

Adam Clarke:

Introduction

To-morrow is uncertain. Self-praise forbidden. Anger and envy. Reproof from a friend. Want makes us feel the value of a supply. A good neighbor. Beware of suretyship. Suspicious praise. The quarrelsome woman. One friend helps another. Man insatiable. The incorrigible fool. Domestic cares. The profit of flocks for food and raiment.

Verse 1

Boast not thyself of to-morrow - See note on James 4:13, etc. Do not depend on any future moment for spiritual good which at present thou needest, and God is willing to give, and without which, should death surprise thee, thou must be eternally lost; such as repentance, faith in Christ, the pardon of sin, the witness of the Holy Spirit, and complete renovation of soul. Be incessant in thy application to God for these blessings.

My old MS. Bible translates thus: Ne glorie thou into the morewenning. Here we see the derivation of our word morning; morewenning, from more, and wen or won, to dwelt, i.e., a continuance of time to live or dwell in your present habitation. Every man wishes to live longer, and therefore wishes for to-morrow; and when to-morrow comes, then to-morrow, and so on.

Verse 2

Let another man praise thee, and not thine own mouth - We have a similar proverb, which illustrates this: "Self-praise is no commendation."

Verse 4

Who is able to stand before envy? - The rabbins have a curious story on this subject, and it has been formed by the moderns into a fable. There were two persons, one covetous and the other envious, to whom a certain person promised to grant whatever they should ask; but double to him who should ask last. The covetous man would not ask first, because he wished to get the double portion, and the envious man would not make the first request because he could not bear the thoughts of thus benefiting his neighbor. However, at last he requested that one of his eyes should be taken out, in order that his neighbor might lose both.

Verse 5

Open rebuke is better than secret love - Plutarch gives an account of a man who, aiming a blow at his enemy's life, cut open an imposthume, which by a salutary discharge saved his life, that was sinking under a disease for which a remedy could not be found. Partial friendship covers faults; envy, malice, and revenge, will exhibit, heighten, and even multiply them. The former conceals us from ourselves; the latter shows us the worst part of our character. Thus we are taught the necessity of amendment and correction. In this sense open rebuke is better than secret love. Yet it is a rough medicine, and none can desire it. But the genuine open-hearted friend may be intended, who tells you your faults freely but conceals them from all others; hence the sixth verse: "Faithful are the wounds of a friend."

Verse 8

Is a bird that wandereth from her nest - Leaving her own brood, places of retreat, and feeding-ground behind, and going into strange countries, where she is exposed to every kind of danger. So is the man who leaves his family connections and country, and goes into strange parts to find employment, better his circumstances, make a fortune, etc. I have seen multitudes of such wanderers from their place come to great misery and wretchedness. God's general advice is, "Do good, and dwell in the land; and verily thou shalt be fed."

Verse 9

Ointment and perfume - Anointing the head and various parts of the body with aromatic oil is frequent in the East, and fumigating the beards of the guests at the conclusion of an entertainment is almost universal; as is also sprinkling rose-water, and water highly odoriferous. Two of the curious vessels which are used for this purpose are now before me; they hold some quarts each, and are beautifully inlaid with silver in the form of sprigs, leaves, etc.

Verse 10

Thine own friend - A well and long tried friend is invaluable. Him that has been a friend to thy family never forget, and never neglect. And, in the time of adversity, rather apply to such a one, than go to thy nearest relative, who keeps himself at a distance.

Verse 12

A prudent man foreseeth the evil - The very same as Proverbs 22:3.

Verse 13

Take his garment - The same as Proverbs 20:16.

Verse 14

He that blesseth his friend - He who makes loud and public protestations of acknowledgments to his friend for favors received, subjects his sincerity to suspicion; and remember the Italian proverb elsewhere quoted: - "He who praises you more than he was wont to do, has either deceived you, or is about to do it." Extravagant public professions are little to be regarded.

Verse 15

A continual dropping - See Proverbs 19:13.

Verse 16

Whosoever hideth her hideth the wind - You may as well attempt to repress the blowing of the wind, as the tongue of a scold; and to conceal this unfortunate propensity of a wife is as impossible as to hush the storm, and prevent its sound from being heard.

The ointment of his right hand - You can no more conceal such a woman's conduct, than you can the smell of the aromatic oil with which your hand has been anointed. The Hebrew is very obscure, and is variously translated. Coverdale thus: "He that refrayneth her, refrayneth the wynde; and holdith oyle fast in his honde." That is, he attempts to do what is impossible to be done.

Verse 17

Iron sharpeneth iron - As hard iron, viz., steel, will bring a knife to a better edge when it is properly whetted against it: so one friend may be the means of exciting another to reflect, dive deeply into, and illustrate a subject, without which whetting or excitement, this had never taken place. Had Horace seen this proverb in the Septuagint translation when he wrote to the Pisos?

Ergo fungar vice cotis, acutum

Reddere quae ferrum valet, exors ipsa secandi.

Hor. Ars. Poet., ver. 304.

"But let me sharpen others, as the hone

Gives edge to razors, though itself have none."

Francis.

Verse 19

As in water face answereth to face - All men's hearts are pretty nearly alike; water is not more like to water, than one heart is to another. Or, as a man sees his face perfectly reflected by the water, when looking into it; so the wise and penetrating man sees generally what is in the heart of another by considering the general tenor of his words and actions.

"Surely, if each man saw another's heart

There would be no commerce;

All would disperse,

And live apart."

Hebert.

Verse 20

Hell and destruction are never full - How hideous must the soul of a covetous man be, when God compares it to hell and perdition!

The eyes of man are never satisfied - As the grave can never be filled up with bodies, nor perdition with souls; so the restless desire, the lust of power, riches, and splendor, is never satisfied. Out of this ever unsatisfied desire spring all the changing fashions, the varied amusements, and the endless modes of getting money, prevalent in every age, and in every country.

Verse 21

As the fining pot for silver - As silver and gold are tried by the art of the refiner, so is a man's heart by the praise he receives. If he feel it not, he deserves it; if he be puffed up by it, he is worthless.

Verse 22

Though thou shouldest bray a fool - Leaving all other conjectures, of which commentators are full, I would propose, that this is a metaphor taken from pounding metallic ores in very large mortars, such as are still common in the East, in order that, when subjected to the action of the fire, the metal may be the more easily separated from the ore. However you may try, by precept or example, or both, to instruct a stupid man, your labor is lost; his foolishness cannot be separated from him. You may purge metals of all their dross; but you cannot purge the fool of his folly.

Verse 23

The state of thy flocks - The directions to the end of the chapter refer chiefly to pastoral and agricultural affairs. Do not trust thy flocks to the shepherd merely; number them thyself; look into their condition; see how they are tended; and when, and with what, and in what proportion, they are fed.

Verse 24

For riches are not for ever - All other kinds of property are very transitory. Money and the highest civil honors are but for a short season. Flocks and herds, properly attended to, may be multiplied and continued from generation to generation. The crown itself is not naturally so permanent.

Verse 25

The hay appeareth - Take care that this be timeously mown, carefully dried and safely ricked or housed. And when the tender grass and the proper herbs appear in the mountains in the spring, then send forth the lambs, the young of the flock, that they may get suitable pasturage, without too much impoverishing the home fields; for by the sale of the lambs and goats, the price of the field is paid - all the landlord's demands are discharged. Either a certain number of lambs, goats, and other cattle, was given to the landlord; or so much money as so many lambs, etc., were then worth.

Verse 26

The lambs are for thy clothing - So many fleeces are given in some places as rent to the landlord.

Verse 27

Goats' milk enough for thy food - *lalachmecha*, *leto* thy bread; for they ate the bread and supped the milk to assist mastication, and help deglutition. And it seems that bread, with goats' milk, was the general article of food for the master and his family; and for the servant maids who assisted in the household work, and performed the operations required in the dairy.

The reader who wishes to see these maxims detailed and illustrated at large, may consult the writers *De Re Rustica*, where he will find much curious information.