Proverbs - Commentaries by Frederick George Patterson

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There are few readers of Scripture but have observed with pleasure, the position enjoyed by “the servants” in the well-known marriage scene at Cana of Galilee; and perhaps some of us have connected the privilege enjoyed by them, with the deeper intelligence of the restful Mary as compared with the dullness of her more active sister Martha—and again have linked therewith the place that seemed so natural to “the beloved disciple,” in the 13th chapter of John, in contrast with that which the more energetic Peter occupied at the supper table.

It was their nearness to the Lord that gave these “servants “ more intelligence than even the governor of the feast. It was the consciousness that she had a sister at home that lived nearer to the Lord than she did, that made Martha call Mary to explain the truth that was beyond her comprehension, saying, “The teacher is come and calleth for thee.” (John 11:25-28.) And it was the fact that John was actually leaning on the Lord’s bosom, at the moment when He made known that the traitor was amongst them, that led Peter to beckon to him that he should ask who it was of whom He spake. The time will shortly come when we “shall know, even as also” we “are known,” and to the part of Scripture which speaks of that day I would briefly direct the reader’s attention. It is evident, as we open Rev. 4:4, that the great time of separation to God has taken place, and the saints now on earth, with all their predecessors, are in glorified bodies in the presence of God and of the Lamb. Under the designation of the “four-and-twenty elders” do we see them. The number expresses their completeness— the name gives to them their representative character. Not one is missing of the thousands of saints that from Adam downwards have been born of God, and have been translated on the coming of the Lord. Their robes point to their priestly character-their crowns to their kingly position. The threatening character of the throne does not disturb them, but the moment the glory of the Creator God, or redeeming Lamb is celebrated, we find them in the fullest activity of praise.

But this is not their only portion of blessedness. A challenge to the universe has sounded forth as to who is worthy to open the book of God’s counsels and loose the seven seals thereof. And even John is at fault now, and in his weakness weeps. But there are those who are in the secret. Children of the light and of the day are they, and their conscious nearness to the Lord has resulted in the unfolding of His counsels to them, and these on a subject surely unspeakably precious above all others that the heart of God has to reveal. They can tell the sorrowing prophet to dry his tears, for that the King of the royal tribe, the very source of him who, in old time, had suffered and triumphed, had, by means of His mighty victory, not achieved without suffering even unto death, won the right to open and unfold the counsels of God, even though sealed up with sevenfold security. Their absolute and perfect separation to God had resulted in this intelligence, not merely for their own enjoyment, but with power to communicate it to others. And again do we find this wondrous privilege before us in the 7th chapter, and not less intelligent are they as to the identity of the white-robed multitude, than as to the person and achievements of the Lamb.

Thus far for heaven—but upon earth the same principle will prevail. To most of us the scene between King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba is happily familiar, and to not a few, the typical as well as the actual force of the passage is discernible. On the former let me for a moment dwell. The application of 1 Chron. 17:13 to Christ in Heb. 1:5, leaves no doubt that He is in figure before us when King Solomon sits upon the throne of his glory; and a comparison of Psa. 72 with 2 Chron. 9 removes every difficulty as to the application of the Queen of Sheba in type, to the Gentiles that will come to yield their homage and devotion to the Son of Man, when “neither adversary nor evil occurred.” He reigns as King of Righteousness, and King of Peace. What, then, is the result of the nearness of approach to Him? “She communed with him of all that was in her heart; and Solomon told her all her questions, and there was nothing hid from Solomon that he told her not” (vv. 1, 2). Of course, the intelligence of those above is of a higher order than that of those below. But whilst we contemplate with joy, what will be our glory when, with the Lamb above, it is at least our privilege to understand the blessedness of those below, when from time to time they come to render homage to the King of Kings and Lord of Lords? With them, as with us, the principle holds good that intelligence will flow from nearness to the source of light and understanding.

The question then most naturally suggests itself: If, in the scenes that are before us, there will be this gracious provision of our God for the blessing of His people, is there no means whereby we may even now anticipate that time, and enjoy, while here, what will be our eternal portion in the brighter days to come? And does the Scripture teach us nothing on this score, replete as it is with counsel on every subject that we need?

Beyond all question we have the fullest instruction on this head in all parts of the Word, and to some of this I would briefly call the reader’s attention.

In Gen. 18:17-21, Jehovah says— “Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do ... And the Lord said, Because the cry of Sodom and Gomorrah is great, and because their sin is very grievous, I will go down now, and see whether they have done altogether according to the cry of it, which is come unto me; and if not, I will know.” Whence this condescension, and whence this confidingness of the Lord?

The whole earth was of one language, and of one speech. And they had said, “Go to, let us build us a city, and a tower, whose top may reach unto heaven; and let us make us a name, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth ... And the Lord said,.... “Go to, let us go down, and there confound their language, that they may not understand one another’s speech. So the Lord scattered them abroad from thence upon the face of all the earth, and they left off to build the city “ (Gen. 11:4-8). From this scene of confusion, God, obliged to show mercy on whom He would show mercy—for all deserved to perish—had called Abram apart. Each link with earth was broken. Country, kindred, and father’s house had lost their claims in obedience to the word of Him who said, “I am the Almighty God, walk before Me, and be thou perfect” (Gen. 17:1). Lot might choose the well-watered plains of Sodom, but the presence of the Almighty God had superior attractions to Abram, and he henceforward determined to look only for that “city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God.” And well was he rewarded. While Lot was vexing his righteous soul from day to day with the unlawful deeds of Sodom, Abram was holding sweet and blessed

communion with the Lord. His separation from surrounding evil, in obedience to His call, had resulted in unclouded intimacy, and He draws aside the veil to unfold His counsels as to judgment. What a wondrous scene it is, and how precious to see that there was one, at all events, on earth to whom God could tell His mind, and thus provoke to intercession! He will have his place amongst the four-and-twenty elders, and thus on earth his walk corresponded to his position there.

But he is not alone in this path of special blessing. Moses equally shines out as the friend of God, as a glance at Ex. 32-34 will prove. Abram had separated from civil disorders; from religious evil Moses turns away. His attitude is very fine. Before God he is zealous for the people; before man he thinks only of God's glory. And in the deepest sense of what was due to this, he takes the tabernacle and pitches it without the camp. The camp, he knew, was a scene of defilement. God and defilement, he was aware, could not combine, and therefore he took new ground for the dwelling place of God, and most preciously did the Lord set His seal upon his faithfulness. "And it came to pass, as Moses entered into the tabernacle, the cloudy pillar descended and stood at the door of the tabernacle, and the Lord talked with Moses.... And the Lord spake unto Moses face to face, as a man speaketh unto his friend" (vv. 9-11). What an instructive scene is this, and how full of encouragement! To hold communion with the Lord there must be absolute separation from what is contrary to His being, but when this is insisted on, there is no limit to the revelations of Himself,

But it is not only in the palmier days of Jewish history, that this important principle found its response among those to whom the Lord was everything, but even when the sun of Israel was set, and the times of the Gentiles had ensued, do we find it taking expression in the person of such an one as Daniel the prophet. Isa. 39:7 had had its fulfillment, and Daniel and his companions were chosen to adorn the court of the king of Babylon. But change of circumstances and altered scenes do not, to the faithful, disturb the written principles of the word of God; and, mindful of the Nazarite vow of Num. 6, these children set themselves apart for God, and refrained from Gentile luxuries and heathenish defilement. (Dan. 1) The grace that had given them power thus to rise above the lusts of nature, now bestows upon them their suited reward, and we find, "As for these four children, God gave them knowledge and skill in all learning and wisdom; and Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams" (v. 17). Separate from natural evil, as Abraham had been separate from worldly, and Moses from religious defilement, most blessedly does God reward them for their faithfulness. We are all familiar with the next chapter how the king dreamed a dream, and then forgot it; how none of the wise men of Babylon could in any measure aid the king's too treacherous memory; how death was pronounced on all; and then how God came in, in love, and in answer to the prayer of Daniel and his companions—revealed the secret in a night vision, and thus preserved their lives, and drew forth their heartfelt adoration. Surely we. may say this revelation was the result of their nearness to the Lord, and this the consequence of the refusal of surrounding evil!

But not alone in the Old Testament do we find the illustrations of this deeply important principle, but also in the New. Christ had entered on the scene, and, as the Shepherd of His sheep, had passed through the lawful door within the precincts of the Jewish sheepfold. Born at the appointed place, coming at the very time that Daniel's prophecy foretold, of the proper stock—a rod of the stem of Jesse—He had fulfilled in every way what the Spirit of God had pointed out concerning Him; and, welcomed heartily by those who, like Simeon, occupied the porter's place, and were therefore on the watch, proceeds to gather the sheep around Himself and lead them forth. One by one they heard Him; one by one they followed His gracious leadings, and exchanged—starvation, bondage, condemnation, for the blessings of salvation, liberty, and pasture. As sheep, they were the objects of His care; but He has a higher title for them:— "Henceforth I call you not servants, for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth, but I have called you friends; for all things I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you." What a place of blessedness was theirs! No doubt it had cost them something to follow Him. The fishermen had left their nets, their fathers; the man whose eyes were opened had forfeited his Jewish rights; but what they had received had more than enough repaid them for all they had left behind. His friends—the friends of the blessed Son of God—and His secrets—the outflowings of the Father's heart towards Him—this was their portion, the portion of those who, through the knowledge of His excellency, had left the worldly, the religious, the domestic circle, for Him. (See John 9)

But not only when the blessed Lord was here did the rule of which I speak find its example in His followers, but even now, while He is absent at His Father's right hand, do we find an illustration of the same. The Ephesians were not only "saints," but "faithful in Christ Jesus" (c. 1:1), or, as we may say, not only set apart, as all saints are, by the action of the Spirit of God quickening their souls, and thus attaching them to God, but they had faithfully maintained (through grace, of course) the position they had assumed. And this expression is the more striking if we contrast it with 1 Cor. 1, where the Holy Ghost can only speak of the faithfulness of God. As we know from the Acts, these men of Ephesus had come apart from everything, through the presentation of God's Son; for, Judaism on the one hand, and heathenism on the other, were alike renounced for the superior claims of Christ in glory; and now, though apostolic energy was absent, they still retained their place as saints and faithful ones to Christ.

The sheep had been drawn around the person of a Shepherd present with them. These had been gathered to an absent Christ, but still to One who, true to His word, is ever the center, and present in spirit to those who are gathered on divine principles. And what do we read about them? That God "had abounded towards them in all wisdom and prudence, having made known the mystery of His will, that in the dispensation of the fullness of times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are in earth, even in Him (c. 1:8-10). What a blessed portion theirs, and ours, who are gathered now on similar principles! Our nearness to the Lord collectively (as was individually the case in John 15) has resulted in His leading our hearts on to the time when all His counsels as to Christ will have their fullest completion and display. That is indeed and rightly called the dispensation of the fullness of times. Times there have been, no doubt, of varied interest and blessing. Adam had his time, and Noah his. Jew and Gentile times ran and are running out their course. The fullness of time (Gal. 4) was seen when Jesus trod the earth, and the Church's day exists at present. But in all of these there has been failure of more or less intensity; and therefore it is that God, who is ever careful of His own glory, has appointed a day, and named it "the fullness of times," wherein every single one of His former displays will be made good in the person of that Son, whose object now is, has been, and will ever be, to glorify the Father. He will reign as the second Adam, the Head of all creation; He will govern the world in righteousness, without the fear of failure, like His predecessor, Noah; He will write His laws in His people's hearts, and sit upon the throne of David; He will rise to reign over the Gentiles, and in Him shall the Gentiles trust; He shall come to be glorified in His saints, and admired in all them that believe. It is to these blessed counsels as to the future glory of the Son that the Holy Ghost would at present introduce those whose privilege it is to be not merely saints, but faithful in Christ Jesus. And surely this is a high and holy privilege, and we should see to it that neither worldly interests, nor religious contamination, nor the joys of nature, creep in to mar the sweet and happy intercourse that is ours, through fellowship with the Father and the Son. In glory, hindrance there will be none to our intelligence and consequent enjoyment. Here it is only through constant occupation with the Son, and watching lest the Spirit within be grieved, that our nearness to the Lord and consequent intimacy, can be

maintained. The Lord give us to lean on His bosom to sit at His feet—to identify ourselves so thoroughly with Him, that He may be free to tell us all He sees we need for comfort, joy and blessing!

D. T. G.

Collected Writings, Proverbs 1:26

Q. “An humble believer,” Glasgow; asks, What is the teaching of Proverbs 1:26? Does that passage mean that God will rejoice over the punishment of the wicked? Does “Wisdom” in the context, mean the Father, the Son, or the Holy Spirit, &c. &c.

A. In the passage it is “Wisdom” who speaks, crying in the streets to the simple, the scorner, and the fool, to turn at her reproof, and to love not their own ways; and that Wisdoms spirit would be given them, and Wisdoms words made known to them. (The fear of the Lord was the beginning of wisdom, verse 7.) When they would therefore be reaping the fruits of the folly they had sown, under the retributive government of God in the world, in their fear and calamity they would call upon Wisdom to guide them, but they would not be heard — it would then be too late to learn Wisdoms ways. Wisdom would then laugh at them as it were (it is a figure of speech), for what they were suffering; having set at naught Wisdoms counsels and reproof, when she cried to them to learn her ways.

The Book of Proverbs refers to the government of God here below, on the principle that “Whatsoever a man sows, that shall he also reap” (Gal. 6:7). This is true of saint or sinner. Grace saves the vilest, but the Government of God is over all. It is on the principle that if a man squanders his money, or his time, or his health; he will reap the fruit of his ways in the loss of these things, &c. The grace of God in Salvation never sets aside these principles of His dealings with men; nor (does this marvelous grace alter the fact that every man reaps the fruits of his ways under God’s government. A true Christian may do something for want of discretion, and want of hearkening to Wisdoms words, which he may have to repent of all his days.

As to your question, who it is who speak? It is plain from 1 Corinthians 1:24. That Christ is the “Wisdom of God”; and that He is made unto us wisdom, verse 30. (Read Prov. 8:22-35, and compare with John 1:1-2). Christ’s word, that is, the expression of Himself, is to dwell in us richly in all wisdom. The Christian, too, is exhorted to walk in wisdom toward them that are without — the world, redeeming the time (Col. 3:16, 4:5).

It is plain that Proverbs 1:20-23, is not a gospel invitation at all. Hence the danger of using scripture out of its true place and connection. The passage does not teach that God will laugh at the punishment of the wicked, and the rejector of Christ, as you have heard. The divinely taught mind shrinks from such an idea.

Words of Truth 1:60-62.

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