

Adam Clarke:

Introduction

Of the benefit of instruction, and the cultivation of piety. The virtuous woman. The different lot of the just and unjust. The humane man. The industrious man. The fool and the wise man. The uncharitable. The excellence of the righteous. The slothful is in want. Righteousness leads to life, etc.

Verse 1

Whoso loveth instruction - מִסָּר (musar), discipline or correction, loves knowledge; for correction is the way to knowledge.

But he that hateth reproof is brutish - בָּאָר (baar), he is a bear; and expects no more benefit from correction than the ox does from the goad.

Verse 2

A good man obtaineth favor - First, it is God who makes him good; for every child of Adam is bad till the grace of God changes his heart. Secondly, while he walks in the path of obedience he increases in goodness, and consequently in the favor of the Lord.

Verse 3

A man shall not be established by wickedness - Evil is always variable: it has no fixed principle, except the root that is in the human heart; and even that is ever assuming new forms. Nothing is permanent but goodness; and that is unchangeable, because it comes from God. The produce of goodness is permanent, because it has God's blessing in it: the fruit of wickedness, or the property procured by wickedness, is transitory, because it has God's curse in it. The righteous has his root in God; and therefore he shall not be moved.

Verse 4

A virtuous woman is a crown to her husband - עֲשֵׂת חַיִּיל (esheth chayil), a strong woman. Our word virtue (virtus) is derived from vir, a man; and as man is the noblest of God's creatures, virtue expresses what is becoming to man; what is noble, courageous, and dignified: and as vir, a man, comes from vis, power or strength; so it implies what is strong and vigorous in principle: and as in uncivilized life strength and courage were considered the very highest, because apparently the most necessary, of all virtues; hence the term itself might have become the denomination of all excellent moral qualities; and is now applied to whatever constitutes the system of morality and moral duties. In some parts of the world, however, where arts and sciences have made little progress, strength is one of the first qualifications of a wife, where the labors of the field are appointed to them. It is not an uncommon sight in different parts of Africa, to see the wives (queens) of the kings and chiefs going out in the morning to the plantations, with their mattock in their hand, and their youngest child on their back; and when arrived at the ground, lay the young prince or princess upon the earth, which when weary of lying on one side, will roll itself on the other, and thus continue during the course of the day, without uttering a single whimper, except at the intervals in which its mother gives it suck; she being employed all the while in such labor as we in Europe generally assign to our horses. In these cases, the strong wife is the highest acquisition; and is a crown to her husband, though he be king of Bonny or Calabar. It is certain that in ancient times the women in Judea did some of the severest work in the fields, such as drawing water from the wells, and watering the flocks, etc. On this account, I think, the words may be taken literally; and especially when we add another consideration, that a woman healthy, and of good muscular powers, is the most likely to produce and properly rear up a healthy offspring; and children of this kind are a crown to their parents.

Is as rottenness in his bones - Does not this refer to a woman irregular in her manners, who by her incontinence not only maketh her husband ashamed, but contracts and communicates such diseases as bring rottenness into the bones? I think so. And I think this was the view taken of the text by Coverdale, who translates thus: "A steadfast woman is a crowne unto her hussbonde: but she that behaveth herself dishonestly is a corruption in his bones."

Verse 7

The wicked are overthrown - Seldom does God give such a long life or numerous offspring.

But the house of the righteous shall stand - God blesses their progeny, and their families continue long in the earth; whereas the wicked seldom have many generations in a direct line. This is God's mercy, that the entail of iniquity may be in some sort cut off, so that the same vices may not be strengthened by successive

generations. For generally the bad root produces not only a bad plant, but one worse than itself.

Verse 9

He that is despised, and hath a servant - I believe the Vulgate gives the true sense of this verse: *Melior est pauper, et sufficiens sibi; quam gloriosus, et indigens pane.*

“Better is the poor man who provides for himself, than the proud who is destitute of bread.” The versions in general agree in this sense. This needs no comment. There are some who, through pride of birth, etc., would rather starve, than put their hands to menial labor. Though they may be lords, how much to be preferred is the simple peasant, who supports himself and family by the drudgery of life!

Verse 10

A righteous man regardeth the life of his beast - One principal characteristic of a holy man is mercy: cruelty is unknown to him; and his benevolence extends to the meanest of the brute creation. Pity rules the heart of a pious man; he can do nothing that is cruel. He considers what is best for the comfort, ease health, and life of the beast that serves him, and he knows that God himself careth for oxen: and one of the ten commandments provides a seventh part of time to be allotted for the rest of laboring beasts as well as for man.

I once in my travels met with the Hebrew of this clause on the sign board of a public inn: *אדם צדיק יחזק בבהמתו* (yodea tsaddik nephesh behemto). “A righteous man considereth the life of his beast;” which, being very appropriate, reminded me that I should feed my horse.

The tender mercies of the wicked are cruel - *אכזרי* (achzari), are violent, without mercy, ruthless. The wicked, influenced by Satan, can show no other disposition than what is in their master. If they appear at any time merciful, it is a cloak which they use to cover purposes of cruelty. To accomplish its end, iniquity will assume any garb, speak mercifully, extol benevolence, sometimes even give to the poor! But, *timeo Danaos, et dona ferentes*. The cry of fire at midnight, provided it be in another’s dwelling, is more congenial to their souls than the; cry of mercy. Look at the human fiends, “out-heroding Herod,” in horse races, bruising matches, and cock fights, and in wars for the extension of territory, and the purposes of ambition. The hell is yet undescribed, that is suited to such monsters in cruelty.

Verse 11

He that tilleth his land - God’s blessing will be in the labor of the honest agriculturist.

But he that followeth vain persons - He who, while he should be cultivating his ground, preparing for a future crop, or reaping his harvest, associates with fowlers, coursers of hares, hunters of foxes, or those engaged in any champaign amusements, is void of understanding; and I have known several such come to beggary.

To this verse the Septuagint add the following clause: *ἀνὴρ ἐστὶν ἐν οἴκῳ διὰ τὴν ἐξουσίαν αὐτοῦ* (occurwmasi kataleiqei atimian). “He who is a boon companion in banquets, shall leave dishonor in his own fortresses.” This has been copied by the Vulgate and the Arabic. That is The man who frequents the ale-house enriches that, while he impoverishes his own habitation.

Verse 12

The wicked desireth the net of evil men - They applaud their ways, and are careful to imitate them in their wiles.

Verse 13

The wicked is snared by the transgression of his lips - A man who deals in lies and false oaths will sooner or later be found out to his own ruin. There is another proverb as true as this: A liar had need of a good memory; for as the truth is not in him, he says and unsays, and often contradicts himself.

Verse 16

A fool’s wrath is presently known - We have a proverb very like this, and it will serve for illustration: - A fool’s bolt is soon shot.

A weak-minded man has no self-government; he is easily angered, and generally speaks whatever comes first to his mind.

Verse 18

There is that speaketh - Instead of *אדם צדיק* (boteh), blabbing out, blustering, several MSS. have *אדם צדיק* (boteach), Trusting: and instead of *אדם צדיק* (kemadkeroth), As the piercings, seven MSS., with the Complutensian Polyglot, have *אדם צדיק* (bemadkeroth), In the piercings. “There is that trusteth in the piercings of a sword: but the tongue of the wise is health.” But I suppose the former to be the true reading.

Verse 19

A lying tongue is but for a moment - Truth stands for ever; because its foundation is indestructible: but falsehood may soon be detected; and, though it gain credit for a while, it had that credit because it was supposed to be truth.

Verse 21

There shall no evil happen to the just - No, for all things work together for good to them that love God. Whatever occurs to a righteous man God turns to his advantage. But, on the other hand, the wicked are filled with mischief: they are hurt, grieved, and wounded, by every occurrence; and nothing turns to their profit.

Verse 23

A prudent man concealeth knowledge - â€œIf a fool hold his peace he may pass for a wise man.â€ I have known men of some learning, so intent on immediately informing a company how well cultivated their minds were, that they have passed either for insignificant pedants or stupid asses.

Verse 24

The hand of the diligent shall bear rule - And why? because by his own industry he is independent; and every such person is respected wherever found.

Verse 25

Heaviness in the heart of a man maketh it stoop - Sorrow of heart, hopeless love, or a sense of Godâ€™s displeasure - these prostrate the man, and he becomes a child before them.

But a good word maketh it glad - A single good or favorable word will remove despondency; and that word, â€œSon, be of good cheer, thy sins are forgiven thee,â€ will instantly remove despair.

Verse 26

The righteous is more excellent than his neighbor - That is, if the neighbor be a wicked man. The spirit of the proverb lies here: The Poor righteous man is more excellent than his sinful neighbor, though affluent and noble. The Syriac has it, â€œThe righteous deviseth good to his neighbor.â€ A late commentator has translated it, â€œThe righteous explore their pastures.â€ How xžx"xçx"x can be translated Their pastures I know not; but none of the versions understood it in this way. The Vulgate is rather singular: Qui negligit damnum propter amicum, justus est. â€œHe who neglects or sustains a loss for the sake of his friend, is a just man.â€ The Septuagint is insufferable: â€œThe well-instructed righteous man shall be his own friend.â€ One would hope these translators meant not exclusively; he should love his neighbor as himself.

Verse 27

The slothful man roasteth not that which he took in hunting - Because he is a slothful man, he does not hunt for prey; therefore gets none, and cannot roast, that he may eat. There is some obscurity in the original on which the versions cast little light. Coverdale translates the whole verse thus: â€œA discreatfull man schal fynde no vantage: but he that is content with what he hath, is more worth than golde.â€ My old MS. Bible: The gylful man schal not fynd wynnyng: and the substance of a man schal ben the pris of gold.

By translating hymr remiyah the deceitful, instead of the slothful man, which appears to be the genuine meaning of the word, we may obtain a good sense, as the Vulgate has done: â€œThe deceitful man shall not find gain; but the substance of a (just) man shall be the price of gold.â€ But our common version, allowing hymr remiyah to be translated fraudulent, which is its proper meaning, gives the best sense: â€œThe fraudulent man roasteth not that which he took in hunting,â€ the justice of God snatching from his mouth what he had acquired unrighteously.

But the substance of a diligent man - One who by honest industry acquires all his property - is precious, because it has the blessing of God in it.

Verse 28

In the way of righteousness is life - x—x™x™x™ (chaiyim), lives; life temporal, and life eternal.

And in the pathway thereof there is no death - Not only do the general precepts and promises of God lead to life eternal, and promote life temporal; but every duty, every act of faith, patience of hope, and labor of love, though requiring much self-abasement, self-denial, and often an extension of corporal strength, all lead to life. For in every case, in every particular, â€œthe path of duty is the way of safety.â€ The latter clause is only a repetition of the sense of the former.