



13 He that answereth a matter before he heareth it, it is folly and shame unto him. 14 The spirit of a man will sustain his infirmity; but a wounded spirit who can bear? 15 The heart of the prudent getteth knowledge; and the ear of the wise seeketh knowledge. 16 A man's gift maketh room for him, and bringeth him before great men. 17 He that is first in his own cause seemeth just; but his neighbour cometh and searcheth him. 18 The lot causeth contentions to cease, and parteth between the mighty. 19 A brother offended is harder to be won than a strong city: and their contentions are like the bars of a castle. 20 A man's belly shall be satisfied with the fruit of his mouth; and with the increase of his lips shall he be filled. 21 Death and life are in the power of the tongue: and they that love it shall eat the fruit thereof. 22 Whoso findeth a wife findeth a good thing, and obtaineth favour of the LORD. 23 The poor useth intreaties; but the rich answereth roughly. 24 A man that hath friends must shew himself friendly: and there is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother. (Prov 18:13-24)

If we could only control that incorrigible tongue, we would fare much better in life for wisdom and forbearance. For example, we would be far better able at hearing the answers to our prayers and knowing the God to whom we offer them: *"Be still, and know that I am God . . ."* (Psalms 46:10a) A very wise Chinese philosopher once remarked, *"He who knows, does not speak. He who speaks does not know."* Lao Tzu (circa 600 BC).

13 He that answereth a matter before he heareth it, it is folly and shame unto him. We have ample evidence of men speaking before hearing out the matter or thinking it through in Holy Scripture. One sterling example is that of King Darius who loved his counselor, Daniel. Out of intense jealousy, the princes, governors, counselors, etc. of the kingdom conspired to lure Darius by ruse to sign a proclamation that any who would petition any God or man (other than the King) should be cast into a den of lions. Not considering his good friend, Daniel, the King signed the decree. *Wherefore king Darius signed the writing and the decree. Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went into his house; and his windows being open in his chamber toward Jerusalem, he kneeled upon his knees three times a day, and prayed, and gave thanks before his God, as he did aforetime.* (Dan 6:9-10) Please note, notwithstanding the severe penalty, Daniel answered to the higher Authority and not the immoral policy of the state or King. He did so very openly with his windows opened. God saved Daniel from the lions to Darius' great joy! It pays to be informed of the facts before making

great decisions, or even little ones.

We may persevere under intolerable circumstances as long as we have hope. But hope forlorn gives way to failure of purpose and depression. Far more suicides result from depressed spirits than from painful diseases. **14 The spirit of a man will sustain his infirmity; but a wounded spirit who can bear?** A prime example would be the apostate traitor, Judas. *Then Judas, which had betrayed him, when he saw that he was condemned, repented himself, and brought again the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, Saying, I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood. And they said, What is that to us? see thou to that. And he cast down the pieces of silver in the temple, and departed, and went and hanged himself.* (Matt 27:3-5) It was not superior arms and equipment that sustained our fathers during the American Revolution, for they were in want of food and the bare necessities of clothing; yet, they prevailed over a favored enemy in the field. Though there were several contributing factors to their victorious performance under great disadvantages, the one factor that decided the contest more than any other was the spirit of liberty burning in the hearts of our wonderful and patriotic forefathers. Has that spirit dissipated and metamorphosed into a spirit of dependence and greed in our day?

15 The heart of the prudent getteth knowledge; and the ear of the wise seeketh knowledge. How is it that the heart of the prudent gets knowledge? Is it not by hearing that wisdom which the ear has sought out? Seeking is usually done with the eye, but it is the ear of the wise that seeks out knowledge. Knowledge and wisdom are an obsession of those who know and love God, for they know that wisdom will lead their characters to be more like the God who made them. The greatest knowledge known to man came by hearing, did it not? *So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.* (Romans 10:17)

16 A man's gift maketh room for him, and bringeth him before great men. Historians tell us that one custom particular to the East was that of gift-giving to great men such as kings and potentates when one was admitted to their presence. In visiting the ancient ruins of Persepolis in Persia, I observed the Gateway of the Nations where conquered kings and people passed through bearing gifts and tribute to Xerxes, Artaxerxes, and the Darius the Great. The practice began when men became accustomed to sacrificing gifts to the deity. The practice thus became corrupted into the doleful practice of bribery in both government and business in the East. Of course, it is a universal principle that money buys influence, perhaps more in our America of today than anywhere else on earth. If we will improve our natures, we might do well to look back on our forefathers for our examples.

Mr. Edmund Burke has said: *"People will not look forward to posterity, who never look backward to their ancestors."* At the onslaught of the French Revolution, Burke had mixed emotions concerning the result. He at first *"believed the Revolution would result in a more humane and fair application of law;"* however, Burke came to see that *"the revolution had not only overthrown the monarchy, and its elitist apparatus of wealth and prestige, but had disrupted and destroyed the very institutions that make society function. So, the Church, army, law, business, manufacture, and the arts were all to varying extents victims of a certain will to destruction."* Do we not observe the same kind of revolution occurring, though by insidious subterfuge, in America under the guise of "political correctness" and big government?

17 He that is first in his own cause seemeth just; but his neighbour cometh and searcheth him. The usual combat strategy of a good "offense being the best defense" does not necessarily apply in the field of oratory. The guilty party usually presses his

case first and with greater vigor than his accusers. After he has ranted and vented a hopeless case, his neighbors or solicitors will cross examine and bare his soul to the light of truth. Sir Francis Bacon says *“There is a difference between the idols of the human mind and the ideas of the Divine Mind....”* I believe he is guilty of plagiarizing the Holy Bible in this analysis; however, there is never guilt in such plagiarizing. *“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD.”* (Isaiah 55:8) The great ME often attempts to supplant the Great I AM in human reasoning.

18 The lot causeth contentions to cease, and parteth between the mighty. The only benefit to casting lots is the hope that it may prevent battle and bloodshed if all parties accept the result. It does appear to have been an honorable means of settling disputes in the ancient East.

19 A brother offended is harder to be won than a strong city: and their contentions are like the bars of a castle. A strong city may fall through a successful conquest, but it is not personally offended thereby though its citizens suffer shame. It will revive and grow strong again. However, a brother offended has personality and memory – a memory that will relive the offense a thousand times before it is allowed to be forgotten. Castles, such as the **Neuschwanstein Castle** in Germany, are most often built upon the heights of the mountain peaks and very difficult to assault. Many waves of attackers and countless lives are required to take a fortified castle on a mountain peak. The same is true with winning back an offended brother – not impossible, but it is an uphill battle.

20 A man's belly shall be satisfied with the fruit of his mouth; and with the increase of his lips shall he be filled. The Scriptures often compare words to seed; for example, the Seed of the Sower (Word of God) of Matthew 13:1-23. The words we speak are very much like seed – either of good wheat, or of tares. The wicked actually thrive on the seed of tares for they bear the same nature as the seed. The more such poison seed they propagate, the fuller shall be their burden of guilt. They may feel full and satisfied just before the destroying wind strikes them unawares.

21 Death and life are in the power of the tongue: and they that love it shall eat the fruit thereof. Herein lies a truth often repeated in Proverbs and elsewhere in Holy Writ. While it is true that the tongue of men has saved lives, it is conversely true that the tongues of men have resulted in the deaths of countless numbers of innocents. Lies and gossip are like tiny missiles that murder their victims with a thousand tiny wounds. The bread of tares (wicked words and behavior) is bitter and coarse indeed. The bread of fine wheat equals good words and morals. Whichever bread we produce with our tongues shall be the bread of our Eternal Feast.

22 Whoso findeth a wife findeth a good thing, and obtaineth favour of the LORD. There is a tiny mystery hidden in this line. Can you spot it? A good wife does not come normally by chance, but as a result of searching until found – very much like a valuable ruby! A good wife makes all other aspects of a man's life good. I often think that we have it backwards in our thinking about the genders. It must be true that a good wife truly is our “better halves” else there would not be a good woman behind every successful man.” A good wife is a gift from God as surely as is the rain on the meadows. If a Godly man SEEKS after a good wife, and will settle for nothing less, God will provide him the same. So a good wife is God's answer to prayer. Unfortunately, it happens that a good wife may be found by an evil man who does not deserve such a blessing.

23 The poor useth intreaties; but the rich answereth roughly. The poor have no bargaining power other than the sympathy of their benefactors. Having no money, they also have little influence except as pawns of the wealthy and corporate elite. The poverty of the poor has a benefit: they are more considerate of others and understand the needs and necessities of life. But why do the rich answer roughly? Because they **CAN** do so with impunity. They do not worry about any threat the poor can pose for them. They are corrupted against mercy. They have power as a consequence of wealth. Lord Acton (a friend of General Robert E. Lee, incidentally) has made a proverb that is as well-known and as true as any others - for it conforms to the truth of Scripture: *"Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely. Great men are almost always bad men."* I happen to know the high regard in which Lord Acton held George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, and R.E. Lee, so his reference was not without exception.

24 A man that hath friends must shew himself friendly: and there is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother. It took several hundreds of years for man to wake up to this simple biblical fact when Dale Carnegie wrote his little book: **How to Win Friends and Influence People** first published in 1936. When I see those unfriendly and hostile faces of people I meet on the streets of a city, I do not wonder that they know not Christ. They are not wise and have not sought out the wisdom of this Proverb. I must repeat from a previous devotion that this one verse of Proverbs carries as much profound truth and power as any other in the Old Testament and, perhaps, even the NT. Jesus Christ is the central figure illustrated here. He became our friend first, and He expects us to return the friendship. He loved us first, therefore, we must love Him in return. Please examine this one simple verse that hails back to this Proverb: *"We love him, because he first loved us."* (1 John 4:19) How beautiful! How simple! Yet, how PROFOUND is this one verse from 1 John 4! Christ is that amazing Friend that sticks closer than any brother can do even if that other brother so desired. He is a Friend that will never forsake you - He has proven that fact by the nail prints on His hands and feet, and the gaping wound in His side. He is your Friend right at this moment, but you must seal the gift by being His best friend by commitment of heart. Have you?