

CHAPTER 4

INTRODUCTION TO PROVERBS 4

In this chapter Solomon advises to seek after wisdom, to avoid bad company, and to continue in the right paths of goodness and truth: he excites attention to what he had to say, from the relation he stood in to the persons addressed; from the nature of his instructions, which were good and profitable; and from his own example, in attending to those his parents gave him, (^{<3001>}Proverbs 4:1-4); He exhorts above all things to get wisdom, from the superior excellency of it, and from the preservation, promotion, and honour, to be had by it, (^{<3005>}Proverbs 4:5-9); and he further enforces big exhortations, from their being the means of a comfortable life, and of the prolongation of it, and of leading in a right way without straitness or stumbling, (^{<3010>}Proverbs 4:10-13). And then proceeds to caution against bad company, and going into a bad way of life; which is enforced from the mischief done by those that walk in it, and from the darkness of it, to which the path of the just is opposed, (^{<3014>}Proverbs 4:14-19). And the exhortation to attend to and observe his instructions, and keep them, is repeated, from the consideration of their being life and health to them, (^{<3020>}Proverbs 4:20-22); and that they might be preserved, and not departed from, direction's are given about ordering the heart, mouth, lips, eyes, and feet, (^{<3023>}Proverbs 4:23-27).

Ver. 1. *Hear, ye children, the instruction of a father*, etc.] Either of God their father, as Gersom interprets it; or rather of Solomon their father: and so he recommends his instruction from the relation he stood in to them; for, since he was their father, he would give them no bad instruction; and, since they were his children, they ought to receive it: by whom are meant, not his children in a natural sense, or the children of his body; but his disciples, such who applied to him for knowledge, and whom he undertook to learn;

and attend to know understanding; what would serve to enlighten, enlarge, improve, and inform their understandings; what would lead them into the knowledge and understanding of things divine and spiritual, and which

would be worth knowing; and of having their understandings stored and enriched with.

Ver. 2. *For I give you good doctrine*, etc.] Whose author, matter, use, and tendency, are good, and therefore should be received; so the Gospel is called, (^{<5016>}1 Timothy 4:6); and no other is here meant: it is the doctrine concerning Wisdom or Christ, as the following verses show; which serves to exalt him, and makes for the good and welfare of immortal souls; and such is the doctrine of the Scriptures, of Christ and his apostles, even all the doctrines and truths of the Gospel;

forsake you not my law; or “doctrine”^{f86}; not the law given on Mount Sinai, as Gersom interprets it; but the doctrine of Christ, which goes out from Mount Zion: this the children of Wisdom should not neglect, relinquish, drop, or depart from; but should keep it, and abide by it.

Ver. 3. *For I was my father’s son*, etc.] Or, “a son to my father”^{f87}; so Solomon was to God, his heavenly Father, (^{<1074>}2 Samuel 7:14); which Jarchi observes, and gives as the sense of this place: but his father David is meant, whose son he was; though he was not his only one, he had others besides him. But the sense is, that he was his darling, his beloved son, whom he loved above the rest; as he was beloved of the Lord, and therefore his name was called Jedidiah, so he was beloved of his father; and, because he had a peculiar love for him, he took a particular care of his education;

tender and only [beloved] in the sight of my mother; his mother Bathsheba, who had a most affectionate regard to him; and therefore in his tender age, as soon as he was susceptible of instructions, gave them to him, which being received, made deep and lasting impressions on him; (see ^{<1301>}Proverbs 31:1,2). The marginal reading is, “to the sons of my mother”; for Bathsheba had more sons, (^{<1305>}1 Chronicles 3:5); both readings may be retained, “beloved in the sight of my mother’s sons”. Gersom interprets this of the people of Israel, who were sons to God their Father; and were the only nation that received the law, and which they received at the time of their coming out of Egypt, in the days of their youth.

Ver. 4. *He taught me also, and said unto me*, etc.] The Targum is,

“they taught me,”

his father and his mother; and so the Septuagint version,

“who said and taught me;”

and the Arabic version,

“they both taught me, and said unto me;”

but in the Hebrew it is singular, and is restrained to the father. He taught him when he was very young, and also gave him instructions when he was older, and a little before his own death; (see ^{<3308>}1 Chronicles 28:8,9 29:1); he taught him by the several psalms he wrote; some of which are called “maschil”, instructive or causing to understand; two of them particularly were written for him, the seventy-second and the hundred twenty-seventh psalms; he taught him in the following words. How far the words of David his father reach is not agreed on, on all hands; some think they end with (^{<3045>}Proverbs 4:5); others with (^{<3046>}Proverbs 4:6), others with the (^{<3049>}Proverbs 4:9), and the words of Solomon begin at (^{<3040>}Proverbs 4:10): some will have it that they take in the whole chapter, which is not probable; nay, others say that the whole of the book following is his, which can by no means be agreed to: it seems most likely to me that they end at (^{<3046>}Proverbs 4:6), and at most are not to be carried beyond (^{<3049>}Proverbs 4:9);

let thine heart retain my words: says David to his son: the instructions he gave him by word of mouth, concerning his moral behaviour, relating to political things, the government of the people; and especially such as concerned the everlasting welfare of his soul, or were about Wisdom or Christ, and the knowledge of divine and spiritual things; these he would have him lay up in his heart, and keep them there, as a rich treasure, to have recourse unto upon all occasions;

keep my commandments, and live: which commandments may respect him both in his private and public capacity, and in a religious and political one; how he should behave as a man, a king, and one that feared God: as well as they may respect his orders for the building of the temple, and settling and establishing the worship of God in it; by observing which he would live comfortably and honourably, and to a good old age.

Ver. 5. *Get wisdom, get understanding,* etc.] Not only moral and political wisdom and understanding, but that which is spiritual and evangelical; Christ, and the knowledge of him; he being the only happy man that has an interest in him, and is possessed of him by faith, which is the meaning of getting him; (see Gill on ^{<3013>}Proverbs 3:13”); by which it appears, that

what Solomon had before delivered, and afterwards repeats and urges, was the same his father David, that wise, great, and good man, taught him; and which he mentions, the more to recommend the getting of wisdom and understanding to others;

forget [it] not; when gotten, keep it in remembrance; be continually meditating on Wisdom, or Christ, his glories and excellencies; the fulness of grace and truth in him; the blessings of goodness which come by him; the great use and profit of having and enjoying him;

neither decline from the words of my mouth; the above instructions, and all others he gave unto him.

Ver. 6. *Forsake her not, and she shall preserve thee*, etc.] That is, Wisdom, or Christ. Men may be said to forsake Christ when they forsake the assembly of his church and people, which are his other self; when they forsake his ministers, his ambassadors, and representatives; when they forsake his word and ordinances; when they drop the doctrines of the Gospel, or depart from them; when they quit the profession they have formerly made. Nominal believers and formal professors may forsake him finally and totally; true believers only partially and for a time, through the weakness of the flesh, the temptations of Satan, the snares of the world, and the prevalence of corruption; and therefore such an exhortation is necessary, and ought to be regarded. To forsake Christ is a very great evil; it is against a man's own interest, and is of dangerous consequence, and therefore to be guarded against; to abide by him, his truths and ordinances, is very commendable; such shall be "preserved" by him safe to his kingdom and glory;

love her, and she shall keep thee; Christ is to be loved for the excellencies and perfections of his nature; for the loveliness of his person; for the love he has showed to his people; for what he in love has done and suffered for them, and is now doing; for the fulness of his grace and salvation, and the suitableness of them to them; for the communion he indulges them in with himself; for the relations of an head, husband, father, brother, and friend, he stands in to them: and also under the character of Wisdom, he being the only wise God and their Saviour, the Wisdom of God and Wisdom to them; and whose Gospel is the Wisdom of God in a mystery. He is to be loved, all of him and that belong unto him, and above all creatures and things, ardently, sincerely, and constantly; and such lovers of him shall be "kept" by him from the evil of the world; from the power and dominion of

sin, and condemnation by it; from being destroyed by Satan, and his temptations; and from a final and total falling away, so as not to perish everlastingly; they are kept in his own hands, in his Father's love and his own, in the everlasting covenant; and in a state of grace, of sanctification, justification, and adoption. Not that loving Christ, and cleaving to him, are the causes of this preservation; but his love, grace, and power; yet these are descriptive of the persons kept and preserved: and the preservation and keeping of them is used as an argument to love him, and cleave unto him.

Ver. 7. *Wisdom [is] the principal thing*, etc.] Or principal, one; the principal of persons and things; the principal of persons, angels or men: Christ is superior to angels, having a more excellent name and nature than they; he is the God, the Creator, and head of them, and is above them in the human nature; he is superior to men, to the greatest of men, he is King of kings and Lord of lords, and to the best of men the saints. Are they kings? he is their King: are they priests? he is the great High Priest: are any of them prophets, teachers, shepherds? he is the great Prophet in Israel; a Teacher, that never any taught or spoke like him; the chief Shepherd and Bishop of souls: is the church a family? he is the Master of it: is it a body? he is the Head: is it a building? he is the Foundation and Corner Stone; yea, the chief Master Builder. He is the beginning and chief of all God's ways, and the chief in them; in election, in the council of peace, and covenant of grace; in redemption and salvation, in grace and glory; he is all in all. Or the words may be rendered, "Wisdom [is] the beginning"^{f88}; so Christ is called, (⁵⁰¹⁸Colossians 1:18); a phrase expressive of his eternity, and of his being the first cause and author of all things, both in the old and new creation. Or thus, that which is "the beginning of wisdom get"^{f89}, etc. which is the fear of the Lord; (see ⁴⁰⁰⁷Proverbs 1:7 9:10);

[therefore] get wisdom; not an interest in Christ, but a knowledge of it; and make use of all means to obtain a greater knowledge of him, and of interest in him, which is what the apostle calls "winning" Christ; by which he means, not getting an interest in him, that he had already, but gaining a greater degree of knowledge of him, as the context shows, (³¹⁰⁸Philippians 3:8-10); or, "buy wisdom"^{f90}; that is, without money and without price; so Christ advises to buy gold and white raiment of him, his grace and righteousness, (⁴⁸¹⁸Revelation 3:18 ²⁵⁰¹Isaiah 55:1);

and with all thy getting get understanding; another name for Christ; (see ⁴⁰⁸⁴Proverbs 8:14); Or, "along with all thy getting"^{f91}, or "above all"; let

not Christ be wanting; he is the one thing needful, the good and better part and portion, which, if missing, all other substance signifies little: or part with all for this pearl of great price, Wisdom, and prefer it to all worldly substance; look upon all but dross in comparison of Christ and the knowledge of him: all other gettings or substance are only for the body, this for the soul, and the eternal welfare of it; they are only for a time, this for eternity; they are not satisfying, but, having this, a soul has enough, has all things; Christ being his, all things are his; he possesses all things, and all other things are not blessings without him.

Ver. 8. *Exalt her, and she shall promote thee*, etc.] Christ is to be exalted in his person, by asserting his proper deity; by ascribing all divine perfections to him; by allowing him to be the author of all divine works; by giving him divine worship and homage; by owning his divine and eternal sonship, and distinct personality: he is to be exalted in all his offices of Prophet, Priest, and King, and as the only Redeemer and Saviour; by trusting in him, embracing his Gospel, and submitting to his ordinances, and such that exalt him, he will “promote” them here and hereafter; of which more in the next clause. According to the Talmudists^{f92}, the word for “exalt” signifies a diligent search, by turning things about to find out what is sought; and so the Septuagint interpret the word in the sense of “searching”, (~~288B~~ Jeremiah 50:26);

she shall bring thee to honour, when thou dost embrace her: by faith: for this is an act of faith, and a very considerable one, and is expressive of great nearness to Christ, of much intimacy and familiarity with him, of strong love and affection to him, of a good degree of boldness used with him, and of joy and exaltation in him; for such an action is used by persons near akin, and are very familiar with, and have a very great affection for one another, and use much freedom with each other, and rejoice at meeting together. Now such who embrace Christ, in the arms of their faith, as their alone Saviour, such he promotes and “brings to honour”; not to honour among men, for to embrace Christ and exalt him is the way to disgrace, though the disgrace is an honour, and will be before long rolled off; but to honour hereafter. Such will be set at his right hand, and be owned by him before his Father and his angels; and they will be placed on the same throne with him, and will reign with him for ever and ever; see (~~0020~~ 1 Samuel 2:30).

Ver. 9. *She shall give to thine head an ornament of grace*, etc.] This, and the following clause, explain what that honour is Christ promotes and brings his followers to here and hereafter: he gives them grace and more grace; “an increase of grace”, so the Vulgate Latin version renders it; and some think James refers to this passage, (^{<3046>}Proverbs 4:6). The grace that Christ gives is very ornamental to his people: justifying grace greatly beautifies and adorns them; it not only covers the nakedness of their souls, and all their spots and imperfections, and through it all their sins are caused to pass from them; but they are made exceeding beautiful, perfectly comely through this comeliness, a perfection of beauty by it; and which is often signified by that which is very ornamental, rich, and costly, as fine linen, clothing of wrought gold, raiment of needlework, a Wedding garment, stuck with jewels and precious stones: sanctifying grace, which also is Christ’s gift, is very ornamental; it is called “the beauty of holiness”; it is that by which a man is made like to God, and conformed to the image of Christ; it is the curious workmanship of the Spirit of God; or what makes a man beautiful, and makes him meet for heaven and happiness: every grace is ornamental; faith, hope, love, humility, etc. these are like rows of jewels, and chains of gold, about the neck. And when this ornament is said to be given “to the head”, it is not to be understood of the natural head of a man, but of his whole person, it gives a comeliness to; and may denote the visibility of it, as it appears in the life and conversation;

a crown of glory shall she deliver to thee; by which is meant eternal glory and happiness, called a “crown”, an ensign of royal dignity, which, belongs to such as are made kings and priests unto God; and is given to conquerors, even who are more than conquerors through Christ, and as a reward of diligence and faithfulness, (^{<6120>}Revelation 2:10). It is sometimes called a crown of life, a crown of righteousness, an incorruptible and never-fading one, and, as here, “a crown of glory”; the saints in heaven will have a glory put upon them, both in soul and body; they will appear with Christ in glory, and be crowned with glory and honour, as he is; they will be clothed and surrounded with it: and so some render it,

“she will compass thee about with a crown of glory as with a shield”^{<f93>};

(see ^{<4152>}Psalm 5:12). This Christ is said to “deliver”; it is in his hands, laid up in him, and is safe with him; he has power to dispose of it, and it may be expected from him; (see ^{<5048>}2 Timothy 4:8).

Ver. 10. *Hear, O my son, and receive my sayings*, etc.] Some think David is still speaking to his son Solomon, or Solomon continues relating what his father said to him; though I rather think these are Solomon's words to his son, to everyone of his children that came to him for instruction, or he took upon him to teach; whom he advises to listen to what he had further to say, and to embrace, and not reject, his doctrines;

and the years of thy life shall be many; (see ^{<4101>}Proverbs 3:1,2); long life here, and length of days for ever and ever, or eternal life hereafter; which must be a very forcible argument to engage attention to his sayings.

Ver. 11. *I have taught thee in the way of wisdom*, etc.] In the way that leads to it, or is concerning it; in the Gospel, which is the wisdom of God in a mystery, the manifold wisdom of God, and which directs to Christ and the knowledge of him, who is true wisdom; this is another reason or argument why the wise man's instructions should be attended to;

I have led thee in right paths; in paths of righteousness, holiness, and truth; in such as are agreeable to the will and word of God, and which lead right on to the city of habitation; and therefore such teachings and leadings should be followed, and such ways walked in.

Ver. 12. *When thou goest, thy steps shall not be straitened*, etc.] By enemies, or attended with difficulties and obstructions, or subject to dangers, but be at freedom and liberty in walking; for though saints do not walk in the broad road with sinners, yet they are brought into a large place, and their steps are enlarged under them, and their hearts are enlarged to run the way of God's commandments; and a wide field of truth and duty such have to walk in, who are taught and led in the ways of wisdom and righteousness, (^{<4989>}Psalm 18:19,36 119:32,45);

and when thou runnest, thou shall not stumble; such that make haste to keep the commandments of God, that run with alacrity and cheerfulness in their Christian race, and in the way of their duty, shall not stumble, through the deceitfulness of sin, the snares of the world, and the temptations of Satan, so as to fall and perish.

Ver. 13. *Take fast hold of instruction*, etc.] Not the law, as Jarchi and Gersom interpret it; but the instruction of wisdom, the doctrine of Christ or the Gospel; (see ^{<4101>}Proverbs 8:1-10); which is an instruction into the mind and will of God, concerning the salvation of men; into the grace of God, showing that salvation, in all its branches, is of pure grace; into the person

and offices of Christ, and into the business of salvation through him; into the doctrines of peace, pardon, righteousness, and eternal life by him. This should be “taken fast hold of”; in order to which, men should take heed unto it, attentively hear it; they should come with a cordial affection to it, and an eager desire after it, or they will never lay fast hold on it; for taking fast hold, as it supposes a careful attention to the Gospel, so a reception of it in the love of it, and an eagerness to be possessed of it: such may be said to take fast hold on it, who receive it into their hearts, and not into their heads only; head knowledge of the Gospel instruction is not hold fast enough, it must be heart knowledge of it; it is taken fast hold on when it is mixed with faith when heard; when it is digested and incorporated as it were into men, and becomes the ingrafted word; when men are led experimentally and practically into it, and are not hearers only, but doers of it; and, being thus taken fast hold of,

let [her] not go; the instruction of wisdom, or the Gospel of Christ; do not drop it, nor depart from it, nor waver about it; nor be languid in a profession of it, nor indifferent to it: “be not remiss”,^{f94}, as the word signifies; or let not thine hand be remiss, or let not thine hand go; having, as it were with both hands, took fast hold of the Gospel, hold it fast, neither drop it through negligence and carelessness, nor suffer it to be taken from thee by fraud or force;

keep her, for she [is] thy life; which may be understood either of the Gospel, Wisdom’s instruction, which should be kept as a rich treasure, and not parted with at any rate; since it is the means of quickening dead sinners; of showing sensible ones the way of life by Christ; of producing faith in them, by which they live upon him; and of maintaining and supporting the spiritual life in them, and of reviving and comforting them under the most drooping and afflictive circumstances; a man would as soon part with his life surely as part with this! Or else, seeing the feminine gender is here used, which does not agree with the word translated “instruction”, but with “wisdom”, mentioned (~~צדק~~ Proverbs 4:11); so Aben Ezra; therefore Christ may be here meant, who is to be kept as the pearl of great price, being more precious than rubies and all desirable things, and especially since he is the “life” of his people: he is the author and maintainer of their spiritual life; he is their life itself, it is hid with him; and because he lives, they live also: all the comforts and supplies of life are from him, and he is their eternal life; it is given through him and by him, and ties greatly in the enjoyment of him.

Ver. 14. *Enter not into the path of the wicked*, etc.] Which leads to eternal death; join not with them in their wicked ways and practices; have no fellowship, keep no company, with them; do not set one foot in the path they tread, lest thou shouldest be tempted to proceed to more ungodliness; you do not know where and when there will be a stop, when once you begin, therefore enter not. The Vulgate Latin version is, “do not delight in the paths of the ungodly”: but this supposes not only entrance, but progress and continuance in them, whereas the first is dehorted from in these words:

and go not in the way of evil [men]; if tempted and prevailed upon to take a step and make a trial, do not proceed; withdraw at once, do not go on. Some render it, seeing the word used has sometimes the signification of blessedness in it, “do not esteem the way of evil men blessed”¹⁹⁵; nor reckon thyself or them happy that walk in such ways; they are far from it: hence the Targum, Septuagint, and Syriac versions are, “do not envy the ways of wicked men”; their seeming pleasure will end in bitterness: the Arabic version is, “do not imitate” them; do not follow their example, and do as they do.

Ver. 15. *Avoid it*, etc.] As dangerous and pernicious, as abominable and detestable; or, “flee from it”, as the Vulgate Latin version: Jarchi and Gersom interpret it, “make it void”; cause it to cease, destroy it, do all you can to hinder the wicked from accomplishing their designs;

pass not by it; do not come near it; keep at a distance from it, that you may not be drawn into it; abstain from all appearance of evil, and everything that may lead to it;

turn from it, and pass away; the Targum adds, “from them”, from wicked men. This heap of words is used to show the danger of bad company; to dissuade from the least approach to it; and to express the vehement desire of the wise man to preserve his son, and all well inclined persons, from it.

Ver. 16. *For they sleep not, except they have done mischief*, etc.] Or they cannot sleep, as Jarchi and Gersom interpret it. Oftentimes they cannot sleep on their beds for devising mischief, their thoughts are so intensely set on contriving wicked schemes; and when they have so done, they cannot sleep until they have executed them; they are continually restless and uneasy day and night, like the troubled sea, constantly casting up mire and dirt. Who would keep such company as these?

and their sleep is taken away, unless they cause [some] to fall; into the snares and traps they lay for them, or into sin and calamity by it; the former of which they endeavour by all means to draw men into, and the latter is the unavoidable consequence of it. They imitate their father the devil, both delight in sin, and in the ruin of their fellow creatures; it is a sport to thereto do mischief, and they have no pleasure without it; (see ^{<01123>}Proverbs 11:23). What company are such!

Ver. 17. *For they eat the bread of wickedness,* etc.] Either that is gotten by wicked and unlawful means, or wickedness itself is bread unto them; it is that to their minds as bread is to their bodies; they feed upon it with as much eagerness, appetite, gust, and pleasure; it is a sweet morsel to them; it is meat, drink, sleep, and everything to them; they take the highest satisfaction and the utmost delight in it;

and drink the wine of violence: either that which is obtained by rapine and violence; or they as greedily commit such acts of oppression and injury as a man drinks a glass of wine; they do not drink up iniquity like water only, but even like wine, the most generous and delicious. Wherefore all society with such men should be avoided.

Ver. 18. *But the path of the just [is] as the shining light,* etc.] The “just” man is one that is made righteous through the righteousness of Christ imputed to him; and who is created anew in Christ, in righteousness and true holiness; and, under the influence of divine grace, lives soberly, righteously, and godly: the “path” he is directed to walk in, and does, is Christ himself, the way, the truth, and the life; through whose blood, righteousness, and sacrifice, he goes to God for grace and mercy, for peace, pardon, and acceptance, for fresh supplies of grace, and in order to enjoy communion with him; and who also is the way of salvation, and to eternal life and happiness: and, besides this grand and principal path, there are the paths of truth, righteousness, and holiness; the path of duty and obedience; the way of the commandments of God, and ordinances of Christ: and this path he walks in, whether of grace or duty, is “as the shining light”; or of the morning, when the day first dawns, or at least when the sun rises. Such is the light beamed in at first conversion, which directs men to walk in the above mentioned paths; it is a light after a night of darkness, as such is the state of unregeneracy; which, though at first is but glimmering, yet afterwards is clear and shining; especially when Christ the sun of righteousness appears, or is revealed, as the hope of glory. The

first grace in conversion is a “true light [that] shines”, (1 John 2:8), by which a soul sees its own vileness and filthiness, the insufficiency of its own righteousness; and the fulness, suitableness, and ability Christ as a Saviour, and has some discerning of Gospel truths;

that shineth more and more unto the perfect day; or “going and shining”^{f96}, or “enlightening”: it shines clearer and clearer, so does true grace; it grows and increases more and more, every grace does, faith, hope, love, patience, humility, etc. the light of the knowledge of Christ the way, though it is imperfect, yet capable of being increased, and is increased by means of the ministry of the word and ordinances; which increase God has promised, saints pursue after, and attain unto. Light into the Gospel, and the doctrines of it, increases yet more and more; whereby a soul walks pleasantly, comfortably, and safely, in right path, “until the perfect day” of glory comes, a day without clouds; when there will be nothing to interpose between God and them; when there will be no more clouds of darkness, unbelief, doubts, and fears; when the sun will always be seen, no more withdrawn, eclipsed, or set; even Christ, the sun of righteousness, whose glory will always be beheld by the righteous to all eternity: when there will be no more night of affliction, desertion, and death; when the light of knowledge will be clear and perfect, and saints shall see face to face, and know as they are known; and when not only the light of the righteous shall be so clear, distinct, and perfect, but they themselves shall shine as the sun in the kingdom of God. The words may be rendered, “the prepared day”^{f97}; appointed in the decrees of God, and firmly established by them: the invisible glories of the heavenly state, which make this everlasting day, are things which God has prepared for his people; the kingdom and glory itself, the inheritance of the saints in light, is prepared for them from the foundation of the world. And, since such is the path of the just, who would walk in the ways of the wicked? which are the reverse of this, as the following words show.

Ver. 19. *The way of the wicked [is] as darkness*, etc.] They are in the darkness of sin, ignorance, error, and unbelief; their works are works of darkness; the way in which they are leads to eternal darkness, ruin, and misery, and so must be most uncomfortable and dangerous;

they know not at what they stumble; they stumble at the word, which they are ignorant of, and at Christ, whom they have no knowledge of; and

through the temptations of Satan and snares of the world, which they are not aware of, nor upon their guard against.

Ver. 20. *My son, attend to my words*, etc.] Which go before and which follow after, his doctrines, instructions, cautions, and exhortations;

incline thine ear unto my sayings; stoop and bow the ear; listen attentively to what is said, as being of the greatest moment and importance.

Ver. 21. *Let them not depart from thine eyes*, etc.] Commit them to writing, frequently read them over; let them be always in sight, as a rule and directory to steer the course of life by. Some understand this of the wicked, as if the sense was, let not them, the wicked, cause them to depart from thine eyes; nor thee to neglect them, by their bad advice, solicitations to sin, and ill examples; (see Gill on "~~20:21~~ Proverbs 3:21");

keep them in the midst of thine heart; lay them up there, and ponder them; often meditate upon them, and do not forget them; show the most affectionate regard unto them, and look upon them as a most inestimable treasure, for which no place is so fit a repository as the heart.

Ver. 22. *For they [are] life unto those that find them*, etc.] The words or doctrines of Christ, whose type Solomon was, are to be found in the field of the Scriptures, by diligent searching for them; and being found, they are the means of spiritual life, and of maintaining it, and of showing the way, and bringing unto eternal life; (see ~~4:63~~ John 6:63);

and health to all their flesh; the whole man, soul and body, as they are the means of preserving the body from many diseases, which intemperance, lust, and luxury, lead unto, and are curbed by these; so of healing the various diseases of the soul; and, however, of directing to a panacea for them, to the blood of Christ, which is the true balm of Gilead, and he the physician of souls. Moreover, the doctrines of the Gospel are the wholesome words of our Lord Jesus; they are sound, salutary, and healthful, and serve to keep the soul in good plight, and the body too. The Septuagint render it, "to all flesh": that is, to all men; but this is not true in fact; for to some the Gospel of Christ, through contempt and rejection of it, is the savour of death unto death.

Ver. 23. *Keep thy heart with all diligence*, etc.] The mind from vanity, the understanding from error, the will from perverseness, the conscience clear of guilt, the affections from being inordinate and set on evil objects, the

thoughts from being employed on bad subjects; and the whole from falling into the hands of the enemy, or being the possession of Satan: great diligence had need be used in keeping it, since it is naturally so deceitful and treacherous; a strict eye is to be kept upon it; all the avenues to it to be watched, that nothing hurtful enters, or evil comes out; it is to be kept by all manner of means that can be thought of, by prayer, hearing, reading, meditation; and, above all, by applying to Christ for his grace and Spirit to sanctify, preserve, and keep it. Or, “above all keeping, keep thine heart”¹⁹⁸; though other things are to be kept, and care taken of them, as kingdoms and cities, and towns and families, and treasures and riches; yet the heart above all:

for out of it [are] the issues of life; of natural life: it is the seat of it, from whence all actions of life are derived; it is, as philosophers say, the first that lives, and the last that dies; and it is the seat of spiritual life the principle of it is formed in it; from whence all spiritual and vital actions flow, and which lead unto and issue in eternal life: as is a man’s heart, such is his state now, and will be hereafter; if the heart is quickened and sanctified by the grace of God, the man will live a life of faith and holiness here, and enjoy everlasting life hereafter: and if the heart is right, so will the actions of men be; they are regulated and denominated by it; they will then spring from right principles, and be directed to right ends, and performed with right views; great care therefore should be taken of the heart, since so much depends upon it, and it is so well known to God the searcher of it.

Ver. 24. *Put away from thee a froward mouth*, etc.] A mouth speaking froward and perverse things; things contrary to right reason, to the law of God, and Gospel of Christ; blasphemies against God or men; every thing that is untrue, unchaste, unjust, foolish, and filthy; all swearing, lying, and everything that is repugnant to truth and justice. Some understand it of men that are liars, blasphemers, and froward persons, who are to be shunned and avoided, and to be debarred the houses and society of good men;

and perverse lips put far from thee; do not make use of them thyself, nor keep company with men of such a character. Much the same thing is meant as before.

Ver. 25. *Let thine eyes look right on*, etc.] To the path of truth and holiness, without turning or looking to the right hand or left, as it is afterwards expressed; to the word of truth, as the rule to walk by; to

Christ, the author and finisher of faith, from whom all grace, and the supplies of it, are to be had; and to the mark, for the prize of the high calling of God;

and thine eyelids look straight before thee; to the precepts of the word, to observe them; to the promises of it for encouragement; to the examples of the saints gone before, as motives to excite diligence, and to exercise patience, faith, and hope; to the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ for eternal life, and to the blessed hope laid up in heaven.

Ver. 26. *Ponder the path of thy feet,* etc.] Consider well what path it is, whether right or wrong; or weigh it in the balances of thought, as Aben Ezra; or rather in the balances of the word, and see whether it agrees with that or not. The Septuagint version is, “make straight paths for thy feet”; to which the author of the epistle to the Hebrews seems to have respect, (^{<823>}Hebrews 12:13);

and let all thy walls be established; so as to walk on steadily, constantly, uniformly, and not be easily moved out of the ways of religion and truth. Or, “let all thy ways be prepared”, or “directed”, or “disposed”^{f99}; according to the rule of the divine word. Some render it as a promise, “and all thy ways shall be established”^{f100}; when care is taken to look well into them; (see ^{<444>}2 Chronicles 20:20).

Ver. 27. *Turn not to the right hand nor to the left,* etc.] Either into the road of immorality and profaneness, or into that of error, superstition, and false worship; but attend to the way of holiness and truth, directed to in the word of God; (see ^{<232>}Isaiah 30:21); nor be moved out of it by threatenings and menaces, nor by flatteries and promises; neither be cast down with adversity, nor be lifted up with prosperity; but keep on in an even way, attending to that which is just and right; leaving all events with God, as knowing you are in the way of your duty, and in which he would have you walk;

remove, by foot from evil; from walking in evil ways and along with evil men, and from doing evil things; abstain from all appearance of evil, keep at a distance from it; the evil of sin brings on the evil of punishment. There are two verses added in the Septuagint, Arabic, and Vulgate Latin versions, which are not in the Hebrew text;

“for the ways which are on the right hand God knoweth; but those that are on the left are perverse. He will make thy paths right, and promote thy goings in peace.”