
PROVERBS 14: 1 Every wise woman builds her house, but the foolish one tears it down with her own hands.

Various moral sentiments. The antithesis between wisdom and folly, and the different effects of each.

Verse 1

Every wise woman buildeth her house - By her prudent and industrious management she increases property in the family, furniture in the house, and food and raiment for her household. This is the true building of a house. The thriftless wife acts differently, and the opposite is the result. Household furniture, far from being increased, is dilapidated; and her household are ill-fed, ill-clothed, and worse educated.

PROVERBS 14: 2 He who walks in his uprightness fears the LORD, but he who is perverse in his ways despises him.

PROVERBS 14: 3 The fool's talk brings a rod to his back, but the lips of the wise protect them.

Verse 3

The mouth of the foolish is a rod of pride - The reproofs of such a person are ill-judged and ill-timed, and generally are conveyed in such language as renders them not only ineffectual, but displeasing, and even irritating.

PROVERBS 14: 4 Where no oxen are, the crib is clean, but much increase is by the strength of the ox.

Verse 4

But much increase is by the strength of the ox - The ox is the most profitable of all the beasts used in husbandry. Except merely for speed, he is almost in every respect superior to the horse.

1. He is longer lived.
2. Scarcely liable to any diseases.
3. He is steady, and always pulls fair in his gears.
4. He lives, fattens, and maintains his strength on what a horse will not eat, and therefore is supported on one third the cost.
5. His manure is more profitable.
6. When he is worn out in his labor his flesh is good for the nourishment of man, his horns of great utility, and his hide almost invaluable.

It might be added, he is little or no expense in shoeing, and his gears are much more simple, and much less expensive, than those of the horse. In all large farms oxen are greatly to be preferred to horses. Have but patience with this most patient animal, and you will soon find that there is much increase by the strength and labor of the ox.

PROVERBS 14: 5 A truthful witness will not lie, but a false witness pours out lies.

PROVERBS 14: 6 A scoffer seeks wisdom, and doesn't find it, but knowledge comes easily to a discerning person.

Verse 6

A scorner seeketh wisdom - I believe the scorner means, in this book, the man that despises the counsel of God; the infidel. Such may seek wisdom; but he never can find it, because he does not seek it where it is to be found; neither in the teaching of God's Spirit, nor in the revelation of his will.

PROVERBS 14: 7 Stay away from a foolish man, for you won't find knowledge on his lips.

Verse 7

When thou perceivest not - the lips of knowledge - Instead of דעת daath, knowledge, several MSS. have שקר sheker, a lie. How this reading came I cannot conjecture. The meaning of the adage is plain: Never associate with a vain, empty fellow, when thou perceivest he can neither convey nor receive instruction.

PROVERBS 14: 8 The wisdom of the prudent is to think about his way, but the folly of fools is deceit.

Verse 8

Is to understand his way - Instead of הבין habin, to understand, הכין hachin, to Direct his way, is found in one MS. It makes a very good sense.

PROVERBS 14: 9 Fools mock at making atonement for sins, but among the upright there is good will.

Verse 9

Fools make a mock at sin - And only fools would do so. But he that makes a sport of sinning, will find it no sport to suffer the vengeance of an eternal fire. Some learned men by their criticisms have brought this verse into embarrassments, out of which they were not able to extricate it. I believe we shall not come much nearer the sense than our present version does.

PROVERBS 14: 10 The heart knows its own bitterness and joy; he will not share these with a stranger.

Verse 10

The heart knoweth his own bitterness - מרת נפשו *morrath naphsho*, "The bitterness of its soul." Under spiritual sorrow, the heart feels, the soul feels; all the animal nature feels and suffers. But when the peace of God is spoken to the troubled soul, the joy is indescribable; the whole man partakes of it. And a stranger to these religious feelings, to the travail of the soul, and to the witness of the Spirit, does not intermeddle with them; he does not understand them: indeed they may be even foolishness to him, because they are spiritually discerned.

PROVERBS 14: 11 The house of the wicked will be overthrown, but the tent of the upright will flourish.

PROVERBS 14: 12 There is a way which seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death.

Verse 12

There is a way which seemeth right unto a man - This may be his easily besetting sin, the sin of his constitution, the sin of his trade. Or it may be his own false views of religion: he may have an imperfect repentance, a false faith, a very false creed; and he may persuade himself that he is in the direct way to heaven. Many of the papists, when they were burning the saints of God in the flames at Smithfield, thought they were doing God service! And in the late Irish massacre, the more of the Protestants they piked to death, shot, or burnt, the more they believed they deserved of God's favor and their Church's gratitude. But cruelty and murder are the short road, the near way, to eternal perdition.

PROVERBS 14: 13 Even in laughter the heart may be sorrowful, and mirth may end in heaviness.

Verse 13

Even in laughter the heart is sorrowful - Many a time is a smile forced upon the face, when the heart is in deep distress. And it is a hard task to put on the face of mirth, when a man has a heavy heart.

PROVERBS 14: 14 The unfaithful will be repaid for his own ways; likewise a good man will be rewarded for his ways.

Verse 14

The backslider in heart shall be filled with his own ways -

1. Who is the backslider? גֵּוֹג *giog*.

1. The man who once walked in the ways of religion, but has withdrawn from them.
2. The man who once fought manfully against the world, the devil, and the flesh; but has retreated from the battle, or joined the enemy.
3. The man who once belonged to the congregation of the saints, but is now removed from them, and is set down in the synagogue of Satan.

2. But who is the backslider in Heart?

1. Not he who was surprised and overcome by the power of temptation, and the weakness of his own heart.

2. But he who drinks down iniquity with greediness.

3. Who gives cheerful way to the bent of his own nature, and now delights in fulfilling the lusts of the flesh and of the mind.

4. Who loves sin as before he loved godliness.

3. What are his own ways? Folly, sin, disappointment, and death; with the apprehension of the wrath of God, and the sharp twingings of a guilty conscience.

4. What is implied in being filled with his own ways? Having his soul saturated with folly, sin, and disappointment. At last ending here below in death, and then commencing an eternal existence where the fire is not quenched, and under the influence of that worm that never dieth. Alas, alas! who may abide when God doeth this?

And a good man shall be satisfied from himself -

1. Who is the good man? (אִישׁ טוֹב ish tob).

1. The man whose heart is right with God, whose tongue corresponds to his heart, and whose actions correspond to both.

2. The man who is every thing that the sinner and backslider are not.

2. He shall be satisfied from himself - he shall have the testimony of his own conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, he has his conversation among men.

3. He shall have God's Spirit to testify with his spirit that he is a child of God. He hath the witness in himself that he is born from above. The Spirit of God in his conscience, and the testimony of God in his Bible, show him that he belongs to the heavenly family. It is not from creeds or confessions of faith that he derives his satisfaction: he gets it from heaven, and it is sealed upon his heart.

PROVERBS 14: 15 A simple man believes everything, but the prudent man carefully considers his ways.

PROVERBS 14: 16 A wise man fears, and shuns evil, but the fool is hot headed and reckless.

Verse 16

A wise man feareth - He can never trust in himself, though he be satisfied from himself. He knows that his sufficiency is of God; and he has that fear that causes him to depart from evil, which is a guardian to the love he feels. Love renders him cautious; the other makes him confident. His caution leads him from sin; his confidence leads him to God.

PROVERBS 14: 17 He who is quick to become angry will commit folly, and a crafty man is hated.

Verse 17

He that is soon angry - קצר אפים ketsar appayim, "short of nostrils:" because, when a man is angry, his nose is contracted, and drawn up towards his eyes.

Dealeth foolishly - He has no time for reflection; he is hurried on by his passions, speaks like a fool, and acts like a madman.

PROVERBS 14: 18 The simple inherit folly, but the prudent are crowned with knowledge.

PROVERBS 14: 19 The evil bow down before the good, and the wicked at the gates of the righteous.

Verse 19

The evil bow before the good - They are almost constrained to show them respect; and the wicked, who have wasted their substance with riotous living, bow before the gates of the righteous - of benevolent men - begging a morsel of bread.

PROVERBS 14: 20 The poor person is shunned even by his own neighbour, but the rich person has many friends.

Verse 20

But the rich hath many friends - Many who speak to him the language of friendship; but if they profess friendship because he is rich, there is not one real friend among them. There is a fine saying of Cicero on this subject: Ut hirundines festivo tempore praesto sunt, frigore pulsae recedunt: ita falsi amici sereno tempore praesto sunt: simul atque fortunae hiemem viderint, evolant omnes - Lib. iv., ad Herenn. "They are like swallows, who fly off during the winter, and quit our cold climates; and do not return till the warm season: but as soon as the winter sets in, they are all off again." So Horace: -

Donec eris felix, multos numerabis amicos: Nullus ad amissas ibit amicus opes. "As long as thou art prosperous, thou shalt have many friends: but who of them will regard thee when thou hast lost thy wealth?"

PROVERBS 14: 21 He who despises his neighbour sins, but blessed is he who has pity on the poor.

Verse 21

He that despiseth his neighbor sinneth - To despise a man because he has some natural blemish is unjust, cruel, and wicked. He is not the author of his own imperfections; they did not occur through his fault or folly; and if he could, he would not retain them. It is, therefore, unjust and wicked to despise him for what is not his fault, but his misfortune.

But he that hath mercy on the poor - Who reproaches no man for his poverty or scanty intellect, but divides his bread with the hungry - happy is he; the blessing of God, and of them that were ready to perish, shall come upon him.

PROVERBS 14: 22 Don't they go astray who plot evil? But love and faithfulness belong to those who plan good.

PROVERBS 14: 23 In all hard work there is profit, but the talk of the lips leads only to poverty.

Verse 23

In all labor there is profit - If a man work at his trade, he gains by it; if he cultivate the earth, it will yield an increase; and in proportion as he labors, so will be his profit: but he who talks much labors little. And a man words is seldom a man of deeds. Less talk and more work, is one of our own ancient advices.

PROVERBS 14: 24 The crown of the wise is their riches, but the folly of fools crowns them with folly.

Verse 24

But the foolishness of fools is folly - The Targum reads, The honor of fools is folly. The fool, from his foolishness, produces acts of folly. This appears to be the meaning.

PROVERBS 14: 25 A truthful witness saves souls, but a false witness is deceitful.

PROVERBS 14: 26 In the fear of the LORD is a secure fortress, and he will be a refuge for his children.

Verse 26

In the fear of the Lord is strong confidence - From this, and from genuine Christian experience, we find that the fear of God is highly consistent with the strongest confidence in his mercy and goodness.

PROVERBS 14: 27 The fear of the LORD is a fountain of life, turning people from the snares of death.

 Verse 27

The fear of the Lord is a fountain of life - **מִקּוּר חַיִּים** mekor chaiyim, the vein of lives. Another allusion to the great aorta which carries the blood from the heart to all the extremities of the body. Of this phrase, and the tree of lives, Solomon is particularly fond. See on Pro 4:23 (note); Pro 10:12 (note).

PROVERBS 14: 28 In the multitude of people is the king's glory, but in the lack of people is the destruction of the prince.

Verse 28

In the multitude of people - It is the interest of every state to promote marriage by every means that is just and prudent; and to discourage, disgrace, and debase celibacy; to render bachelors incapable, after a given age, of all public employments: and to banish nunneries and monasteries from all parts of their dominions; - they have ever, from their invention, contributed more to vice than virtue; and are positively point blank against the law of God.

PROVERBS 14: 29 He who is slow to anger has great understanding, but he who has a quick temper displays folly.

Verse 29

That is hasty of spirit - **קֵצֵר רוּחַ** ketsar ruach, "the short of spirit;" one that is easily irritated; and, being in a passion, he is agitated so as to be literally short of breath. Here put in opposition to **אֵרֶךְ אֶפְיִם** erech appayim, long of nostrils; see on Pro 14:17 (note); and of the same import with St. Paul's μακροθυμα, longsuffering, longmindedness. See on Eph 4:2 (note).

PROVERBS 14: 30 The life of the body is a heart at peace, but envy rots the bones.

Verse 30

A sound heart is the life of the flesh - A healthy state of the blood, and a proper circulation of that stream of life, is the grand cause, in the hand of God, of health and longevity. If the heart be diseased, life cannot be long continued.

PROVERBS 14: 31 He who oppresses the poor shows contempt for his Maker, but he who is kind to the needy honours him.

Verse 31

He that oppresseth the poor reproacheth his Maker - Because the poor, or comparatively poor, are, in the order of God, a part of the inhabitants of the earth; and every man who loves God will show mercy to the poor, for with this God is peculiarly delighted. The poor have we ever with us, for the excitement and exercise of those benevolent, compassionate, and merciful feelings, without which men had been but little better than brutes.

PROVERBS 14: 32 The wicked is brought down in his calamity, but in death, the righteous has a refuge.

Verse 32

The wicked is driven away in his wickedness - He does not leave life cheerfully. Poor soul! Thou hast no hope in the other world, and thou leavest the present with the utmost regret! Thou wilt not go off; but God will drive thee.

But the righteous hath hope in his death - He rejoiceth to depart and be with Christ: to him death is gain; he is not reluctant to go - he flies at the call of God.

PROVERBS 14: 33 Wisdom rests in the heart of one who has understanding, and is even made known in the inward part of fools.

PROVERBS 14: 34 Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a disgrace to any people.

Verse 34

But sin is a reproach to any people - I am satisfied this is not the sense of the original, **וְיָחַד לְעַמּוּמִים** *vechesed leummim chattath*; which would be better rendered, And mercy is a sin-offering for the people. The Vulgate has, *Miseros autem facit populos peccatum*, "sin makes the people wretched." *Ελασσονουσι δε φυλας ἀμαρτιαι*; "But sins lessen the tribes." - Septuagint. So also the Syriac and Arabic. The plain meaning of the original seems to be, A national disposition to mercy appears in the sight of God as a continual sin-offering. Not that it atones for the sin of the people; but, as a sin-offering is pleasing in the sight of the God of mercy, so is a merciful disposition in a nation. This view of the verse is consistent with the purest doctrines of free grace. And what is the true sense of the words, we should take at all hazards and consequences: we shall never trench upon a sound creed by a literal interpretation of God's words. No nation has more of this spirit than the British nation. It is true, we have too many sanguinary laws; but the spirit of the people is widely different.

If any one will contend for the common version, he has my consent; and I readily agree in the saying, Sin is the reproach of any people. It is the curse and scandal of man. Though I think what I have given is the true meaning of the text.

PROVERBS 14: 35 The king's favour is toward a servant who deals wisely, but his wrath is toward one who causes shame.

Verse 35

The king's favor is toward a wise servant - The king should have an intelligent man for his minister; a man of deep sense, sound judgment, and of a feeling, merciful disposition. He who has not the former will plunge the nation into difficulties; and he who has not the latter will embark her in disastrous wars. Most wars are occasioned by bad ministers, men of blood, who cannot be happy but in endeavoring to unchain the spirit of discord. Let every humane heart pray, Lord, scatter thou the people who delight in war! Amen - so be it. Selah!