



PROVERBS :

The Book of Relationship.

Notes of an Address by S. J. B. Carter
at Newcastle-on-Tyne.

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(PROV. I. 8, 9; II. 1-5; III. 1, 2; IV. 20-27; VI. 20-23
VII. 1-3; VIII.; IX. *passim*; X. 1.)

(Please read the passages.)

THE Book of Proverbs is the book of relationship, in contrast to the Book of Ecclesiastes, which is not that. Hence the oft repeated salutation in Proverbs, "My son," "My son," "My son," and sometimes, "Hear, O ye children." It is the Father addressing the family. In the Book of Ecclesiastes the name of God is mentioned, but the name of Jehovah is not once found, whereas in the Book of Proverbs the name of Jehovah, indicting covenant relationship between God and His people, is found over one hundred times. If we would at all apprehend and appreciate the proverbs of Solomon, we must be established in our souls in the truth of relationship—the relationship that exists between us as the children of God, and God as our Father—otherwise, in considering the exhortations of this book, we

shall get legal. The salutation, "My son," is used repeatedly right up to the end of chapter vii., but after that it is rarely used, though the children are addressed.

Chapter x. really starts the "Proverbs of Solomon." It begins with the heading, "The Proverbs of Solomon." All that goes before chapter x. in this book is really introductory to these proverbs, to establish us in the sense of relationship. The father would impress upon his children—upon his sons, and upon his daughters—the sense of relationship. Let us not then take up these proverbs in a legal spirit, otherwise we shall get into bondage. Of course sonship, as taught in the Book of Proverbs, is not sonship touching the other side of death and new creation. It does not go that far. It is sonship on this side of death—it is sonship in the kingdom. There are sons in the kingdom, and there are daughters in the kingdom—there are no sons and daughters distinguished in new creation. They are all sons in that sphere. But on this side of death there are sons and daughters; as the apostle quotes: "Ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty."

Solomon wrote three books, as you know. He wrote the Song of Songs when he was quite a young man, which has, doubtless, an historical basis. Solomon did not understand the spiritual import of that which he wrote. The song was

really a love song devoted to Pharaoh's daughter—his Gentile bride. But the Spirit of truth guided the pen of Solomon, so that when we cast the light of Christianity upon it we find the reciprocal affection which exists between Christ and the church, and the church and Christ. It has also its bearing upon Israel.

At the end of Solomon's life, Solomon wrote the Book of Ecclesiastes. He wrote it after his terrible backsliding—backsliding which made his wisdom forsake him. The Book of Ecclesiastes is inspired from start to close, as far as the record is concerned. Solomon was inspired to write it, but many things which Solomon tells us he SAID in his backsliding days, he was never inspired to SAY. Those who teach the doctrine of annihilation, and other kindred evil doctrines, go to the Book of Ecclesiastes to prove their theory. But when Solomon records that as a backslider he said that man dies like a beast, he tells us he said it in his heart, when he was away from God. He *spoke* as a mere human philosopher, speculating apart from the revelation of God. He was inspired to *write* the Book of Ecclesiastes, but many things that he puts down in black and white that he *said* when he was away from God, he was never inspired to *say*. Judas was never inspired to betray the Lord, Peter was never inspired to deny Him, and the Jews were never inspired to crucify Him, but the evangelists were

inspired to record these, and many other events, and words, and things, which were not inspired of God. In the Book of Ecclesiastes, the key expression is, "I said in mine heart." Solomon puts down again and again what he *had said* in his heart. When a man begins to say anything in his heart, apart from the word of God, he gets very wide of the truth. "Thou hast said in thine heart" was spoken to Satan. (Isa. xiv. 13.) David "said in his heart," so did Jeroboam, and also the evil servant of Matthew xxiv. "Say not in thine heart" is a needful warning. (Rom. x.) Solomon was inspired to write in the book of Ecclesiastes many things which he had said in his heart when away from God and which oft-times were wide of the truth.

But in between the writing of the Song of Songs and that of Ecclesiastes, Solomon wrote the Book of Proverbs, a book fraught with practical wisdom as regards our everyday pathway. Yet we must go through this book in the spirit of relationship. The apostle, in quoting from it, says, "Ye have quite forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to sons." We should write across the Book of Proverbs these words, "Which speaks to you as to sons."

Now, the first thing that the father claims in addressing his children is the ear. "My son, hear the words of thy father, and forsake not the teaching of thy mother." (New Trans.)

“Teaching” it is, or it should be, not *law*. The maternal spirit comes in here—the motherly ministry. The mother echoes what the father says, but in different words. Ministry comes to us now continually on the father line, and it is very precious, but it is hard sometimes for the young to understand. So the motherly spirit comes in to break the truth up. At our weekly readings we have a fine opportunity to breathe the maternal spirit, and help the young and the immatured. The father claims the ear. That must be given up first of all. The blood, in the cleansing of the leper, was placed upon the ear, before it was placed upon the hand, and upon the foot. Then upon the cleansing blood was placed the consecrating oil. Thus we learn not only that our members are redeemed by the blood, but consecrated to God by the Spirit. (Lev. xiv. 25-28.) The first member touched by the blood and by the oil was the ear. God claims the ear first. The Lord, in incarnation—in His *birth*—had His ears “digged”: “Mine ears hast thou digged.” (Psa. xl., New Trans.) In His *life* His ears were “*opened*.” (Isa. l.) In His *death* His ears were “*bored*.” He was the wonderful anti-type of the Hebrew servant, who was brought to the door-post, and his ear were bored through with an awl, and he became a servant for ever.

Well now, we pass on to the next salutation, “My son, if thou wilt receive my words.” Every

word that falls from the lips of the Father we must keep. We must not lose a word. Sometimes the omission of a tiny word makes a very great difference indeed. "The disciples missed out the little word "if" in John xxi. 22, 23, and a false tradition went abroad. We need to be very careful to keep to the letter of the word, as well as to enter into its spirit. J. N. D. said, "We are only sure of the truth of God, in so far as we are able to express it in the very words of God."

"Hide my commandments with thee." Hide them, because the enemy wants to rob you of them. "So that thou incline thine ear unto wisdom, and apply thine heart to understanding." Mary sat at His feet, listening to His word. She not only heard, but she listened. She was eager not to lose anything. "Give thyself wholly to these things, that thy progress may appear to all," says Paul. How blessed to be able to progress thus ! It is the result of listening, the result of meditation. Then we have *prayer*, "If thou liftest up thy voice for understanding." We cannot get on without prayer. "Call unto me, and I will answer thee, and I will shew thee *great* and *hidden* things, which thou knowest not" (New Trans.), said the Lord to Jeremiah. That is what we have here. "If thou seekest her as silver, and searchest for her as hid treasures." "The treasures of wisdom and knowledge" are *hid*. (Col. ii. 3.) We must search for them. We never get anything

really from God unless we get it through exercise—"Then shalt thou understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God."

But let us pass on. "My son, forget not my law; but let thine heart keep my commandments." How prone we are to forget. James says a man who is not a forgetful hearer, but a doer, of the word shall be blessed in his *doing*. If we listened to ministry with the idea of doing, should we forget so much? But God is very gracious to us, and makes every allowance. Although what you heard in an address seems to go from you very quickly, yet it may leave a divine impression on your soul; then when you get before the Lord you find that things come back to you in a wonderful manner. We get a good many psalms in acrostic form. God has given these acrostic psalms to help in the matter of remembrance. In the Book of Lamentations, too, we find that four chapters have twenty-two verses each, and are acrostic. The other chapter has sixty-six verses, and gives a letter of the Hebrew alphabet in rotation to every three verses. So, in the closing chapter of the Book of Proverbs we have the virtuous woman, the church, described alphabetically in twenty-two verses. If Christ is the alphabet of God, the church should be the same of Christ.

Let us now turn to Proverbs iv, "My son, attend to my words; incline thine ear unto my

sayings.” A young man goes out in life. He is commanded very distinctly by his father about certain things; but then there are the *sayings* of the father that the young man, if he is worth anything, treasures up and keeps in mind.

“Keep them in the midst of thine heart.” But then the heart itself is to be kept. “Keep thy heart more than anything that is guarded; for out of it are the issues of life.” (New Trans.) Backsliding always starts in the heart. Above all things we should keep our hearts—our affections—from wandering. If we find there is less desire to go to the meetings, or to commune with God in secret and to feed on His word, or to engage in active service, there is declension in the affections. We should stop in alarm and concern, for backsliding starts in the heart. The backslider may be right enough outwardly in his ways—go regularly to the meetings and so forth, but sooner or later his heart affects his ways, and then, alas for him, he proves that “the backslider *in heart* shall be filled with his own ways.”

“Put away from thee a froward mouth, and perverse lips put far from thee. Let thine eyes look right on, and let thine eyelids look straight before thee.” Moses, when he slew the Egyptian, looked this way and that way. If he had looked up, God would have told him not to do it. He would have said, “You are acting before you

have got your commission, wait until I tell you to act." But Moses was thinking of men, not of God. It is important as regards any line of service which we have, not to look to any one but God. It is blessed to have the fellowship of our brethren, but service is very individual. "There is nothing more distinctly individual," said J. N. D. once, "than our service." The servant gets his instructions from his Lord and not from his fellow-servants.

But then we must be quite sure as to our path, that it is a divinely given path. And so we have here, "Ponder the path of thy feet, and let all thy ways be established." We should see to it that our paths are right paths. "The path of the just is as the dawning light, going on and brightening until the day be fully come." That is how some translate verse 18. We wake up early in the morning, and all is dark. Presently the dawn comes, light trickles through the casement. At first we can only dimly see objects in the room, but the light increases. Then we see things more clearly. At last the "perfect day" comes—*the sun shines!* And so it is with soul progress. We should go on slow and sure. Thank God for any glimmer of light that comes to us, but let us be true to it. It has never been God's way to dazzle His people with fresh light. When He introduces anything fresh, He does it gradually. In the Acts of the Apostles Judaism gradu-

ally fades away, and Christianity gradually shines in.

But let us look at chapter vi. : "Keep thy father's commandment, and forsake not the law of thy mother." "Bind them continually upon thine heart." Bind them—they are very prone to slip off. "Tie them about thy neck." What a beautiful necktie for brothers, and sisters, too (for some sisters wear neckties)—let us wear it. It may cost us a great deal—a great deal of exercise—but it is worth the cost, and the tie will wear well. "Bind them continually upon thine heart. When thou goest, it shall lead thee; when thou sleepest, it shall keep thee; and when thou awakest, it shall talk to thee." What lovely intimacy with God. We want to know more of it. *The commandment goes into details.* "The commandment is a lamp," it just gives us light for one step at a time. But the law, the word as a whole, is light. It illuminates the whole of our pathway. "The *opening* of thy words giveth light, *it* giveth understanding to the simple," says David. It is the *entrance* or the *opening* of the words that gives light. The Spirit of truth alone can give us light—guide us into all truth—open up the word.

Look at chapter vii. : "My son, keep my words, and lay up my commandments with thee." Many people believe in laying up in the bank against what they call a rainy day. If we lay up the

commandments of our God in our hearts, depend upon it we shall safeguard our souls against the rainy day. The rainy day often comes to our souls when we cannot see the sun. Everything is gloomy. How blessed to be prepared for the rainy day ; to store in our hearts, to lay up there, that which will keep us going when dark days come.

“ Keep . . . my law as the apple of thine eye.” There is no organ more sensitive than the apple of the eye—none do we keep more carefully. “ Bind them upon thy fingers.” They should touch every detail of everyday life. Nothing is too small to be controlled by the word of God. “ *Whatsoever* ye do in word or in deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus.” Young woman, can you read that novel in the name of the Lord Jesus ? Can you, young man, smoke that cigarette in the name of the Lord Jesus ? Is it possible to go to worldly amusements in the name of the Lord Jesus ? But in much less flagrant things than these, how this word touches us ! Whatsoever we are undertaking we ought to be able to do “ in the name of the Lord Jesus ”—by His authority—“ giving thanks to God the Father by him.” Let us bind the commandments, in filial fear and love, upon our fingers, and let them be written on the fleshy tables of our hearts.

Just a few words more. In Proverbs viii. and ix. we have *Wisdom*. In Proverbs viii. however,

Wisdom is "Christ, the wisdom of God." "The Lord possessed me in the beginning of his way." He says, "I was by him, as one brought up with him: and I was daily his delight, rejoicing always before him." Only He could speak like that, only He could use the language of Proverbs viii. as His own. He only could call Himself "the nursling" of the Father's love. (Ver 30, New Trans., margin.)

But in Proverbs ix. Wisdom is the *church*. If you look at that translation which we have already quoted from you will find that J. N. D. points out that in Proverbs viii. the word "Wisdom" is in the *singular*, but in chapter ix. it is in the *plural*. Wisdom in chapter ix. is a figure of the church. In Ephesians, the apostle says, "In order that now to the principalities and authorities in the heavenlies might be known *through the assembly* the all-various *wisdom of God*." (Eph. iii. 10.) The church is now the lesson book of angels. Angels learn the manifold wisdom of God in the assembly of God—marvellous thought, and *men should learn it too*. (Eph. iii. 9.) Thus wisdom is here still, although Christ is gone. Christ on high is the perfection of wisdom, but the wisdom of God—Christ characteristically—comes out in the assembly.

"Wisdom hath builded her house, she hath hewn out her seven pillars." Every local assembly, formed rightly, is formed by wisdom—the wisdom

of Christ—and supported by her seven pillars. We get them from God's side in the Second Epistle to Timothy. Seven times in that epistle we have "in Christ Jesus" spoken about. All God's purpose and counsel is safely secured in Him. It is the sovereign side there. Everything that is for God is vested in Christ Jesus, and it is secure. But then there is our side—the responsible side. We get it suggested in James : "The wisdom that is from above is first pure," that is the first pillar, "then peaceable, gentle, easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy"—seven pillars, you see, morally and safely supporting a local assembly.

But the foolish woman also has her house. In 1 Timothy we have the wise woman's house and the behaviour of those composing it (chap. iii. 15), but in 2 Timothy we have the foolish woman's house. It is called a "great house." What a contrast between the two. The foolish woman has no table, she has nothing to give to her guests : no meat and drink. She sitteth at the door of her house, she is idle and full of talk—loquacity characterises her, not deeds. The wise woman has too much to do to sit idly at the door of her house. The wise woman has meat, bread and wine. Her table is "furnished." The foolish woman has none. The foolish woman has no "maidens"—there is no moral or doctrinal holiness in her abode. The wise woman cries in the

highest places of the city, but the foolish woman only cries in the *high* places. The foolish woman is always after “passengers who go right on their ways”—she lets other passengers pretty well alone. Paul was such a passenger; he says, “This one thing I do, forgetting those things that are behind . . . I press towards the mark.” That is the kind of passenger the world—the foolish woman—wants to lure and to stop. The foolish woman is full of promises, but she fails to fulfil them. She is false and delusive altogether. Alas for her guests—they are found in the depths of hell! The wise woman warns us against the foolish woman, she says, “Forsake the foolish [woman] and live.”

The Proverbs of Solomon really start in chapter x.—“A wise son maketh a glad father.” David’s men were “*mighty* men” who stood for the throne and the testimony. Solomon’s men were “*happy* men” gazing upon his face. Hezekiah’s men were *wise* men. (Prov. xxv. 1.) May we be numbered among all three. If we would be wise we must study well this book. It is full of practical wisdom. But we must take up these proverbs in the spirit of relationship! We must hear first the voice of the father saying, “*My son.*”

S. J. B. C.