



7 Be not wise in thine own eyes: fear the Lord, and depart from evil. 8 It shall be health to thy navel, and marrow to thy bones. 9 Honour the Lord with thy substance, and with the firstfruits of all thine increase: 10 So shall thy barns be filled with plenty, and thy presses shall burst out with new wine. 11 My son, despise not the chastening of the Lord; neither be weary of his correction: 12 For whom the Lord loveth he correcteth; even as a father the son in whom he delighteth. (Prov 3:7-12)

No one gains a deep understanding of God's Word by simply picking up the Bible and reading it from cover to cover. The Bible is not a novel, or a single work of law; nor is it a single Book of Religion. It is a complete course on morals, religion, science, nature, agriculture, and diet. But even more than these, the Holy bible is a book about life and how we must live our lives to the greatest joy and profit. We can in no wise absorb all of its beauty and meaning by simply reading it straight through. Every word, every phrase, every sentence, and every paragraph must be meditated upon as if they were orders used by the Commander on the battlefield. Every jot and tittle carries so much weight that lives depend upon our complete understanding. As the prophet Isaiah has said: *Whom shall he teach knowledge? and whom shall he make to understand doctrine? them that are weaned from the milk, and drawn from the breasts. For precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little* (Isaiah 28:9-10) Certainly, there is no shame in the consumption of the milk of the Word. If we omit the milk of God's Word, we may as well forego the meat of it for we shall never be able to digest it. But the milk comes with the early acceptance of the provisions of Salvation and Grace. We have not mastered

our course and studies at the first approach to Christ. We must follow in His footsteps, as did the disciples, in order to continually grow in knowledge and wisdom. Someone, like Andrew, must have introduced us to Christ, and then taught us of all they knew of Him – the healings, the miracles, the compassion, etc. But after this, we must have a profound hunger to know more. If we are not growing, we are dying. So do we ever learn ALL that is made available to us of truth in the Bible? Not at all! Many great truths are couched in mystery with purpose. As we grow and are able to comprehend, the Holy Ghost will reveal some of those gems of truth that others may miss. But there are always greater mysteries yet to be revealed, either in this life, or the life to come.

The first verse of today's text is a powerhouse of wisdom: 7. ***Be not wise in thine own eyes: fear the Lord, and depart from evil.*** If intellectual conceit is vain, spiritual conceit is far worse than vain. It bars our mind from knowing of our continual depravity without Christ. I have never known a truly wealthy man who felt compelled to boast of his wealth. It will be obvious to his neighbors that he is wealthy. I have never known a devout Christian who has felt compelled to boast of their prayer and fasting. Our piety and devotion will be known through our perseverance in love and good works to others. That which is worthy of being treasured in Heaven is a matter between the Christian and His Lord. Neither the Pastor, nor others, need know the level of giving by members of the parish to preclude a favoritism based on filthy lucre. ***Let another man praise thee, and not thine own mouth; a stranger, and not thine own lips.*** (Prov 27:2). A truly good parish priest cannot boast of his own Godly sermons, but his parishioners will always afford the best commendation of those sermons to others. The very beginning of wisdom is having a "fear of the Lord." What does a fear of the Lord have to do with departing from evil? When we at first realize that God truly exists, that He is all-powerful, that He holds our very lives in His Hand moment-by-moment, we will know that such a Divine Person must be feared above every other being in the world. The Lord is righteous and just – simply the complete opposite of evil. He will brood no evil in His Majestic Presence. So, if we draw near the King of Kings, we must draw away from evil. (see also Romans 12:16)

The next three verses reveal how we are profited in our fear and honor of the Lord our God. 1) First, we are made healthy in our inward being by our fear of the Lord. ***8 It shall be health to thy navel, and marrow to thy bones.*** Our inward being is made stronger (navel) and our outward form (bones) shall give us stature. 2) We are enriched with whatsoever gain is profitable to us. ***9 Honour the Lord with thy substance, and with the firstfruits of all thine increase: 10 So shall thy barns be filled with plenty, and thy presses shall burst out with new wine.*** Do you remember how the Bible describes 'why we love Christ?' ***We love him, because he first loved us.*** (1 John 4:19) The love of God prompts reciprocation in our hearts. Please remember that your mother loved a screaming and self-centered baby long before that baby loved its mother. All good things come from God. He gave us life and liberty. He gives health and nutrition, clothing and lodging. Should we not reciprocate with that same measure of love? Should we not return our tithes and offerings to a gracious God through our giving at church as well as to our fellow man? ***The liberal soul shall be made fat: and he that watereth shall be watered also himself.*** (Prov 11:25) Every kindness shown to others is one more golden coin laid on deposit in our heavenly bank.

The seeming prosperity of the wicked has doubtless escaped your observation. They are not bound by rules of honesty, morality, or propriety in business or politics. Whatever deceitful means gains an advantage is their means of choice. While the Godly person is limited by rules of righteousness and cannot bend to deceitful habits. But such

prosperity of the wicked is an illusion. Their hearts are full of the disease of greed and chicanery. Their sleep is not pleasant but continually interrupted with unspeakable fears and unrest. ***11 My son, despise not the chastening of the Lord; neither be weary of his correction: 12 For whom the Lord loveth he correcteth; even as a father the son in whom he delighteth.*** The Lord does not chasten the wicked, but rather judges them in their sins. When a good man or woman undertakes a good work, it seems that the dogs of hell are unleashed to stop it. That is a normal expectation from an enemy of righteousness. But when a Godly man or woman becomes more obsessed with the work of doing good than in the reason of it, God may bring chastisement on that person in order to correct their compass of conscience. Just as a loving parent corrects his child for their own good, so does God correct us in varied ways for our own benefit. If, like a child playing in the busy thoroughfare, we get into paths and places we should not be, God will chastise for our own safety. Instead of moping about (my mother's favorite charge against me) resentfully, or sullen up at every word of correction, the Christian soul should be joyed by the correction knowing that all of God's correction brings benefits. Do we have the faith to be happy about correction? ***Behold, happy is the man whom God correcteth: therefore despise not thou the chastening of the Almighty*** (Job 5:17)