

CHAPTER 27

<17> PROVERBS 27:1

MISCELLANEOUS MAXIMS

Here is,

1. A good caution against presuming upon time to come: *Boast not thyself, no, not of to-morrow*, much less of many days or years to come. This does not forbid preparing for to-morrow, but presuming upon to-morrow. We must not promise ourselves the continuance of our lives and comforts till to-morrow, but speak of it with submission to the will of God and as those who with good reason are kept at uncertainty about it. We must not *take thought for the morrow* (<405> Matthew 6:34), but we must cast our care concerning it upon God. See <503> James 4:13-15. We must not put off the great work of conversion, that one thing needful, till to-morrow, as if we were sure of it, *but to-day, while it is called to-day*, hear God's voice.

2. A good consideration, upon which this caution is grounded: *We know not what a day may bring forth*, what event may be in the teeming womb, of time; it is a secret till it is born, <2115> Ecclesiastes 11:5. A little time may produce considerable changes, and such as we little think of. *We know not what the present day may bring forth*; the evening must commend it. *Nescis quid serus vesper vehat — Thou knowest not what the close of evening may bring with it.* God has wisely kept us in the dark concerning future events, and reserved to himself the knowledge of them, as a flower of the crown, that he may train us up in a dependence upon himself and a continued readiness for every event, <407> Acts 1:7.

<17> PROVERBS 27:2

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Note,

1. We must do that which is commendable, for which even strangers may praise us. Our *light* must *shine before men*, and we must do good works that may be seen, though we must not do them on purpose that they may be seen. Let our own works be such as will praise us, even *in the gates*, ~~1008~~Philippians 4:8.

2. When we have done it we must not commend ourselves, for that is an evidence of pride, folly, and self-love, and a great lessening to a man's reputation. Every one will be forward to run him down that cries himself up. There may be a just occasion for us to vindicate ourselves, but it does not become us to applaud ourselves. *Proprio laus sordet in ore* — *Self-praise defiles the mouth*.

~~1017~~PROVERBS 27:3-4

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These two verses show the intolerable mischief,

1. Of ungoverned passion. The wrath of a fool, who when he is provoked cares not what he says and does, is more grievous than a great stone or a load of sand. It lies heavily upon himself. Those who have no command of their passions do themselves even sink under the load of them. The wrath of a fool lies heavily upon those he is enraged at, to whom, in his fury, he will be in danger of doing some mischief. It is therefore our wisdom not to give provocation to a fool, but, if he be in a passion, to get out of his way.

2. Of rooted malice, which is as much worse than the former as coals of juniper are worse than a fire of thorns. *Wrath* (it is true) *is cruel*, and does many a barbarous thing, *and anger is outrageous*; but a secret enmity at the person of another, an envy at his prosperity, and a desire of revenge for some injury or affront, are much more mischievous. One may avoid a sudden heat, as David escaped Saul's javelin, but when it grows, as Saul's did, to a settled envy, there is no *standing before it*; it will pursue; it will overtake. He that grieves at the good of another will be still contriving to do him hurt, and will keep his anger for ever.

~~1275~~ PROVERBS 27:5-6

MISCELLANEOUS MAXIMS

Note,

1. It is good for us to be reprov'd, and told of our faults, by our friends. If true love in the heart has but zeal and courage enough to show itself in dealing plainly with our friends, and reprov'ing them for what they say and do amiss, this is really *better*, not only than secret hatred (as ~~1287~~ Leviticus 19:17), but *than secret love*, that love to our neighbours which does not show itself in this good fruit, which compliments them in their sins, to the prejudice of their souls. *Faithful are the reproofs of a friend*, though for the present they are painful as *wounds*. It is a sign that our friends are faithful indeed if, in love to our souls, they will not suffer sin upon us, nor let us alone in it. The physician's care is to cure the patient's disease, not to please his palate.

2. It is dangerous to be caressed and flattered by *an enemy*, whose *kisses are deceitful*. We can take no pleasure in them because we can put no confidence in them (Joab's kiss and Judas's were deceitful), and therefore we have need to stand upon our guard, that we be not deluded by them; they are to be deprecated. Some read it: *The Lord deliver us from an enemy's kisses, from lying lips, and from a deceitful tongue.*

~~1276~~ PROVERBS 27:7

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Solomon here, as often in this book, shows that the poor have in some respects the advantage of the rich; for,

1. They have a better relish of their enjoyments than the rich have. Hunger is the best sauce. Coarse fare, with a good appetite to it has a sensible pleasantness in it, which those are strangers to whose hearts are *overcharged with surfeiting*. Those that fare sumptuously every day nauseate even delicate food, as the Israelites did the quails; whereas those that have no more than their necessary food, though it be such as *the full*

soul would call *bitter*, to them it *is sweet*; they eat it with pleasure, digest it, and are refreshed by it.

2. They are more thankful for their enjoyments: *The hungry* will bless God for bread and water, while those that are *full* think the greatest dainties and varieties scarcely worth giving thanks for. The virgin Mary seems to refer to this when she says (Luke 1:53), *The hungry*, who know how to value God's blessings, *are filled with good things*, but *the rich*, who despise them, are justly *sent empty away*.

PROVERBS 27:8

MISCELLANEOUS MAXIMS

Note,

1. There are many that do not know when they are well off, but are uneasy with their present condition, and given to change. God, in his providence, has appointed them a place fit for them and has made it comfortable to them; but they affect unsettledness; they love to wander; they are glad of a pretence to go abroad, and do not care for staying long at a place; they needlessly absent themselves from their own work and care, and meddle with that which belongs not to them.

2. Those that thus desert the post assigned to them are like *a bird that wanders from her nest*. It is an instance of their folly; they are like a silly bird; they are always wavering, like the wandering bird that hops from bough to bough and rests nowhere. It is unsafe; the bird that wanders is exposed; a man's place is his castle; he that quits it makes himself an easy prey to the fowler. When the bird wanders from her nest the eggs and young ones there are neglected. Those that love to be abroad leave their work at home undone. *Let every man therefore, in the calling wherein he is called, therein abide, therein abide with God.*

~~379~~ PROVERBS 27:9-10

MISCELLANEOUS MAXIMS

Here is,

1. A charge given to be faithful and constant to our friends, our old friends, to keep up an intimacy with them, and to be ready to do them all the offices that lie in our power. It is good to have a friend, a bosom-friend, whom we can be free with, and with whom we may communicate counsels. It is not necessary that this friend should be a relation, or any way akin to us, though it is happiest when, among those who are so, we find one fit to make a friend of. Peter and Andrew were brethren, so were James and John; yet Solomon frequently distinguishes between a friend and a brother. But it is advisable to choose a friend among our neighbours who live near us, that acquaintance may be kept up and kindnesses the more frequently interchanged. It is good also to have a special respect to those who have been friends to our family: “*Thy own friend*, especially if he have been *thy father's friend*, forsake not; fail not both to serve him and to use him, as there is occasion. He is a tried friend; he knows thy affairs; he has a particular concern for thee; therefore be advised by him.” It is a duty we owe to our parents, when they are gone, to love their friends and consult with them. Solomon's son undid himself by forsaking the counsel of his father's friends.

2. A good reason given why we should thus value true friendship and be choice of it.

(1.) Because of the pleasure of it. There is a great deal of *sweetness* in conversing and consulting with a cordial friend. It is like *ointment and perfume*, which are very grateful to the smell, and exhilarate the spirits. It *rejoices the heart*; the burden of care is made lighter by unbosoming ourselves to our friend, and it is a great satisfaction to us to have his sentiments concerning our affairs. *The sweetness of friendship* lies not in hearty mirth, and hearty laughter, but in *hearty counsel*, faithful advice, sincerely given and without flattery, *by counsel of the soul* (so the word is), counsel which reaches the case, and comes to the heart, counsel about soul-concerns, ~~386~~ Psalm 66:16. We should reckon that the most pleasant conversation which is about spiritual things, and promotes the prosperity of the soul.

(2.) Because of the profit and advantage of it, especially in a *day of calamity*. We are here advised not to go into a *brother's house*, not to expect relief from a kinsman merely for kindred-sake, for the obligation of that commonly goes little further than calling cousin and fails when it comes to the trial of a real kindness, but rather to apply ourselves to our neighbours, who are at hand, and will be ready to help us at an exigence. It is wisdom to oblige them by being neighbourly, and we shall have the benefit of it in distress, by finding them so to us, ^{<171>}Proverbs 18:24.

^{<171>}PROVERBS 27:11

MISCELLANEOUS MAXIMS

Children are here exhorted to be wise and good,

1. That they may be a comfort to their parents and may *make their hearts glad*, even when *the evil days come*, and so recompense them for their care, ^{<175>}Proverbs 23:15.

2. That they may be a credit to them: “*That I may answer him that reproaches me* with having been over-strict and severe in bringing up my children, and having taken a wrong method with them in restraining them from the liberties which other young people take. *My son, be wise*, and then it will appear, in the effect, that I went the wisest way to work with my children.” Those that have been blessed with a religious education should in every thing conduct themselves so as to be a credit to their education and to silence those who say, *A young saint, an old devil*; and to prove the contrary, *A young saint, an old angel*.

^{<171>}PROVERBS 27:12

MISCELLANEOUS MAXIMS

This we had before, ^{<173>}Proverbs 22:3. Note,

1. Evil may be foreseen. Where there is temptation, it is easy to foresee that if we thrust ourselves into it there will be sin, and as easy to foresee that if we venture upon the evil of sin there will follow the evil of

punishment; and, commonly, God warns before he wounds, having *set watchmen over us*, ^{<2417>}Jeremiah 6:17.

2. It will be well or ill with us according as we do or do not improve the foresight we have of evil before us: The *prudent man, foreseeing the evil*, forecasts accordingly, *and hides himself, but the simple* is either so dull that he does not foresee it or so wilful and slothful that he will take no care to avoid it, and so he *passes on* securely *and is punished*. We do well for ourselves when we provide for hereafter.

^{<2173>}PROVERBS 27:13

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This also we had before, ^{<2116>}Proverbs 20:16.

1. It shows who those are that are hastening to poverty, those that have so little consideration as to be bound for every body that will ask them and those that are given to women. Such as these will take up money as far as ever their credit will go, but they will certainly cheat their creditors at last, nay, they are cheating them all along. An honest man may be made a beggar, but he is not honest that makes himself one.

2. It advises us to be so discreet in ordering our affairs as not to lend money to those who are manifestly wasting their estates, unless they give very good security for it. Foolish lending is injustice to our families. He does not say, “Get another to be bound with him,” for he that makes himself a common voucher will have those to be his security who are as insolvent as himself; therefore *take his garment*.

^{<2174>}PROVERBS 27:14

MISCELLANEOUS MAXIMS

Note,

1. It is a great folly to be extravagant in praising even the best of our friends and benefactors. It is our duty to give every one his due praise, to applaud those who excel in knowledge, virtue, and usefulness, and to

acknowledge the kindnesses we have received with thankfulness; but to do this *with a loud voice, rising early in the morning*, to be always harping on this string, in all companies, even to our friend's face, or so as that he may be sure to hear it, to do it studiously, as we do that which we rise early to, to magnify the merits of our friend above measure and with hyperboles, is fulsome, and nauseous, and savours of hypocrisy and design. Praising men for what they have done is only to get more out of them; and every body concludes the parasite hopes to be well paid for his panegyric or epistle dedicatory. We must not give that praise to our friend which is due to God only, as some think is intimated in *rising early* to do it; for in the morning God is to be praised. We must not *make too much haste to praise men* (so some understand it), not cry up men too soon for their abilities and performances, but let them first be proved; lest they be lifted up with pride, and laid to sleep in idleness.

2. It is a greater folly to be fond of being ourselves extravagantly praised. A wise man rather counts it *a curse*, and a reflection upon him, not only designed to pick his pocket, but which may really turn to his prejudice. Modest praises (as a great man observes) invite such as are present to add to the commendation, but immodest immoderate praises tempt them to detract rather, and to censure one that they hear over-commended. And, besides, over-praising a man makes him the object of envy; every man puts in for a share of reputation, and therefore reckons himself injured if another monopolize it or have more given him than his share. And the greatest danger of all is that it is a temptation to pride; men are apt to think of themselves above what is meet when others speak of them above what is meet. See how careful blessed Paul was not to be over-valued, ⁴⁷¹⁵2 Corinthians 12:6.

⁴⁷¹⁵PROVERBS 27:15-16

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Here, as before, Solomon laments the case of him that has a peevish passionate wife, that is continually chiding, and making herself and all about her uneasy.

1. It is a grievance that there is no avoiding, for it is like *a continual dropping in a very rainy day*. The contentions of a neighbour may be like

a sharp shower, troublesome for the time, yet, while it lasts, one may take shelter; but *the contentions of a wife* are like a constant soaking rain, for which there is no remedy but patience See ~~203~~ Proverbs 19:13.

2. It is a grievance that there is no concealing. A wise man would hide it if he could, for the sake both of his own and his wife's reputation, but he cannot, any more than he can conceal the noise of the wind when it blows or the smell of a strong perfume. Those that are froward and brawling will proclaim their own shame, even when their friends, in kindness to them, would cover it.

~~207~~ PROVERBS 27:17

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This intimates both the pleasure and the advantage of conversation. One man is nobody; nor will poring upon a book in a corner accomplish a man as the reading and studying of men will. Wise and profitable discourse sharpens men's wits; and those that have ever so much knowledge may by conference have something added to them. It sharpens men's looks, and, by cheering the spirits, puts a briskness and liveliness into the countenance, and gives a man such an air as shows he is pleased himself and makes him pleasing to those about him. Good men's graces are sharpened by converse with those that are good, and bad men's lusts and passions are sharpened by converse with those that are bad, as iron is sharpened by its like, especially by the file. Men are filed, made smooth, and bright, and fit for business (who were rough, and dull, and inactive), by conversation. This is designed,

1. To recommend to us this expedient for sharpening ourselves, but with a caution to take heed whom we choose to converse with, because the influence upon us is so great either for the better or for the worse.

2. To direct us what we must have in our eye in conversation, namely to improve both others and ourselves, not to pass away time or banter one another, but to *provoke one another to love and to good works* and so to make one another wiser and better.

PROVERBS 27:18

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This is designed to encourage diligence, faithfulness, and constancy, even in mean employments. Though the calling be laborious and despicable, yet those who keep to it will find there is something to be got by it.

1. Let not a poor gardener, who *keeps the fig-tree*, be discouraged; though it require constant care and attendance to nurse up fig-trees, and, when they have grown to maturity, to keep them in good order, and gather the figs in their season, yet he shall be paid for his pains: He *shall eat the fruit* of it, ⁴⁸⁹⁷1 Corinthians 9:7.

2. Nay, let not a poor servant think himself incapable of thriving and being preferred; for if he be diligent in *waiting on his master*, observant of him and obedient to him, if *he keep his master* (so the word is), if he do all he can for the securing of his person and reputation and take care that his estate be not wasted or damaged, such a one *shall be honoured*, shall not only get a good word, but be preferred and rewarded. God is a Master who has engaged to put an honour on those that serve him faithfully, ⁴⁹²⁶John 12:26.

PROVERBS 27:19

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This shows us that there is a way,

1. Of knowing ourselves. As the water is a looking-glass in which we may see our faces by reflection, so there are mirrors by which the *heart of a man* is discovered to *a man*, that is, to himself. Let a man examine his own conscience, his thoughts, affections, and intentions. Let him behold his *natural face in the glass* of the divine law (⁵⁰²³James 1:23), and he may discern what kind of man he is and what is his true character, which it will be of great use to every man rightly to know.

2. Of knowing one another by ourselves; for, as there is a similitude between the face of a man and the reflection of it in the water, so there is

between one man's heart and another's for God has fashioned men's hearts alike; and in many cases we may judge of others by ourselves, which is one of the foundations on which that rule is built of doing to others as we would be done by, ^{<123>}Exodus 23:9 *Nihil est unum uni tam simile, tam par, quam omnes inter nosmet ipsos sumus. Sui nemo ipse tam similis quam omnes sunt omnium* — *No one thing is so like another as man is to man. No person is so like himself as each person is to all besides. Cic. de Legib. lib.*

1. One corrupt heart is like another, and so is one sanctified heart, for the former bears the same image of the earthy, the latter the same image of the heavenly.

^{<171>}PROVERBS 27:20

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Two things are here said to be insatiable, and they are two things near of kin — death and sin.

1. Death is insatiable. The first death, the second death, both are so. The grave is not clogged with the multitude of dead bodies that are daily thrown into it, but is still an *open sepulchre*, and cries, *Give, give*. Hell also has enlarged itself, and still has room for the damned spirits that are committed to that prison. *Tophet is deep and large*, ^{<213>}Isaiah 30:33.

2. Sin is insatiable: *The eyes of man are never satisfied*, nor the appetites of the carnal mind towards profit or pleasure. *The eye is not satisfied with seeing*, nor is he the *loves silver satisfied with silver*. Men labour for that which surfeits, but satisfies not; nay, it is dissatisfying; but satisfies not; nay, it is dissatisfying; such a perpetual uneasiness have men justly been doomed to ever since our first parents were not satisfied with all the trees of Eden, but they must meddle with the forbidden tree. Those whose eyes are ever toward the Lord in him are satisfied, and shall for ever be so.

~~3171~~ PROVERBS 27:21

MISCELLANEOUS MAXIMS

This gives us a touchstone by which we may try ourselves. Silver and gold are tried by putting them into the furnace and fining-pot; so is man tried by praising him. Let him be extolled and preferred, and then he will show himself what he is.

1. If a man be made, by the applause that is given him, proud, conceited, and scornful, — if he take the glory to himself which he should transmit to God, as Herod did, — if, the more he is praised, the more careless he is of what he says and does, — if he *lie in bed till noon* because *his name is up*, thereby it will appear that he is a vain foolish man, and a man who, though he be praised, has nothing in him truly praise-worthy.

2. If, on the contrary, a man is made by his praise more thankful to God, more respectful to his friends, more watchful against every thing that may blemish his reputation, more diligent to improve himself, and do good to others, that he may answer the expectations of his friends from him, by this it will appear that he is a wise and good man. He has a good temper of mind who knows how to pass by evil report and good report, and is still the same, ~~4068~~ 2 Corinthians 6:8.

~~3172~~ PROVERBS 27:22

MISCELLANEOUS MAXIMS

Solomon had said (~~3125~~ Proverbs 22:15), *The foolishness which is bound in the heart of a child may be driven out by the rod of correction*, for then the mind is to be moulded, the vicious habits not having taken root; but here he shows that, if it be not done then, it will be next to impossible to do it afterwards; if the disease be inveterate, there is a danger of its being incurable. *Can the Ethiopian change his skin?* Observe,

1. Some are so bad that rough and severe methods must be used with them, after gentle means have been tried in vain; they must be *brayed in a mortar*. God will take this way with them by his judgments; the magistrates must take this way with them by the rigour of the law. Force

must be used with those that will not be ruled by reason, and love, and their own interest.

2. Some are so incorrigibly bad that even those rough and severe methods do not answer the end, their *foolishness will not depart from them*, so fully are their *hearts set in them to do evil*; they are often under the rod and yet not humbled, in the furnace and yet not refined, but, like Ahaz, trespass yet more (¹⁸²²2 Chronicles 28:22); and what remains then but that they should be rejected as reprobate silver?

¹⁷²³PROVERBS 27:23-27

THE REWARD OF PRUDENCE

Here is,

I. A command given us to be diligent in our callings. It is directed to husbandmen and shepherds, and those that deal in cattle, but it is to be extended to all other lawful callings; whatever our business is, within doors or without, we must apply our minds to it. This command intimates,

1. That we ought to have some business to do in this world and not to live in idleness.
2. We ought rightly and fully to understand our business, and know what we have to do, and not meddle with that which we do not understand.
3. We ought to have an eye to it ourselves, and not turn over all the care of it to others. We should, with our own eyes, inspect the *state of our flocks*, it is the master's eye that makes them fat.
4. We must be discreet and considerate in the management of our business, *know the state* of things, and *look well* to them, that nothing may be lost, no opportunity let slip, but every thing done in proper time and order, and so as to turn to the best advantage.
5. We must be *diligent* and take pains; not only sit down and contrive, but be up and doing: "Set thy heart to thy herds, as one in care; lay thy hands, lay thy bones, to thy business."

II. The reasons to enforce this command. Consider,

1. The uncertainty of worldly wealth (v. 24): *Riches are not for ever.*

(1.) Other riches are not so durable as these are: “*Look well to thy flocks and herds, thy estate in the country and the stock upon that, for these are staple commodities, which, in a succession, will be for ever, whereas riches in trade and merchandise will not be so; the crown itself may perhaps not be so sure to thy family as thy flocks and herds.*”

(2.) Even these riches will go to decay if they be not well looked after. If a man had *an abbey* (as we say), and were slothful and wasteful, he might make an end of it. Even the crown and the revenues of it, if care be not taken, will suffer damage, nor will it *continue to every generation* without very good management. Though David had the crown entailed on his family, yet he *looked well to his flocks*, ^{<177>}1 Chronicles 27:29, 31.

2. The bounty and liberality of nature, or rather of the God of nature, and his providence (v. 25): *The hay appears.* In taking care of the *flocks and herds*,

(1.) “There needs no great labour, no ploughing or sowing; the food for them is the spontaneous product of the ground; thou hast nothing to do but to turn them into it in the summer, *when the grass shows itself*, and to *gather the herbs of the mountains* for them against winter. God has done his part; thou art ungrateful to him, and unjustly refuseth to serve his providence, if thou dost not do thine.”

(2.) “There is an opportunity to be observed and improved, a time when *the hay appears*; but, if thou let slip that time, thy flocks and herds will fare the worse for it. As for ourselves, so for our cattle, we ought, with the ant, to provide meat in summer.”

3. The profit of good husbandry in a family: “Keep thy sheep, and thy sheep will help to keep thee; thou shalt have food for thy children and servants, *goats' milk enough* (v. 27); and *enough is as good as a feast*. Thou shalt have raiment likewise: the *lambs' wool shall be for thy clothing*. Thou shalt have money to pay thy rent; the goats thou shalt have to sell shall be *the price of thy field*;” nay, as some understand it, “*Thou shalt become a purchaser*, and buy land to leave to thy children,” (v. 26). Note,

(1.) If we have food and raiment, and wherewithal to give every body his own, we have enough, and ought to be not only content, but thankful.

(2.) Masters of families must provide not only for themselves, but for their families, and see that their servants have a fitting maintenance.

(3.) Plain food and plain clothing, if they be but competent, are all we should aim at. “Reckon thyself well done to if thou be clothed with home-spun cloth with the fleece of thy own lambs, and fed with goats' milk; let that serve for thy food which serves for the *food of thy household and the maintenance of thy maidens*. Be not desirous of dainties, *far-fetched and dear-bought*.”

(4.) This should encourage us to be careful and industrious about our business, that that will bring in a sufficient maintenance for our families; we shall *eat the labour of our hands*.