

Excerpts from
Lectures on the Book of Proverbs

by

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Proverbs 3:3,4 -- *"Let not mercy and truth forsake you; bind them around your neck, write them on the tablet of your heart, and so find favor and high esteem in the sight of God and man."*

Respecting mercy and truth, three things are here enjoined: (1) *"Let them not forsake you."* That is, let the practice of them be steadfastly and invariably adhered to in all your course--in all circumstances however trying, and no matter how strong the temptation to different feelings and the opposite course may be. Never in any case let them leave you, but keep them constantly and perseveringly, that in no situation in which you may be placed may they ever fail to prompt and counsel you.

(2) *"Bind them about your neck."* That is, let them be at all times the grace and ornament of your character. That this is the idea appears from chapter 1 verse 9: "For they will be a graceful ornament on your head, and chains about your neck." The command to "bind them about your neck" seems to imply the wearing of them constantly--a permanent adorning, not to be put on at one time and taken off at another, like certain ornamental articles of dress that are worn only on special occasions and in particular companies. These are ornaments fit for all times and for all descriptions of society. All will admire mercy and truth.

(3) *"Write them on the tablet of your heart."* Inscribe them deeply there. Let them not be the *ornament* of your character merely, but your *treasure* too. Let all your heart's affections and desires be under their control. Do not be satisfied with knowing them only as what was "written on tables of stone," but let your desire be to have them incorporated with all the leanings of the inner man--to possess a heart in entire unison with their dictates.

Mercy and truth are the recommendations of the divine. The men of the world may hate the *principles* of the man of God, but he will have a testimony in their conscience; and if he maintains a steadfast consistency, he will command their respect and goodwill. This is the only legitimate way of finding favor with men. Their favor must be forsaken if it cannot be gotten except by conduct inconsistent with right principle. It is but a false, selfish, and temporary favor at best that can thus be obtained; and it is obtained at the expense of what is infinitely more precious--the favor of God.

Proverbs 3:11-12 -- *"My son, do not despise the chastening of Yahweh, nor be weary of His correction; for whom Yahweh loves He corrects, just as a father the son in whom he delights."*

When may we be said to *despise* the chastening of the Lord? In the following cases:

1. When it is not *felt*; when there is a lack of natural sensibility to the particular stroke of the rod. This happens but rarely. Men in general are quite sufficiently alive to the value of temporal things; but the value of them is comparative. There are cherished and favorite possessions and others less highly thought of, less fondly held. The Lord, it may be, deals gently. He spares the cherished. He does not take what is most highly esteemed. Yet, instead of humbly acknowledging the kindness (that is, being lowly and submissive and seeking a blessing on the gentle stroke of chastening that the heavier one may be withheld), the preservation and safety of the greater possession produces insensibility to the privation of the lesser; and thus the correction is thus disregarded and proves inefficient.

2. When it is not duly felt *as from God*; when God's hand in the correction is not duly considered, acknowledged, and submitted to. However much an event may be felt in itself, or however much the feelings of nature may be wounded to the quick and the heart ready to break under the sad calamity, unless it is felt as coming *from God*, it is "despised."

Everything depends on this. A child may smart under the rod, or his punishment may vex and distress him greatly, but he may not feel it *as from his father*. It is not the sense of *his father's displeasure* that grieves him. And so with the child of God. If while suffering he fails to acknowledge his heavenly Father's hand, if it is considered as a mere chance that has befallen him, as something that forms a part of the common lot of men--the *fortune* of others as well as his--then it is "despised." That which should be mostly seen and mostly regarded, and which should give the most concern, is overlooked or little thought of. And even when God's hand is seen and felt in the suffering, still it must be felt *humbly and submissively* and not resisted.

Job exemplified the proper state of mind under correction. He felt God's hand; he acknowledged it; he bowed before it: "Yahweh gave, and Yahweh has taken away; blessed be the name of Yahweh" (1:21). "Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?" (2:10). But the spirit of Jonah was a mournful example of the opposite, when he fretted impatiently and selfishly at the loss of his gourd, and said in the heat of a discontented and rebellious heart, "It is right for me to be angry" (4:9). Surely, never could there be more unseemly and sinful irreverence. It was "doing despite" to the correcting hand of the Lord, treating contemptuously the procedure of Him whose chastisement should have laid him low.

4. When the *design* or *end* of correction is not duly laid to heart, is not seriously thought of and sought after. We never treat a fellowman with due consideration when we show no concern about the objective he has in view, and especially when we ourselves are the subjects of his solicitude and his plans. A child shows no respect for his parents when, on being corrected by them for a fault, he repeats it. This is practical contempt. So when the Lord tells his children the design of his corrections, and they show no anxiety after the attainment of that design, they "despise" his chastening.

There is a *general* design in all affliction, "to take away sin." There is also a *particular* design involved. For example, if there is worldly ambition--a commencing or growing prevalence of the "lust of the eyes and the pride of life"--it may be particularly aimed at by the infliction of sweeping losses in earthly substance or the frustration of confident hopes. The man who hankers after them, who wastes himself in regrets and lamentations, is unreconciled to the divine will and forgets the purpose of the loss, is "despising the chastening," for he is not seeking in earnest

the accomplishment of the divine intention. God considers the *end* of affliction as most worthy of the sacrifice involved, as more truly valuable than the objects of earthly attachment which he takes away. We, on the other hand, judge otherwise. We mourn over our losses, and would rather have them back instead of being humbly thankful for the intended benefit accruing from their loss.

The second of the two extremes against which we are admonished is "*being weary of his correction,*" or as the apostle has it, "fainting when we are rebuked by Him." We are chargeable with this in the following ways:

1. When we cherish a spirit similar to that just noticed--*dwelling* on and brooding over the trial itself, hanging our heads and weeping over the recollection of it, wearying oneself to exhaustion by incessant bemoaning. This is wrong, and it arises from forgetting the *end* purpose for which the trial has been sent. It is remarkable how precisely opposite to fainting and being weary is the use which the apostle exhorts the Hebrews to make of their trials: "Therefore lift your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees, and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be put out of joint but rather be healed" (12:5, ESV).

2. This "wearying" and "fainting" may arise from unbelief of the divine promises on two points: as to the *design* of the trial and as to *strength* or *grace* duly to bear and improve it. There is nothing so bracing to the spirit as the firm conviction that, *first*, "all things are of God" (2 Cor. 5:18), and *second*, that "all things work together for good to those who love God" (Rom. 8:28). If the mind loses sight, or loses hold, of such assurances, the spirit will droop and languish.

3. "Fainting" and "wearying" may take place in two ways. The heart may be overwhelmed by *sudden* trials (suddenness combining with heaviness), giving an effect so stunning and overpowering that the spirit sinks into a temporary bewilderment. Or it may become wearied out and exhausted by the long continuance of the same trial, or by the rapid succession of different strokes of the rod--another and another coming before the wound of the former has had time to heal.

There are cases of both kinds to be met with. But however long the chastening hand of the Lord may be allowed to lie upon us, and however numerous and frequent may be the successive strokes, there ought to be no fainting and no wearying. One thing alone should be enough to prevent both the one and the other--the assurance that "It is Yahweh. Let Him do what seems good to Him" (1 Sam. 3:18).

Proverbs 3:16 -- "*Length of days is in her right hand, in her left hand riches and honor.*"

I am aware that respectable commentators interpret this as meaning simply long life, and all desirable prosperity and comfort in it. But I am of the opinion that both parts of the verse refer to something higher and better, and for this reason especially--that in the verses preceding, Solomon affirms the incomparable superiority of wisdom to silver, gold, rubies, and all things that can be desired of a similar transitory kind:

Happy is the man who finds wisdom, and the man who gains understanding; for

her proceeds are better than the profits of silver, and her gain than fine gold. She is more precious than rubies, and all the things you may desire cannot compare with her.

Now it certainly appears far from likely that Solomon should bring prominently forward as a *reason* for this superiority the tendency of wisdom to procure *these very things*--the long life, riches, and honors of the present world. "Length of days," therefore, and "riches and honor," I regard as meant in the way of contrast to the same things as they are "highly esteemed among men."

It is true, I freely allow, that wisdom does possess a most favorable tendency as to this life; but still its chief recommendation goes far beyond time and the things of time. The "length of days" is the same with that promised to the Redeemer in reward for his work: "He asked life from You, and You gave it to him--length of days forever and ever" (Ps. 21:4). It is eternity itself. And the "riches and honor" conferred by divine Wisdom are riches and honor incomparably more excellent and more lasting than those which the world, or which man, can bestow.

If you compare the verse with 8:18, you will be satisfied of this. The epithet there applied to the riches--"*durable riches*"--is evidently intended to make an emphatic distinction between them and the riches of earth, which are ever described in God's word as the very reverse of durable. The riches meant here, then, are such riches as are spoken of elsewhere as bestowed by the Saviour on all who come to him--the glories and enjoyments of heaven, or rather of the spiritual life begun on earth and consummated in heaven.¹ They are simply being represented under the figure of those things which are most highly prized among men.

And as to *honor*, it is not "the honor that comes from man." The Saviour represents that eager aspiration as one of the greatest obstacles to men's submission to the wisdom of God. "How can you believe, who receive honor from one another, and do not seek the honor that comes from the only God?" (John 5:44). "But now Yahweh says: 'Far be it from Me; for those who honor Me I will honor, and those who despise Me shall be lightly esteemed'" (1 Sam. 2:30). "If any man serve Me, let him follow Me; and where I am, there My servant will be also. If any man serves Me, him My Father will honor" (John 12:26). What an honor is this--bestowed by God himself--a participation in the glory of his exalted Son! And that Son declares, "To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne" (Rev. 3:21).

How complete are the two things in this verse when put together! With one hand Wisdom bestows length of days, and with the other provides for the enjoyment of the life thus bestowed.

¹ **KM Note:** That our "spiritual life" is "consummated in heaven" may perhaps be a simplified statement lacking precision. However, conservative theologians of all eschatological positions (premillennialism, postmillennialism, and amillennialism) agree that the eternal destiny of the redeemed is the new earth. For example, Anthony Hoekema writes, "The Bible assures us that God will create a new earth on which we shall live to God's praise in glorified, resurrected bodies. On that new earth, therefore, we hope to spend eternity, enjoying its beauties, exploring its resources, and using its treasures to the glory of God." Similarly, George Ladd states, "Throughout the entire Bible, the ultimate destiny of God's people is an earthly destiny....Biblical thought always places man on a redeemed earth, not in a heavenly realm removed from earthly existence." For a more detailed discussion of this topic, see my paper, "The Christian Answer to Death and The Eternal Destiny of the Redeemed."

Or, inverting the order, with one hand she bestows riches and honor, and with the other eternity to possess and enjoy them!