



# The Reflector

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## Proverbs

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Proverbs are wise sayings passed down in various cultures of the world. There are old Chinese proverbs, American proverbs, etc.; and then there are biblical proverbs, most notably the proverbs of Solomon.

Some examples of American proverbs are: “Early to bed, early to rise, makes one healthy, wealthy and wise.” “You can catch more flies with honey than you can with vinegar.” “You can lead a horse to water, but you can't make him drink.”

Proverb that describe general basic rules of conduct are also known as maxims. The “early to bed, early to rise...” proverb is an example of a maxim. The nature of such proverbs is that they are intended to express a general rather than necessarily an absolute truth. The conduct of the proverb/maxim when applied tends to produce the stated results, it not a principle so fixed that there are no exceptions. Like the maxim just noticed, good sleep, rest, and industrious habits generally tends toward health, prosperity and wisdom - but it is known that some midnight oil burners and late risers have turned out healthy, wealthy and wise. And some early to bed and early to rise people did not do so well.

You say, “but such are human proverbs/maxims, what about inspired biblical proverbs?” While being inspired guarantees the accuracy of the proverbs or maxims recorded, it does not change the nature of a proverb/maxim. It is still a proverb and proverbs often express a general truth rather than absolute. Are there proverbs that express absolute truth? Yes.

But there are also those that only express general truth.

The following are some examples of proverbs that express generally true tendencies, but we know that there can be exceptions from a study of other Scriptures and general observations.

1. “*The fear of the LORD prolongeth days: but the years of the wicked shall be shortened.*” (Proverbs 10:27) While it is generally true that fear of the Lord prolongs days and wickedness shortens them, it is also known that some God-fearing people die very young and some wicked people live much longer than most of the rest of us.
2. “*The righteous has enough to satisfy his appetite, But the stomach of the wicked is in want.*” (Proverbs 13:25 NASB) While this states a general truth, does it mean that **every** righteous person **always** has enough to eat and that **every** wicked person **always** goes hungry? Surely not. This proverbs states that which is generally so and generally tends in that direction.
3. “*When a man's ways please the LORD, he maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him.*” (Proverbs 16:7) Again, while this may generally be the situation with those that please the Lord – there are those that please the Lord whose enemies are not at peace with them. The Lord had his enemies. The Apostles had their enemies. Early saints had their enemies. The fact that their ways pleas-

ed the Lord did not bring **all** their enemies around to be at peace with them.

4. *“Whoso findeth a wife findeth a good thing, and obtaineth favour of the LORD.” (Proverbs 18:22).* Now that does not say a “good” wife, or a “godly” wife – but simply a wife. Now, it is generally true that it is a good thing to find a wife and that one who does obtains favor of the Lord. But is that always true. If so, what of all the biblical examples where men found wives that were not such “good things” and did not bring the favor from the Lord?
5. *“The poor useth intreaties; but the rich answereth roughly.” (Proverbs 18:23)* Is there anyone that thinks that the poor **never** answers roughly, nor that the rich **never** use intreaties? Again the proverb states a general truth.
6. *“He that loveth pleasure shall be a poor man: he that loveth wine and oil shall not be rich.” (Proverbs 21:17).* If this is an absolute truth that is always the case, then how do you explain the Kennedy’s, the Onassis’s, Rockefeller’s and such like of the world?  
And now the biggie. The one possibly discussed most:
7. *“Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it.” (Proverbs 22:6)* There is no doubt that, generally speaking, a child that is brought up in the way he should go will not depart for his raising. If this proverb means there is no exception to this general truth, then there are other logical consequences that follow: (1. A child brought up in the way he should go loses his free-will. He could not depart if he wanted to – if he (absolutely) will not depart. (2. For the correctly brought up child, there is the impossibility of apostasy. There is no need to warn him “take heed lest he fall” (1 Cor. 10:12) or “Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God.” Once his upbringing in the

proper way is complete his destiny is sealed – not only **will** he not depart, he **cannot** depart, if this proverb expresses absolute rather than general truth. It is a maxim. It was never meant to be a statement of absolute truth.

Nothing that I say here should be taken to mean that I believe that parents should not do everything they possibly can to bring their children up “in the nurture and admonition of the Lord” or that they will not be held responsible if they do not. It is an awesome responsibility. Nor do I, in any way, want to give any comfort to those who have failed to so train their children.

On the other hand, parents who have apparently followed the Lord’s instruction on bringing up children and in spite of their efforts have a wayward child, do not need the extra burden of unnecessary rebuke for their **perceived** failure.

God preserved the proverbs of the Bible for a purpose. They teach us great and valuable lessons that both encourage and prod us to live upright lives before God in a succinct form that can not be found elsewhere in the Scriptures. They need to be preached and taught. They need to be read often by every Christian. They also need to be understood for what they are – they are **proverbs**. ■

## The Responsibility of Listening

R. J. Evans

Some people will listen to the word of God up to a point. In Acts 22, Paul defended himself in Jerusalem. The Jews listened to Paul concerning his birth (v. 3), education (v. 3), zeal towards the law (vv. 3-5), they even listened to the facts concerning his conversion to Christ (vv. 6-16). But, when Paul mentioned the Gentiles, a group of people they hated—that did it! (Acts 22:21) Their prejudices were so blinding that they would hear Paul no more. What Paul said in verse 21 “turned them off” immediately. “And they listened to him until this word, and then they raised their voices and said, ‘Away with such a fellow from the earth,

for he is not fit to live!” (Acts 22:22)

The Athenians listened to Paul in Acts 17:22-31. But, “when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked, while others said, ‘We will hear you again on this matter’” (Acts 17:32).

The above examples are of people in New Testament times who listened “up to a point.” Likewise, it is not uncommon to encounter the same today with those of the denominational world. For example, they may be quite interested, listening well to Bible teaching concerning faith, repentance, etc., until it is pointed out that baptism is essential to salvation (Mk. 16:16; Acts 2:38; 22:16; Rom. 6:3; 1 Pet. 3:21). Though the teaching is sound and scriptural—they are “turned off” immediately. They want to hear no more of it!

It must also be pointed out that some members of the Lord’s church listen in the same way. They like the preacher and what he says just fine until he begins to “step on their toes.” After that, they don’t hear a word he says.

The only remedy for one’s “listening up to a point” is for the individual to cultivate a genuine desire for and love of the truth. We must be as the Bereans— “These were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so” (Acts 17:11). How dangerous it is when one does not have a genuine love for the truth (2 Thes. 2:10). If we listen only up to a point, we will fall short of what God desires of us. We must listen all the way through—then obey all of the Lord’s commands given to us (Rom. 6:17-18; 1 Pet. 1:3-5). Are you “turned off” by God’s truth? Just how willing are you to listen to the “whole counsel of God”? (Acts 20:27).

As listeners to God’s word, may we all seek to be like Cornelius and his household— “Now therefore, we are all present before God, to hear all the things commanded you by God” (Acts 10:33). Their main objective was to hear the word of God. When the preacher takes his place in the pulpit, as a listener, are you truly concerned with hearing God’s word? The preacher will have to give an account for what he says, and you, the listener, will have to give an

account for how you listen. Someone once said: “I have a task and that is talking to you. You have a task of listening to me. I hope you do not finish before I do.” In most cases, when the listener stops listening to a scriptural sermon before it is completed, the problem does not lie with the preacher, but rather, with the heart of the one who has stopped listening. May we all realize the importance of listening to God’s word. ■

## Reinstated?

Bill Hall

We are hearing some rather strange expressions these days. A man was telling us recently that he had gone forward the Sunday before to be reinstated. A woman said she was thinking of going back into the church. Are such expressions a problem in terminology? Or are we faced with a problem in concept? Are people thinking of the church as an organization similar to the P.T.A., in and out of which they can go at will, returning simply to be reinstated?

Unfaithfulness is not just a matter of dropping out of the church for a while. It is a matter of trampling the Son of God underfoot; of insulting the Spirit of grace; of giving occasion to the enemies of the LORD to blaspheme; of turning one’s back on the Lord and His promises; of living in sin and flirting with eternal damnation. Imagine a person’s being in such a position, and then coming forward to be reinstated!!! What that person needs to do is repent, fall on his knees before God, confess to Him and to his brethren, I have sinned, and cry to God for mercy.

We are not questioning God’s mercy. He is prepared to forgive His wayward child; to run to him, fall on his neck, and kiss him; to place the best robe on his back, a ring on his finger, shoes on his feet; to kill the fatted calf and be merry. But this abundant forgiveness is for that wayward child who returns with a full recognition of his sin and unworthiness, who confesses his sins, who asks, not to be reinstated as a son, but to be received back

only as a hired servant. Forgiveness is for the penitent.

May the Lord help us to see sin in its true ugliness, to abhor what is evil and cling to what is good, to remember the price paid by our Lord for our forgiveness, to be faithful, and to humbly acknowledge our sins when we do fall. And when we are forgiven, let us not speak glibly of going back into the church, but let us speak of the grace of God that could save a wretch like me.

Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted (Matthew 5:4). ■

## Comfort Zones

Stephen Russell

What is your comfort zone? Whatever it is, I'm sure someone has told before that you should get out of it. Now why is that? After all, I'm in this zone because it is comfortable and I don't really want to be uncomfortable. Well, different people use this phrase to mean different things and with different motivations.

I'm afraid that very often I have heard it used to persuade people to leave the traditional values that they have grown up with and are therefore comfortable with. Among brethren even, there are folks who want to introduce doctrines opposed to the truth and when people are uncomfortable with such introductions, we are told to get out of our comfort zones. It is certainly not my aim to join such a chorus in calling folks to leave their comfort zones. By all means, stand firm (and comfortably) in those principles that are from God.

However, we will often find that standing for truth is not a comfortable endeavor. Neither is living in the truth. Following God and His Word requires us to "contend earnestly" as well as to "examine ourselves" (Jude 3; II Corinthians 13:5). That doesn't sound too comfortable on either account. Who wants to contend? Who wants to be examined (even by our own eye)? And the standard we contend for and examine ourselves by is not the easy and loose one that the world uses, but the

unyielding Word of God.

Preachers can get into a comfort zone if they are not careful. We may present lessons that are true with no false doctrine and still not have done our jobs. Unless we are preaching the truth both the comforting parts and the discomfoting parts then we are failing in our responsibility. Some like to pretend they are getting out of their comfort zones when they rail against one thing or another. They say things like, "some folks may not want me to say this but.." or "this may make some folks mad but..." and then they go on to preach against something that everyone in the room agrees about such as drunkenness being a sin. Even the drunkard agrees with that. What he won't say is "thou art the man." Perhaps you are familiar with the story of David and Nathan the prophet who came to tell him of his sin. Nathan told David a story that illustrated David's sin. There David sat in the pew nodding his head and agreeing with Nathan that the man in the story was a sinner of the worst sort. Then Nathan got out of his comfort zone and let David know who he was talking about. He said, "thou are the man." Sometimes I wonder if we are getting enough "thou are the man" type of preaching.

That is not to say the one sitting in the pew doesn't have responsibility as well. When we hear God's Word preached it is very easy, very comfortable, to think about all the other people to whom it applies. It may bring discomfort, or "godly sorrow," but we must take what is presented and make the application that brings the necessary changes. If we, like David, require someone to call us out, then we will miss much of what we need to hear. We will be like the pitiful man described in James 1 who looks in the mirror and simply walks away looking no better than before. The next time you hear a sermon, don't think first about all those bad people on the news, all of those followers of men in the denominations, or even the wayward brother over in the other pew. There's a time to give consideration to all of these. But we must start with ourselves. Then, when perhaps we find ourselves completely discomfoted by what we see, we can come to the Comforter and in Him find a comfort zone worth staying in. ■