

# April 2017

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- unless otherwise noted, answers to questions by Keith Sharp -

## In This Issue...

- **How Short Is Too Short?** | *Jefferson David Tant*
- **The Church As God Intended It For His Glory, Pt. 2** | *Tommy G. Thornhill*
- **The Mistakes of Peter** | *Jim Mickells*
- **Sunday After Easter** | *Mike Thomas*
- **The Samuel Complex** | *William J. Stewart*
- **Names of the Messiah: Eternal Father** | *Sean P. Cavender*
- **Gossip** | *Keith Sharp*
- **Introduction to Proverbs** | *Keith Sharp*

Finally, brethren

# WHATEVER THINGS

are true  
are noble  
are just  
are pure  
are lovely

PHILIPPIANS  
4:8

are of good report  
IF THERE IS ANY VIRTUE AND IF THERE  
IS ANYTHING PRAISEWORTHY –  
**meditate on these things.**

You can download this month's Meditate On These Things as a PDF file by clicking [here](#). Also, an archive of past MOTT issues is available at [christistheway.com](http://christistheway.com).

Pat Farish who is a regular, valued contributor to "Meditate on These Things," has been in the hospital and is now in rehabilitation. We pray he makes a speedy recovery.

## How Short Is Too Short?

Jefferson David Tant | Roswell, Georgia, USA

If you haven't noticed, the summer months are coming, which brings in the season for the shedding not only of winter coats, but also the shedding of modesty. Then the question is raised about "How short is too short?" This is a question that those professing to follow Christ must consider.

We are aware of Paul's instruction to Timothy:

*"Likewise, I want women to adorn themselves with proper clothing, modestly and discreetly, not with braided hair and gold or pearls or costly garments, but rather by means of good works, as is proper for women making a claim to godliness"*  
(1 Timothy 2:9-10)

We know that Paul is not condemning fixing hair or wearing nice things, but is saying the emphasis should be on her manner of life rather than her manner of dress. But he does mention "proper clothing, modestly and discreetly." So, what does that mean?

"Proper" in the Greek means "orderly, i.e. decorous:--of good behaviour, modest." "Modestly" carries the idea of "bashfulness, i.e. (towards men), modesty or (towards God) awe:--reverence." And "discreetly" refers to "soundness of mind, i.e. (literally) sanity or (figuratively) self-control:--sobriety, sobriety." Then Paul says the way a woman dresses is to make a declaration that she claims to be serving God. The way she dresses should cause no one to suppose that she is not a God-fearing woman.

Now, back to the “shortness.” We remember the story of Adam and Eve who realized their nakedness after eating the forbidden fruit. So “they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loin coverings” (Genesis 3:7). These “loin coverings” in other translations are rendered “girdles” or “aprons.” We are aware that such a garment would cover the middle part of the body.

But we remember that God was not satisfied with this, for the text goes on to say, “The LORD God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife, and clothed them.” (3:21) The “garment” God made for them is from the Hebrew “*kethoneth*,” and according to Gesenius’ Hebrew and English Lexicon, refers to a garment such as a tunic, commonly reaching to the knee.” That’s interesting. The knee has long seemed to be a sensible “drawing line” for women’s garments. Everybody has a knee, and knows where it is. And if God thought that was a proper length, that’s good enough for me. And I hope it’s good enough for our sisters as well. How do our ladies’ skirts measure up?

Then there is the beach wear. One piece, two piece, bikini, whatever. “Everybody else has a swim suit on, so I’m not out of place.” OK, what about a nudist beach? “Everybody else is naked, so I won’t be out of place.” Just because “everybody else...” is not a good reason to do anything. Several years ago, Bob West drew a cartoon showing just clothing. There was a woman’s slip, and then shorts and halter. The doorbell rings, and mom’s slip says, “Oh, there’s the doorbell, and I’m in my underwear.” To which the daughter’s shorts and halter replies, “I’m dressed. I’ll get it.” Do you see the inconsistency? Which one had more clothes on?

If a swimsuit or shorts and halter is modest apparel, then why not wear it to church? Many years ago when I was a teenager in Texas, a girl we called “Sister” liked to compete in girls’ events in rodeos. One time she was out of town for a Saturday event and planned to be back home Saturday night. But the car broke down and she had to spend the night away. Sunday morning she went to church in her rodeo outfit. That wasn’t her normal “Sunday go to meetin’” clothing, but she was modestly attired. Suppose she had been at a swimming competition, or even a track meet with shorts. Knowing her as I did, she would not have gone to church in such attire. (And she didn’t dress that way at any time.)

Mary Quant, the London fashion designer and mother of the mini-skirt, stated: “Mini-clothes are symbolic of those girls who want to seduce a man...” When asked where it was all leading to (miniskirts, etc.) she replied with one word “sex.”

At a church near a university where many students attended, they had some difficulty in recruiting men to serve communion in the area where many students sat. When asked for an explanation, it was told that it was difficult to stand at the end of a row to pass the trays when there was often such an exposure of breasts due to low cut or otherwise revealing outfits. In teaching a teenage class at summer camp, I asked the young people why girls wore revealing clothing. Almost universally, the teenagers summed it up in one word—“advertising.” So... Ladies, when you go out in public, what are you “advertising,” your godliness or your worldliness? In our summer work in Jamaica, we take several young people with us, and as we walk about the town, I recall being asked, “Are you Christians?” How could they tell? By the way we were dressed.

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## The Church As God Intended It For His Glory (2)

Tommy G. Thornhil | Etna, Arkansas, USA

In concluding the last article, I pointed out that once we have learned from the New Testament what God intended the church to be, that His Son promised, paid for and built, then, we as members will do all we can to conform ourselves as a group to His revealed plan (follow the pattern). In so doing we will glorify God, not man, just as He intended (Ephesians 3:21). But, even with such a determination on the part of the membership, it will never reach perfection because of the human factor. As fallible human beings, mistakes will be made, errors in judgment will happen, even as the members strive toward perfection. But, just because the goal has not yet been obtained, the members must not give up trying to reach it. For

when the members lose this desire to follow the perfect pattern found in the New Testament, that will be the time when they drift away from the truth, and will no longer be worthy of being considered a local church of Christ.

Since the Lord's church consists of people who want to identify with the truth, we must be careful in establishing and maintaining fellowship with other groups of people who claim to be part of the New Testament church. We must make sure their claim to be New Testament Christians is more than just a claim. This is where fellowship with other groups that seem to be of like faith becomes a matter of personal judgment, as to whether they are also following the pattern revealed in the New Testament. We have the obligation to examine other groups to see if they are following the Bible-defined standard or pattern of faith, worship, work and conduct. All have to be tested by the same rule or standard, the word of God, not human opinion and traditions. The way may seem right, but not be right (Proverbs 14:12).

Why is it continually necessary to stress these things about the church? Because, when these things are no longer taught, people forget the truth. No church (group of people) who claim to be a church that God intends it to be, is immune from the danger of falling away. The moment a congregation begins to teach or practice anything it cannot find authority for in the Word of God it is in danger of departing the faith, and if it refuses to repent of its error, when they learn of it, in due time the congregation will become so corrupted that it ceases to be the church God and Christ intended.

One of the most pathetic, erroneous teachings (doctrines) taught and believed today is the one that teaches, "Since we were God's chosen people in the past we still are." This was the thinking of the Jews when Jesus came into the world. They had been God's chosen people, so they still felt they were. John the Baptist speaking for God, told the Israelite leaders who came to watch him baptize, that they could not be saved unless they repented (Matthew 3:8-9). In fact, he said that God would "raise up children out of stones," before saving them with such an impenitent condition.

Notice the churches in the New Testament. They all had problems. The churches of Galatia were in danger of falling away and losing their identity as God's people. Paul refers to them as "foolish Galatians" (Galatians 3:1). The church at Ephesus was in danger of having its candlestick removed because it had left its first love (Revelation 2:5). Other local churches in Revelation chapters 2-3, Pergamos, Thyatira, Sardis, were told to remove the false doctrines and practices plaguing them or the Lord would remove their lampstands. Laodicea was so indifferent that the Lord was ready to vomit its brethren out of His mouth. These local churches may have been right when they started, but they did not remain right. The same can be said of other churches mentioned in the New Testament.

From an earthly standpoint, none of the New Testament churches were perfect. The "faithful few" in these churches were told to remove the "leaven" (sinful teachings and practices) or be "leavened" by them and be lost. I believe the inference in the New Testament is that the "faithful" must either work to remove the sin, or if this can't be accomplished, the only other choice is to withdraw from that local congregation and find a church (group of people) that will not tolerate or teach false doctrine.

In the first century, after the apostles died, the truth began to be lost to many. Little by little, people quit following the New Testament pattern, and drifted from the truth (Hebrews 2:1-3), as they began to add their own human ideas. But, this drifting from the truth didn't just happen in the 1st century. It has happened over and over through the centuries since, and it is still happening. Today, the result is a divided religious world with denominationalism running rampant. We have hundreds of different human denominations teaching and practicing a variety of doctrines and practices that do not fit the New Testament pattern. People have defiled and despised the Lord's church, compromising and/or discarding the truth for human schemes, ideas and modernistic thinking. If that isn't enough, many who know, or have known, the pattern of the New Testament church have allowed ungodliness and worldliness to nullify the appeal of the simple New Testament church (Titus 2:7, 8, 11-12; 2 Corinthians 6:14-18).

In my own lifetime, I have not only heard of, but personally seen, local churches of Christ that at one time adhered closely to the New Testament pattern, that have now drifted into apostasy. God is no longer glorified since they no longer desire to be governed by His word. They no longer want “a thus says the Lord” (book, chapter and verse) for the things they teach and practice in their worship and work.

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## **The Mistakes Of Peter**

Jim Mickells | Lewisburg, Tennessee, USA

What do people remember most about the apostle Peter? Would it be his great impetuosity? No doubt he acted quickly on occasion without adequate thought. I have certainly been guilty of such on more than one occasion myself. Certainly, one of the things he is remembered for is his denying the Lord three times. We must never forget though this led to tears of sorrow and repentance by this great man. There are some valuable lessons that you and I can learn from this man's failure.

His first mistake was that he was overconfident. Jesus had warned the apostles they would all be made to stumble because of Him that very night, fulfilling a prophecy in Zechariah 13:7 (Matthew 26:31). Yet Peter boldly proclaimed, “Even if all are made to stumble because of You, I will never be made to stumble” (Matthew 26:33). “Jesus said to him, “Assuredly, I say to you that this night, before the rooster crows, you will deny Me three times” (Matthew 26:34). He should have been asking the Lord for strength and courage, so that his faith would be sufficiently strong to stand firmly with his Lord. We can only be successful in serving Christ by putting our confidence in God and not just in ourselves. Paul warned, “Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall” (1 Corinthians 10:12).

The second mistake? He followed the Lord at a distance (Luke 22:54). He did show some faith. He did follow. Yet not wanting to get so close where he could be identified in anyway with the One who was about to die to redeem him from his sins. Do we show some faith by following? But do we follow afar as well? Peter, out of fear it seems, followed at a distance and even denied he knew the Lord. Are we afraid to take up our cross daily and follow Jesus? When we have an opportunity to speak with someone about Christ, out of fear do withhold the truth? Do we follow from a distance because we are so busy with life we never have the time to study the word of God, to pray, to visit the sick, or to teach the lost? Listen carefully to words of James, “Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded” (James 4:8).

His third mistake was warming at the fires of the enemy. “Now when they had kindled a fire in the midst of the courtyard and sat down together, Peter sat among them” (Luke 22:55). Would his faith be strengthened by those with whom he sat? Would they help him to have the courage to stand up and admit he had been with Christ? Would they encourage him to speak to others about the Messiah? The answer to these questions is no! We need to be with those of like faith so we can be stirred to good works (Hebrews 10:24-25). If an individual intentionally misses one of the assemblies of the church, with whom is he sitting? At whose fire is he warming? Certainly, not with the Lord. Christ would be with His people, worshiping God. Jesus said, “He who is not with Me is against Me, and he who does not gather with Me scatters abroad” (Matthew 12:30).

This led to his denying the Lord. Later Jesus asked Peter three times if he loved Him. Notice the first time He posed this question to the apostle, “So when they had eaten breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me more than these?” He said to Him, “Yes, Lord; You know that I love You.” He said to him, “Feed My lambs” (John 21:15). It is certain we do not know what the Lord meant by the expression “more than these.” It could be, especially considering what Peter had said in Matthew 26:33, He was asking if he loved Him more than these other men. Regardless, we just like the apostle, must answer the same question. Do we love the Lord more than our rest, recreation, jobs, families, sin, etc. (Luke 14:26-33).

May the Lord help us to learn from the mistakes of great men like Peter and from our own failures as well.

Help us O Jehovah to trust in You, draw near to You, and to have our hearts warmed and encouraged at the fires where your people are gathered.

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## Sunday After Easter

Mike Thomas | Beaver Dam, Kentucky, USA

Once the colorful clothes are put in the closet and the grass is mowed shorter the next week, will you still be interested in Jesus? When the world resumes its own pursuits on the Sunday after Easter, will you still sacrifice your time and energy to worship Jesus? Or will Sunday become just another day again? Jesus asked, "But why do you call Me 'Lord, Lord,' and not do the things which I say?" (Luke 6:46). He wants more than just a casual interest from us; He wants us to genuinely appreciate Him because of the great love He has for us (1 John 3:16).

While we are on the subject, if we love Jesus we will worship Him in ways He wants. It is an offense to Him to practice the commandments of men in place of the doctrines He commands. He said, "These people draw near to Me with their mouth, and honor Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me. And in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men" (Matthew 15:8-9). It is not enough to worship God when we are in the mood. If we are to honor and please Him, we must worship according to His will and from our heart – "in spirit and truth" (John 4:24). "For the Father is seeking such to worship Him" (verse 23). God has always been offended by people who stray from His pattern in worship. He rejected Cain for changing the type of sacrifice required (Genesis 4:4-5). He condemned Nadab and Abihu for changing the type of fire commanded (Leviticus 10:1-3). He will respond no differently to us when we offer things contrary to His will.

In light of these thoughts, where does the New Testament teach Christians to celebrate Easter? Where did Jesus and His apostles ever instruct saints to engage in an annual ceremony for His resurrection? The only memorial they instituted is a weekly observance of the Lord's sacrifice (Matthew 26:26-29), which is why Sunday became the traditional day of worship for Christians. The first saints assembled every first day to partake of this ceremony: the Lord's Supper (Acts 20:7). But Lent, Easter, Christmas, and other holy days are not found in God's Word. If so, where is the verse?

The fact is Easter (and similar days) stem from the influence of the Roman Catholic Church and its efforts to fuse pagan holidays with Christianity. Most encyclopedias will confirm this. And while these holidays have honorable intent, they are an addition to Christ's doctrine in the same way Cain, Nadab and Abihu violated God's will. These are "self-imposed religion" (Colossians 2:24), which we are told to avoid. If we seek to honor Jesus, we will give Him what He wants. And He said to "do this in remembrance of Me" in commanding the Lord's Supper (1 Corinthians 11:24-25). If He wanted special ceremonies for His birth or His resurrection, He would have told us how and when to do so. But since we don't even know the date of His birth and are told to remember His death instead, we dishonor Him by teaching the commandments of men as doctrine from heaven.

I am all for time with family and the social traditions that stem from religious holidays. These will occur sometimes from religious error (1 Corinthians 10:25-31), as it has with Easter. There is no harm in hunting eggs and sharing candy if done as a secular holiday, and without offense to the conscience. But when it comes to doctrine and things done in worship, we may only teach and practice that which Jesus authorizes (Colossians 3:16). Thus, let us praise Him as Lord in the ways He wants, instead of what men want in Christmas and Easter. Jesus wants us to take the Lord's Supper next Sunday. Will we?

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## The Samuel Complex

William J. Stewart | Odessa, Ontario, Canada

When he was an old man, the elders of Israel approached Samuel, who served as a prophet, priest and judge among his people, and said, "*make us a king to judge us like all the nations*" (1 Samuel 8:5). The prophet was broken up (Strong's, 03415) over their demand. The LORD assured Samuel, "*they have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me*" (1 Samuel 8:7).

Years later, the king whom Samuel had anointed over the people showed himself to be arrogant and self-

willed, failing to follow the LORD's commands. After Saul failed to destroy the Amalekites as he had been commanded, Samuel went to Saul with this message:

*Because you have rejected the word of the LORD, He also has rejected you from being king. (1 Samuel 15:23)*

Samuel mourned for Saul (1 Samuel 15:35). It devastated him that the king he had installed for the people should fail as he did. He bewailed (Strong's, 056) king Saul's rejection of the LORD.

I believe "the Samuel Complex" is a common reaction in those who serve among the Lord's people in a position of authority. It involves feelings of guilt, sorrow and rejection, not about things he has done, but over the failures of those whom he ministers to. He feels their failures as his own, or at the very least, that it reflects upon him and his work.

There are several Old Testament examples of spiritual leaders who were crushed to see God's people walk in their own way rather than God's way. In the New Testament, I believe we see the same very clearly in the apostle Paul. Those whom he taught had a special place in his heart. In fact, he uses phrases of endearment for them - even identifying them as his children (ie. Galatians 4:19-20; 1 Thessalonians 2:7-19). He was invested in them. He wanted to see them succeed in the faith, and when they did not, he took their failures personally (Galatians 2:2; 4:11; Philippians 2:16; 1 Thessalonians 3:5; 2 Corinthians 9:3-4; 12:20-21). In 2 Timothy 4:10, Paul wrote, *"Demas has forsaken me, having loved this present world."* This man had been a fellow worker with Paul, but now, like Israel and Saul, had forsaken the Lord. But Paul took it personally.

When his fellow countrymen would not respond to the gospel message, it filled him with sorrow (Romans 9:2-4; 10:1-2). When he instructed his brethren, for their benefit, at times he was treated as though he was their enemy (Galatians 4:16). In a list of the hardships and difficulties he endured for the cause of Christ, his 'last but certainly not least' statement was *"my deep concern for all the churches"* (2 Corinthians 11:28). In the next verse, he revealed that he internalized the struggles of others. He bore them as though they were his own.

One cannot read Paul's letters to the church at Corinth without seeing the turmoil he endured. This was a church he had worked with for 18 months (Acts 18:1, 11). He loved them and wanted to see them grow in faith. His first letter was basically one rebuke after another, for they were an immature group of believers (1 Corinthians 3:1-3) who were arrogantly ignorant of their spiritual condition (1 Corinthians 4:8-16). In his second letter, Paul laments that he had *"sorrow over those for whom I ought to have joy"* and had written to them *"out of much affliction and anguish of heart"* (2 Corinthians 2:3-4). He asked them to open their hearts to him, for sadly his love for them was not reciprocated (2 Corinthians 6:11-12; 7:2-3). And yet he affirmed, *"I will very gladly spend and be spent for your souls; though the more abundantly I love you, the less I am loved"* (2 Corinthians 12:15).

Those who serve the Lord and the body of believers in positions of spiritual leadership are invested in your success. They yearn to see and rejoice in the times that you grow, but meet frustration and disappointment in your setbacks and failures. When your spiritual life is not what it ought to be, when you say "good sermon," but fail to apply it, when people turn back to the world, it is distressing to the preacher (and elders, if present). When preachers spend many hours preparing Bible classes, sermons and bulletin articles, only to have some brethren not show up; their absence tells him that he and his work are not respected or appreciated. Though we ought to know (and do realize) that it is actually the Lord who has been insulted and disrespected, it is hard for the spiritual worker to not take it personally, as Samuel, Paul and others before us have.

Perhaps the Samuel Complex is a good thing; since it is evidence of the care and concern ministers have for God's people. Without it, we might find ourselves to be cold, detached and apathetic to the spiritual condition of others. And so those who devote their lives to equipping and edifying the saints willingly

endure the lost sleep, the stress, the headache, the tears, and the heartache. And yet brethren ought to be aware of these hardships which belong to those who are in leadership roles in the body of Christ. Hebrews 13:17 is likely written specifically about elders, but in principle is also true of preachers. It reads:

*Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you.*

Friends, let those who watch out for your souls do so with joy and not grief. Be interested and attentive to their words, for it is a message delivered out of love and for your benefit. Let's work together for God's glory and our glorification with Him in eternity.

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## **Names of the Messiah**

### **Eternal Father**

Sean P. Cavender | Bald Knob, Arkansas, USA

Examining the prophecy in Isaiah 9 indicates the nature of the Messiah's rule over His kingdom. The prophet of God, Isaiah, spoke of a time when a light would be seen by the Gentiles and good news proclaimed in the land of Zebulun, Naphtali, and Galilee of the Gentiles (Isaiah 9:1-2). The apostle Matthew, inspired by the Holy Spirit, deliberately connects the fulfillment of Isaiah 9:1-2 with the preaching by Jesus Christ concerning the kingdom of heaven:

- (14) *"This was to fulfill what was spoken through Isaiah the prophet:*
- (15) *'The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, by the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles—*
- (16) *the people who were sitting in darkness saw a great light, and those who were sitting in the land and shadow of death, upon them a light dawned.'*
- (17) *From that time Jesus began to preach and say, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand,' (Matthew 4:14-17)*

Where Isaiah reveals the nature of the kingdom and the kind of ruler the Messiah would be, Matthew shows the dawning of the rule of Christ. The kingdom of Jesus Christ would be established and ruled with peace, justice, and righteousness. God's rule would be established "from then on and forevermore" (Isaiah 9:7). Picturing the Messiah rule over the kingdom, it would be an everlasting and eternal reign. No enemy of God would overthrow the Messiah's kingdom.

One of the most intriguing names attributed to Christ in the series of kingly assignments attributed to Him is the name "Eternal Father."

*"For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us; and the government will rest on His shoulders; and His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace," (Isaiah 9:6).*

Some mistakenly assume and assert from this text that Jesus and the Father are one and the same. The Bible clearly teaches three different and distinct personalities in the Godhead, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This passage does not teach that God is only one Person and the Father and the Son are just different manifestations of God. It does not teach that Jesus is His own Father. Anyone who suggests that misses the entire context of Isaiah's prophecy.

Isaiah reveals Christ, the Messiah and Anointed of God, assuming the throne and government. Any explanation of Jesus as the Eternal Father must be rooted in the context of the kingdom and government language and accolades that are assigned to Christ in this passage.

The term 'father' commonly refers to an ancestor or progenitor of a family. However, that is only one meaning of the term. The word 'father' might mean originator or founder. For example, in the United States,

we refer to George Washington, John Adams, Thomas Jefferson, Benjamin Franklin, etc. as our “founding fathers.” We recognize these men as the founders of the country and the architects behind our government. The Hebrew word ‘father’ can have a similar meaning: “founder, originator, i.e., one who causes something to begin (Genesis 4:20, 21; 1 Chronicles 2:24, 42), note: including profession, or cities;” (**Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains: Hebrew**).

Isaiah himself refers to those whom God has granted power, authority, and leadership as “fathers.” In Isaiah 22:20-22, Eliakim is referred to as God’s servant whom God will bestow authority and he would become a “father” to the people of Jerusalem and be given keys to the house of David. Therefore, it is right to conclude that a “father” may not only refer to an ancestor, but also to those whom God has given authority, rule, and power.

What does it mean that Jesus is the Eternal Father? The King of kings, Jesus Christ will rule over His kingdom and He will be the source of eternal life.

- He is the author of salvation (Hebrews 2:10).
- He is the source of eternal salvation to all who obey Him (Hebrews 5:9).
- He is the finisher, or perfecter, of faith (Hebrews 12:2).

Furthermore, all authority has been given to Him on heaven and earth (Matthew 28:18). God has exalted Jesus Christ to sit at His right hand and reign on the throne of David in heaven (Acts 2:30-33). Jesus has been given the throne of David and is the Eternal Father and source of eternal salvation for those who become part of His kingdom.

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## Gossip

Keith Sharp | Mountain Home, Arkansas, USA

Arkansas is unusually blessed. There are only four kinds of poisonous snakes in North America, and all four are found here!

The deadliest is also the smallest, the coral snake. It reminds me of the tongue - small but dangerous. “Death and life are in the power of the tongue, And those who love it will eat its fruit” (Proverbs 18:21; cf. James 3:1-12). The use of the tongue produces fruit, and if we love to use the tongue, we must eat its fruit.

One of the chief dangers of the tongue is gossip. What does the Bible teach about gossip?

### What is “gossip”?

One reason the apostle Paul advised young women to marry is because otherwise they might “learn to be idle, wandering about from house to house, and not only idle but also gossips and busybodies, saying things which they ought not” (1 Timothy 5:13). Obviously we shouldn’t be “gossips” or “bushbodies.” Albert Barnes explains that the word “gossip” means literally, “‘overflowing;’ then overflowing with talk; ... They would learn all the news; become acquainted with the secrets of families, and of course indulge in much idle and improper conversation” (**Notes**). Gossips talk too much, and they love to engage in idle talk about others.

Closely akin are “bushbodies.” Vine defines acting as a bushbody as “meddling in other persons’ affairs” (Vine. 1:61). Wise Solomon observed, “He who passes by and meddles in a quarrel not his own is like one who takes a dog by the ears” (Proverbs 26:17). A bad dog attacks, and you grab it by its ears. Now what will you do? You can’t hang on forever, but you can’t let go. Bushbodies grab bad dogs by the ears, and they will get hurt. We need to mind our own business.



Paul was afraid he would find “contentions” (“strife,” **NASB**) among the brethren when he came to Corinth (2 Corinthians 12:20). Two causes of strife are “backbitings” and “whisperings”(Ibid).

The term translated “backbitings” is rendered “slanders” in the **NASB** and “slander” in the **ESV**. Mounce defines it as “evil-speaking” (1183). I once attended a lecture at an institutional congregation in Lakeland, Florida. Someone in the audience asked the speaker what “Antis” believed. He answered that they are “opposed to almost everything.” He uttered slander.

“Whisperings” is “secret slander” (Vine. 4:212). Asaph accused the wicked: “You give your mouth to evil, and your tongue frames deceit. You sit and speak against your brother; you slander your own mother’s son” (Psalm 50:19-20). Solomon declared, “Whoever hides hatred has lying lips, And whoever spreads slander is a fool” (Proverbs 10:18).

### **Why Not Gossip?**

Why should we avoid gossip? Gossips bring trouble on themselves. “Whoever guards his mouth and tongue keeps his soul from troubles” (Proverbs 21:23). What will you do when the victim of your gossip confronts you? Gossip stirs up strife. “Where there is no wood, the fire goes out; And where there is no talebearer, strife ceases” (Proverbs 26:20). A wagging tongue can keep strife going as effectively as adding wood to a fire keeps the fire burning. Gossip hurts the one being gossiped about. It damages a good reputation and is an act of hatred. “Whoever hides hatred has lying lips, And whoever spreads slander is a fool” (Proverbs 10:18). God hates gossip! (Proverbs 6:16-19)

### **How can we avoid gossip?**

To avoid gossip, before you say anything bad about someone else, ask yourself four questions.

1. Is it true? (Are you sure?) “Therefore, putting away lying, ‘Let each one of you speak truth with his neighbor,’ for we are members of one another.” (Ephesians 4:25).
2. Will it do any good to tell it? “Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers” (Ephesians 4:29).
3. Will it help all involved to tell it? (Ephesians 4:29)
4. Have you spoken to the person himself? “Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted” (Galatians 6:1).

Always remember the power of the tongue. “Death and life are in the power of the tongue, And those who love it will eat its fruit” (Proverbs 18:21).

### **Conclusion**

The story is told of a Christian who learned that a member of the church was spreading gossip about him. He went to see the gossip on a windy day and took with him a feather pillow. Upon being confronted, the gossip confessed his sin and said he wanted to undo the damage. The victim of the gossip tore open the feather pillow, and as feathers blew far and wide, he told the gossip to pick them all up and put them back in the pillow case. Impossible? That’s how hard it is to undo the harm caused by a wagging tongue. “Whoever spreads slander is a fool” (Proverbs 10:18). Let’s keep our lips pure.

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# Introduction to Proverbs

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As the psalms of Israel reached their apex with David, the wisdom literature of the Hebrews ascended to its pinnacle with Solomon, the son of David.

When Solomon ascended the throne, the Lord appeared to him in a dream, telling him to ask what he would, and Solomon humbly requested the wisdom necessary to rule Israel (1 Kings 3:4-9). The Lord was pleased with Solomon's request, and granted him wisdom, prosperity, and honor (verses 10:13). Solomon's rule was peaceful and prosperous, giving Solomon and others time to reflect upon the nature of things and the means with which to experiment (1 Kings 4:20-25). King Solomon was the wisest mere mortal who ever lived and the wealthiest person of his day (1 Kings 3:16-28; 4:29-34; 10:1-9,23-24).

One way Solomon demonstrated his wisdom was by writing proverbs (1 Kings 4:32). Most of his proverbs have not been preserved, but the book of Proverbs contains the height of the wisdom of the wisest man.

Proverbs is

*the inspired production of Solomon. It is the first book of the Bible prefaced by the name of the author. The New Testament abounds with citations from the Proverbs... (Fausett).*

Actually, although Solomon was the preeminent writer of proverbs, as his father was the greatest psalmist, like Psalms, the book of Proverbs was arranged by a later author or authors (cf. Proverbs 25:1) and also contain proverbs from other authors (22:17; 24:23; 30:1; 31:1).

A proverb is a short, easily remembered sentence composed of two or more parallel lines concisely expressing an important principle of living.

*The Hebrew word for 'proverb' (mashal) means a 'comparison.'... Most of the proverbs are in couplets or triplets, or some modifications of them the members of which correspond in structure and length, as if arranged to be compared one with another (Ibid).*

*"Hebrew poetry, like all poetry whatever the culture, tends to be more terse, more concise, than prose.... In Proverbs terseness becomes even more acute; it is the hallmark of its lines. The sage teaches truth through aphorisms (a terse formulation of truth) that are also epigrams (a terse, sage, witty, and often paradoxical saying). They concentrate or distill truth and so by their nature cannot express the whole truth about a topic.... The book assumes the youth's responsibility to accept the sage's teaching (see 1:4) and threatens apostates with death (e.g., 1:20-33; 2:12-15...)" (Waltke. 1:38)*

Proverbs in the Bible are wise sayings gained by experience and recorded by inspiration. The Proverbs are the height of human wisdom concerning every day life safe guarded from error by divine inspiration.

The Proverbs have parallels and similarities in other ancient wisdom literature (cf. 1 Kings 4:29-31), especially Egyptian. Solomon made an alliance with Pharaoh of Egypt by marrying his daughter (1 Kings 3:1). He imported horses from Egypt (1 Kings 10:28), and patterned his rule after Egyptian rule. There are striking parallels to Proverbs in more ancient Egyptian wisdom literature. Solomon apparently adapted by inspiration (2:6) the wisdom of the ancients (22:17) to the unique thought of Israel.

*"... Israel's wisdom uniquely lays down the fear of the Lord as the foundation for acquiring wisdom (Job 28:28; Prov. 1:7; 9:10; cf. Eccl. 12:13-14), and it is this concept ... that represents the central religious principle in the wisdom literature" (Waltke. 1:52).*

## In Proverbs

*God has condescended to become our teacher on the practical affairs belonging to all the relations of life. He has adapted His instruction to the plain and unlettered, and presented, in this striking and impressive method, the great principles of duty to Him and to our fellow men... (Ibid).*

The purpose of the book of Proverbs is to teach wisdom (1:1-6). Wisdom is "insight into the underlying causes and significance or consequences of things, which insight enables one properly to apply to the best end the knowledge which he has" (Hailey). In brief, wisdom is the ability to properly use knowledge. We should pray for wisdom (James 1:5).

The book of Proverbs teaches the practical wisdom or prudence about daily affairs of this life. The principles are moral in nature.

*"... it is addressed to gullible youths (1:4) and wise children (1:5, 18) to enable them to attain wisdom and be safeguarded against the world-and-life views of the impious and unethical in any age" (Waltke. 1:37)*

Since this wisdom came through experience, it is the advice of a father to his son (1:8,10,15; 2:1; 3:1,11,21; 4:10,20; 5:1,20; 6:1,3,20; 7:1; 19:27; 23:15,19,26; 24:13,21; 27:11). Young people should especially study Proverbs to learn practical wisdom to guide them through every day life. Proverbs primarily promises to the wise student, not eternal life, but success, happiness, and length of life.

The introduction to Proverbs (1:1-6) contains ten terms that together describe wisdom. "Ten" symbolized fullness or completeness to the Jews (ten fingers, ten toes). The terms are:

1. wisdom: the ability to properly apply knowledge,
2. instruction: "moral training" (Deane),
3. understanding: "the capability of discerning the true from the false, good from bad" (Ibid),
4. justice: "that which is in accord with the will and ordinances of God as Supreme Judge" (Ibid),
5. judgment: "right reason" (Ibid),
6. equity: "integrity" (Ibid),
7. subtlety: "the capacity of escaping from the wiles of others" (Ibid),
8. knowledge: correct information,
9. discretion: "that which sets a man on his guard and prevents him from being duped by others" (Ibid), and
10. wise counsels: truths that help us live right.

## Outline

### I. Introduction - 1:1-7

- A. Purpose and Methods of the Book - 1:1-6
- B. Principle of True Wisdom - 1:7

### II. Exhortations to Seek Wisdom and Avoid Foolishness - 1:8 - 9:18

This section is a series of ten exhortations addressed by father to son and two by Lady Wisdom to the student.

### III. Proverbs of Solomon in Two Line Parallelism - 10:1 - 22:16

This is the heart of the book, a collection of about 400 sayings primarily of two lines each in the Hebrew poetic form of "parallelism." In "parallelism" the second line is in some way parallel to the first. In this section the second line is either analogous to (like), in contrast with, or completes the first.

### IV. A Series of Admonitions by Solomon, Each Generally of Two or More Verses - 22:16 - 24:22

This is

*a section containing the more continuous teaching, the personal address, of the teacher to his "son" Pro\_23:15, Pro\_23:19, Pro\_23:26; Pro\_24:13, Pro\_24:21, the same warnings against sins of impurity Pro\_23:27-28, the same declaration of the end which the teacher has in view Pro\_22:17-21, as are met with in Prov. 1-9... (Barnes).*

V. Words of the Wise - 24:23-34

This is

*a section with a new title. 'These things also belong to the wise,' i. e., are spoken by them, fulfill the promise of the title Pro\_1:6 that it would include the 'words of the wise,' wherever the compiler found them... (Ibid).*

VI. Proverbs of Solomon Copied by the Men of Hezekiah - chapters 25 - 29

VII. The Words of Agur - chapter 30

VIII. The Words of King Lemuel That His Mother Taught Him - chapter 31

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