Proverbs - Commentaries by Alfred Henry Burton

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(PROV. 8:22-35.)

THE inward man, begotten of God, delights in Christ, the Son of God; finds in Him ever an object of unspeakable joy and satisfaction; has always, whenever and in whatever character His glories are presented for contemplation, a responsive chord awakened in the heart which answers back — “Unto Him that loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and His Father; to Him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen!” (Rev. 1:5, 6).

The renewed soul, partaker of the divine nature, delights also in God and in the things of God; rejoices in His joys and esteems it the highest privilege to be admitted into this intimacy, and to share His thoughts: to learn in counion with Him, not only what Christ is to us, but what He is to God: to have thus revealed the glories appertaining to and inherent in the Son — glories which can only increase His value to the soul, while at the same time the heart bows in reverent worship to Him, the One who is above all.

This is fellowship with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ; it is indeed an inestimable privilege; it is fullness of joy (1 John 1:3, 4). And note: it is not here as in 1 Corinthians 1:9, “His Son Jesus Christ our Lord” The soul in this fellowship with the Father learns the relationship of Jesus Christ, not so much to us as “our Lord” (though this be blessedly true) but, to God and His Father as “His Son.” Wondrous grace! such as could be alone in the heart of God our Father, for it is as His children that we are admitted into this fellowship, it is the intimacy of the family circle in the family home. Israel will yet learn in intimacy with Jehovah of the preciousness of Jehovah’s Christ, we learn in intimacy with the Father of the preciousness of “the Son of the Father.” Yet it is the same Person, and therefore even what is predicted of Him in Old Testament times is precious to us. Every ray of His glory shines with a brightness which quickens the pulsation of the heart of the believer. The anointing oil may be poured upon His head, but it flows down to the skirts of His garments.

In such a way (i.e., what Christ is to God). He is presented to us in Proverbs viii. The passage speaks of wisdom, yet not of wisdom as a mere abstract quality in God, but as personified in One who is God and also with God (ver. 30). And He who is with God is also for God — a daily delight to Him. Now we are left in no uncertainty who this One is, for the Spirit of God in 1 Corinthians 1:24 tells us that it is Christ: not an unknown Christ, but one well known to us, one whom we treasure above everything, for it is He who was crucified (ver. 23), who is our Lord, and who is also His Son (ver. 9). We learn to know Him as sent forth in due time, as the Word become flesh. But in the essence of His being and in the glory of His power He is bore all time, and that not only as “God” but as “Son of the Father.” In Him there was a joy for God, a daily (constant) delight; an object for the love of the Father which was from all eternity. And the renewed soul, “renewed unto knowledge,” rejoices in this: to know God not only as the eternal God (and upon this rests the believer’s salvation and blessing now, as by-and-by that of Israel, see Isa. 40:28), but also as the blessed (happy, 1Tim. 1:11) God whose heart has had an object for its delight from eternity.

“The Lord possessed Me.” When man had no existence, when this world (to possess which the mightiest men have striven) was not, then the Lord possessed Him, then God had an object for His constant delight. If, then, this delight was before the world was formed, before man was made, this delight was also independent of this world and of man — it was solely in Christ His Son, solely in what this Son was to Him — “the Father loveth the Son.” The natural man delights and interests himself only in things which concern him or in any way have an application to him, values only people who value him or are of use to him. The renewed mind delights in God and the things of God, the things which bring glory and joy to God: delights to meditate on Christ as the joy of God — of which joy man never could be a cause, for man was not even in existence then.

And this joy and delight in His own Son, which was God’s before ever the world was “Thou hast loved Me before the foundation of the world” — is not to be mixed up with His refreshment and joy in His work of creation (Exod. 31:17; Ps. 104:31). There are “His angels that excel in strength,” but “unto which of the angels said He at any time, Thou art My Son?” This Son is the only-begotten, His own Son—alone and supreme in glory and greatness: the Son who is “appointed heir of all things.” And though man be set to have dominion over the earth, and even if he should be highly honored by God, like a Moses or Elias, yet when Peter, to whom the Father had just before revealed Him as “the Christ, the Son of the living God,” would place them on the same level with Him, God the Father — ever jealous of the glory of His own Son — at once steps forward to give Him Honor and glory, when there came such a voice to Him from the excellent glory: “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.” And when this voice was come, “Jesus was found alone.”

This greatness and glory of the Son is indeed the theme in the Epistle to the Hebrews. He is greater than any angel, greater than Moses, greater than Joshua, greater than David, greater than Aaron, greater than Abraham, greater than Levi or any of the Levitical priesthood. Aaron, when made priest, received an Honor which he never had before, but He by the glory which is inherent in His Person — Jesus, the Son of God — gives value to His priesthood. It is God who has already owned Him, saying, “Thou art My Son,” who salutes Him as “high priest after the order of Melchizedek.” And it is this superiority of Himself surpassing everyone and everything, that gives its special character to the pathway of faith in Hebrews 12, as to the life of faith in Galatians 2., “the faith of the Son of God.” An Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Rahab, and the many others of whom the world was not worthy, may in various measures and in divers manners be witnesses (God thus speaking through them) of the blessedness of the pathway of faith; yet now, we are to look away unto Jesus. He is to be the only One we are to consider and follow, the only One we are to have as object before us. And those whose faith we are to follow now are not the Old Testament saints, but those who have spoken to us the Word of God, summed up in this: “Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to-day, and forever.”

And further, this joy of God in His own Son is an eternal joy; He is ever the same, “One Son” (Mark 12:6): whether in the glory with the Father before the world was, or down here on earth when He took “the form of servant and was made in the likeness of men,” or now raised by the glory of the Father and exalted high, made “both Lord and Christ.” At all times and in every place and circumstance He is the object of the Father’s ineffable delight. Who can tell what He was to the Father before the foundation of the world? We know it only from Him who could testify of it and who has said: “I was daily His delight,” and again, “Thou hast loved Me before the foundation of the world.” Who can tell what He was to the Father when down here? None but the Father Himself, who by a double (i.e., complete) testimony testified, “This is My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased”; this testimony was equally given to the Son, when in grace and to fulfill all righteousness He was found associating Himself with self-confessed sinners at the Jordan, as when on the Holy Mount “the fashion of His countenance was altered, and His raiment was white and glistering.” But neither this transfiguration enhanced His value in His Father’s eyes, nor could His association at the Jordan with self-confessed sinners detract from it. He was always, and is always, the only-begotten who is in the bosom of the Father. And now in resurrection and by resurrection He is “marked out” by God to be the Son of God in power; raised by the glory of the Father, as well as by the power of God.

Thus, as the Father’s delight in Him is eternal, so is it also always perfect; and the renewed mind delights to know this. There was a joy for God in the works of His creation, but that joy was soon ended. The anointed cherub “in the day that he was created” was perfect in beauty, perfect in his ways, but a time came when his heart was lifted up because of his beauty, and God had to pronounce his doom. There was a time, when God “saw everything that He had made, and behold! it was very good.” But a time came, when “it repented the Lord that He had made man upon the earth, and it grieved Him to His heart, for God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth.” And again, only judgment could be pronounced upon man “with the earth.” But this delight which He finds in His Son is ever the same, perfect and complete. He who in eternity could say, “I was daily His delight,” could with equal truth say when down here as man, “I do always those things that please Him.” God was robbed of His joy in man by man, but the heart rejoices to know that His joy in the Son is ever perfect. And more, through His Son God will have His joy again in His creation, through Him of whom it is written, “I restored that which I took not away”; giving thus — to speak as a man — an added cause for the love of His Father to Him, as He said, “Therefore doth My Father love me, because I lay down My life, that I might take it again.” He takes it again as head of a new creation in which He should no longer abide alone, but fill all things with His redemption glory. And God thus receives a glory to His name, such as even the first creation before man’s fall could not Witness to. As it says in 2 Corinthians 1:20, “In Him are yea, and in Him Amen, unto the glory of God by us.”

It is indeed the glory and perfection of His person which give value to His work and to all the associations into which by grace He may enter. On this is founded the whole argument in the Epistle to the Hebrews, as has been already noticed. The “how much more” of resulting blessings in chap. 9:14 is based on the fact that it is by the blood of Christ that they have been effected, even as the “how much sorer punishment” in chap. 10:29, is owing to the fact that it is the Son of God who is trodden under foot. The dignity and value of our calling is this that we are made companions of Christ. And not only, nor even chiefly, is it the blessings which we have received which are brought into view in connection with the atonement work of Christ, but there is that aspect in it which brings out God’s portion— “He through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God.”

God could only be a fault-finding God with a people under the first covenant (chap. 8:8). He could find no pleasure in burnt-offerings and sacrifices for sin (chap. 10:8). But that which neither law-covenant nor sacrifices could accomplish both for the joy and for the glory of God, the Son of God has done — “I come to do Thy will, O God.” Thus not only in eternity, not only in His life down here, not only now in glory, but in His very death in obedience to the will of God His Father, He was ever the perfect delight of His Father; He “hath given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet smelling savor”; “wherefore God also hath highly exalted Him and given Him a name, which is above every name; that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things on earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord: to the glory of God the Father.” He who will be owned by the whole universe as Lord, is He who is owned by God as Son, for this is the name that is above every name — a more excellent name than that of angels. The glory in which He will be displayed will be not only as the Son of man (who has glorified God) in the glory of God, but as the Son (who has glorified the Father) in the glory of the Father (cf. John 13:31, 32, and 17:4, 5), and He will be owned as the worthy object of that glory.

And as the glory of His person gives efficacy to His work, so also does it give value to the resultant blessings into which we are brought through His work — “He hath given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God, for a sweet smelling savor.” He gave Himself in all the value and preciousness of His own person to God for us: identified Himself with us on the cross, that we might be identified with Him — the Sanctifier and the sanctified “all of one.” And over the whole of this scene as seen by God, rests, for the joy of God, the sweet smell of the savor of the worth and preciousness of His own Son (2 Cor. 2: 14, 15): those who are brought into sonship by Jesus Christ are accepted (graced) in the Beloved.

Such is indeed “the grace which He for us has won!” “Thou hast loved them, as Thou hast loved Me.” This is our blessed portion and position before God always and in every place, so that wherever He may lead us about in triumph, we are unto God a sweet savor of Christ. The voice from the excellent glory, “This is My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased,” was to Him and Him alone — His by right — at the Jordan; yet the company of self-confessed and self-judged sinners might know for the joy and comfort of their own hearts that this beloved Son had come into their midst and identified Himself with them “to fulfil all righteousness,” so that though they cannot claim for themselves any share in that voice to Him, they can claim Him for themselves.

The believing soul may enter yet very little into what the full blessedness of this association is, or what the glories of this Person are who thus associated Himself with them in grace; as even John the Baptist testified, “I knew Him not.” But even though an Andrew find only the Messiah in Him, yet the soul which found Christ (the Messiah), has found Him who is the Christ and the Son of the living God, Him who is chosen of God and precious to God; and for us who believe is the preciousness. We are indeed before God in Christ, in all the preciousness of of His person. “Whoso findeth me, findeth life and shall obtain the favor of the Lord.”

May the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, give to us the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the full knowledge of Him!

And may He grant that the Christ may dwell in our hearts by faith, being rooted and grounded in love I—

NOTES OF AN ADDRESS By the late H. M. HOOKE.

Proverbs 30:24-31.

THE Bible was not written for the information of scientists, but there has been no discovery of science which can overthrow the truths it contains. The Word of God stands alone; it does not require the aid of science to establish its authority, or to add to it, for it is complete in itself. In this very chapter we read, “Every word of God is pure... add thou not unto His words, lest He reprove thee, and thou be found a liar.” Take care and do not add science or any other thing to the Lord’s word, lest He reprove thee, and thou be found a liar. In the present day we find people adding to the Lord’s word on every side.

Jesus Himself says, “Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on Me hath everlasting life.” Yet we find people saying that nobody can know in this world that they have everlasting life; that they must wait until they die before they can know it; and so they make Jesus a liar, for He says that the believer has life now. Is there one who is making Jesus a liar? To such a one I would say, Take care, lest He reprove you, and you be found a liar. It is you who are the liar and not Jesus; every word of His is pure, He cannot lie. Come unto Him now, and believe in His word as it stands, without any addition of man, and you will get everlasting life; you may now be the present possessor of everlasting life.

In the scripture at the head of this paper we read of four things which are little on the earth. Now, I am not going to give you a lecture on natural history; if I were I could tell you all about the habits of the ants, conies, locusts, and spiders; but what I want to do is to bring before you what is taught here, and to show you how each of these things spoken of brings before us different conditions. If the first four conditions be true of any, the last four follow as a consequence.

“The ants are a people not strong, yet they prepare their meat in the summer.” They do not find their food in their nest, they have to go outside for it. But God causes the food to grow near them; it’s there, and all they have to do is to go outside for it. Are there any whose condition is that of the ants? Are there any who are without strength? Well now, what does Scripture say about those who are without strength? Turn to Romans 5:6, where we read, “For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly.” If there be one without strength, ungodly, well, Christ died for you, poor sinner. The blessing is for you, but it is outside of yourself; you must look outside of yourself for salvation. God has sent His Son into the world to die for you, and now salvation is within your reach. You must give up trusting in your own works or feelings, and trust in Christ and in the work which He accomplished, and you will be saved just now, as you are, and where you are. The work by which you can be saved was done outside of you by the spotless Son of God, when He suffered on Calvary’s cross.

“The conies are but a feeble folk, yet make they their houses in the rocks.” Now, how do the conies make their houses in the rocks, for they are unable to make a hole even in the ground? God sends the thunderbolt and rends the rocks, so that the conies may find a place of safety in the clefts. You often listen to the thunder and watch the lightning, all the time wondering why it has been sent. Well, I will tell you; God sends it in order to provide a place of security for the poor feeble conies. When the coney is hidden in the cleft of the rock she is quite safe from the lion (though she may tremble when she hears his roar), as the cleft, though large enough for the coney, is not large enough for the lion to get in. Before the lion could touch one of the feeble conies which are hidden in the rock he would have to tear the rock to pieces, and this he could not do.

Now, beloved hearers, the thunderbolt of the wrath of God against sin has fallen upon Christ, when He suffered on Calvary, and the Rock of Ages has been cleft, as the hymn says —

You wonder why I have changed the second line, and have not said—

Well, I will tell you why I did so. I am hidden in the cleft of the Rock of Ages, and I do not ask that I may be. Just think how strange it would be if I were to go into one of your houses for tea, and when sitting at your table, with the tea before me, I should begin to knock on the table. You would say, “What do you want?” And suppose I said, “I want you to let me into your house, and give me some tea;” you would say, “But you are in already, and the tea is before you.” If I were to say, “Oh, but I must continue to knock,” you would think it very queer of me to go on that way instead of enjoying what was before me. And so it is with those who go on praying to God for what He has given them already instead of enjoying it, and thanking and praising Him for it. Before I was converted I came to the Lord and said—

But now I can say—

and thank and praise Him for it. The feeblest believer is safe in Christ, safe in the cleft of the Rock of Ages; and though Satan is going about as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour, you need not fear, for he cannot take you out of Christ. Before he can get a single believer out of Christ, he would have to tear the Rock of Ages to pieces. Poor feeble one, do not fear, you are safe forever in the Rock of Ages; safe in the cleft which was made when the thunderbolt of the wrath of God fell upon the Rock of Ages on Calvary’s cross.

“The locusts have no king, yet go they forth all of them by bands.” Here we get another thing. The locusts have no visible head, yet they keep in rank. This answers to the unity of the body of Christ. We have no head on earth, but we are all united to our Head in heaven, and to one another on earth by the Holy Ghost. There is one body on earth to which all Christians belong, with Christ the Head in heaven. We, who believe, have all been baptized into the body of Christ by the Spirit, and we are now to endeavor to keep the unity of the Spirit. We should all keep rank as the locusts, and own no head on earth. The locusts form one band as they go forth, and they never break rank; they will allow themselves to be broken by the wheels of an approaching vehicle rather than break rank. It is sad to see Christians split up into so many sects instead of owning the one body, and expressing the unity of it here on earth! We should take a lesson from the locusts, who would rather let themselves be broken into pieces than separate.

“The spider taketh hold with her hands, and is in king’s palaces.” Now, what insect is more repulsive than the spider? And yet it is to be found in the king’s palace. The spiders are to be found in the outhouses in the summer, but when the weather gets cold they find their way into the houses, and generally get to the highest places, where they remain undisturbed. They are to be found on the corners of the drawing-room ceiling, high up, and safe from the housemaid’s broom. No doubt Solomon caught sight of one on the grand ceiling of the drawing-room of his

palace, which led him to write about it. Now what position true of all believers, does this answer to? Well, we shall find it in Ephesians 2:4-6. We were by nature loathsome as the spider, and at a distance from God, in the outhouse and in our sins: “but God, who is rich in mercy, for His great love wherewith He loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ (by grace ye are saved), and hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ.” We have our place now in the king’s palace.

In the ants we have an illustration of the salvation of all poor sinners who have no strength, but who have come outside of themselves to Christ and taken salvation as a gift from Him. In the conies is seen the security of all believers; in the locusts our unity, and in the spider our place now as seated in the heavenlies. Now when we know that we have salvation and security in Christ, we should seek to keep rank, seek to own the truth of the one body into which we have been baptized by the Holy Ghost, and then live in the enjoyment of our place in Christ. If we do so, the four last conditions will be true of us.

We shall be bold as lions, swift as greyhounds, hardy as goats, and as dignified as kings! There are three things which go well; yea, four are comely in going; a lion which is strongest among beasts, and turneth not away for any! This is boldness. We should be bold as the lion in the service of the Lord, not to be turned aside by any one from following Him. In the “grayhound” we get swiftness. Well, we are to be swift to serve the Lord; swift to carry out His wishes. The “he-goat” gives us hardness. We are to endure hardness in the Lord’s service. “Thou therefore endure hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.” “A king against whom there is no rising up.” This gives us dignity. We are to go through the world in a manner in keeping with the place we are in. Just fancy the King of Italy coming to England and spending his time playing marbles with the boys on the streets. Would it be in keeping with his position as a king? Surely not; and so with us. We should not do anything unbecoming to our dignity as beloved children of God, and as those who are seated in the heavenlies in Christ. We need not go to theaters, flower shows, concerts, or boat races for enjoyment; it would be beneath our dignity; all our enjoyment is in Christ, and in living for Him. “For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.”

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