



"1 Better is the poor that walketh in his integrity, than he that is perverse in his lips, and is a fool. 2 Also, that the soul be without knowledge, it is not good; and he that hasteth with his feet sinneth. 3 The foolishness of man perverteth his way: and his heart fretteth against the LORD. 4 Wealth maketh many friends; but the poor is separated from his neighbour. 5 A false witness shall not be unpunished, and he that speaketh lies shall not escape. 6 Many will intreat the favour of the prince: and every man is a friend to him that giveth gifts. 7 All the brethren of the poor do hate him: how much more do his friends go far from him? he pursueth them with words, yet they are wanting to him. 8 He that getteth wisdom loveth his own soul: he that keepeth understanding shall find good. 9 A false witness shall not be unpunished, and he that speaketh lies shall perish. (Prov 19:1-9)

Proverbs makes a contrast to the response of the world to that of the spiritual. The wisdom revealed in Proverbs addresses the issues in a real-world sense - not approving, but simply stating the obvious insofar as the world is concerned. Today's lesson will address wealth & wisdom (vs. 1-4) and deceivers and liars (vs. 5-9). It seems that those of wealth comprise the greater proportion of those who fit the mold of "deceivers and liars." The greed for money will compel a man to do or say almost anything to gain more of it (and more is never enough!)

Historically speaking, statisticians tell us that about 80% of all men who have been considered 'great' have come from poor and humble beginnings. It seems that wealth alone will not sustain a man through the hard challenges of greatness. We need only look to the man, Christopher Columbus, who begged bread for his hungry son, and died in poverty; yet, Columbus gave more than an immense fortune in gold to the world - a new continent, "*conceived in Liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.*" The great artist, Millet, was burdened with poverty throughout his life, yet he gave the world the Masterpiece - the *Angelus*. Now what of the property

holdings of the greatest Man who ever walked among us - the Lord Jesus Christ? "*The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head.*" (Matt 8:20) Many will remember the words of the Jewish peasant, Tavia, in Fiddler on the Roof, who lamented, "Lord, I know that there is no disgrace in being poor, but there is no great honor in it, either!" There truly is no immoral or evil aspect of money itself - it is the value WE place on it that may be evil. God never said money was evil - "*For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.*" (1 Tim 6:10)

"*1 Better is the poor that walketh in his integrity, than he that is perverse in his lips, and is a fool.*" Not all poor are righteous or wise. More than likely, the very opposite may be true if we are raised up among a wealth of resources and find ourselves unable to provide for our families. But many poor are beyond the reach of opportunity and are held captive by an unrighteous social and political system. But a poor man who would rather suffer hunger, than rob or steal, has greater good than the man who indulges in profane and vulgar language. The verse quoted describes such a one as a 'fool (*and is a fool*).' I apologize for so often quoting from my favorite poet, Mr. Thomas Gray, but the words are so appropriate to the occasion:

*Full many a gem of purest ray serene,
The dark unfathom'd caves of ocean bear:
Full many a flow'r is born to blush unseen,
And waste its sweetness on the desert air.*

*Some village-Hampden that with dauntless breast
The little tyrant of his fields withstood;
Some mute inglorious Milton here may rest,
Some Cromwell guiltless of his country's blood.*

*The applause of listening senates to command,
The threats of pain and ruin to despise,
To scatter plenty o'er a smiling land,
And read their hist'ry in a nation's eyes,*

*Their lot forbade: nor circumscrib'd alone
Their growing virtues, but their crimes confin'd;
Forbade to wade through slaughter to a throne,
And shut the gates of mercy on mankind,*

*The struggling pangs of conscious truth to hide,
To quench the blushes of ingenuous shame,
Or heap the shrine of Luxury and Pride
With incense kindled at the Muse's flame.*

~ Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard 1751

"*2 Also, that the soul be without knowledge, it is not good; and he that hasteth with his feet sinneth.*" This verse further illustrates the principle of the first. The fool, without knowledge, rushes forward as if he had full knowledge and sins in his foolishness. He also commits a multitude of blunders so that all of the community will know him as a fool. "*Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall.*" (Prov 16:18) There is a devotion in the World War II (1942) "*Strength for the Journey to*

God and Country" serviceman's book which describes the bugle call, the Still, in the British Navy. When a severe emergency occurs, the "Still" is sounded, at which time all seaman aboard pause momentarily to collect their thoughts, assess the situation, and proceed to address the matter with reason. Would not life be far less stressful if we all followed that example?

"3 *The foolishness of man perverteth his way: and his heart fretteth against the LORD.*" Whose fault is it when we succumb to temptation? Has the Lord tempted us and caused us to fall? *"Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man: But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed."* (James 1:13-14) If it was not the Lord, then who is responsible? We fall into temptation by way of our own foolishness. The young, especially, believe that they can associate with desperate sinners and withstand the temptation, but they fall as flies over the flames. Our innate lust and greed draws us ever nearer the fires until our wings are singed and we can only fall. We often blame the devil for every shortcoming, but we do so falsely. Though the devil is the Emperor of Evil, he has given his subjects leeway in their sins. In his work, *History of the Devil*, Daniel Defoe (1660-1731) says:

*Bad as he is, the Devil may be abus'd,
Be falsly charg'd, and causelesly accus'd,
When Men, unwilling to be blam'd alone,
Shift off these Crimes on Him which are their Own.*

"4 *Wealth maketh many friends; but the poor is separated from his neighbour.*" This is more rhetorical than it is absolute. Wealth really does not make friends - it draws flies. The Prodigal Son seemingly had a host of friends while his inheritance lasted, but finally found himself in the pig sty starving for bread. The poor, on the other hand, find themselves shunned by their neighbors fearing that the poor man, Lazarus, will beg crumbs from the table of the wealthy. But among the common poor themselves, there may be found friends who share in common want and are friends worth dying for. Unwittingly, perhaps, Benigno "Ninoy" S. Aquino, Jr, former Philippine Senator and martyred patriot, made the statement in Taipei in 1983 - shortly before his assassination: *"the Filipino is worth dying for"* - and he did, indeed, die for his people at the hands of the Marcos regime. That slogan now appears on the Philippine 500 pesos bill; however, that slogan means far more than Aquino intended - the Lord Jesus Christ considered the Filipino, and all peoples, worth dying for.

"5 *A false witness shall not be unpunished, and he that speaketh lies shall not escape.*" The liar and false witness are constantly weaving a web of lies and deceit that will eventually trap them. Mr. B.L. Hale (my high school French professor) loved to say: *"Oh what tangled webs we weave when first we practice to deceive."* - Sir Walter Scott, *Marmion*. I heard it often and that which seemed trivial at first, being repeated so often by Prof. Hale, became profound truth to my understanding after prolonged observation and, I must admit, personal practice.

"6 *Many will intreat the favour of the prince: and every man is a friend to him that giveth gifts.*" Wealth is just like honey. Honey alone is good. It offers health benefits and tastes delicious. But honey attracts varmints that cannot profit a man. Ants, flies, and even bears are attracted to honey. So the plague of the wealthy is the ingratiatory habits of the crowd seeking honey or money. But a man who gives gifts and, particularly politicians who give away the earnings of others, curries favor with the 'madding crowd.' (Thomas Hardy)

"7 All the brethren of the poor do hate him: how much more do his friends go far from him? he pursueth them with words, yet they are wanting to him." If our brethren despise us for our poverty, what of our less loyal friends? Those who fall into poverty and want will also be wanting of friends. The only bargaining chip a poor man has is the currency of his words. But there remains One who hears the pleas of the poor: *"Mine eye mourneth by reason of affliction: LORD, I have called daily upon thee, I have stretched out my hands unto thee."* (Psalms 88:9)

"8 He that getteth wisdom loveth his own soul: he that keepeth understanding shall find good." Wisdom is the handle which the Holy Ghost uses to draw us to God and preserve our souls. Without that wisdom granted by the dear Holy Ghost, we could never know God. Understanding is key to happiness. Many go through life blind to the prodding's of kindness and charity, but keen to the call of lust and greed. Can we comprehend, on our own merits, the mystery inherent in these words of Jesus? *"For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it."* (Matt 16:25) The Lord expands upon them in the following verse: *"For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?"* (Matt 16:26) Even if we, like Nicodemus, must come to the Lord during the bleak, desponding hours of night to find truth, we must do so. Seek and we shall find... *Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.* (Matt 7:7-8)

"9 A false witness shall not be unpunished, and he that speaketh lies shall perish." I have personally observed the absolute truth of this verse with my own eyes. The purveyors of gossip and slander are hoisted on the prongs of their own *tribulatum* (Lat. for pitchfork, and the root word for tribulation). The 63rd Psalm was the favorite of General George S. Patton. He was much slandered and maligned for his straightforward and apolitical commentary. His favorite verses of that entire Psalm were these: *But those that seek my soul, to destroy it, shall go into the lower parts of the earth. They shall fall by the sword: they shall be a portion for foxes.* (Psalms 63:9-10) And thus to all who willfully pursue wickedness!