto me shall dwell safely - The man who hears the voice of wisdom in preference to the enticements of the wicked. He shall dwell in safety, יִשְׁכַּן בְּטָחָא (yishkan betach), he shall inhabit safety itself; he shall be completely safe and secure; and shall be quiet from the fear of evil, having a full consciousness of his own innocence and God's protection. Coverdale translates, "And have ynough without eney feare of evell." What the just man has he got honestly; and he has the blessing of God upon it. It is the reverse with the thief, the knave, the cheat, and the extortioner: Male parta pejus dilabuntur; "all gotten, worse spent."