

# CHAPTER 3

This chapter is one of the most excellent in all this book, both for argument to persuade us to be religious and for directions therein.

**I.** We must be constant to our duty because that is the way to be happy (v. 1-4).

**II.** We must live a life of dependence upon God because that is the way to be safe (v. 5).

**III.** We must keep up the fear of God because that is the way to be healthful (v. 7, 8).

**IV.** We must serve God with our estates because that is the way to be rich (v. 9, 10).

**V.** We must hear afflictions well because that is the way to get good by them (v. 11, 12).

**VI.** We must take pains to obtain wisdom because that is the way to gain her, and to gain by her (v. 13-20).

**VII.** We must always govern ourselves by the rules of wisdom, of right reason and religion, because that is the way to be always easy (v. 21-26).

**VIII.** We must do all the good we can, and no hurt, to our neighbours, because according as men are just or unjust, charitable or uncharitable, humble or haughty, accordingly they shall receive of God (v. 27-35). From all this it appears what a tendency religion has to make men both blessed and blessings.

## ~~III~~ PROVERBS 3:1-6

### COMMUNION CONFERRED BY WISDOM

We are here taught to live a life of communion with God; and without controversy great is this mystery of godliness, and of great consequence to us, and, as is here shown, will be of unspeakable advantage.

**I.** We must have a continual regard to God's precepts, v. 1, 2.

**1.** We must,

**(1.)** Fix God's law, and his commandments, as our rule, by which we will in every thing be ruled and to which we will yield obedience.

**(2.)** We must acquaint ourselves with them; for we cannot be said to forget that which we never knew.

**(3.)** We must remember them so that they may be ready to us whenever we have occasion to use them.

**(4.)** Our wills and affections must be subject to them and must in every thing conform to them. Not only our heads, but our hearts, must *keep God's commandments*; in them, as in the ark of the testimony, both the tables of the law must be deposited.

**2.** To encourage us to submit ourselves to all the restraints and injunctions of the divine law, we are assured (v. 2) that it is the certain way to long life and prosperity.

**(1.)** It is the way to be long-lived. God's commandments *shall add to us length of days*; to a good useful life on earth, they shall add an eternal life in heaven, *length of days for ever and ever*, <sup><214></sup>Psalm 21:4. God shall be our life and the length of our days, and that will be indeed long life, with an addition. But, because length of days may possibly become a burden and a trouble, it is promised,

**(2.)** That it shall prove the way to be easy too, so that even the days of old age shall not be evil days, but days in which thou shalt have pleasure: *Peace shall they be continually adding to thee*. As grace increases, peace shall increase; and *of the increase of Christ's government and peace*, in the heart as well as in the world, *there shall be no end*. *Great and growing peace have those that love the law*.

**II.** We must have a continual regard to God's promises, which go along with his precepts, and are to be received, and retained, with them (v. 3): *“Let not mercy and truth forsake thee*, God's mercy in promising, and his truth in performing. Do not forfeit these, but live up to them, and preserve thy interest in them; do not forget these, but live upon them, and take the comfort of them. *Bind them about thy neck*, as the most graceful ornament.” It is the greatest honour we are capable of in this world to have an interest in the mercy and truth of God. *“Write to them upon the table of*

*thy heart*, as dear to thee, thy portion, and most delightful entertainment; take a pleasure in applying them and thinking them over.” Or it may be meant of the mercy and truth which are our duty, piety and sincerity, charity towards men, fidelity towards God. Let these be fixed and commanding principles in thee. To encourage us to do this we are assured (v. 4) that this is the way to recommend ourselves both to our Creator and fellow-creatures: *So shalt thou find favour and good understanding.*

**1.** A good man seeks the favour of God in the first place, is ambitious of the honour of being accepted of the Lord, and he shall find that favour, and with it a good understanding; God will make the best of him, and put a favourable construction upon what he says and does. He shall be owned as one of Wisdom's children, and shall have praise with God, as one having that *good understanding* which is ascribed to all those *that do his commandments*.

**2.** He wishes to have favour with men also (as Christ had, <sup><15></sup>Luke 2:52), to be *accepted of the multitude of his brethren* (<sup><10></sup>Esther 10:3), and that he shall have; they shall understand him aright, and in his dealings with them he shall appear to be prudent, shall act intelligently and with discretion. *He shall have good success* (so some translate it), the common effect of good understanding.

**III.** We must have a continual regard to God's providence, must own and depend upon it in all our affairs, both by faith and prayer.

**1.** By faith. We must repose an entire confidence in the wisdom, power, and goodness of God, assuring ourselves of the extent of his providence to all the creatures and all their actions. We must therefore *trust in the Lord with all our hearts* (v. 5); we must believe that he is able to do what he will, wise to do what is best, and good, according to his promise, to do what is best for us, if we love him, and serve him. We must, with an entire submission and satisfaction, depend upon him to perform all things for us, and not *lean to our own understanding*, as if we could, by any forecast of our own, without God, help ourselves, and bring our affairs to a good issue. Those who know themselves cannot but find their own understanding to be a broken reed, which, if they lean to, will certainly fail them. In all our conduct we must be diffident of our own judgment, and confident of God's wisdom, power, and goodness, and therefore must

follow Providence and not force it. That often proves best which was least our own doing.

**2.** By prayer (v. 6): *In all thy ways acknowledge God.* We must not only in our judgment believe that there is an over-ruling hand of God ordering and disposing of us and all our affairs, but we must solemnly own it, and address ourselves to him accordingly. We must ask his leave, and not design any thing but what we are sure is lawful. We must ask his advice and beg direction from him, not only when the case is difficult (when we know not what to do, no thanks to us that we have our eyes up to him), but in every case, be it ever so plain, We must ask success of him, as those who know *the race is not to the swift.* We must refer ourselves to him as one from whom our judgment proceeds, and patiently, and with a holy indifferency, wait his award. *In all our ways* that prove direct, and fair, and pleasant, in which we gain our point to our satisfaction, we must acknowledge God with thankfulness. *In all our ways* that prove cross and uncomfortable, and that are hedged up with thorns, we must acknowledge God with submission. Our eye must be ever towards God; to him we must, in every thing, make our requests known, as Jephthah *uttered all his words before the Lord in Mizpeh,* <sup><small>viii></sup>Judges 11:11. For our encouragement to do this, it is promised, “*He shall direct thy paths,* so that thy way shall be safe and good and the issue happy at last.” Note, Those that put themselves under a divine guidance shall always have the benefit of it. God will give them that wisdom which is profitable to direct, so that they shall not turn aside into the by-paths of sin, and then will himself so wisely order the event that it shall be to their mind, or (which is equivalent) for their good. Those that faithfully follow the pillar of cloud and fire shall find that though it may lead them about it leads them the right way and will bring them to Canaan at last.

## ~~<small>ix>~~ PROVERBS 3:7-12

### CONSECRATION TO GOD

We have here before us three exhortations, each of them enforced with a good reason: —

**I.** We must live in a humble and dutiful subjection to God and his government (v. 7): “*Fear the Lord,* as your sovereign Lord and Master; be

ruled in every thing by your religion and subject to the divine will.” This must be,

**1.** A humble subjection: *Be not wise in thy own eyes.* Note, There is not a greater enemy to the power of religion, and the fear of God in the heart, than conceitedness of our own wisdom. Those that have an opinion of their own sufficiency think it below them, and a disparagement to them, to take their measures from, much more to hamper themselves with, religion's rules.

**2.** A dutiful subjection: *Fear the Lord, and depart from evil;* take heed of doing any thing to offend him and to forfeit his care. To *fear the Lord*, so as to *depart from evil*, is true *wisdom and understanding* (~~xxx~~ Job 28:28); those that have it are truly wise, but self-denyingly so, and not *wise in their own eyes*. For our encouragement thus to live in the fear of God it is here promised (v. 8) that it shall be as serviceable even to the outward man as our necessary food. It will be nourishing: *It shall be health to thy navel.* It will be strengthening: It shall be *marrow to thy bones*. The prudence, temperance, and sobriety, the calmness and composure of mind, and the good government of the appetites and passions, which religion teaches, tend very much not only to the health of the soul, but to a good habit of body, which is very desirable, and without which our other enjoyments in this world are insipid. Envy is *the rottenness of the bones*; the sorrow of the world dries them; but hope and joy in God are marrow to them.

**II.** We must make a good use of our estates, and that is the way to increase them, v. 9, 10. Here is,

**1.** A precept which makes it our duty to serve God with our estates: *Honour the Lord with thy substance.* It is the end of our creation and redemption to honour God, to be to him for a name and a praise; we are no other way capable of serving him than in his honour. His honour we must show forth and the honour we have for him. We must honour him, not only *with our bodies and spirits which are his*, but with our estates too, for they also are his: we and all our appurtenances must be devoted to his glory. Worldly wealth is but poor substance, yet, such as it is, we must honour God with it, and then, if ever, it becomes substantial. We must honour God,

**(1.)** *With our increase.* Where riches increase we are tempted to honour ourselves (~~xxx~~ Deuteronomy 8:17) and to set our hearts upon the world

(<sup><352></sup>Psalm 62:10); but the more God gives us the more we should study to honour him. It is meant of the increase of the earth, for we live upon annual products, to keep us in constant dependence on God.

(2.) *With all our increase.* As God has prospered us in every thing, we must honour him. Our law will allow a prescription for a *modus decimandi* — a mode of tithing, but none *de non decimando* — for exemption from paying tithes.

(3.) *With the first-fruits of all,* as Abel, (<sup><1094></sup>Genesis 4:4. This was the law (<sup><1239></sup>Exodus 23:19), and the prophets, (<sup><3080></sup>Malachi 3:10. God, who is the first and best, must have the first and best of every thing; his right is prior to all other, and therefore he must be served first. Note, It is our duty to make our worldly estates serviceable to our religion, to use them and the interest we have by them for the promoting of religion, to do good to the poor with what we have and abound in all works of piety and charity, *devising liberal things.*

2. A promise, which makes it our interest to serve God with our estates. It is the way to make a little much, and much more; it is the surest and safest method of thriving: *So shall thy barns be filled with plenty.* He does not say thy bags, but thy barns, not thy wardrobe replenished, but thy presses: “God shall bless thee with an increase of that which is for use, not for show or ornament — for spending and laying out, not for hoarding and laying up.” Those that do good with what they have shall have more to do more good with. Note, If we make our worldly estates serviceable to our religion we shall find our religion very serviceable to the prosperity of our worldly affairs. *Godliness has the promise of the life that now is* and most of the comfort of it. We mistake if we think that giving will undo us and make us poor. No, giving for God's honour will make us rich, (<sup><329></sup>Haggai 2:19. What we gave we have.

**III.** We must conduct ourselves aright under our afflictions, v. 11, 12. This the apostle quotes (<sup><505></sup>Hebrews 12:5), and calls it *an exhortation which speaks unto us as unto children*, with the authority and affection of a father. We are here in a world of troubles. Now observe,

1. What must be our care when we are in affliction. We must neither despise it nor be weary of it. His exhortation, before, was to those that are rich and in prosperity, here to those that are poor and in adversity.

(1.) We must not despise an affliction, be it ever so light and short, as if it were not worth taking notice of, or as if it were not sent on an errand and therefore required no answer. We must not be stocks, and stones, and stoics, under our afflictions, insensible of them, hardening ourselves under them, and concluding we can easily get through them without God.

(2.) We must not be weary of an affliction, be it ever so heavy and long, not *faint* under it, so the apostle renders it, not be dispirited, dispossessed of our own souls, or driven to despair, or to use any indirect means for our relief and the redress of our grievances. We must not think that the affliction either presses harder or continues longer than is meet, not conclude that deliverance will never come because it does not come so soon as we expect it.

2. What will be our comfort when we are in affliction.

(1.) That it is a divine correction; it is *the chastening of the Lord*, which, as it is a reason why we should submit to it (for it is folly to contend with a God of incontestable sovereignty and irresistible power), so it is a reason why we should be satisfied in it; for we may be sure that a God of unspotted purity does us no wrong and that a God of infinite goodness means us no hurt. It is from God, and therefore must not be despised; for a slight put upon the messenger is an affront to him that sends him. It is from God, and therefore we must not be weary of it, for he knows our frame, both what we need and what we can bear.

(2.) That it is a fatherly correction; it comes not from his vindictive justice as a Judge, but his wise affection as a Father. The father corrects *the son whom he loves*, nay, and because he loves him and desires he may be wise and good. He delights in that in his son which is amiable and agreeable, and therefore corrects him for the prevention and cure of that which would be a deformity to him, and an alloy to his delight in him. Thus God hath said, *As many as I love I rebuke and chasten,* ~~(419)~~ Revelation 3:19. This is a great comfort to God's children, under their afflictions,

[1.] That they not only consist with, but flow from, covenant-love.

[2.] That they are so far from doing them any real hurt that, by the grace of God working with them, they do a great deal of good, and are happy means of their satisfaction.

## PROVERBS 3:13-20

### HAPPINESS OF THOSE WHO FIND WISDOM

Solomon had pressed us earnestly to seek diligently for wisdom (~~3:1~~ Proverbs 2:1, etc.), and had assured us that we should succeed in our sincere and constant pursuits. But the question is, What shall we get by it when we have found it? Prospect of advantage is the spring and spur of industry; he therefore shows us how much it will be to our profit, laying this down for an unquestionable truth, *Happy is the man that findeth wisdom*, that true wisdom which consists in the knowledge and love of God, and an entire conformity to all the intentions of his truths, providences, and laws. Now observe,

**I.** What it is to find wisdom so as to be made happy by it.

**1.** We must get it. He is the happy man who, having found it, makes it his own, gets both an interest in it and the possession of it, who *draws out understanding* (so the word it), that is,

**(1.)** Who derives it from God. Having it not in himself, he draws it with the bucket of prayer from the fountain of all wisdom, *who gives liberally*.

**(2.)** Who takes pains for it, as he does who draws ore out of the mine. If it do not come easily, we must put the more strength to draw it.

**(3.)** Who improves in it, who, having some understanding, draws it out by growing in knowledge and making five talents ten.

**(4.)** Who does good with it, who draws out from the stock he has, as wine from the vessel, and communicates to others, for their instruction, *things new and old*. That is well got, and to good purpose, that is thus used to good purpose.

**2.** We must trade for it. We read here of the merchandise of wisdom, which intimates,

**(1.)** That we must make it our business, and not a by-business, as the merchant bestows the main of his thoughts and time upon his merchandise.



(2.) That we must venture all in it, as a stock in trade, and be willing to part with all for it. This is that pearl of great price which, when we have found it, we must willingly sell all for the purchase of, <sup><4135></sup>Matthew 13:45, 46. *Buy the truth*, (<sup><4123></sup>Proverbs 23:23); he does not say at what rate, because we must buy it at any rate rather than miss it.

3. We must lay hold on it as we lay hold on a good bargain when it is offered to us, which we do the more carefully if there be danger of having it taken out of our hands. We must apprehend with all our might, and put forth our utmost vigour in the pursuit of it, lay hold on all occasions to improve in it, and catch at the least of its dictates.

4. We must retain it. It is not enough to lay hold on wisdom, but we must keep our hold, hold it fast, with a resolution never to let it go, but to persevere in the ways of wisdom to the end. We must *sustain it* (so some read it), must embrace it with all our might, as we do that which we would sustain. We must do all we can to support the declining interests of religion in the places where we live.

## II. What the happiness of those is who do find it.

1. It is a transcendent happiness, more than can be found in the wealth of this world, if we had ever so much of it, v. 14, 15. It is not only a surer, but a more gainful merchandise to trade for wisdom, for Christ, and grace, and spiritual blessings, than for silver, and gold, and rubies. Suppose a man to have got these in abundance, nay, to have all the things he can desire of this world (and who is it that ever had?), yet,

(1.) All this would not purchase heavenly wisdom; no, it would *utterly be contemned*; it *cannot be gotten for gold*, <sup><4335></sup>Job 28:15, etc.

(2.) All this would not countervail the want of heavenly wisdom nor be the ransom of a soul lost by its own folly.

(3.) All this would not make a man half so happy, no, not in this world, as those are who have true wisdom, though they have none of all these things.

(4.) Heavenly wisdom will procure that for us, and secure that to us, which silver, and gold, and rubies, will not be the purchase of.

2. It is a true happiness; for it is inclusive of, and equivalent to, all those things which are supposed to make men happy, v. 16, 17. Wisdom is here

represented as a bright and bountiful queen, reaching forth gifts to her faithful and loving subjects, and offering them to all that will submit to her government.

**(1.)** Is length of days a blessing? Yes, the most valuable; life includes all good, and therefore she offers that *in her right hand*. Religion puts us into the best methods of prolonging life, entitles us to the promises of it, and, though our days on earth should be no more than our neighbour's, yet it will secure to us everlasting life in a better world.

**(2.)** Are riches and honour accounted blessings? They are so, and them she reaches out with *her left hand*. For, as she is ready to embrace those that submit to her with both arms, so she is ready to give out to them with both hands. They shall have the wealth of this world as far as Infinite Wisdom sees good for them; while the true riches, by which men are rich towards God, are secured to them. Nor is there any honour, by birth or preferment, comparable to that which attends religion; it makes the *righteous more excellent than his neighbour*, recommends men to God, commands respect and veneration with all the sober part of mankind, and will in the other world make those that are now buried in obscurity to *shine forth as the sun*.

**(3.)** Is pleasure courted as much as any thing? It is so, and it is certain that true piety has in it the greatest true pleasure. *Her ways are ways of pleasantness*; the ways in which she has directed us to walk are such as we shall find abundance of delight and satisfaction in. All the enjoyments and entertainments of sense are not comparable to the pleasure which gracious souls have in communion with God and doing good. That which is the only right way to bring us to our journey's end we must walk in, fair or foul, pleasant or unpleasant; but the way of religion, as it is the right way, so it is a pleasant way; it is smooth and clean, and strewed with roses: *All her paths are peace*. There is not only peace in the end, but peace in the way; not only in the way of religion in general, but in the particular paths of that way, in all her paths, all the several acts, instances, and duties of it. One does not embitter what the other sweetens, as it is with the allays of this world; but they are all peace, not only sweet, but safe. The saints enter into peace on this side heaven, and enjoy a present sabbatism.

**3.** It is the happiness of paradise (v. 18): *She is a tree of life*. True grace is that to the soul which the tree of life would have been, from which our first parents were shut out for eating of the forbidden tree. It is a seed of

immortality, a *well of living waters, springing up to life eternal*. It is an earnest of the New Jerusalem, in the midst of which is *the tree of life*, ~~621~~ Revelation 22:2; 2:7. Those that feed and feast on this heavenly wisdom shall not only be cured by it of every fatal malady, but shall find an antidote against age and death; they shall *eat and live for ever*.

**4.** It is a participation of the happiness of God himself, for wisdom is his everlasting glory and blessedness, v. 19, 20. This should make us in love with the wisdom and understanding which God gives, that *the Lord by wisdom founded the earth*, so that it cannot be removed, nor can ever fail of answering all the ends of its creation, to which it is admirably and unexceptionably fitted. *By understanding he has likewise established the heavens* and directed all the motions of them in the best manner. The heavenly bodies are vast, yet there is no flaw in them — numerous, yet no disorder in them — the motion rapid, yet no wear or tear; the depths of the sea are broken up, and thence come the waters beneath the firmament, and *the clouds drop down the dews*, the waters from above the firmament, and all this by the divine wisdom and knowledge; therefore *happy is the man that finds wisdom*, for he will thereby be *thoroughly furnished for every good word and work*. Christ is that Wisdom, by whom the worlds were made and still consist; happy therefore are those to whom he is *made of God wisdom*, for he has wherewithal to make good all the foregoing promises of long life, riches, and honour; for all the wealth of heaven, earth, and seas, is his.

## ~~202~~ PROVERBS 3:21-26

### THE EXCELLENCY OF WISDOM

Solomon, having pronounced those happy who not only lay hold on wisdom, but retain her, here exhorts us therefore to retain her, assuring us that we ourselves shall have the comfort of doing so.

**I.** The exhortation is, to have religion's rules always in view and always at heart, v. 21.

**1.** To have them always in view: “*My son, let them not depart from thy eyes; let not thy eyes ever depart from them to wander after vanity. Have them always in mind, and do not forget them; be ever and anon thinking of*

them, and conversing with them, and never imagine that thou hast looked upon them long enough and that it is time now to lay them by; but, as long as thou livest, keep up and cultivate thy acquaintance with them.” He who learns to write must always have his eye upon his copy, and not let that be out of his sight; and to the words of wisdom must those, in like manner, have a constant respect, who will walk circumspectly.

2. To have them always at heart; for it is in that treasury, the hidden man of the heart, that we must *keep sound wisdom and discretion*, keep to the principles of it and keep in the ways of it. It is wealth that is worth keeping.

II. The argument to enforce this exhortation is taken from the unspeakable advantage which wisdom, thus kept, will be of to us.

1. In respect of strength and satisfaction: “It will be *life to thy soul* (v. 22); it will quicken thee to thy duty when thou beginnest to be slothful and remiss; it will revive thee under thy troubles when thou beginnest to droop and despond. It will be thy spiritual life, an earnest of life eternal.” Life to the soul is life indeed.

2. In respect of honour and reputation: It shall be *grace to thy neck*, as a chain of gold, or a jewel. *Grace to thy jaws* (so the word is), grateful to thy *taste and relish* (so some); it shall infuse *grace into all thou sayest* (so others), shall furnish thee with acceptable words, which shall gain thee credit.

3. In respect of safety and security. This he insists upon in four verses, the scope of which is to show that *the effect of righteousness* (which is the same with *wisdom* here) is *quietness and assurance for ever*, <sup>2317</sup>Isaiah 32:17. Good people are taken under God's special protection, and therein they may have an entire satisfaction. They are safe and may be easy,

(1.) In their motions by day, v. 23. If our religion be our companion, it will be our convoy: “*Then shalt thou walk in thy way safely*. The natural life, and all that belongs to it, shall be under the protection of God's providence; the spiritual life, and all its interests, are under the protection of his grace; so that thou shalt be kept from falling into sin or trouble.” Wisdom will direct us into, and keep us in, the safe way, as far as may be, from temptation, and will enable us to walk in it with holy security. The way of duty is the way of safety. “We are in danger of falling, but wisdom

will keep thee, that *thy foot shall not stumble* at those things which are an offence and overthrow to many, but which thou shalt know how to get over.”

(2.) In their rest by night, v. 24. In our retirements we lie exposed and are most subject to frights. “But keep up communion with God, and keep a good conscience, and then *when thou liest down thou shalt not be afraid* of fire, or thieves, or specters, or any of the terrors of darkness, knowing that when we, and all our friends, are asleep, yet *he that keeps Israel* and every true-born Israelite *neither slumbers nor sleeps*, and to him thou hast committed thyself and taken shelter under the shadow of his wings. *Thou shalt lie down*, and not need to sit up to keep guard; having lain down, thou shalt sleep, and not have thy eyes held waking by care and fear; and *thy sleep shall be sweet* and refreshing to thee, being not disturbed by any alarms from without or from within,” <sup><3908></sup> Psalm 4:8; 116:7. The way to have a good night is to keep a good conscience; and the sleep, as of the labouring man, so of the wise and godly man, is sweet.

(3.) In their greatest straits and dangers. Integrity and uprightness will preserve us, so that we need *not be afraid of sudden fear*, v. 25. The harms that surprise us, unthought of, giving us no time to arm ourselves by consideration, are most likely to put us into confusion. But let not the wise and good man forget himself, and then he will not give way to any fear that has torment, be the alarm ever so sudden. Let him not fear the *desolation of the wicked, when it comes*, that is,

[1.] The desolation which the wicked ones make of religion and the religious; though it comes, and seems to be just at the door, yet be not afraid of it; for, though God may make use of the wicked as instruments of his people's correction, yet he will never suffer them to be the authors of their desolation. Or rather,

[2.] The desolation which wicked men will be brought into in a moment. It will come, and timorous saints may be apprehensive that they shall be involved in it; but let this be their comfort, that though judgments lay waste generally, at least promiscuously, yet God knows who are his and how to separate between the precious and the vile. Therefore be not afraid of that which appears most formidable, for (v. 26) “*the Lord shall be not only thy protector to keep thee safe, but thy confidence to keep thee secure, so that thy foot shall not be taken* by thy enemies nor ensnared by thy own fears.” God has engaged to keep the feet of his saints.

## JUSTICE AND KINDNESS RECOMMENDED

True wisdom consists in the due discharge of our duty towards man, as well as towards God, in honesty as well as piety, and therefore we have here divers excellent precepts of wisdom which relate to our neighbour.

**I.** We must render to all their due, both in justice and charity, and not delay to do it (v. 27, 28): “*Withhold not good from those to whom it is due* (either for want of love to them or through too much love to thy money) *when it is in the power of thy hand to do it*, for, if it be not, it cannot be expected; but it was thy great fault if thou didst, by thy extravagances, disable thyself to do justly and show mercy, and it ought to be the greatest of thy griefs if God had disabled thee, not so much that thou art straitened in thy own comforts and conveniences as that thou hast not wherewithal to give to those to whom it is due.” *Withhold* it not; this implies that it is called for and expected, but that the hand is drawn in and the *bowels of compassion are shut up*. We must not hinder others from doing it, not be ourselves backward to it. “If thou hast it by thee to-day, hast it in the power of thy hand, say not to thy neighbour, *Go thy way for this time*, and come at a more convenient season, and I will then see what will be done; *to-morrow I will give*; whereas thou art not sure that thou shalt live till to-morrow, or that to-morrow thou shalt *have it by thee*. Be not thus loth to part with thy money upon a good account. Make not excuses to shift off a duty that must be done, nor delight to keep thy neighbour in pain and in suspense, nor to show the authority which the giver has over the beggar; but readily and cheerfully, and from a principle of conscience towards God, give good to *those to whom it is due*,” to the *lords and owners of it* (so the word is), to those who upon any account are entitled to it. This requires us,

1. To pay our just debts without fraud, covin, or delay.
2. To give wages to those who have earned them.
3. To provide for our relations, and those that have dependence on us, for to them it is due.
4. To render dues both to church and state, magistrates and ministers.

**5.** To be ready to all acts of friendship and humanity, and in every thing to be neighbourly; for these are things that are due by the law of doing as we would be done by.

**6.** To be charitable to the poor and necessitous. If others want the necessary supports of life, and we have wherewithal to supply them, we must look upon it as due to them and not withhold it. Alms are called *righteousness* because they are a debt to the poor, and a debt which we must not defer to pay, *Bis dat, qui cito dat* — *He gives twice who gives speedily.*

**II.** We must never design any hurt or harm to any body (v. 29): “*Devise not evil against thy neighbour; do not contrive how to do him an ill-turn undiscovered, to prejudice him in his body, goods, or good name, and the rather because he dwells securely by thee, and, having given thee no provocation, entertains no jealousy or suspicion of thee, and therefore is off his guard.*” It is against the laws both of honour and friendship to do a man an ill-turn and give him no warning. *Cursed be he that smites his neighbour secretly.* It is a most base ungrateful thing, if our neighbours have a good opinion of us, that we will do them no harm, and we thence take advantage to cheat and injure them.

**III.** We must not be quarrelsome and litigious (v. 30): “*Do not strive with a man without cause; contend not for that which thou hast no title to; resent not that as a provocation which peradventure was but an oversight. Never trouble thy neighbour with frivolous complaints and accusations, or vexatious law-suits, when either there is no harm done thee or none worth speaking of, or thou mightest right thyself in a friendly way.*” Law must be the last refuge; for it is not only our duty, but our interest, *as much as in us lies, to live peaceably with all men.* When accounts are balanced, it will be found there is little got by striving.

**IV.** We must not envy the prosperity of evil-doers, v. 31. This caution is the same with that which is so much insisted on, Psalm 37. “*Envy not the oppressor; though he be rich and great, though he live in ease and pleasure, and make all about him to stand in awe of him, yet do not think him a happy man, nor wish thyself in his condition. Choose none of his ways; do not imitate him, nor take the courses he takes to enrich himself. Never think of doing as he does, though thou wert sure to get by it all that he has, for it would be dearly bought.*” Now, to show what little reason

saints have to envy sinners, Solomon here, in the last four verses of the chapter, compares the condition of sinners and saints together (as his father David had done, Psalm 37), sets the one over against the other, that we may see how happy the saints are, though they be oppressed, and how miserable the wicked are, though they be oppressors. Men are to be judged of as they stand with God, and as he judges of them, not as they stand in the world's books. Those are in the right who are of God's mind; and, if we be of his mind, we shall see, whatever pretence one sinner may have to envy another, that saints are so happy themselves that they have no reason at all to envy any sinner, though his condition be ever so prosperous. For,

**1.** Sinners are hated of God, but saints are beloved, v. 32. The froward sinners, who are continually going from-ward him, whose lives are a perverse contradiction to his will, are *abomination to the Lord*. He that hates nothing that he has made yet abhors those who have thus marred themselves; they are not only abominable in his sight, but an abomination. The righteous therefore have no reason to envy them, for they have his secret with them; they are his favourites; he has that communion with them which is a secret to the world and in which they have a joy that a stranger does not intermeddle with; he communicates to them the secret tokens of his love; his covenant is with them; they know his mind, and the meanings and intentions of his providence, better than others can. *Shall I hide from Abraham the thing that I do?*

**2.** Sinners are under the curse of God, they and their houses; saints are under his blessing, they and their habitation, v. 33. The wicked has a house, a strong and stately dwelling perhaps, but *the curse of the Lord* is upon it, it is *in it*, and, though the affairs of the family may prosper, yet the very blessings are curses, <sup><3012></sup>Malachi 2:2. There is *leanness in the soul*, when the body is fed to the full, <sup><1465></sup>Psalm 106:15. The curse may work silently and slowly; but it is as a fretting leprosy; it will consume the *timber thereof and the stones thereof*, <sup><3014></sup>Zechariah 5:4; <sup><3011></sup>Habakkuk 2:11. The just have a habitation, a poor cottage (the word is used for sheep-cotes), a very mean dwelling; but God blesses it; he is continually blessing it, from the beginning of the year to the end of it. The curse or blessing of God is upon the house according as the inhabitants are wicked or godly; and it is certain that a blessed family, though poor, has no reason to envy a cursed family, though rich.

**3.** God puts contempt upon sinners, but shows respect to saints, v. 34.



**(1.)** Those who exalt themselves shall certainly be abased: *Surely he scorns the scorers*. Those who scorn to submit to the discipline of religion, scorn to take God's yoke upon them, scorn to be beholden to his grace, who scoff at godliness and godly people, and take a pleasure in bantering and exposing them, God will scorn them, and lay them open to scorn before all the world. He despises their impotent malice, *sits in heaven and laughs at them*, <sup><1010></sup>Psalm 2:4. He retaliates upon them (<sup><1030></sup>Psalm 18:26); *he resists the proud*.

**(2.)** Those who humble themselves shall be exalted, for *he gives grace to the lowly*; he works that in them which puts honour upon them and for which they are *accepted of God and approved of men*. Those who patiently bear contempt from scornful men shall have respect from God and all good men, and then they have no reason to envy the scorers or to choose their ways.

**4.** The end of sinners will be everlasting shame, the end of saints endless honour, v. 35.

**(1.)** Saints are wise men, and act wisely for themselves; for though their religion now wraps them up in obscurity, and lays them open to reproach, yet they are sure to inherit glory at last, the far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory. They shall have it, and have it by inheritance, the sweetest and surest tenure. God gives them grace (v. 34), and therefore they shall inherit glory, for grace is glory, <sup><1020></sup>2 Corinthians 3:18. It is glory begun, the earnest of it, <sup><1030></sup>Psalm 84:11.

**(2.)** Sinners are fools, for they are not only preparing disgrace for themselves, but at the same time flattering themselves with a prospect of honour, as if they only took the way to be great. Their end will manifest their folly: *Shame shall be their promotion*. And it will be so much the more their punishment as it will come instead of their promotion; it will be all the promotion they must ever expect, that God will be glorified in their everlasting confusion.