

Sermons and Addresses

BY

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“Trust in the Lord.”

*A Sermon Preached at Bethesda Chapel, Great George Street, Bristol, on
Sunday Evening, May 30th, 1897.*

Proverbs iii. 5-17.

THE Book of Proverbs forms a deeply important portion of the Word of God. It is full of most precious counsels and advice for all human beings, if they would only give ear. Of course, believers in the Lord Jesus Christ will have the greatest blessing through it; but even for those who as yet do not know the Lord, if they were to attend to what is given in this Book of Proverbs, they would find great blessing and benefit, not merely in regard to the life to come, but for their stay here on earth. It is full of important instruction. I will mention just this point, for instance. More than once warning is given against becoming surety for other persons, Now, very many of us know, from our own experience, what misery, what exceeding great misery, has come upon whole families, it may be upon several families, simply on account of not attending to this.

Hastily, inconsiderately, they have become sureties for others, saying to themselves, “I shall never be called on to pay this money;” but before they were aware of it they were compelled to make good their suretyship, and often and often brought the greatest misery not merely on themselves, but on their whole family, and perhaps more than one family were drawn thus into misery. Now, God, knowing all this beforehand, through His servant Solomon admonished us not to do it. I myself, in my long life, have known instance upon instance of the greatest misery brought on whole families on account of not attending to this. Now, this is just one instance that I mention; but there are numberless points in the Book of Proverbs of a similar character, which, because they are not attended to, bring wretchedness and misery, not merely on one, but often on very many, Verse 5; “Trust in the Lord with all thine heart, and lean not unto thine own understanding.” Often and often because this likewise has not been attended to misery has been brought, the greatest misery, not only on individuals, but on large families. The temptation is, “O I have a great deal of experience in lay business; know what to do, I know how to act, I know what

will turn out best.” Thus speculation has come on, and speculation to a very, very large extent; and misery beyond description has been brought about on account of this. I just mention one instance which I was intimate with, the individual concerned being one whom I greatly loved. There was a war with China coming on, many, many years ago—the first war with China on the part of England; the individual was advised to buy an immense quantity of tea, because tea would rise in price exceedingly on account of the war, and the beloved, dear Christian man said to me “I do not care about this speculation for myself, but I feel exceedingly for my own dear brother about business matters” And so, being advised by the brother to buy an immense quantity, he speculated far beyond his capital, in order to help his brother out of difficulties. The result was, very soon war was at an end, the tea did not at all rise to what it was expected it would—indeed, because so many had bought very large quantities, it actually decreased in price, instead of rising—and this beloved Christian friend of mine lost an enormous sum of money, so that instead of helping his brother he brought himself into exceeding great difficulty.

Now here, you see, is the Word speaking to the opposite effect, “Trust in the Lord with all thine heart”—“depend on Me for what you need; look to Me for what you need, and do not take the advice of those brokers, or any other such agents, but consult the Lord”—“lean not unto thine own understanding.” Do not suppose because you have had a good deal of experience, or another person has had a good deal of experience, that that is all which is needed; but betake yourself to the Lord under all circumstances, at all times, under all difficulties, and seek His advice and counsel. Now this has been my habit (it was not my habit for the first two years after my conversion), but it has now been for 69 years my habit to act according to this, and the result is that all has been going on well with my affairs. I have never been allowed to bring myself into difficulties on account of such matters, because I have not trusted in my own experience, but have trusted in the Lord.

If difficulties arise with our service, when we meet in the mornings we lay our case before God, tell Him in all simplicity our position, and ask His counsel and advice. And He does give unto us counsel and advice, and helps us out of difficulties and perplexing circumstances, though they are very frequent in our service—yea, there is rarely a day but something or other turns up in which we need to be guided and directed by the Lord; and He helps us, He appears for us. I can advise this way of living and acting to all my beloved Christian friends, for the result of it is peace, peace, peace! All the ordinary troubles of life vanish, if we thus throw our burden on the Lord and speak to Him about

matters “Lean not unto thine own understanding.” How clearly expressed, how decidedly expressed! Our danger is continually to lean on our own understanding; to say to ourselves, “O, I have many times passed through similar circumstances. I have a good deal of experience in these matters; it is not necessary that I should pray about it, for I know very well what I ought to do.” And thus we bring on ourselves wretchedness and misery, and often not merely on ourselves, but on those connected with us.

“In all thy ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct thy paths.” In all thy ways. Let us particularly notice this—not merely now and then come to God for guidance and direction, but regarding every step that we take, every business that we enter into, and every new phase of our business, bring it before God and talk to Him, converse with Him concerning the matter. That is the meaning of “In all thy ways acknowledge Him;” and the result will be this: “He shall direct thy paths.” Never begin anything without going to God about it in prayer! Never take any step without first of all settling the matter between yourselves and God, and the result will be you will not speak to Him in vain. He loves you. “He shall direct thy paths; “He will make plain your way, and show you clearly and distinctly how you ought to act Thus you will escape the great difficulties, the great trials, in carrying out the measure of light which God will give you. O how precious!

Now, we have not to say, “I do not live in the days of miracles; I do not live in a time when there is a Urim and a Thummim, and the high priest who could tell me what to do.” For God is willing by His Spirit, through the Holy Scriptures, yet in our day, at the close of the nineteenth century, to guide and direct us. And in being guided and directed, we carry out the measure of light which God is pleased to give to us, we shall find how blessed it is not to take any steps directed by our own understanding, but to seek wisdom from God, and obtain counsel and advice from Him. The Lord Jesus Christ, among all other titles given to Him in the Word of God, has one title: that is, He is the Counsellor. The Counsellor of the Church of God, for her benefit, for her instruction. We are naturally ignorant, we do not know how to act, what to do; but if we betake ourselves to our Counsellor, the Lord Jesus Christ, we shall find how ready He is to counsel us, to advise us, I have found it thus, more or less, during the last 69 years that I have known the Lord. The first two years I often, often acted hastily, without much prayer, because patience was not natural to me then. I would have the matter settled, and therefore acted without patiently and quietly waiting on God; and taking hasty steps often and often, I was not merely confounded, but I brought trouble on myself. During the last 69

years, however, I have acted differently, and have therefore gone peacefully along, and have had rest in God. None of those trials through which I first passed after my conversion have been found in my life since, because I have patiently and quietly waited on God, to guide, direct, and help me. “Be not wise in thine own eyes; fear the Lord, and depart from evil.” Naturally we have, often and often, too high an idea about ourselves; we are “wise in our own eyes,” and on account of this take steps to go forward without seeking the counsel and advice of the Lord. The result is, trouble and difficulty. Now, beloved Christian friends, let us especially be warned by this, not to be wise in our own eyes, because it is too true, that we are not wise. If left to ourselves, we shall surely take wrong steps; we shall surely be confounded. Things will not go an well. And therefore it becomes us as being made fully aware of our natural ignorance and helplessness, to betake ourselves to God for counsel and advice. That is what we have to do, and above all to “fear God and to depart from evil.”

Our own ways are so frequently connected with that which is contrary to the mind of God; but if we are not wise in our own eyes, not only shall we be guided aright, but the result, further, will be that taking steps according to the mind of God we shall be departing from evil. Now, what follows from this? It tends even to the benefit of the body. Not merely gives peace of mind to the soul, but is good even for the body. “It shall be health to thy navel and marrow to thy bones.”

Now comes in another subject altogether. “Honour the Lord with thy substance, and with the first-fruits of all thy increase, so shall thy barns be filled with plenty, and thy presses shall burst out with new wine.” I do not forget that the Israelites had special promises given to them with regard to abundance in this life, if they walked in the ways of the Lord. Now, though in this present dispensation, we have not the promise to become very rich, to become great men, if we walk in the ways of the Lord, still there is, if we attend to these two verses, blessing coming to us even in this life, besides spiritual blessing. I have known this in my own experience, by acting according to these two verses. I have seen it ever so many times in the lives of godly brethren and sisters in Christ, who acted according to these two verses.

“Honour the Lord with thy substance and with the first-fruits of all thy increase.” God fills the clouds with rain, for the very purpose that they may empty themselves on the land, to make the land fertile; and so God trusts His children, as His stewards, with means not to keep all to themselves, not to enjoy merely themselves, but to communicate out of the abundance He is pleased to

give them to their fellow men—those who are weak and feeble, and cannot work, or who through other circumstances are brought into straightened, difficult positions and circumstances. This attended to bring blessing not only to the soul, but even blessing of a temporal character. I speak as one who knows all this from an experience in my own case of much more than 60 years. I speak about this as having, through my acquaintance with more than tens of thousands of children of God, had brought before me again and again and again the fact that those who acted according to the principles here laid down, not merely brought blessings to their souls, but even as to their circumstances temporarily, obtained far more again than they had given away, so that not only interest was given them, but compound interest, and in many cases twenty times, fifty times, even a hundred times more than they had given to the poor, or than they had given to the work of God. For God ever sees to it that He is not our debtor, but that we are His debtors. O if brethren and sisters in Christ habitually acted according to this verse, how different would be their position even as to this life, and how great the blessing which they would thus bring to their own souls!

“Honour the Lord with thy substance.” When God is pleased to give to us temporal blessings, He gives them, not that on our own persons we may spend the abundance He is pleased to bestow on us, but that we may remember the weak and sickly, and help and assist them; that we may remember those who are out of employment, who would gladly work, but who have no work; and that we may care for the widow, and the aged widow in particular, and the aged man who can no longer work—that we may remember their necessities and care for them. And the result will be, as I have seen it times without number in my long Christian career, that not only will blessing come to the souls of those who act according to this word, but that even with regard to temporal things God will abundantly repay what we have thus given. “So shall thy barns be filled with plenty, and thy presses shall burst out with new wine.” We may have no barns, and no vineyard, to have this literally fulfilled; but God, in some way or other, will make it manifest how He is mindful of what we have given to the widow, to the poor sick person who cannot work, to the poor aged man who is past work.

Now comes another subject. “My son, despise not the chastening of the Lord; neither be weary of His correction, for whom the Lord loveth He correcteth, even as a father the son in whom he delighteth.” Often and often I have found how real, true children of God are discouraged, disheartened, greatly bowed down, because they are so long afflicted, forgetting that the very affliction is a token of the Father’s love to them. O remember this, because it is

a matter not to question. I take God at His word, “Whom the Lord loveth He correcteth.” All these afflictions are education to our hearts in regard to our positions and circumstances, “Whom the Lord loveth He correcteth, even as a father the son in whom he delighteth;” not the father the son whom he hates, whom he does not care about in the least, whom he despises, whom he may mean to disinherit. Nothing, nothing, nothing of the kind, “Even as a father the son in whom he delighteth.” Ah! if this were laid to heart by the dear children of God in trial, in affliction, and in difficulty, how differently would they judge their trials, their afflictions, their disappointments, their sorrows, their pain and suffering. “My son, despise not the chastening of the Lord.”

I was once for a good while in a position that I could not work at all, because I had overwrought myself, overworked myself in service for the Lord, had not been careful at all about my health. For six years, I had never taken a walk in the fields! If the work of the Lord called me to exercise, I would walk eight, ten, twenty miles, or more in such service, but if the work of the Lord did not call me to exercise, I would never go out for five minutes for the sake of recreation, or for the sake of benefiting my health. The consequence was, that while before I was able to write ten, fifteen, or twenty letters without rising from my chair, and read for three or four hours at a stretch, I was now so reduced that the writing of one single little note was too much for me, and, as for reading, not a quarter of an hour could I stay at it. It was all too much. Under these circumstances I did not, by the grace of God, despise His chastening; but, after months and months had passed, leaving me in this state, I began to be weary of His correction. That was the danger into which I came, and I began to ask God not merely to keep me from despising the chastening, but not to weary—to be willing to go on bearing with the way in which He dealt with me. And, in the riches of His grace, He kept me from being weary.

So after months had been passed in this weakness mentally, in the inability of going on doing what I had been able to do, my health became by little and little restored; and I that obtained the ability of warning my fellow-believers to take care of their health, began to take now and then a little rest, now and then a little walk; and the consequence was I have been able to work far, far more abundantly, and have been far, far happier in my soul since I began to care about my health. I mention this for warning to those who despise the taking care of their health, and go on toiling, toiling, toiling, as if their bodies were brass and iron. If we wish to get profit to the soul, we need to let the body have rest. I state deliberately and solemnly, in the fear of God, during these last fifty years of my life, since I have allowed myself a quarter of an hour’s rest, or a

little more, now and then, God has enabled me to labour far more abundantly than before, and my soul has also been blest far more abundantly.

“My son, despise not the chastening of the Lord; neither be weary of His correction.” Let this sink into our souls—not to be weary of His correction. It does not require overmuch grace not to despise the chastening of the Lord; but it requires a good deal of grace when the mental affliction, the chastening of the Lord, continues for a long time, not to be weary of His correction. But the will of God is to submit to His dealings with us, and His leadings of us, both now and always; for “whom the Lord loveth He correcteth.” This is a word for particular support under affliction, to remember that it is a love-token when we are afflicted. “Whom the Lord loveth He correcteth, even as a father the son in whom he delighteth.” Notice this phrase, “In whom he delighteth.” Therefore it is entirely a mistake to suppose that when affliction, trial, or sorrow is allowed to befall us, that it is a token of dislike on the part of God; but it is all intended for blessing to our souls. Because God loves us, He gives us this love-token of affliction.

“Happy is the man that findeth wisdom, and the man that getteth understanding.” Now, this is particularly a word to those who are not converted, for “finding wisdom” means to be brought to the fear of the Lord. Wisdom is the fear of the Lord, to know the Saviour, to see that we are sinners, to own that we are sinners, to confess that we are sinners; and then to put our trust in the Lord Jesus Christ for the salvation of our souls. That is the meaning of finding wisdom. Now, before going on any further, I affectionately ask the little company here present, “Are we all believers in the Lord Jesus Christ?” God’s delight is to make us all as happy as we are capable of being while yet in the body. Now, have we obtained this real, true happiness, every one of us, through faith in the Lord Jesus? That is my desire and my prayer regarding all here present.

There is nothing to hinder us individually from obtaining the blessing. I was as far from God as anyone possibly could be; but it pleased God to show me what a great sinner I was. I owned it before God, and He helped me to put my trust alone in Jesus for salvation; and thus I became a very happy young man, and am continuing to hold fast to Christ, to trust in Him alone for salvation, and, by grace, to walk in the fear of God. I have now been for more than fifty years a very happy man. And thus blessing is to be obtained by everyone, for God does not act by partiality, or despise this or another one; He takes delight and pleasure in bestowing this happiness on any and every one He has to do with. But there are some individuals who will not have it, who are determined

to go their own way, who despise the blessing which God is willing to give to them in Christ Jesus, and therefore they are without it, and they will remain without it as long as they continue in this state of mind. But let us not forget what is said here, “Happy is the man that findeth wisdom.” That means, happy is the man who comes to Christ, happy is the man who puts his trust in the Lord Jesus Christ; and here those who have not yet done so will find it thus if they will close with Christ, if they will but own that they are sinners needing a Saviour. Then, having confessed this, having put their trust in the Lord Jesus Christ, God will account them just and righteous for Christ’s sake, God will forgive them their sins for Christ’s sake, and this will bring peace to the soul, rest to the soul, and make them happy through faith in Christ Jesus. “Happy is the man that findeth wisdom.” I say once more, wisdom means the fear of God. “Findeth the fear of God;” and this is brought about through faith in Christ. Thus we are regenerated, born again, get spiritual life and a new nature, by which we hate sin and love holiness. Though it be but little and little at the first, yet we shall increase more and more in this.

“And the man that getteth understanding”—that is, getteth understanding about heavenly things, about his own sinfulness; about God and the Lord Jesus Christ; and about the vanity of this present world and the blessedness of heavenly things. For the merchandise of it is better than the merchandise of silver, and the gain thereof than fine gold; she is more precious than rubies, and all the things thou canst desire are not to be compared unto her.” In this figurative language is brought before us the blessedness of being believers in Christ, the blessedness of having found wisdom, and of having obtained a new nature, spiritual life, justification, and the forgiveness of all our sins. “The merchandise of it is better than the merchandise of silver”— that is, whatever we might gain in the possession of silver, it is all as nothing in comparison with getting Christ. “And the gain thereof than fine gold.” To have found Jesus is better, better by far, than an abundance of fine gold. “She is more precious than rubies.” Wisdom, the fear of God obtained through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, is more precious than rubies or pearls, “and all the things thou canst desire are not to be compared unto her.” A very large property left us, as a legacy, is nothing in comparison with finding Christ. A very lucrative situation is nothing in comparison with Christ. A very high post under Government is nothing in comparison with Christ. All the blessings of this present life, all is nothing in comparison with finding Jesus, O let this sink deeply into our hearts. “She is more precious than rubies.” In other words, “Jesus is more precious

than pearls, than rubies; and all the things thou canst desire are not to be compared unto Him.”

“Length of days is in her right hand, and in her left hand riches and honour.” This is particularly to be looked at in a spiritual point of view. The eternal life, eternal happiness, is our lot—is that which we obtain through faith in the Lord Jesus. “And in her left hand riches and honour.” That is, spiritual riches and spiritual honours, because we become the inheritors of God and of the Lord Jesus; honours because we shall share with the Lord Jesus Christ the glory which the Father gives Him as a recompense for His mediatorial work as our Saviour. We shall have the honour with Him; He will not have it merely to Himself. His Bride, the Church of God, will share it with Him, and therefore shall we partake of the honour which the Father gives to Him.

“Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace.” I cannot tell you what a happy man I became when I found the Lord Jesus. I had been seeking year after year for happiness; but met with nothing but disappointment and increased guilt on the conscience as long as I was not a believer in Christ. But when I found Jesus, I became a truly happy young man, and I have been a truly happy man now for 71 years and six months. I have had fulfilled in my own experiences what is stated here—that the ways of wisdom are the ways of pleasantness. Numberless persons think it is far from being pleasant to become a Christian; they think if they were to become believers in the Lord Jesus Christ they would not have a happy day more. This is the greatest folly, the greatest mistake, for our real true happiness commences only when we find the Lord Jesus Christ; therefore we need not to be pitied as believers in Christ, but others are to be counselled to seek the same Lord whom we have found, in order that they, too, may partake of the happiness which we have obtained through faith in Him.

Then, lastly, “All her paths are peace.” Now, if at any time we are without peace, we should ask ourselves, “What is the reason? Am I really walking in the ways of wisdom, for it is stated that all her paths are peace? If I am without peace, it becomes me solemnly, earnestly, and carefully, to look into the matter, and see whether I have not departed from the ways of the Lord, whether I have not forsaken the fear of the Lord; for if I were going on in the paths of wisdom I should be at peace.” O how instructive is all this!

Now, my beloved Christian friends, I have been directed, after a good deal of prayer, to the words on which we have been meditating, and I beseech and entreat you all to ponder again and again and again these verses, and to remember the remarks which I have made in connection with them; for weighty

and important matters are contained in these verses, and, if attended to, the result will be happiness in a way in which as yet we have not known it. And, again, should there be any present who are not yet believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, they should give themselves no rest in asking God to show them that they are sinners, and that they need the Saviour; and when they are brought to know this, then to ask God to enable them to put their trust in Jesus. And what they will obtain will be the forgiveness of their sins and peace to their souls, and hatred of sin and love for holiness. God grant this blessing to all of us, for Christ's sake.