

**The Wisdom of
Jesus Christ**
in the Book of Proverbs

by Phillip A. Ross



Pilgrim Platform
149 E. Spring St.
Marietta, Ohio 45750
www.pilgrim-platform.org

©2007 by Phillip A. Ross
Edition: 1.10.2012

ISBN: 978-0-6151-7215-6

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*Lovingly dedicated to my children
Adam, Austin & Justin
for their grandchildren*

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction.....	i
Proverbs One.....	1
Proverbs Two.....	37
Proverbs Three.....	55
Proverbs Four.....	80
Proverbs Five.....	96
Proverbs Six.....	110
Proverbs Seven.....	126
Proverbs Eight.....	132
Proverbs Nine.....	154
Proverbs Ten.....	164
Proverbs Eleven.....	183
Proverbs Twelve.....	200
Proverbs Thirteen.....	222
Proverbs Fourteen.....	244
Proverbs Fifteen.....	263
Proverbs Sixteen.....	278
Proverbs Seventeen.....	294
Proverbs Eighteen.....	307
Proverbs Nineteen.....	317
Proverbs Twenty.....	329
Proverbs Twenty-One.....	342
Proverbs Twenty-Two.....	355
Proverbs Twenty-Three.....	368
Proverbs Twenty-Four.....	380
Proverbs Twenty-Five.....	392
Proverbs Twenty-Six.....	401
Proverbs Twenty-Seven.....	411
Proverbs Twenty-Eight.....	421
Proverbs Twenty-Nine.....	432

Proverbs Thirty.....	443
Proverbs Thirty-One.....	455
Alphabetical Index	465
Scripture Index.....	477

INTRODUCTION

There is a great need for the application of biblical principles in modern life. Far too many Christians do not understand how the Bible applies to life, and turn Scripture into a collection of aphorisms of self-encouragement in the face of adversity. And while Scripture does provide much encouragement that is to be applied in the face of adversity, it also provides principles that are to be applied to every aspect of daily life.

There was a time when Proverbs was read and studied with the intent of application, but we are so removed from those times that Proverbs is difficult to understand in our day. People tend to read over them without understanding, or to narrow their meaning and application to the fit into their own unbiblical beliefs and habits, and to ignore what isn't immediately clear to them. I know, because I have done this myself over many years.

This study of Proverbs is an attempt to uncover the biblical message of Proverbs verse by verse in the light of Jesus Christ. We cannot pretend to be other than Christians who live on the redemption side of the Cross, while Proverbs was written on the anticipation side of the Cross. Nonetheless, the Christian faith is founded on the eternal consistency of God. God does not change (John 1:2, Acts 7:35, 1 Corinthians 12:6, Hebrews 13:8).

The God of Solomon, the author (and editor) of Proverbs, is the same God spoken of in the New Testament. In fact, the God of Solomon is Jesus Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit. Thus, the present work acknowledges this fact of faith and applies it by reading Proverbs in the light of Jesus Christ.

It might be objected that this practice is not objective scholarship. Indeed, it is not. Scripture tells us repeatedly that objectivity is not possible for human beings, and that the belief in one's own objectivity is, in fact, a function of sin. Thus, the current study makes no effort to be objective. This statement will generate harsh criti-

cism among the ungodly, who strive for objectivity and dependence upon human faculties and experience. But the derision the statement may cause does not effect its truth, but only confirms it.

Neither is Scripture to be a matter of mere scholarship. While scholarship is certainly important to a faithful understanding of Scripture, to make Scripture an object of scholarship is to turn it into either an historic curiosity or a present abstraction, neither of which are faithful readings of Scripture. The purpose of Scripture, and particularly of Proverbs, is the shaping of a biblical understanding of life that will serve as a foundation for practical living.

The Bible endeavors to be ordinary in the root meaning of the word. It provides the foundation of law itself, as well as the most important and practical laws, the Ten Commandments. In addition, we find a plethora of principles for daily living, and a gaggle of good advice about human nature. To overly spiritualize the Bible is to misunderstand its application to ordinary life. Similarly, to under spiritualize it is to ignore its transcendental power.

My intent is to follow the path between these twin errors, and I pray for God's guidance on my part, but also for God's guidance on your part—that the Lord Himself will correct my errors and provide you with understanding that is beyond my ability to communicate. Indeed, this is the only way that genuine understanding of God's Word is possible. I pray that the Lord crack the nut of your self-confidence that the seed of His presence may take root in your life.

I make no pretense to be a scholar of ancient languages, neither Greek nor Hebrew. Understanding the original languages will enhance understanding of Scripture. Fortunately, in our day there are many helps that are available to ordinary Christians. I have found that a basic Hebrew lexicon can make available elements of meaning otherwise obscured by time and tradition. References to Hebrew words have been included in the text so that those who are interested can confirm or correct my efforts.

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PROVERBS ONE

CONSIDERATIONS

1 The proverbs of Solomon the son of David, king of Israel; 2 To know wisdom and instruction; to perceive the words of understanding; 3 To receive the instruction of wisdom, justice, and judgment, and equity; 4 To give subtlety to the simple, to the young man knowledge and discretion.

—Proverbs 1:1-4

The Book of Proverbs is attributed to Solomon, the son of David. Whether or not Solomon personally wrote the various proverbs or simply collected them—or both—is immaterial because the Holy Spirit is the real author of them all. Attributing them to Solomon provides a kind of date. The Book of Proverbs was put together during Solomon's reign and serves as a compendium of rules, thoughts and practical advice for godly living. It is as helpful today as it was in Solomon's day because of the eternal nature of God's Word.

The book itself tells us why it was written, “To know wisdom and instruction; to perceive the words of understanding; To receive the instruction of wisdom, justice, and judgment, and equity; To give subtlety to the simple, to the young man knowledge and discretion” (vs. 2-4). Each sentence fragment answers the question about why the Book of Proverbs was written, and each engages an important verb—*to know* (יָדַע), *to perceive* (בִּיַן), *to receive* (לָקַח), and *to give* (נָתַן).

These proverbs are given so that people can know and make use of God's wisdom. It is important to notice that God (the Author of Scripture) assumes that people do not already know wisdom. That is to say that apart from God's Word wisdom is not known, and that

wisdom can be known only because God gives it. Wisdom, then, is not an inherent part of the human constitution, but is an additional gift of God. Wisdom is not the reward of human accomplishment, but is an unqualified gift of God that is bestowed through His Word, Scripture. An important corollary is that wisdom is not known apart from God's giving it. There is no godly wisdom apart from knowing Scripture.

What is this wisdom that God wants us to know? The Hebrew word for *wisdom* (חכמה) is rich in meaning, and covers every aspect of human experience. For instance, wisdom is involved in craftsmanship and technical work (Exodus 28:3, 31:3, 31:6), in the proper use of tactical warfare (Isaiah 10:13), in the proper administration of government (Deuteronomy 34:9, 2 Samuel 14:20)—in every human endeavor, as we shall see.

It is important to notice that wisdom is available to pagan leaders as well as to those who are committed to the Lord. We can see this universal aspect of God's wisdom when Ezekiel, speaking on behalf of the Lord, prophesied against the King of Tyre, a blatant pagan. In that prophecy Ezekiel noted that Tyre, an ancient center of paganism, had been able to make riches for itself, to put gold and silver into its treasuries because it employed wisdom and understanding (Ezekiel 28:4). In other words, sound fiscal policy, whether in the home, in the church, or in the state, requires the implementation of these proverbial principles. Wealth and material prosperity are consequences of the principles taught in Scripture, and particularly in Proverbs. Salvation is not a requirement for sound fiscal policy.

Does that mean that people can get rich by following the principles taught in Scripture? In a way it does, and in a way it doesn't. It doesn't guarantee that every individual who practices these principles will become rich. But it teaches that societies that are dominated by these principles will prosper physically as well as spiritually.

However, motivation is everything. The motivation to get rich is almost always a function of selfishness and greed, and is not a proper motivation for God's people. Those who are faithful are not motivated by selfishness and greed. Nonetheless, the implementation of biblical principles will usually result in greater social and personal wealth and prosperity across the board.

Yet, we must understand that the result of wealth and prosperity alone is not always a blessing. Apart from God's grace even wealth and prosperity can be used as vehicles of judgment against the faithless. Wealth and prosperity are a blessing to the faithful,

but a curse to the unfaithful. Many societies have been brought to ruin by wealth and prosperity. Similarly, poverty (the lack of abundance, not starvation) can be a blessing to the faithful, as it can be a curse to the unfaithful.

God's concern is not wealth and prosperity, but grace and faithfulness. God is not simply concerned about the result of our activities, but about our personal motivation. "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye make clean the outside of the cup and of the platter, but within they are full of extortion and excess" (Matthew 23:25). Even the faithless can know and apply God's Word to an extent, and Proverbs calls attention to this fact by contrasting the word *wisdom* with the word *instruction*.

While wisdom involves the practical application of knowledge, instruction is another matter. The Hebrew word for *instruction* (מוּסָר—*muwcar*) carries the sense of correction and chastisement. To know instruction is a function of discipline or discipleship. To be instructed means to receive correction. To know instruction requires knowing an instructor. There can be no instruction apart from an instructor. Instructions are orders or commands given by an instructor that when followed result in correct construction. A thing is put together correctly by following the instructions.

So, when Scripture calls us to "know wisdom and instruction" (v. 2), it means that we need to know about the world, to be worldly wise or to know the ways of the world, the truth about how things work in the world. But it also means that we need to know the Lord Himself, who provides instruction for those who love Him. For as we will learn, nothing can be truly understood apart from God (Proverbs 28:5).

There are two errors that Proverbs avoids by contrasting and comparing various things. The first is knowing God apart from knowing practical knowledge about the world, which results in idealism. The second is knowing the world apart from knowing the wisdom of God, which results in atheism. Both are based on half-truths. Both are popular roads that lead to hell.

The Hebrew word for *instruction* suggests correction that results in education or learning on the part of the person who has been corrected. Speaking of discipline and correction, the Lord Himself said to the ancient Israelites, "Therefore thou shalt love the Lord thy God, and keep his charge, and his statutes, and his judgments, and his commandments, always. And know ye this day: for I speak not with your children which have not known, and which have not seen the chastisement (*muwcar*) of the Lord your God."

The Lord went on to provide some examples of His chastisement, such as

his greatness, his mighty hand, and his stretched out arm, And his miracles, and his acts, which he did in the midst of Egypt unto Pharaoh the king of Egypt, and unto all his land; And what he did unto the army of Egypt, unto their horses, and to their chariots; how he made the water of the Red sea to overflow them as they pursued after you, and how the Lord hath destroyed them unto this day; And what he did unto you in the wilderness, until ye came into this place; And what he did unto Dathan and Abiram, the sons of Eliab, the son of Reuben: how the earth opened her mouth, and swallowed them up, and their households, and their tents, and all the substance that was in their possession, in the midst of all Israel: But your eyes have seen all the great acts of the Lord which he did. Therefore shall ye keep all the commandments which I command you this day, that ye may be strong, and go in and possess the land, whither ye go to possess it (Deuteronomy 11:1-8).

God requires both knowledge of the world and knowledge of Him. And yet, mere knowledge is not enough because God not only demands that we know wisdom and instruction, but that we also “perceive the words of understanding” (v. 2). Again, we see that knowledge and perception are contrasted. The Hebrew word for *knowledge* (יָדָה—*yada*), suggests the many kinds of knowledge that can be gained by the senses. *Yada* is sensual in its root meaning, and is also used for sexual intercourse as in the well-known euphemism, “Adam knew Eve his wife; and she conceived” (Genesis 4:1).

In contrast, the Hebrew word translated as *perceive* (בִּיַן—*biyn*) refers to knowledge that is superior to the mere gathering of data or sensory experience. *Biyn* refers to spiritual knowledge or insight. As Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 2:14, “But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.”

The various contrasts in Proverbs are both numerous and instructive. We have already seen the contrast between wisdom and instruction, and between knowledge and perception (or insight). We now note the contrast between perceive and receive, “to perceive the words of understanding; To receive the instruction of wisdom” (vs. 2-3). We are to understand the words of Scripture both physically and spiritually; that is, to understand both the worldly or ordinary application of Scripture as well as its spiritual importance.

Here we see that Scripture not only applies to all of life, but to all people for all time. Scripture is not just for Christians, not just for some elect group of people, to the exclusion of the rest of humanity. Rather, God intends for His Word to be applied to or by all people—everywhere and at all times. Just as God’s love for mankind is without qualification, so God’s mandates are without qualification. God’s Word is for the species known as Man.

Of course, there are significant differences between the saved and the lost, between the faithful and the unfaithful. But these differences do not nullify God’s law for all of society. The consequences of obedience are different than the consequences of disobedience. But the law still applies to both groups.

In addition, Proverbs tells us that people are supposed to humbly receive the instruction (or chastisement—*muwcar*) of the Lord, who is Himself the Teacher of wisdom. Three kinds of instruction are listed: 1) the instruction of wisdom, 2) of justice or judgment, and 3) of equity.

The word for *wisdom* (שכל—*sakal*) is not the same word used earlier. *Sakal* carries the sense of prudence and circumspection. It takes special regard for the future, and the consequences of one’s actions. Justice (צדק—*tsedeq*) refers to righteousness, to what is right or just in an ethical sense. Judgment (משפט—*mishpat*) refers to the judgments rendered by courts of law. The Hebrew word מִישָׁר (*meishar—equity*) literally means “a level place,” and can best be understood by using the contemporary phrase “a level playing field.” The concern for a level playing field is about fairness and evenhandedness.

With these definitions in mind we look again at the verse and see that the Lord uses these things to instruct and/or chastise His people. The Lord instructs and chastises His people with these four things—wisdom, justice, judgment, and equity. He instructs by teaching people to be aware of the consequences of their action, by teaching righteousness, through legal judgments, and through establishing a level playing field. When we apply these things to our lives, when we make use of what God has provided, we receive instruction. But when we fail to apply them to our lives, we receive chastisement to encourage us to apply them or to make better use of them.

But do all people humbly receive the instruction and chastisement of the Lord? History clearly shows us that they do not. So, regarding this contrast between perceiving and receiving God’s Word we find that humanity is divided into two groups: those who do and those who don’t, the faithful and the faithless, believers and nonbe-

lievers, saved and unsaved, Christian and Pagan. All of these terms refer to the same distinction.

What is the difference between these two groups? Why are some people in one group and others in the other? The difference between believers and nonbelievers is illustrated by the various contrasts given in Proverbs. It is the difference between wisdom and instruction, between knowledge and perception (or insight), the difference between perception and reception. This difference is the grand subject or theme of the Book of Proverbs. And this is the subject that we will explore as we study this important book.

Verse 4 tells us the benefits that God's wisdom provides. It gives "subtilty to the simple, to the young man knowledge and discretion." It gives what to whom? It gives עֲרֻמָּה (*ormah*) to the פְּתִי (*pethiy*). The Hebrew word *ormah* means shrewdness, craftiness, or prudence. And *pethiy* indicates an inexperienced or naïve person. In other words, God's wisdom provides a kind of virtual worldly wisdom for those who are inexperienced in the ways of the world. It provides worldly wisdom without worldly corruption, but only if it is believed, only if one's behavior assumes God's Word to be true.

Trying to understand the meaning of this verse provides an education in the corruption of language. To rely solely upon a contemporary dictionary to understand the meaning of these words yields either nonsense or the opposite of the Hebrew meaning.

First, the word *subtle* is defined in the dictionary as fine, delicate. And the word *simple* means unassuming or unpretentious; not affected; or manifesting little sense or intelligence. But the verse does not mean that God intends to teach stupid people how to be delicate, whatever that might mean.

Rather, God intends to teach people who are inexperienced in the sinful ways of the world about the evils of the world, without bringing them into actual contact with those evils. The Lord intends to instruct people who are without personal experience of the depth and depravity of sinfulness without personally exposing them to the temptations of sin because He knows the weaknesses of the flesh. The Lord wants to do this because He is very aware of the infectious and corrosive character of evil.

In particular, God has in mind to teach these things to young men, particularly virgin men who have not been tainted by the traps and snares of the world. God is not doing this because of some sexist, male dominated notion of culture or society, but because He is particularly aware of a weakness and susceptibility on the part of males—and particularly but not limited to, young men.

At the same time that the Lord couches much of His wisdom in terms that are sexual, the application of His wisdom reaches far beyond the sexual realm. What is true about the temptations, traps, and entanglements of human sexuality also applies to many other areas of life in this fallen world. Thus, the illustrations intended to garner the attention of young men will have wide application to all people upon further study.

Much of the teaching of God's wisdom is accomplished in the *Book of Proverbs* by comparing and contrasting various words and ideas. These comparisons always point to the distinction between the faithful and the faithless, the saved and the lost, between believers and nonbelievers. We will see these contrasts and comparisons everywhere and will make much use of them to help us in our study.

God wants His people to be discerning people, to discern between good and evil, between what is righteous and what is unrighteous, between believers and nonbelievers. Furthermore, we will see that the only way to do this effectively is to rely upon God's Word and not upon our own experience or judgments. God's Word is given explicitly for this purpose.

May we not miss it, or blur it, or distort it.

WISDOM

5 A wise man will hear, and will increase learning; and a man of understanding shall attain unto wise counsels: 6 To understand a proverb, and the interpretation; the words of the wise, and their dark sayings. 7 The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge: but fools despise wisdom and instruction.
—Proverbs 1:5-7

The definition of wisdom is shown here to involve making good use of what a person hears by learning from it. But notice that Scripture begins with "a wise man" (v. 5). The writer of Proverbs does not attempt to turn a fool into a wise man by providing a series of steps that will produce wisdom. Scripture well understands the reality of human nature. "Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? then may ye also do good, that are accustomed to do evil" (Jeremiah 13:23). Proverbs is not a self-help program for sinners lost in foolishness.

Rather, the perspective of Proverbs is astonishingly real in its assessment of human nature. People are what they are and, except for the miraculous intervention of God Himself, fools become more

foolish and sinners continue to sin. Wisdom and foolishness provide an enduring contrast in the *Book of Proverbs*. Fools do not—and cannot—become wise apart from the miraculous intervention of the Lord. Again, Jeremiah tells us that there is only one way to change human nature, and it is not a self-help program. Only God can change human nature. “And I will give them an heart to know me, that I am the Lord” (Jeremiah 24:7). Apart from the Lord Himself giving a person a new heart, the *Book of Proverbs* will fall on deaf ears.

Those who are wise reveal their wisdom by hearing, “a wise man will hear” (v. 5). The Hebrew word for *hear* (שמע—*shama*) is intimately associated with response or obedience. *Shama* is also translated as *hearken*, which means to give heed. Biblical hearing is responsive hearing. It is responsible hearing because it responds to what is heard. Jesus acknowledged this reality over and over again. “He that hath ears to hear, let him hear” (Matthew 11:15). Jesus knew that not everyone had ears to hear, that not everyone would faithfully respond to the gospel.

The writer of Proverbs provided a definition for wisdom that is eminently practical and realistic. Wisdom hears the Lord. Wisdom heeds Scripture. Wisdom obeys God. And doing so, those who are wise learn. To learn is to understand the essence of what is taught. And that which is taught, the lesson of a particular teaching, is also called its doctrine. Wisdom learns and applies what it learns—biblical doctrine—to the whole of ordinary living. This is a necessary consequence of wisdom. “A wise man will hear, and will increase learning” (v. 5). Apart from biblical obedience and spiritual growth there is no wisdom.

When Proverbs says that “a man of understanding shall attain to wise counsel” (v. 5), it means that those who are able to hear and heed Scripture will grow in their understanding of it. Thus, knowledge of Scripture is attained, not through intellectual study, but by practical application. But this does not mean that people should not study Scripture, only that the way to learn Scripture is to apply to yourself what doctrine you already know. The Lord reveals truth to those who apply it. If you fail to apply what you already know, more cannot be revealed. Biblical knowledge is not abstract by nature, but concrete. It is not head knowledge, but life knowledge, not intellectual understanding, but practical application.

Verse 6 continues the explanation of the purpose of Proverbs. It tells us that the Book of Proverbs provides understanding of: 1) the various proverbs of which it is composed, 2) the correct interpretation of these proverbs, 3) the definitions of the words that are

used by these proverbs, and 4) the “dark sayings” (v. 6) that are found in Scripture.

Paul would say that the Book of Proverbs, like all of Scripture, is provided for the chastisement (Hebrews 12:6) and edification (Ephesians 4:12) of the saints. Again, the Hebrew word translated in Proverbs as *understand* is *muwcar*, which carries the sense of correction and chastisement. However, it is not chastisement for the purpose of punishment, but for the purpose of edification. We must always remember this when we feel the sting of God’s chastisement.

The fact that the Lord mentions the word *interpretation* here (v. 6) suggests that He is aware that the correct interpretation of these proverbs is an important issue. To mention it at all means that there is more than one possible interpretation. But it also means that God is very concerned that the correct interpretation be received and understood by the faithful.

The Hebrew word translated as *interpretation* (מְלִיצָה) suggests scorning and mocking. The implication is that the scorning or mocking of God’s Word arises from a wrong interpretation of it. The particular sin of the scorner is pride, thinking that he always knows best and is able to judge the validity or worthiness of God’s Word by his own standard.

Scripture mentions various sources of scorn, including wine (Proverbs 20:1) and pride (Psalm 119:51), and various kinds of scorners, including Job’s friends (Job 16:20). Also among the various mockers are included God’s priests and prophets who sin by refusing to give out God’s Word as He first gave it. To twist the meaning of Scripture to suit our own understanding and desires amounts to scorning God’s Word. This particular problem is found throughout the Bible. And the correction of it is addressed here in Proverbs.

Part of that correction concerns itself with the definitions of words. Definitions must remain constant for meaning and interpretation to remain constant. The anchoring of definitions is necessary because God’s Word contains “no variableness, neither shadow of turning” (James 1:27). God Himself is always the same, and the meaning of His Word does not change. As the writer of Hebrews put it, “Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever” (Hebrews 13:8).

Finally, the *Book of Proverbs* is also intended to throw some light on the various “dark sayings” (v. 6) in Scripture. The Hebrew word (חִידָה) refers to the riddles, enigmas, and interpretative difficulties that are found in Scripture. First of all, notice that the Lord

is well aware of the fact that such things exist in Scripture. We should not be surprised about this because Jesus also spoke “many things ... in parables” (Matthew 13:3). This perplexed the disciples. They thought that the Messiah should clarify things, not hide them in arcane stories. So, they went to Jesus and asked him, “Why speakest thou unto them in parables?” (Matthew 13:10). Jesus then explained that he had spoken to the masses “in parables: because they seeing see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand” (Matthew 13:13), quoting from Isaiah 6:9-10.

The implications of this are astounding. Jesus refused to give “that which is holy unto the dogs.” Neither did He cast “pearls before swine” (Matthew 7:6). Why not? Why did He not just speak plainly and directly? Because God’s plan is to separate the wheat from the chaff (Luke 3:17), to save the one and burn the other. And the “dark sayings” of God’s Word help accomplish this separation.

Jesus said, speaking of the final judgment, “And before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats” (Matthew 25:32). Paul advised the saints in Corinth who faced corruption in the church, “Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness?” (2 Corinthians 6:14). And a few verses later, “Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you“ (2 Corinthians 6:17).

The problem is that holiness and purity cannot mix with unholiness and impurity without losing their essential character. To mix at all is to no longer be holy and pure. In order to maintain His holiness and purity God cannot tolerate what is not holy or pure. Thus, among other things, separation provides for the stability of meaning, understanding, and interpretation of God’s Word because God’s Word is not to be mixed with anything.

Verse 7, then, provides the ultimate contrast between wisdom and foolishness. “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge: but fools despise wisdom and instruction.” The Hebrew word for *fear* (יִרְאָה) suggests not simply respect, but extreme terror. We must take care not to think that wisdom and terror of the Lord are the same things. In fact, the fear of the Lord is mentioned here, not in relationship to wisdom but to knowledge. Knowledge and wisdom are not the same, not in English nor in Hebrew.

Knowledge (דַעַת) is a function or product of perception and experience. Wisdom (חִכְמָה), however, involves the application of knowledge, the application of perception and experience. Further-

more, the fear of the Lord is not the whole of knowledge, but the beginning of it. If knowledge does not begin with the fear of the Lord, then it does not really begin at all.

Understanding the Hebrew word translated *beginning* (רֵאשִׁית) sheds a great deal of light on the meaning of this verse. The primary meaning of the root of the word is *head* (רֵאשׁ). It is common to all Semitic languages and refers to the top part of the body and, by extension, to the chief of a family or clan. This root word is also used to designate divinely appointed Old Testament leaders. The root also refers to the first in a series. The particular form of the word used in verse 6 can be translated as *first, beginning, choicest*, or the best of a group. Thus, in the case before us it signifies a necessary or foundational experience that is essential to knowledge. It amounts to a kind of initiation experience.

It should also be mentioned that this experience does not produce salvation. People cannot be saved by knowledge of any kind, or by becoming afraid of the Lord. This is not an initiation into salvation, but the beginning of knowledge.

What is this initiation experience? It is the fear of the Lord, by which is meant extreme terror. First and foremost, the contemplation of the Lord ought to scare people spittleless. This is the proper posture from which to learn about God. The assumption of such a posture is a function of humility. The fear of the Lord fills the hearts of the faithful with utter terror and produces genuine humility. From this position, then, the novice is prepared to listen and learn. To fear the Lord is to be humble before Him.

Fools, however, are repulsed by such an idea. Fools refuse to fear God. They refuse to be humble before the Lord. They will not submit themselves to the personal humiliation that accompanies the guilt of sin. Rather, they reject it all—the sin, the guilt, and the humility. Fools refuse to see themselves as sinners. They refuse to acknowledge the seriousness of sin, and doing so, they refuse everything that God offers. To reject sin is to turn away from salvation. To deny sin is to deny salvation. It is to deny God. To deny sin is to deny the need for instruction and chastisement. It is to deny the need for God Himself. And this is why Scripture refers to such people as fools.

The faithful, however, are painfully aware of their own sinfulness, of their own weaknesses, just as they are aware of God's power and perfection. The faithful fear the Lord, not just because He is able to bring judgment upon them, but because they know that He would be right to do so. The fear of the Lord is not just a function of God's immensity. He is a lot bigger than we are. But the

fear of the Lord is also a function of justice. To acknowledge one's sin means knowing that you are guilty and deserve only death and damnation. It means that you have no recourse of your own, but must depend solely upon the grace and mercy of God for any and all continuance in this world. Here is the beginning of knowledge and the heart of faithfulness.

DAD'S INSTRUCTION, MOM'S LAW

8 My son, hear the instruction of thy father, and forsake not the law of thy mother: 9 For they shall be an ornament of grace unto thy head, and chains about thy neck.

—Proverbs 1:8-9

Verse 8 is directed primarily at sons, that is to say, young, unmarried males. We will notice this recurring feature throughout Proverbs. Notice also that it is written in the first person, suggesting that the pattern is for sons to be instructed by their fathers and grandfathers. This does not mean that young women or old men—or anyone else for that matter—cannot benefit greatly from Proverbs. God's wisdom will benefit anyone who takes it seriously. But it clearly is intended to be taught within a family context to young men by older men who are blood related. The ideal is for fathers to teach Proverbs to their own sons, but the teacher could just as well be a grandfather or uncle, etc. There are two points to notice from the fact that Proverbs is directed to "My son" (v. 8). First, it is male oriented. And second, it is family oriented.

The reasons for this are undoubtedly related to the issue of authority. Generally speaking, authority in Scripture is directed to males because males will assume authority in their own families when they marry. Again, that does not mean that women do not have authority. The very next verse refers to "the law of your mother" (v. 9). Women do have authority, but that authority exists primarily within the family and is subordinate to the head of the household.

It does not mean that husbands and fathers have absolute authority in their families either. Male authority is also subordinate authority. All human authority is subordinate authority. The biblical model is that the head of the household—the husband and/or father—is to be subordinate to Christ, to Scripture, because Scripture is the Word of the Lord.

If young husbands and fathers are to correctly understand and exercise their authority, they must themselves learn submission to

authority. If young men themselves are to grow up and assume family authority, they themselves must learn how to live in submission. Thus, Scripture directs that God's wisdom—Proverbs—be taught to young men by their fathers in order to demonstrate the role and function of authority in the family in personal and practical ways. All biblical authority is authority in submission to Scripture, submission to Christ and to His Word. Biblical authority is never a matter of doing what you want, but is always a matter of doing what God wants you to do.

Verse 8 points back to verse 7. "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge" (v. 7) because the authority of God is the beginning of everything. Exactly what is authority? It is the power to enforce laws, to exact obedience, to command, determine, or judge. God created everything we know and experience by the power of His Word. Thus, God is the ultimate authority in all matters. Actually, all people live under the authority of God all the time, but not everyone acknowledges it.

It's not that God's power and authority are effective in your life only if you believe in Him. It's not that human belief unlocks the power of God's authority. Rather, God's authority is always operating everywhere at all times, whether or not people believe it, whether or not people respect it. The same is true of the sheriff of your town or county. The power and authority of the sheriff functions whether or not people acknowledge and abide by the law he represents. If people abide by the law, they will have a very different relationship with the sheriff than if they don't. If people do not respect the power and authority of the sheriff and violate the law, the sheriff still has power and authority over them. They can resist him. They can flee him. They can oppose him. But the fact of his power and authority remain the same. The same thing is true about God, about His Word, about His law. God's Word, God's law is truth itself.

The coin of truth has two sides or faces. One side is power and authority, the other is obedience and submission. Everything exists in obedience to truth, or truth is not true. Truth is a power that cannot be otherwise. Obedience to truth is not an option. Everything conforms to the power and authority of truth. Truth is not dependent upon our understanding of it, nor upon our belief in it. It is what it is regardless of what we might think it is. Everything ultimately submits or conforms to truth.

Consequently, if we are to understand our relationship to truth we must live our lives in submission or conformity to it. Wherever truth leads, we must be willing to go—because if truth actually

leads there, we will go there whether or not we like it. Philosophy at its best is the study of truth. Knowledge is composed of the facts of truth. Science is the application of truth. Authority is the deputy of truth.

Jesus said, “And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free” (John 8:32). And a few verses later He said, “If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed” (John 8:36). God’s people are set free by the truth, set free in order to live in obedience and conformity to the truth—God’s truth.

Note that Scripture suggests that there is a difference between male and female authority. “The instruction of thy father” (v. 8) points to male authority. “The law of thy mother” (v. 8) points to female authority. But notice also that this authority is not generically male or female, but that it is specifically related to *your* father and *your* mother. It is not that all males have a certain authority, or that all females have a certain authority. Rather, your father and your mother have a kind of foundational authority over you. The verse points to family authority. It is not about men and women generally, but about the structure and role of the family in society. Your relationship to all other kinds of social authorities will reflect your relationship with your mother and father. In addition, this foundational authority is best taught and learned in the family.

“My son, hear the instruction of thy father” (v. 8). The Hebrew reads *shama* the *muwcar*, or heed the chastening of your father. At times instruction feels like chastisement because it seeks to correct through disapproval. Parents are often seen as overly critical to their children. It often seems like parents don’t like anything that their children do because they are always harping on them to do it better or do it in some other way. It often seems as if parents are never satisfied with the accomplishments of their children.

This proverb speaks directly to this situation. The lesson of this verse is primarily directed to maturing sons, and instructs those sons to bear with what often seems like a torrent of criticism from their parents, and particularly from their fathers. The *Book of Proverbs* suggests to young sons that their fathers are acquainted with the reality of truth, and that their criticism, their instruction, their *muwcar*, is not intended to be a punishment, but is given out of love and concern for the well-being of the child.

Most often the instruction of the father offends the ego of the son because the most important lessons that the fathers can teach concern the development of humility and submission to authority. The father stands in a unique relationship with the son. No one else can teach what the father must teach. The father knows that he

himself lives under various authorities and that his sons will also live under those authorities. Living under authority is a fact of life. It is a truth. Thus, the sons must also learn to live under authority.

Pride and self-esteem—fruits of Adam’s Fall—rebel against authority. Thus, the lessons that the fathers must teach are often aimed at curbing pride and self-esteem. That is why the sons feel the sting of the fathers’ instruction. Pride does not want to be curbed. Pride does not want to live under authority. Pride wants to be the authority, not to live under some other authority. Pride complains, “Why does everything always have to be his way?”

Scripture demands that sons live in obedience to the authority of their fathers. However, Scripture also demands that fathers themselves live in obedience to the authority of God. So, the authority of the father must not be arbitrary, nor must it conform to the whims of the father, but it must always itself be in conformity to God’s Word, to truth. When it functions correctly, the instruction of the father conforms to the instruction of Scripture.

But Scripture is not content to teach the lessons of authority through the instruction and relationship with one’s father alone. Fathers do not exist independently, but within the family structure. So, Scripture marshals the authority of the wife and mother to make a significant contribution as well. “Forsake not the law of thy mother” (v. 8).

The Hebrew word (נָטַשׁ) means to forsake, to leave or abandon. Thus, Scripture commands that sons not abandon the law or torah (תּוֹרָה) of their mothers. Torah means law, direction or instruction. The word is often used to refer to the Deuteronomic or Mosaic law of Scripture, the first five books of the Bible. There are many implications of this fact.

First, it implies that the mother herself lives in obedience to *torah*, to the law of the Bible. And if the mother lives in obedience to *torah*, to Scripture, then she lives in obedience to her husband, as well—because that is what Scripture commands of her. Genesis 3:16 commands that husbands “rule over” their wives as a consequence of the Fall. Paul acknowledged that this relationship was not only the norm of the Old Testament, but of the New as well. “Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as it is fit in the Lord” (Colossians 3:18).

However, the purpose of pointing to the “law of thy mother” (v. 8) is not to highlight the authority of the mother, but to highlight the authority of Scripture. The same thing is true when Scripture says to “hear the instruction of thy father” (v. 8). These verses are not highlighting the father or the mother. The point is not their au-

thority within the family. Rather, these verses are highlighting the authority and primacy of Scripture in the family structure. Proverbs is not so much pointing to the authority of the father or the authority of the mother, as it is pointing to the authority of Scripture over fathers and mothers, who exercise their authority under the authority of Scripture. It is pointing to the importance of teaching biblical authority to the children by modeling it in the family.

Verse 9 tells us that “they shall be an ornament of grace unto thy head, and chains about thy neck.” They refers to “the instruction of thy father” and “the law of thy mother,” and suggests that they will be ornaments or symbols of grace. Don’t miss this most important relationship between law and grace that is provided here. Scripture says that obedience to God’s law is a symbol of God’s grace. Law and grace are not opposed to one another, but work hand-in-hand with one another. Obedience to God’s law symbolizes or represents God’s grace.

That is to say that family obedience serves as a public testimony of God’s grace. It is an ornament and a necklace that is worn or demonstrated to honor the Lord. Biblical family structure is a testimony to God’s grace. While it serves as a public testimony, it cannot do so unless it also exists in reality and in truth privately first. It is not a matter of putting on a public face or acting a certain way in public that is different from private actions. The public face and the private reality must be the same in order to bring honor to God and to Scripture.

Fathers are to model submission by being submitted to the Lord themselves. Mothers are to model submission by being submitted to their husbands, who are submitted to the Lord. And the children are to learn submission by submitting themselves to their parents—both of their parents, who are to live in submission to the Lord.

DO NOT BE WILLING

10 My son, if sinners entice thee, consent thou not. 11 If they say, Come with us, let us lay wait for blood, let us lurk privily for the innocent without cause: 12 Let us swallow them up alive as the grave; and whole, as those that go down into the pit: 13 We shall find all precious substance, we shall fill our houses with spoil: 14 Cast in thy lot among us; let us all have one purse: 15 My son, walk not thou in the way with them; refrain thy foot from their path: 16 For their feet run to evil, and make haste to shed blood. —Proverbs 1:10-16

The Authorized Version (AV) reads “consent thou not,” where the Modern King James Bible (MKJB) reads “do not be willing” (v. 10). The phrase is bursting with mineable ore. God (Scripture) issues a command to His people, “do not be willing” to be lured by sinners. Can human will be commanded? We are face to face with one of the most perplexing and enduring issues in Scripture—human free will. On the one hand, it seems like such a small thing that the Lord asks. Rather, that He commands! The Lord commands people to do or not do various things of their own free will.

The problem is that if God commands something, and God is in control of all things, then His command seems to negate the idea of human free will. On the other hand, human free will seems to equally negate the idea of God’s sovereignty. The problem is the existence of these two things at the same time. And yet, that is what Scripture clearly teaches. Theologians have tried various solutions to this logical conundrum, yet the problem persists.

Verse 15 commands God’s people to “walk not thou in the way with them.” The emphasis there is different. There people are commanded not to do something or not to go somewhere. The command is directed at behavior. But in verse 10 the command is directed at motivation, at the mere contemplation or consideration of a thing, rather than an action. Of course, God does not want His people to go in the way of wickedness. But in addition—and even more importantly, He does not want His people to be willing to even consider it because action follows thought.

Consent is an aspect of the will. When people consent to something they are in willing, moral and legal agreement with it. They are legally responsible for that which they consent to. To consent is to approve. It is to be guilty by association or like-mindedness with whatever is consented to, good or bad. To consent is to agree with a course of action. To consent is to be willing.

There is an interesting story in yesterday’s paper about a man named Brian Dalton, who wrote in his journal about torturing and molesting children. “The stories were also complete fiction. But he still was sentenced to 10 years in prison” (Marietta A.M., 7/14/2001). Dalton’s diary was found during a routine search of his home. He was on probation from a 1998 pornography conviction. In spite of the fact that he pleaded guilty for pandering obscenity involving a minor while on probation, his case has caught the attention of the American Civil Liberties Union. The story suggests that Dalton is in prison for thinking about torturing and molesting children. The issues and problems with this case are legion, but it illustrates the importance of the issue under consideration.

While the fact of Dalton's recent conviction is a travesty of justice in that it represents an expansion of state law beyond its jurisdiction, it also suggests that there is an important correlation between thought and action. Scripture tells us repeatedly that such a correlation exists. That, however, does not mean that the state has the right to prosecute people on the basis of their thoughts. State prosecution should never ensue apart from criminal actions or activities. State prosecution should never come about because of likelihoods, tendencies, or potentials. It is not illegal to think criminal thoughts—nor should it be.

It is, however, immoral to think or consider criminal thoughts. Not everything immoral is—or should be—prosecutable by the state. Immoral thoughts or so-called hate crimes are simply beyond the pale of state jurisdiction. However, to say that does not mean that I approve of hate or immorality. All it means is that I recognize that there are limits to the jurisdiction of the state.

That being said, the point remains that Scripture itself commands people to have certain kinds of thoughts, ideas and interests, and it forbids certain other thoughts and desires because they are evil and immoral. Can God command that people have certain kinds of thoughts and desires? He does, so He must be able to. Can the state make those same kinds of demands? It cannot do so without overstepping its God-given jurisdiction and trampling on a host of other God-given personal rights. The point is that the state cannot do what God does, and when it attempts to do what God does it is guilty of idolatry. The jurisdiction of the state is different from the jurisdiction of God.

Proverbs 1:10 begins with the phrase, "if sinners entice thee." Again, the MKJV reads, "if sinners lure you." The translation as *lure* is better than *entice*. Both words involve a promise of some pleasure or gain, but *lure* suggests that the promise is a fake. A lure pretends to be something it is not. Falsehood is part of its essential character. The Hebrew word here (פִּתְיוֹן) suggests deceit and gullibility.

Proverbs goes on to describe a proposed scam, which involves stalking innocent people in order to murder and rob them. The justification for this scam is the acquisition of personal wealth—greed. Verse 13 reads, "We shall find all precious substance, we shall fill our houses with spoil."

Verse 14 also provides a kind of incentive or justification, "Cast in thy lot among us; let us all have one purse." The idea is that these criminals are willing to share equally among themselves. That is to say that they said that they were willing to abide by the

principles of fairness and equality among themselves. Having “one purse” implies or suggests that they would share the booty fairly and equally.

Sharing is good. Equality is good. We teach our children about the virtues of fairness and equality. But fairness and equality are only good when they are defined by Scripture, by God. When these virtues are divorced from Scripture they become open to interpretation. Fairness according to what rules? Equality by what measure?

To be fair means to be without bias. It means to play by the rules. But who is without bias? And what if the rules themselves are biased or unfair? What then? Who is to say what is a bias and what is not? Who makes the rules? If the rules are agreed upon, then fairness is relatively easy to adjudicate. When people are playing games the stakes are low, but in real life, when issues go to court, the stakes are higher.

The fact is that every law, every rule, protects some particular interest. We have laws in order to protect particular interests. Traffic laws protect people from property damage, injury and loss of life. Traffic laws are biased toward those things, those values. The purpose of laws and rules is to protect certain interests. To be completely unbiased would mean that no interests at all would be protected, that no preferences would be served. The complete lack of bias would require the complete lack of laws and/or rules. It is essential for people to understand that law itself is biased. It cannot be otherwise.

The purpose of this diversion is to point out that all law, all rules, are biased and can provide neither complete unbiased fairness or equality in anything. There are no perfectly fair laws, nor any perfectly equal justice. In fact, the ideas of fairness and equality are themselves the very lures that are used to entice God’s people into robbery and murder in this section of Proverbs. The justification of the criminal actions suggested in verses 11-13 involve fairness and equality among the perpetrators of theft and murder, who said, “Cast in thy lot among us; let us all have one purse” (v. 14). While the words fair and equal do not appear here, they are suggested by the idea of sharing things in common, that is, joining together and having one purse.

We must realize that these thieves and murderers who will entice God’s people are no less thieves and murderers if they call themselves something else. People are no less thieves and murders if they call themselves a government than if they call themselves a gang or a Mafia. (I am not suggesting that all governments are criminal by nature. They are not!) The point is that the most profit-

able and effective criminal activities in history have operated with government sanctions. In fact, we could say that governments themselves are particularly susceptible to criminal activity because of the power they wield. In addition, they promise to provide fairness and equality, and they operate out of “one purse” (v. 14)—taxation. This is why the founding fathers of the United States sought to limit the power and jurisdiction of government.

Having expanded our understanding of this proverb, let’s return to verse 10 and see if there are any further applications of this proverb to our lives. The proverb tells us not to consent to theft and murder, not even in the name of fairness and equality. It tells us not to “lay in wait for blood,” nor “lurk privily for the innocent without cause” (v. 11). Who could be more innocent than the unborn? What could be a better description of abortion than “swallow(ing) them up alive as the grave; and whole, as those that go down into the pit” (v. 12)? While the unborn have no “precious goods” or property themselves, there is much to gain from abortion in the way of fees and government subsidies. It is a very profitable enterprise. Does this verse apply to abortion? Are abortuaries lying in wait for the innocent? They are!

God’s command, “consent thou not” (v. 10) is given more specificity in verse 15, “walk not thou in the way with them; refrain thy foot from their path.” God’s people are not to consent to any kind of theft or murder, any activity that leads toward theft or murder, or any involvement with those who are engaged in such activity. Furthermore, we are not to have any desire for such things—including the desire for them in the name of fairness or equality, which can be lures for murder and theft. Scripture suggests, however subtly, that thieves and murderers often appeal to the principles of fairness and equality, a kind of “honor among thieves.” It does not mean that every appeal to fairness and equality is made by murderers and thieves. But it does mean that we must be on our guard whenever appeals to fairness and equality are made.

Of course, these verses mean that we should not be involved with common thieves and murders, but they have an even wider application. We need to see how we ourselves are involved in the kind of desires and behaviors that Scripture forbids. If God’s Word is to be real, it must hit people at home. I am convinced that this caution against being lured by sinners is directed at ordinary people in every age. The key is to see that murder and theft are still justified in the same ways, by an appeal to greed, fairness and equality. Thus, Scripture cautions us to beware of the principles of

self-concern, fairness and equality, and categorizes them as lures—fakes.

But how are these things to be avoided? How can we avoid self-concern and the desire for fairness and equality? How can we avoid bias in our judgments? How can people avoid participating in a government that subsidizes theft and murder through immoral taxation and abortion in the name of self-concern, fairness and equality?

Are God's people called to fight against a tyrannical government that engages in murder and theft? Are God's people called to rebellion or civil war? Absolutely not! But are God's people called to preach God's Word in the face of tyranny? Are God's people called to protect the innocent and the disadvantaged? Absolutely yes! We are called to submit to the immoral laws and tyrannical taxation of our government, and at the same time to publish the Word of God widely. The Word of God alone will fight against the injustice and tyranny of every foe. The Word of God alone will bring down every principality and power, every government and institution that opposes God's will, God's Word.

Are God's people supposed to be fair and unbiased? Are they supposed to be guided by the principles of self-concern, fairness and equality? No, these are not the guiding principles of God's people. Don't jump to conclusions! I'm not saying that we are to treat others unfairly. Not at all. Rather, all of our thoughts and activities are to conform to Scripture because we understand that as sinners we cannot render fair or unbiased judgments. All our thoughts and judgments are contaminated by the selfishness of sin. Thus, Scripture calls us to live according to God's judgments, God's values in everything. We are called to be God's servants, to serve God in everything. And that means to be biased toward God, to seek—not fairness, but God's favor.

Is God fair and unbiased? Not at all. God seeks His own glory. He seeks truth and justice—rather, He is Truth and Justice! To be fair is to be unbiased, without preferences. But God is biased toward what is good, toward what is truthful and honest. God prefers truth and justice, and that is His bias. God has promised to bring glory to everything that serves His purposes, everything that promotes truth, justice and goodness as He has defined them in His Word. In addition, God has promised to bring an end to everything that opposes Him, that opposes His purposes.

Indeed, Christians are called to be the most biased people in the world because they are called to “love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind” (Matthew

22:37). To love is to be biased. To eliminate bias requires the elimination of love.

Verse 15 refers to the *way* (דרך) of murder and theft. The Hebrew word suggests a pattern or habit of life. Jesus also spoke of a way. “Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it” (Matthew 7:13-14). The way of the world and the way of salvation are opposed to each other. The way of the world is the way of self-concern, murder and theft. It is the way of abortion and of tyranny.

God’s people are called to “keep back from (that) path” (v. 16). Steering clear from the way of the world also means not desiring the things of the world. It means that God’s people must be unwilling to be enticed by the lures of the world because the way of the world is ultimately the way of murder and theft. It is a matter of controlling one’s own will, of conforming our desires to the desires of God.

UNJUST GAIN

My son, walk not thou in the way with them; refrain thy foot from their path: 16 For their feet run to evil, and make haste to shed blood. 17 Surely in vain the net is spread in the sight of any bird. 18 And they lay wait for their own blood; they lurk privily for their own lives. 19 So are the ways of every one that is greedy of gain; which taketh away the life of the owners thereof. —Proverbs 1:15-19

When Scripture commands “walk not thou in the way with them” (v. 15) the Lord is steering His people clear of a particular way of life, away from a certain kind of behavior, a kind of morality, a way of thinking. There is much emphasis on right living, right behavior, or right morality in Scripture. The Lord demands that His people live in a particular manner or way. The first mention of the word *way* (דרך) is found in Genesis 3:24. When Adam was driven from the Garden of Eden, “a flaming sword” was set up to guard or “keep the way of the tree of life.” Sinners have no place in the Garden of Eden.

Adam’s sin destroyed the purity of his fellowship with God and his innocence. Having tasted the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, Adam could not untaste it or forget it. Once he had digested it he could not undigest it. His experience with the

forbidden fruit changed his perception. It altered Adam's judgment and understanding. It was not something that could be given back or abandoned. Like Humpty-Dumpty's fall from the wall, Adam's former innocence could not be restored apart from Christ. And because man is not able not restore it by himself, the Lord placed a band of *cheribim* (angels) armed with flaming swords to discourage him from the effort. The attempt to restore fellowship with God on our own or apart from Christ is sure madness, so the Lord has forbidden it. It is, in essence, forbidden by its own impossibility, but man, not knowing that it was impossible, and no longer living in obedience to God, would try it to his own detriment.

It is not that God doesn't want to restore fellowship with man, but that God knows that man cannot accomplish that end himself—but having tasted of sin wants to do it himself. Atonement is available only through Christ, only on God's terms, in God's way—not through the works or efforts of man apart from Christ. The guardian *cheribim* serve as a deterrent to the measures of self-effort. Self-effort cannot avail the kingdom of God, or the tree of life. Man is barred from the tree of life, barred from self-restoration with God by his own limitations, by his finitude.

The way to the tree of life, of restoration with God, is guarded. The purpose of a guard is to forbid unauthorized entry. And these particular guards are invincible. Thus, the only way to pass through them is with permission.

At this point, after Adam's Fall, two paths or ways of life show themselves in human history. Prior to the Fall, there was only one way of life—God's way. After the Fall, man went his own way, the way of self-centeredness. Or as Satan described it, by "knowing good and evil" (Genesis 3:5), man began to follow his own heart, his own values and morals. After tasting the forbidden fruit, Adam and Eve forsook God's way and followed Satan's way, in order to be "like gods, knowing good and evil."

After the Fall did man actually know good and evil for himself? Did God ever say that such knowledge would actually result from eating the forbidden fruit? No, He didn't. Of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil God said only not to "eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die" (Genesis 2:17).

Notice that God said nothing about it actually bestowing any knowledge of good and evil. God did not say that eating of the fruit would produce in man the knowledge of good and evil. Nor is it implied. We do not become apples by eating the fruit of an apple tree, not do we take on any characteristics of appleness by eating apples. Rather, from what God said, it can only be concluded that the fruit

of that particular tree was poisonous. The only result of eating that particular fruit is death, according to the Word of the Lord.

So, who said that eating of that particular fruit would bestow the knowledge of good and evil? The words belong to Satan, “For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil” (Genesis 3:5). Satan’s statement insinuates that those who have followed Adam actually have the knowledge of good and evil, and purports to explain its origin. The problem is that Satan is the world’s biggest liar! Satan’s statement is a lie, but which part of it is not true? Did he lie about God knowing that “ye shall be as gods”? Or was the lie that “your eyes shall be opened”? Or that “ye shall be as gods”? Or that the eating of the fruit would produce “the knowledge of good and evil”? Or are all of these various parts of this verse lies?

They are all lies. First of all, Satan does not know what God knows. Second, it is a lie that human eyes were opened to see good and evil as the result of the eating of the forbidden tree. Rather, when their eyes opened they only saw that they were naked. While human perception changed as a result of that action, not all changes in perception can be called good. Third, note that Satan did not promise actual godhood, but only that Adam and Eve would be “as gods,” *like* gods, but not like *God*. In addition, if the gods are fakes—and according to Scripture they are, then Adam and Eve, having eaten of the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil, became fakes, like the host of false gods that we find in Scripture. And lastly, being fakes, they could not know anything about actual good and evil because that knowledge that belongs only to God Himself.

The whole thing was a lie, start to finish. Thus, the way of Satan (masquerading as the way of man, or the way of human freedom and independence) stands in complete opposition to the way of God. There never was any knowledge of good and evil that was or is available to man in and of himself. It was all a lie. Man is not capable of knowing good and evil. Thus, whatever man thinks about good and evil on his own is nothing but death. The whole effort to know good and evil by our own resources leads to death. That’s what God said!

Consequently, the writer of Proverbs bids us to “refrain thy foot from their path” (v. 15), from the path or way of sin, from Satan’s way. All of the feet that are on that path “run to evil, and make haste to shed blood” (v. 16). Proverbs is not simply saying here that we should not follow common thieves and murderers—al-

though we definitely should not. Rather, the meaning of the this verse is much deeper, much more widely applicable.

The writer of Proverbs goes on to mention an important characteristic of sinfulness, of Satan's way of life, the way that masquerades as human freedom and development. When he says that "their feet run to evil" (v. 16), he omits mention of their heads, or their hearts or their beliefs. The clear implication is that regardless of what they may think, they are on the road to destruction. It is not their heads that are guiding them, but their feet. Their heads—their thoughts and ideas—are immaterial because they are deluded. Their perception is not right, not correct. They misunderstand themselves and everything else because of the Fall. Because of their faulty perceptions, they are eager and willing "to shed blood" (v. 16). They think that the destruction of some people is a necessary expense for the accomplishment of a greater good. Of course, that greater good is nothing more than their own wants and desires, but that fact does not trouble them.

Verses 17 and 18 must be read together because verse 18 responds to the vanity of 17. Their evil plans are ultimately vain. In other words, their plans will not unfold as they imagine. They will not accomplish the goals that they think they will accomplish. Rather, their own lives will be caught up in the evil of their ways. They themselves will be consumed by their own evil values and morals. And the result will be their own destruction. The traps that they set for others will snare themselves. Jesus said it this way, "For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again" (Matthew 7:2).

Jay Green, Sr. (MKJB) translates the Hebrew word **יָבֵט** as "watch secretly" rather than "lurk privily," as it is in the AV. The word refers to the inner thinking process, to one's hopes, dreams, and expectations. The inner thinking of sinners produces hopes, dreams, and expectations that will end in their own death, contrary to what they believe, contrary to what they understand.

According to verse 19, this kind of thinking describes people who are "greedy of gain," or as Green puts it, "So are the ways of everyone who gains unjust gain." The Hebrew joins the idea of covetousness with injustice. The Hebrew suggests that covetousness, the constant longing for what you don't have, leads to the injustice of gaining your desires unrighteously or unfairly. Covetousness leads to sin. Covetousness is sin!

Eve's progressive capitulation to Satan's lies is important because it is the archetype of sin. Genesis 3:6 says that before Eve

tasted the fruit she “saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise.” Sin satisfied her desires. It was consumable. It was beautiful. And she wanted it to make her wise. Scripture doesn’t say that it would actually make her wise, but only that she wanted it to make her wise.

Only after she saw all of this did she take “of the fruit thereof, and...eat.” The Hebrew word translated as *saw* (ראה), is much like the English word *see*. It refers, not only to the physical sense of sight, but to the mental activity of perception or thinking. When we understand something we often say, “I see.” Eve understood—or thought that she understood something—before she acted. Her actions followed her thinking, her belief. And so it is with us. Action or behavior follows thought or belief.

The truth that Proverbs 1:19 points to is that God forbids greed and covetousness. Greed and covetousness are root causes of the evil that motivate sinners. Indeed, it is a root cause of all sin. We see this in the archetypal behavior of Eve as she considered Satan’s lies. And we see it in the world around us.

What Satan identified as “the knowledge of good and evil” (Genesis 3:5)—the fruit of the forbidden tree, God called sure death. Satan said that it would open their eyes and make them gods. God said it would close their eyes in death. The writer of Proverbs said, “So are the ways of every one that is greedy of gain; which taketh away the life of the owners thereof” (v. 19). Avoid it! Don’t go that way! The writer of Proverbs steers God’s people away from sin, away from the root causes of sin, away from greed and covetousness.

Proverbs suggests that greed and covetousness ultimately lead to murder and are, therefore, no different than murder. The lesson is simple: wanting the wrong things leads to murder—to death. Wanting anything other than what God wants for us ends up killing us. Thus, wrong desire, ungodly desire, is the gateway to sin and death. And by the same token, godly desire, desire that is directed by and conformed to the Word of God is the gateway to heaven.

Our desires will lead us to heaven or to hell. Human ambition plays a key role in life. Thus, we can see the importance of the question, “What do you want to be when you grow up?” What do you want to do with your life? What do you want to achieve? What is your primary goal or purpose in life? Will you serve Satan’s cause? Or God’s? Do you want to be smart and successful? Or do you want to be obedient and humble?

WISDOM CRIETH WITHOUT

20 Wisdom crieth without; she uttereth her voice in the streets: 21 She crieth in the chief place of concourse, in the openings of the gates: in the city she uttereth her words, saying, 22 How long, ye simple ones, will ye love simplicity? and the scorers delight in their scorning, and fools hate knowledge? 23 Turn you at my reproof: behold, I will pour out my spirit unto you, I will make known my words unto you. 24 Because I have called, and ye refused; I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded; 25 But ye have set at nought all my counsel, and would none of my reproof: 26 I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh; 27 When your fear cometh as desolation, and your destruction cometh as a whirlwind; when distress and anguish cometh upon you. 28 Then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer; they shall seek me early, but they shall not find me: —Proverbs 1:20-28

From where does wisdom cry? She cries from without. She cries from the streets. The Hebrew word is **קריה** and its ancient root means sever. The implication is that wisdom is separated from the homes and families of God's people. Wisdom is crying from without or outside of the family and social structures of society. She cries from the streets because she is an outcast. Wisdom is homeless.

Then in verse 21 we find wisdom crying “in the chief place of concourse,” and “in the openings of the gates.” The words of the translation are accurate, but the language is awkward to our ears. What is “the chief place of concourse,” or “the chief place of gathering” (MKJB)? The Hebrew word translated *chief place* (**ראש**) refers to the head, with all of its attendant meanings—first, ordinal, chief, elder, highest public office, etc. It also related to another ancient Hebrew root that means to shake. We get the idea of heads shaking in agreement and/or disagreement in conversation.

קריה is translated as *concourse* and literally means roar, murmur, or growl. It refers to the sound of a crowd of people. The idea is that wisdom is crying for recognition in the most important places where people gather, and she cries to the heads of such gatherings, to the leaders.

She also cries “in the openings of the gates” (v. 21). Here we find a reference to the legal and judicial systems of ancient Israel. Business was conducted at the city gates, in public where there were witnesses. Court was also held at the city gates in the sense that legal judgments were made by the elders there. The implica-

tion is that wisdom cries for recognition in the legal and judicial systems of society.

But again it is important to notice that wisdom cries out from a position of abandonment. She is outside of the social systems. She is a homeless beggar crying from the streets for attention. And she is not content to remain homeless, so she is accosting everyone she meets. She is throwing herself at people because they are ignoring her. She has become like a beggar because she has been rejected by society.

Seeing, then, the place or position from which wisdom cries, Scripture directs our attention to the content of her message. What is she crying about? While she is perceived as a beggar, and behaves somewhat like a beggar, her message is not the message of a beggar. “How long, ye simple ones, will ye love simplicity? and the scorners delight in their scorning, and fools hate knowledge?” (v. 22).

The Hebrew word פְּרִי is repeated for emphasis. It means simple as in naïve, foolish, or open-minded. The question is rhetorical, how long will you be content to be inexperienced in the ways of wisdom? How long will stupid people love stupidity? Notice that people are not stupid because they have no other choice. They are not stupid because they are victims of society or of the economy or whatever. Rather, the implication is that people are stupid because they love stupidity. They are idiots because they prefer their ideology more than the truth.

Scripture repeats the same idea two more times. “How long... will scorners delight in their scorning, and fools hate knowledge?” (v. 22). Scorn is a kind of contempt or disdain toward others. Its root is pride in that it lifts itself up by putting others down. It is a kind of bragging or boasting. Braggarts love to brag. Pride loves to speak well of itself. Scorners delight in scorning. Wisdom cries for an end to such nonsense and bigotry!

Do fools hate knowledge? Of course, they do. That is precisely what makes them foolish. But while foolishness is the lack of knowledge, experience, and wisdom, fools are also filled with pride. There is a direct correspondence between foolishness and arrogance. What makes fools foolish is the arrogance of their ignorance!

There is nothing wrong with the lack of knowledge, experience, and wisdom. Children lack these things, everyone begins life without them. What is wrong is the rejection of knowledge, experience, and wisdom in favor of arrogance and pride. Wisdom cries in the streets like a wife who has been abandoned by her husband be-

cause he has taken up with a harlot. Wisdom cries to be reinstated to her rightful position in society.

She is not crying for mercy. She is crying for justice! It is not that wisdom seeks the merciful generosity of society to take her back. She does not want by-gones to be by-gones. She is not willing to enter into a relationship with a society that casts her into the role of a slave or servant. She is not content to serve the interests of humanity. Rather, she insists that humanity be in her service. She is not crawling back to her estranged husband any way that she can. Not at all! She is taking her estranged husband to court and demanding her legal marriage rights. She insists that she be held in high respect and honor, that she be esteemed by her husband. She insists that her husband stop philandering with the harlots of ignorance, foolishness, stupidity, and human ideology. She is not asking for mercy from her estranged husband. Rather, she is willing to grant him mercy. Though he has abandoned her, she is willing to take him back.

Verse 23 demonstrates her mercy. Yes, she is chastising her husband. She has a legal and legitimate gripe against him, against society! She rebukes and reproofs him because he has failed to live up to his legal and moral obligations to her. She is not asking him to take her back. Rather, she offers to take him back. Reconciliation cannot happen on his terms, but must be made on her terms because she is in the right. Truth and justice are on her side.

Because of her love and mercy she offers to pour herself into him, to invest herself in him, in human society. Though he has abandoned her, she has not abandoned him. She is, in fact, willing to serve him—but not on his terms, not according to his selfish and foolish preferences. Rather, she serves the preferences of righteousness, the plan and purpose of God. She offers to make her words known.

The Hebrew word for *known* is יָדָע—*yada*. We have encountered it before. It refers to knowledge of a personal and intimate character. As Adam knew Eve, so wisdom offers to make her words known to society. Wisdom does not offer head knowledge, not degrees and certifications. Rather, Wisdom offers life knowledge, experiential knowledge. Wisdom offers nothing but mercy and grace to mankind. She is willing and able to make personal commitments to the betterment of humanity. She seeks the well-being of human society.

But she has been rejected—not just in the past, not just in ancient Israel. She continues to be rejected daily. Even today!

Verse 24 begins with the word *because*, and establishes the cause for the action that wisdom will describe in the next few verses. In spite of her grace and mercy, wisdom “will laugh at (human) calamity (and) will mock when (our) fear cometh” (v. 26). How is it that Wisdom will laugh and mock us if she is filled with the spirit of grace and mercy, and seeks reconciliation? Verse 24, which begins with the word *because* tells us the reason; “Because I have called, and ye refused; I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded; But ye have set at nought all my counsel, and would (have) none of my reproof.”

Wisdom called, but people refused to listen. The word translated *called* (קָרָא) here was translated *crieth* in verse 21. Wisdom called in the chief place of concourse, and at the city gates. The Hebrew word also means summon. She is not so much crying a sigh of emotional anguish, as she is delivering a judicial summons. Yet she is not emotionless! She summons her estranged husband, the man she loves. She is pained to see him as he is, clutching at the skirts of foolishness, ignorance and human ideology.

She has offered her hand, stretched it out in order to help those who are lost. She has offered it at the city gates and in the high courts, wherever people gather. But “no man regarded” her. No one listened. No one paid her any attention. Everyone passed her by as if she was a blind beggar and could not see them. They avoided her, shunned her, pretended that she was not there. They set at naught all of her counsel and would have none of her reproof, none of her chastisement. They would not heed her advice. They turned a blind eye to truth and justice.

Because of this, according to verse 24, she “will laugh at (human) calamity (and) mock when (our) fear cometh” (v. 26). As people laughed and scorned her when she cried out in the streets and the courts, so she will laugh and scorn those who suffer calamity because they refused to listen to her, refused to abide by the dictates of truth and justice.

Notice that she does not say that she will laugh at them *if* their luck turns sour, but that she will laugh at them *when* they are in the midst of calamity and destruction—not if, but when. Wisdom knows that God’s judgment lies waiting, that no one can escape it, and no one can bribe or otherwise deter God from righteousness and ultimate justice.

“When your fear cometh as desolation, and your destruction cometh as a whirlwind; when distress and anguish cometh upon you. Then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer; they shall seek me early, but they shall not find me” (vs. 27-28). This is the

Lord speaking, and He clearly says that He will *not* come in at the last minute to rescue people who have spent a lifetime ignoring Him. God will not rapture people who have lived their lives according to their own standards and beliefs, who have not made every effort to conform their lives to His dictates. God's plan is not about avoiding the consequences of sin, but of fulfilling the requirements of righteousness through the grace and mercy of Jesus Christ.

He is speaking to people who claim to be religious, to people who claim to know Him. He knows that they will call upon Him in their distress. In the midst of their calamity and destruction they may even abandon their false religiousness and actually confess belief in the only true God by calling on Him in prayer. And though He may save them in some spiritual sense from the gaping jaws of eternal damnation, He will not save them from their own earthly destruction.

Why not? Because He can't? No! All things are possible with God. God will not save disobedient sinners because God's plan is to teach humanity His plan, the plan of righteousness and obedience. To learn that plan, we must face the natural consequences of our behavior. Though last-minute, bed-side conversions are both possible and real, they are not the norm. They are actually very unusual. You cannot live like a goat and die like a lamb.

Can it be that people will call upon the Lord and He will not answer them? Absolutely. Jeremiah was called to deliver God's message to His people because they rejected the Lord. God told Jeremiah to "pray not thou for this people, neither lift up a cry or prayer for them: for I will not hear them in the time that they cry unto me for their trouble" (Jeremiah 11:14). God's plan requires listening to the voice of wisdom before calamity and destruction become inevitable.

God's plan is not to ignore indulgence, but to teach righteousness. God's grace and mercy toward repentant sinners does not excuse disobedience—and particularly not ongoing disobedience. Rather, God's grace and mercy have provided for the fulfillment of His justice by the sacrifice of Christ, and have wiped the slate of sin clean for those who are in Christ, those who follow Christ, who are and remain obedient to Christ.

We know that Wisdom is none other than the Holy Spirit of Jesus Christ crying to His people to hear and heed God's Word, the voice of truth and justice. That is the calling and the primary vocation of every Christian.

DID NOT CHOOSE

28 Then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer; they shall seek me early, but they shall not find me: 29 For that they hated knowledge, and did not choose the fear of the LORD: 30 They would none of my counsel: they despised all my reproof 31 Therefore shall they eat of the fruit of their own way, and be filled with their own devices. 32 For the turning away of the simple shall slay them, and the prosperity of fools shall destroy them. 33 But whoso hearkeneth unto me shall dwell safely, and shall be quiet from fear of evil.

—Proverbs 1:28-33

People who ignore the Lord all their lives will find that the Lord also ignores them in their time of need. But why? Isn't God all-loving? Isn't He willing and able to forgive any sin when people turn to Him in repentance? The answer to these questions is *yes*. So, why then does God turn a deaf ear to some people, as in verse 28?

The reason is simple. God knows our hearts. God knows when people are serious about repentance and when they are using it as a means to satisfy their own desires. God knows that some people do not turn to Him in repentance, but turn to Him in order to get themselves out of trouble. An honest reading of the Bible will show that God's people do not escape trouble, but are often in trouble precisely because of their commitment to the Lord.

Verse 29 tells us that the people that God does not and will not answer are God-haters, "they hated knowledge, and did not choose the fear of the Lord." There are certain things about the Lord that such people do not like. Two of them are mentioned. First, they hate godly knowledge—not all knowledge, but godly knowledge. The Hebrew word used (דעת) suggests the ability to discern and discriminate. To hate knowledge, then, suggests either an inability to discern and discriminate, or a desire to belittle and devalue discernment and discrimination.

We see this attitude in the politically correct movement to eliminate all discernment and discrimination. Today discernment and discrimination of every sort is increasingly disallowed in the name of egalitarianism. Egalitarianism requires treating all people and their various values and beliefs as equal. Where all actions, activities and values are equally valid, there can be no discernment or discrimination that suggests that some actions, activities and values are better than others. However, godly knowledge absolutely requires the discernment and discrimination between what is good

and what is evil. Some beliefs, values and actions are better than others.

Secondly, we find that God-haters do not like the fact that “the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom“ (Psalms 111:10). They simply will not assume the humility that is required to fear the Lord. Their understanding of God is such that fear is not necessary. But that is not what God Himself says. Their error is to believe their own understanding about God and to neglect what God says about Himself. They simply trust themselves and their own understanding more than they trust God and His understanding.

Again, we notice that the Lord insists that the people who love Him actually choose or decide to love and obey Him. God does not force people to love Him. Love does not work like that. Rather, God makes Himself available to people who genuinely love and appreciate Him. To fail to love and appreciate the Lord is to invite Him to turn His back to you.

This is exactly what happened to the God-haters discussed here. They did not want God’s counsel, “they despised all of (His) reproof” (v. 30). They didn’t like what the Lord said in His Word, and they didn’t like being shown that they were wrong. If God is right, if God’s Word is true, then people are short-sighted, self-concerned sinners who cannot trust their own judgments. If God is right, people cannot be right apart from God. If God is right, there is no place for human pride.

Human understanding itself is at the very root of sin. People don’t sin because they want to be bad. They sin because they do not understand or believe that their actions are sinful. They don’t believe in God. Or they don’t believe that God forbids certain things. Or they believe that God will forgive everything, so it doesn’t matter. Or God is not even on their radar screen. But it all boils down to a failure to properly understand God’s power and demands for righteousness.

We can almost say that sin is always the result of a flawed understanding. The problem with such a statement is that it implies that sin can be cured by gaining a proper understanding, that education can eliminate sin—which is a cardinal tenet of Liberalism. However, this tenet falls short of the mark because when presented with the proper understanding—and the only understanding that can be ultimately deemed proper is God’s understanding—people continue to ignore, deny, or otherwise contradict it. Thus, education, or presenting the truth to people, is not sufficient to change them. People are not changed by a proper presentation of the truth. Conversion does not result from preaching the gospel correctly.

This, however, does not mean that there is no value in proper preaching or correct gospel presentation. The fact that people reject the truth does not make the truth less true. To despise or belittle the correction that is offered by a proper presentation of the truth does not negate the correction. Truth is true apart from any emotional response people may have toward it. Love of something does not make it true, nor does hate of a thing render it false. However, it is pure foolishness to love what is false and hate what is true.

And yet this kind of foolishness characterizes the vast majority of mankind, who either ignore or despise what God calls truth. God said that human sin is both universal and willful. To disagree with God about this is to prove Him right. Yet, the prevalent “Christian” theologies today deny both of these biblical tenets by postulating the goodness of humanity and the sovereignty of human decision-making. The vast majority of Christians today believe that people are basically good and will choose to do what is right when they are properly presented with the right facts. This view is eminently reasonable and any reasonable person will be persuaded by it.

But that is not what God’s Word says! God’s Word says that sinners will spit in the face of truth, that they will deny and despise the evidence—even when it is clearly undeniable in the light of an honest assessment. Scripture tells us that people hate God and hate the truth that He has revealed.

“Therefore,” says the Lord, “shall they eat of the fruit of their own way, and be filled with their own devices” (v. 31). To reject the truth in favor of an opinion is to invite the consequences of that opinion. There is nothing deep and mysterious here. It only means that people build upon what they believe. Jesus said it this way, “Take heed what ye hear: with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you” (Mark 4:24). “The fruit of their own way” (v. 31) is none other than the fruit “of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil” (Genesis 2:17). The choosing or eating of a particular fruit suggests taking a particular path or journey. Thus, people will travel toward the destination of the path they are on. You cannot go the high way by taking the low road. You cannot go the right way by taking in the wrong path. But whatever path you take will lead you to its destination. It cannot be otherwise.

To be filled with one’s “own devices” (מועצה—v. 31) is an interesting phrase. While the translation as *devices* (AV) or *desires* (MKJB) is right, neither provides the richness and fullness of the Hebrew term—nor its appropriateness or applicability for our times. The Greek Old Testament (LXX) translates it as *paideuo*,

which is usually understood as *education* and the discipline required for education. Substituting *education* for *devices* we read that sinners will “be filled with their own education” (v. 31).

Paideuo carries the sense of chastisement and correction. Hebrews 12:6 tells us that God chastens those He loves. Chastening serves as a kind of guidance. But in Proverbs 1:31 we find reference, not to God’s chastening, but to one’s own chastening or correction. People chasten or correct or guide themselves. Again, the idea is that sinners are unable to escape their own limitations, their own corrections. Sinners cannot be taught beyond what they are willing to learn. Again and again Scripture tells us that humanity is trapped by the limitations of human understanding, and that those limits cannot be breached by human action or will.

According to verse 32 it is “the turning away (משובה) of the simple” that “shall slay them.” The AV marginal reading is “the ease of the simple.” The Hebrew word translated here as *turning away* appears twelve times in Scripture, and this is the only time that it is not translated as *backsliding*. The plain meaning here is that backsliding will kill you. Turning away from God spells death.

Who are the simple mentioned here? They are the ordinary people, the uneducated people, what we would call the masses. When the common people of a society turn away from God that society has stepped onto the path that leads to its own death.

The cause of backsliding and the abandonment of godly living is provided in the second half of the verse, “the prosperity of fools shall destroy them” (v. 32). Foolishness alone is bad enough, but here it is coupled with prosperity. When prosperity is divorced from Godliness, death and destruction will surly follow. That doesn’t mean that such a society will be destroyed next week or next month or next year. Nonetheless, its death is inevitable. It will come in God’s time.

Verse 32 provides two signs of a deadly social illness—backsliding and the prosperity of fools. The combination is lethal. Given what Scripture says about these things, it would be easy for us in our day to give up hope. Even a cursory look at the world in which we live reveals that both backsliding and the prosperity of fools are on the rise. The signs of death and destruction permeate our world. Thus, it is tempting to give up hope.

But there are two things that prevent God’s people from giving up hope—history and God’s Word. It would be easy to look around at the state of the world and conclude that it has never been this bad before, that the destruction of this society is imminent. But history shows that the world has always been this way, that the

faithless have always outnumbered the faithful. These things are not unique to our particular historical moment. In spite of how it sometimes seems, there is plenty of opportunity for faithfulness and happiness in this world. God has not and will not abandon His people.

We see this promise in verse 33, “But whoso hearkeneth unto me shall dwell safely, and shall be quiet from fear of evil.” In spite of the evils of the world, which have dominated this world since the Fall, people who listen to the Lord will live in peace and quiet. Here is the gospel invitation given to any and all who will heed the Word of God. To listen to the Lord is to be obedient to His Word.

God’s promise is a statement of fact. It is not that the chances for peace and quiet are increased by living in obedience to Scripture, but that the faithful “shall dwell safely, and shall be quiet from fear of evil” (v. 33). God does not deal in probabilities, but in facts.

Fear produces anxiety and worry. God’s promise here is that living in obedience to Him will eliminate anxiety and worry about being overtaken by the evils of the world. God’s way is not the way of the world. God’s people must still live in the world, in the midst of faithlessness and the prosperity of fools. These are the defining characteristics of a fallen world. They have dominated this world since Adam and Eve. We are not at the mercy of faithless fools any more than any other generation.

Rather, God’s people live in the mercy of God. In spite of how it may appear to us at any given moment, God is sovereign and is in the process of bringing this world into conformity with His Word. Our responsibility as Christians is to keep our eyes on the Lord, to trust that God’s Word is absolutely true, and that sooner or later everyone on earth will realize that God is, in fact, who He says He is. In that day the faithful will be celebrated.

Let us not hate the knowledge that God so graciously provides, though it humbles us in the dust. That is exactly what it is intended to do. Rather, let us “choose the fear of the Lord” (v. 29) and embrace the way of wisdom.

ALPHABETICAL INDEX

ALPHABETICAL INDEX

- 9/11/2002.....218
 abandon 15, 23, 28, 29, 31, 35,
 36, 58, 91, 99, 111, 156,
 247, 281, 290, 326, 340,
 360, 362, 373, 403, 433
 abhor.....77, 361, 362, 388
 Abimelech.....385
 abomination...73, 77, 115, 118,
 132, 134, 135, 183, 192,
 216, 238, 265, 266, 274,
 280, 283, 284, 301, 332,
 338, 351, 383, 409, 424,
 442
 abortion.....20, 22
 Abraham.....385
 abundance.3, 52, 62, 107, 119,
 152, 154, 169, 174, 189,
 198, 241, 257, 265, 276,
 294, 318, 350, 430, 447,
 451
 accomplish...2, 10, 23, 25, 39,
 50, 52, 58, 59, 62, 64, 66,
 69, 70, 72, 73, 78, 82, 93,
 107, 123, 136, 139, 160,
 177, 178, 179, 183, 191,
 202, 208, 214, 238, 246,
 272, 279, 282, 298, 354,
 360, 402, 411, 444, 461,
 464
 achieve.....26, 152, 226, 448
 Achilles' heel.....131
 Adam 4, 15, 22, 24, 29, 36, 42,
 51, 60, 67, 89, 113, 131,
 149, 184, 202, 227, 228,
 229, 251, 253, 257, 267,
 299, 342, 368
 adulterous woman, John 8
 124
 adultery .52, 54, 119, 121, 123,
 124, 128, 156, 177, 361,
 362, 412, 433, 451, 452
 afraid.....11, 69, 159, 225, 461
 Agur 443, 444, 445, 446, 448,
 451, 454, 455
 alcohol.....378, 379, 404, 456,
 457
 alms.....302
 ambassador.....142, 235, 236
 American.....65, 86, 358
 American Civil Liberties
 Union.....17
 anarchy.....61, 113
 ancient landmark...366, 367,
 371
 angel.....23, 56, 108, 236, 237
 anguish.....27, 30
 answer a fool.....403
 answer, will not.....438
 ant.....110, 112, 452
 anxiety.....36, 218, 219, 249
 apart from God's Word. .1, 72,
 90, 138
 apostasy.....290
 arbitrary.....15, 423
 archetype.....25, 50
 Arminius, Jacobus.....38
 art 97, 380, 394, 461
 atheism.....3
 atonement . .23, 144, 149, 151,
 167, 228, 248, 266, 281,
 343
 attire.....126, 130
 attitude.....163, 188, 194, 260,
 263, 268, 279, 285, 303,
 363
 audacity.....290
 authority 12, 13, 15, 56, 74, 77,
 86, 88, 120, 134, 141, 142,
 151, 152, 168, 204, 206,
 218, 231, 257, 258, 259,
 271, 293, 294, 303, 319,
 326, 327, 331, 340, 342,
 362, 374, 396, 398, 402,
 432, 433, 437, 438, 439,
 440, 441, 451, 456
 ba'al.....74, 368, 382
 balance.....59, 183, 241, 259,
 267, 283, 338
 banking.....241
 barren womb.....449
 Bathsheba.....82
 battle.....91, 92, 181, 240, 354,
 438, 454
 bed-side conversions.....31
 beggar.....28, 30, 296
 behavior .6, 17, 20, 22, 26, 31,
 39, 44, 48, 49, 64, 91, 94,
 107, 115, 118, 121, 123, 131,
 140, 144, 145, 157, 158,
 160, 163, 168, 173, 176,
 177, 184, 188, 190, 194,
 204, 210, 225, 232, 234,
 248, 254, 257, 261, 266,
 274, 279, 287, 289, 291,
 295, 296, 298, 303, 308,
 309, 318, 322, 324, 325,
 326, 331, 336, 342, 344,
 351, 355, 358, 372, 402,
 439, 462
 belief...13, 26, 31, 38, 58, 213,
 246, 293, 428, 448
 believe....6, 13, 25, 33, 34, 38,
 41, 46, 65, 72, 120, 122,
 130, 135, 138, 150, 151,
 161, 181, 183, 188, 211,
 212, 223, 224, 228, 232,
 246, 248, 252, 253, 267,
 279, 290, 293, 295, 297,
 309, 311, 313, 338, 368,
 401, 408, 409, 415, 422,
 428, 430, 435, 439, 440,
 442
 believers...5, 6, 7, 38, 63, 120,
 127, 158, 214, 232, 336,
 365
 beyond human
 understanding.....59, 119,
 290
 bias.....19, 21, 428
 bias, eliminate.....22
 biblical principles...2, 99, 357
 bigotry.....28
 blessing.....2, 39, 53, 77, 105,
 106, 107, 114, 119, 122,
 146, 152, 177, 188, 195,
 199, 256, 287, 296, 388,
 416, 438
 blind 38, 58, 72, 135, 142, 181,
 252, 290, 387, 429, 432
 bloodsucker.....449
 boast...28, 133, 177, 329, 334,
 351, 395, 411, 434, 447
 bones .60, 62, 203, 204, 260,
 276, 289, 304, 396
 boss.....75, 112, 178, 290
 bread of idleness.....462
 bribe....30, 135, 184, 195, 274,
 275, 297, 304, 313, 429,
 433
 buckler.....42, 44
 bully.....291
 business...27, 66, 76, 103, 111,
 133, 166, 180, 183, 187,
 188, 194, 197, 207, 330,
 334, 365, 367, 368, 369,
 370, 382, 387, 460, 462,
 464
 calamity....27, 30, 31, 115, 117,
 287, 295, 321, 387, 414
 chaff.....10, 419
 change human nature.....8
 chaos.....61, 150

- charismatic.....120
 chasing women.....455
 chastise...3, 5, 9, 11, 14, 30, 35, 64, 89, 109, 121, 152, 153, 158, 175, 177, 200, 237, 276, 324, 327, 412, 437
 cheerful.....268
 children...3, 14, 16, 17, 19, 28, 37, 41, 61, 80, 82, 83, 85, 90, 92, 96, 101, 105, 106, 113, 116, 120, 125, 127, 128, 142, 149, 151, 153, 159, 160, 165, 193, 213, 214, 222, 223, 227, 240, 242, 245, 257, 258, 259, 267, 296, 303, 321, 328, 331, 332, 337, 358, 362, 373, 375, 376, 389, 402, 406, 423, 433, 437, 440, 449, 462, 463
 Christ, 9, 12, 23, 31, 47, 51, 52, 54, 64, 67, 69, 70, 72, 81, 83, 87, 100, 105, 108, 114, 119, 122, 131, 144, 145, 149, 151, 152, 157, 158, 167, 173, 178, 180, 184, 192, 196, 203, 205, 206, 213, 221, 226, 237, 240, 266, 277, 281, 284, 290, 296, 299, 310, 343, 345, 350, 414, 426, 428, 434, 439, 442, 447, 455, 456, 464
 Christian, 5, 21, 31, 34, 36, 38, 40, 50, 54, 56, 61, 65, 67, 69, 71, 77, 86, 91, 93, 94, 127, 131, 141, 143, 150, 160, 165, 167, 197, 226, 230, 238, 298, 307, 314, 337, 352, 357, 439
 Christian Liberty.....298
 church attendance.....87, 160, 218, 266
 cistern.....106
 citizen.....76, 129
 civil government...56, 59, 141, 147, 242, 284, 319, 365, 370, 387, 388, 421, 427, 456, 464
 civil war.....105
 civilization.....56, 61, 103, 111, 113, 133, 157, 180, 186, 188
 clean, 3, 31, 48, 245, 246, 259, 279, 331, 341, 360, 407
 clothing, style.....130
 coexist180, 216, 247, 356, 431
 collateral.....111, 113, 146, 334, 335, 366, 413
 command, 3, 13, 15, 17, 20, 22, 39, 42, 43, 53, 55, 56, 57, 62, 75, 80, 84, 85, 86, 94, 96, 97, 98, 100, 101, 107, 114, 118, 120, 121, 126, 127, 136, 149, 151, 157, 162, 170, 184, 207, 218, 222, 224, 231, 232, 257, 315, 320, 323, 356, 361, 370, 372, 374, 375, 376, 380, 384, 386, 389, 396, 427, 437, 445, 459
 commandment...3, 37, 39, 53, 55, 56, 83, 85, 97, 98, 107, 118, 119, 120, 126, 127, 149, 162, 170, 218, 224, 231, 232, 320, 323, 337, 389, 396, 445, 457
 communion.....10, 442
 compassion.....136, 360
 complain.....378
 conditional statements.....39
 conditions...38, 40, 156, 219, 259
 confiscation.....241
 conform, 13, 15, 21, 22, 26, 31, 36, 44, 46, 93, 94, 104, 107, 115, 117, 118, 119, 127, 129, 141, 161, 167, 168, 173, 237, 243, 266, 298, 305, 363, 364, 372, 418, 440
 conies.....452
 conscience.....272, 298
 consecrated.....49
 consent.....16, 17, 20
 consequence.....2, 5, 8, 15, 31, 34, 41, 53, 66, 77, 88, 89, 92, 108, 111, 112, 116, 118, 121, 124, 127, 131, 157, 159, 168, 190, 229, 233, 240, 242, 257, 275, 292, 295, 300, 302, 305, 308, 318, 325, 327, 328, 333, 337, 338, 355, 357, 362, 371, 374, 378, 384, 386, 390, 391, 403, 410, 415, 422, 423, 424, 426, 432, 434, 441, 448, 452
 consumption...185, 194, 336, 349, 429, 443, 449, 450
 contention229, 291, 300, 301, 309, 313, 321, 330, 360, 377, 378, 394, 408, 416, 430
 Continental Divide.....53
 contradiction.....81, 120, 167, 426
 contrary...25, 49, 77, 116, 117, 141, 181, 215, 253, 288, 303, 359, 421, 435
 contrast.....4, 164
 contrast, abundance vs. poverty.....257
 contrast, anger vs. fury...440
 contrast, beauty vs. discretion193
 contrast, believers vs. nonbelievers.....6
 contrast, bitterness vs. joy249
 contrast, bread vs. understanding.....208
 contrast, bribery & destruction.....433
 contrast, consequences of work.....344
 contrast, correction vs. reproof.....267
 contrast, damnation vs. salvation.....249
 contrast, deceit vs. truth...258
 contrast, deceitful thing vs. sure thing.....191
 contrast, desire vs. expectation.....193
 contrast, destruction vs. peace.....233
 contrast, diligent vs. hasty343
 contrast, distance vs. availability.....275
 contrast, eternity vs. temporality.....214
 contrast, faithful vs. faithless234, 428
 contrast, falling vs. stumbling385
 contrast, finding vs. not finding.....246
 contrast, folly vs. knowledge253
 contrast, foolish pride.....245
 contrast, froward vs. forward345
 contrast, frugality vs. lavishness.....349
 contrast, generosity vs. stinginess.....194
 contrast, glory vs. shame...79
 contrast, godly vs. mischief215
 contrast, good vs. evil, 43, 198
 contrast, good wife vs. bad wife.....204
 contrast, head knowledge vs. heart knowledge.....206
 contrast, heart vs. mouth...275
 contrast, house vs. habitation78
 contrast, humble living vs. pride of life.....208
 contrast, increasing wickedness.....265
 contrast, inheritance vs. loss240
 contrast, instruction & honor277
 contrast, joy vs. deceit.....214
 contrast, kindness vs. cruelty208
 contrast, knowing God vs. knowing world.....3
 contrast, knowledge & perception.....4
 contrast, lazy vs. diligent..225
 contrast, learning & faithfulness.....247
 contrast, learning vs. not

- learning.....175
- contrast, life vs. death 99, 231, 273
- contrast, love vs. hatred . 270, 412
- contrast, mercy vs. truth. .256
- contrast, mouth vs. heart. 269
- contrast, my desire vs. God's desire.....239
- contrast, no counsel vs. many counselors.....189
- contrast, nothing hidden from God.....268
- contrast, obedience vs. disobedience.....423, 438
- contrast, open vs. closed. .224
- contrast, poverty vs. pride 287
- contrast, power vs. poverty436
- contrast, prayer.....275
- contrast, priorities.....293
- contrast, prudence vs. foolishness.....216, 235
- contrast, quietness vs. strife294
- contrast, receiving instruction. .264, 288, 326
- contrast, revenge vs. justice435
- contrast, revenge vs. perseverance.....337
- contrast, reward vs. consequence.....233
- contrast, righteous vs. wicked225
- contrast, righteousness vs. popularity.....205
- contrast, righteousness vs. pretense.....227
- contrast, scarcity vs. abundance.....294
- contrast, Scripture vs. popularity.....205
- contrast, sin vs. grace.....458
- contrast, slow vs. hasty....260
- contrast, sluggard vs. diligent225
- contrast, snared vs. free....210
- contrast, soft answer vs. wrath.....263
- contrast, spanking vs. not 242
- contrast, swine's snout vs. fair woman.....193
- contrast, the word vs. the commandment.....232
- contrast, tongue of just vs. heart of wicked.....176
- contrast, tree of knowledge vs. tree of life.....43
- contrast, true worship vs. false worship.....219
- contrast, trust & safety....441
- contrast, truth vs wickedness134
- contrast, understanding vs. deceit.....248
- contrast, unrealized hope vs. right desire.....230
- contrast, upright vs. overthrown.....227
- contrast, uprightness vs. darkness.....49
- contrast, uprightness vs. perversity.....423
- contrast, veracity vs. vanity278
- contrast, virtue vs. vice.....168
- contrast, wage vs. reward..191
- contrast, wholesomeness vs. perversity.....264
- contrast, wicked desire vs. righteous desire.....168
- contrast, wicked vs. just...78, 92
- contrast, wickedness vs. faithfulness.....235, 237
- contrast, wickedness vs. health.....236
- contrast, wickedness vs. righteousness.....166, 274
- contrast, wisdom vs. foolishness. .8, 10, 78, 271, 304
- contrast, wisdom vs. frowardness.....180
- contrast, wisdom vs. harlots433
- contrast, wisdom vs. instruction.....3
- contrast, wisdom vs. perversity.....206
- contrast, wisdom vs. punishment.....173
- contrast, wise lips vs. foolish heart.....265
- contrast, work vs. shame. .169
- contrast, wrong heart.....219
- contrast, curse vs. blessing. 77
- convert 38, 157, 166, 196, 201, 289, 391, 419
- Corinth.....10, 48, 97, 122
- correct gospel presentation 34
- correction. 3, 9, 34, 35, 57, 60, 63, 89, 121, 127, 152, 153, 158, 163, 171, 175, 200, 222, 223, 237, 245, 265, 267, 276, 298, 324, 326, 327, 352, 362, 372, 391, 403, 412, 429, 432, 437, 439
- corrupt..6, 10, 47, 92, 93, 143, 186, 202, 236, 258, 290, 301, 335, 360, 399, 421, 430
- corruption of language.....6
- cosign. .110, 111, 112, 189, 190, 302, 334, 366
- counsel...8, 27, 30, 32, 33, 77, 105, 137, 141, 149, 189, 205, 210, 211, 214, 230, 268, 272, 324, 325, 330, 336, 353, 382, 407, 413
- countenance....268, 285, 398, 417
- court 5, 19, 27, 29, 30, 87, 133, 203, 232, 254, 258, 328, 347, 365, 382, 388, 424, 461
- covenant...46, 50, 51, 70, 104, 106, 121, 123, 128, 130, 137, 139, 178, 233, 237, 240, 266, 315, 335, 362, 376, 377, 379, 389, 433, 464
- covet....26, 65, 123, 225, 260, 274, 281, 368, 378, 412, 418, 426, 428, 429
- craftiness.....137
- craftsmanship.....2
- crafty.....6, 137, 138
- creation....67, 71, 85, 147, 149, 150, 151, 225, 280, 333
- creative.....89, 117, 150, 151
- criminal. 18, 19, 75, 76, 86, 91, 123, 173, 187, 229, 254, 261, 287, 328, 335, 341, 424, 441
- criticism.....14, 238
- crowd.....27
- culture....6, 47, 102, 129, 130, 131, 180, 230, 266, 293, 307, 417, 443, 444, 448, 452, 461
- curse.....3, 53, 74, 77, 78, 105, 114, 167, 172, 186, 195, 199, 257, 337, 354, 388, 397, 401, 402, 415, 431, 440, 441, 447, 448
- damnation. .12, 31, 54, 67, 83, 163, 174, 180, 184, 186, 188, 194, 222, 229, 233, 249, 256, 270, 290, 299, 309, 320, 328, 351, 353, 362, 373, 418, 419, 432, 434, 441
- dangers of self-assessment446
- dark sayings.....7, 9
- date of Proverbs.....1
- David.....1, 81, 82, 206, 404
- deaf.....8, 32, 320, 437
- death....12, 24, 25, 26, 35, 43, 47, 51, 52, 53, 59, 69, 72, 90, 91, 96, 99, 105, 117, 119, 123, 127, 131, 149, 153, 157, 162, 166, 167, 168, 169, 170, 174, 175, 177, 180, 184, 187, 191, 193, 194, 196, 198, 202, 221, 226, 231, 233, 240, 242, 250, 256, 258, 259, 261, 267, 273, 275, 276, 284, 289, 299, 304, 310, 323, 324, 328, 335, 337, 343, 344, 346, 348, 350,

- 351, 354, 377, 378, 383,
387, 397, 398, 408, 413,
422, 432, 434, 438, 441,
449, 457
death is not the end.....185
debt88, 110, 111, 112, 113, 189,
358, 366
deceit....18, 118, 122, 135, 139,
175, 177, 186, 187, 191,
205, 212, 213, 214, 218,
230, 233, 234, 248, 257,
258, 267, 269, 296, 319,
325, 331, 332, 334, 335,
338, 344, 361, 368, 369,
371, 388, 389, 408, 409,
410, 412, 430, 436, 446,
463
deception. 138, 246, 329, 337,
446
defense against Satan.....100
definition of wisdom.....7
definitions 8, 9, 65, 81, 84, 97,
203, 459
delicate.....6, 439
deliverance..50, 185, 189, 354
democracy.....201
denial of self-reliance.....446
depression.....218, 397
desolation.....27, 30, 69
despise..7, 10, 34, 60, 63, 118,
140, 188, 206, 207, 231,
255, 271, 276, 323, 362,
371, 374, 450
destination 34, 49, 53, 60, 94,
100
destroy....4, 22, 32, 35, 38, 47,
52, 103, 112, 119, 123, 129,
140, 156, 178, 184, 186,
187, 205, 206, 216, 231,
239, 241, 244, 246, 250,
273, 280, 310, 318, 331,
339, 344, 350, 373, 377,
380, 387, 404, 405, 410,
430, 432, 433, 442, 455
destruction.22, 25, 27, 30, 35,
52, 53, 56, 72, 105, 109,
111, 118, 121, 131, 153, 174,
175, 179, 187, 203, 204,
206, 218, 224, 231, 232,
240, 241, 250, 259, 267,
270, 280, 284, 286, 289,
299, 300, 302, 303, 309,
310, 311, 343, 344, 346,
377, 380, 381, 418, 432,
433, 434, 447, 449, 450,
456, 457, 458
devices..32, 34, 108, 177, 202,
253, 325
discern....4, 7, 32, 71, 97, 100,
105, 126, 139, 140, 150,
156, 157, 186, 216, 234,
253, 254, 262, 264, 288,
292, 295, 312, 313, 318,
326, 360, 378, 409, 413
disciples.....10
discipleship.....3
discipline....3, 35, 55, 83, 89,
144, 152, 175, 200, 222,
224, 237, 242, 245, 253,
264, 277, 288, 323, 372,
374, 378, 391, 400, 402,
437, 458
discord.....115, 117, 408
discreet vs. discrete.....48
discretion..1, 6, 47, 48, 69, 71,
96, 97, 98, 116, 140, 141,
193, 224, 301, 321, 330,
382
disdain.....28, 220, 247, 268,
296
disgrace.....158, 308, 327
dishonor...103, 232, 308, 357,
439
disobedient.....31, 49, 161
disobey...61, 86, 98, 158, 229,
232, 297, 328, 412, 448
distaff.....461
distress. 27, 30, 256, 269, 452
divide.....5, 10, 48, 287
divination.....283
divine/human relationship
.....129
doctrine. 8, 38, 42, 80, 81, 83,
138, 149, 445
dog.....10, 152, 387, 405, 408,
431
dominion...107, 114, 368, 383
drug addiction.....239
dumb.....457, 458
earn 78, 84, 88, 152, 160, 188,
234, 240, 333
earth. 4, 31, 36, 42, 46, 47, 50,
51, 53, 54, 64, 67, 68, 70,
89, 91, 97, 107, 114, 137,
141, 146, 148, 149, 150,
151, 163, 166, 179, 185,
198, 225, 294, 296, 304,
323, 339, 373, 387, 405,
444, 449, 452, 464
economic stability.....177, 241
economy.....28, 104, 180, 194,
195, 207, 259, 420
edification.....9
education....3, 6, 33, 35, 239,
443, 444
egalitarianism.....32
Egypt.....4, 126
elders.....27, 461
elect.....5, 39, 147
elegant.....463
emotion.....81, 212, 255, 258,
263, 268, 270, 358, 397,
440
employ..40, 75, 143, 178, 207,
225, 230, 235, 256, 381,
439
employee.....75, 179, 194, 207
encourage..5, 77, 101, 111, 115,
127, 161, 170, 175, 190,
191, 195, 196, 210, 218,
220, 230, 239, 263, 278,
283, 315, 323, 332, 369,
373, 418, 428, 430, 439
end of history.....45, 46
enemy of sinners.....281
enigmas.....9
envy.....380
equal.....18
equality. 10, 17, 19, 20, 32, 44,
45, 128, 129, 151, 161, 166,
226, 229, 245, 286, 325,
340, 404, 442
equity....1, 5, 42, 45, 134, 283,
305, 373
error...3, 10, 11, 33, 56, 81, 117,
120, 128, 145, 148, 159,
180, 201, 220, 222, 277,
387
estranged.....29, 30, 50, 249
ethical.....5
Eve...4, 23, 24, 25, 29, 36, 52,
60, 67, 149, 202, 297,
299, 414, 459
everyone 8, 25, 28, 36, 38, 44,
64, 66, 67, 75, 89, 116,
119, 123, 128, 129, 133,
134, 136, 172, 175, 200,
206, 213, 215, 217, 223,
225, 227, 229, 236, 239,
248, 262, 285, 286, 293,
300, 310, 319, 343, 381,
388, 416, 435
evil.6, 7, 16, 18, 22, 24, 25, 32,
33, 34, 36, 42, 45, 46, 49,
60, 61, 67, 71, 73, 74, 76,
77, 86, 90, 91, 92, 94, 97,
101, 105, 107, 115, 118,
121, 137, 138, 139, 140,
141, 164, 177, 185, 191,
196, 198, 209, 214, 215,
223, 236, 238, 239, 240,
250, 252, 253, 254, 255,
263, 264, 269, 273, 275,
277, 279, 280, 281, 286,
290, 292, 299, 300, 303,
308, 316, 325, 331, 337,
338, 341, 345, 352, 356,
359, 360, 370, 374, 380,
385, 386, 388, 390, 397,
402, 407, 410, 414, 415,
421, 422, 424, 426, 429,
434, 441, 442, 454, 457,
459
exaggeration.....116, 245
exalt.....85, 86, 89, 188, 260,
303
excellence..132, 134, 219, 296,
364, 461, 464
existentialism.....58
experience2, 4, 6, 7, 10, 11, 13,
22, 28, 43, 44, 58, 100,
105, 111, 116, 119, 120, 151,
167, 169, 181, 185, 186,
212, 215, 239, 242, 249,
251, 265, 272, 279, 297,
315, 316, 325, 341, 342,
395, 413, 424, 428, 444
fail to apply.....5, 8

- Fair 5, 19, 20, 21, 44, 134, 183, 187, 194, 229, 283, 331, 409, 429
- faithful. 2, 5, 7, 8, 9, 11, 36, 45, 48, 60, 62, 69, 72, 73, 77, 82, 83, 88, 89, 94, 100, 119, 120, 122, 134, 146, 152, 161, 165, 167, 168, 171, 173, 177, 181, 182, 189, 190, 199, 203, 206, 212, 213, 215, 216, 219, 220, 226, 230, 234, 235, 236, 238, 246, 247, 256, 259, 261, 273, 294, 297, 302, 304, 325, 330, 331, 340, 347, 350, 355, 357, 365, 374, 384, 386, 392, 395, 412, 417, 423, 427, 428, 436, 439, 443, 456, 462, 463
- faithful children.....83
- faithless.....2, 5, 7, 36, 62, 69, 104, 161, 165, 212, 234, 235, 261, 361, 384
- fake.....18, 21, 24, 127, 145
- fallen. 7, 36, 113, 114, 127, 137, 152, 166, 169, 188, 215, 239, 246, 249, 258, 265, 270, 284, 318, 319, 360, 368, 369, 383, 384, 385, 424, 425
- false distinction.....80
- false gods.....24, 74, 218
- false worship.....74, 218, 219
- family 11, 12, 14, 15, 16, 27, 55, 56, 75, 82, 87, 101, 102, 103, 112, 113, 114, 124, 128, 137, 144, 151, 155, 161, 165, 169, 173, 190, 197, 206, 208, 213, 241, 244, 253, 265, 274, 291, 294, 295, 298, 302, 305, 310, 313, 319, 322, 327, 335, 374, 377, 381, 399, 402, 414, 420, 430, 433, 437, 440, 452, 459, 460, 461, 464
- fat 195, 225, 276, 323, 430
- father.....12, 14, 42, 60, 64, 80, 81, 82, 84, 85, 96, 97, 98, 118, 119, 120, 144, 164, 165, 222, 223, 242, 259, 264, 271, 296, 303, 305, 310, 312, 321, 327, 337, 373, 374, 375, 407, 414, 423, 430, 433, 438, 440, 443, 448, 450, 455
- faulty perceptions.....25
- fear of the Lord.....7, 10, 11, 13, 32, 36, 37, 41, 61, 85, 137, 140, 141, 159, 179, 244, 252, 258, 259, 270, 277, 281, 282, 325, 357, 373, 387, 463
- Federal Reserve Note.....103
- feet. 16, 22, 25, 73, 90, 94, 96, 99, 115, 116, 118, 123, 126, 130, 217, 317, 318, 403, 433
- fellowship 10, 22, 46, 92, 239, 249, 302, 410, 436, 442
- Fifth Commandment...97, 98, 327, 337, 448, 450
- Finney, Charles.....38
- fiscal policy.....2
- flatter.....46, 50, 118, 121, 126, 128, 129, 130, 336, 352, 410, 425, 429, 434
- flirt.....52, 99, 121, 129
- fool...7, 127, 131, 170, 171, 175, 177, 197, 211, 212, 216, 233, 235, 238, 244, 245, 247, 252, 253, 259, 262, 264, 265, 268, 269, 288, 296, 298, 300, 301, 303, 304, 305, 307, 308, 309, 320, 329, 330, 336, 346, 357, 371, 382, 384, 387, 401, 402, 403, 404, 405, 407, 411, 412, 415, 419, 423, 429, 430, 436, 439, 452
- foolish. .8, 28, 29, 79, 111, 131, 133, 154, 156, 157, 159, 161, 164, 165, 171, 172, 174, 177, 211, 215, 217, 223, 225, 244, 245, 247, 251, 252, 253, 265, 271, 297, 301, 304, 305, 307, 309, 311, 317, 318, 320, 321, 339, 349, 356, 362, 366, 371, 373, 382, 401, 403, 411, 419, 423, 435, 436, 454
- forbidden. 23, 24, 26, 76, 198, 260, 282, 297, 363, 366, 389, 396, 456
- foreclosure.....104, 113
- foreigner.....50, 76
- forget.....22, 55, 80, 84, 219, 456, 457
- forgive.....32, 33, 57, 81, 108, 124, 131, 226, 237, 249, 266, 299, 314, 338, 412, 424, 426
- fornication 122, 376, 377, 412, 433
- forsake...12, 15, 46, 50, 51, 55, 57, 59, 80, 81, 118, 136, 154, 156, 161, 267, 276, 336, 337, 414, 419, 422, 423, 425, 428
- foundations of human society52, 129
- free will.....17
- freedom.....24, 45, 64, 65, 89, 187, 201, 318, 376, 434
- friends...76, 108, 110, 111, 112, 128, 188, 254, 255, 291, 297, 298, 301, 302, 315, 318, 319, 336, 361, 365, 396, 399, 412, 414, 423, 432, 464
- froward 46, 49, 73, 77, 90, 94, 114, 116, 117, 132, 135, 137, 141, 180, 192, 291, 292, 298, 303, 317, 344, 348, 357, 379
- funny.....117
- future. .5, 39, 61, 170, 254, 411
- gain.....18, 22, 26, 64, 66, 76, 166, 209, 215, 220, 274, 305, 313, 319, 335, 363, 424, 459
- garbage in, garbage out....295
- gates.....27, 30, 132, 133, 136, 149, 152, 254, 461, 463, 464
- genetic.....102
- genetic engineering.....102
- genetics.....101, 206
- gentle.....65, 238, 263
- gestation.....62
- get rich.....2, 369, 428
- gift 2, 38, 52, 78, 83, 88, 135, 195, 234, 259, 275, 297, 301, 304, 312, 321, 322, 347, 350, 355, 375, 376, 395, 411, 433, 446, 456, 457
- glad.....72, 164, 179, 187, 218, 268, 269, 271, 296, 373, 376, 385, 414, 426, 432
- glory.....21, 47, 55, 56, 66, 68, 69, 70, 74, 78, 86, 88, 136, 149, 292, 296, 321, 340, 350, 392, 399, 425, 427, 447, 464
- goats.....10, 48, 62, 420
- God allows drunkenness. .457
- God curses.....78
- God hates evil.....280
- God hates frowardness.....115
- God hates lies.....301
- God hates pride.....273, 280
- God hates several things...118
- God is biased.....21
- God loves those who love Him.....144
- God loves truth.....118
- God will not answer.....27, 30, 31, 32
- God's decrees.....150
- God's judgment 21, 30, 46, 78, 167, 171, 184, 196, 202, 203, 226, 234, 269, 280, 283, 292, 299, 349
- God's plan...10, 31, 47, 49, 52, 59, 68, 149, 155, 161, 280, 307
- God's purpose...45, 47, 51, 52, 56, 65, 107, 111, 116, 119, 123, 139, 143, 148, 149, 152, 179, 184, 198, 225, 247, 267, 279, 351, 381,

- 392
 God's wrath..85, 142, 146, 194
 godly living.....1, 35
 gold 2, 62, 64, 65, 66, 88, 132,
 136, 143, 146, 148, 183,
 193, 204, 270, 285, 295,
 334, 355, 394, 418, 445
 golden rule.....410
 Goliath.....404
 good...7, 17, 19, 21, 22, 24, 26,
 32, 34, 42, 43, 45, 46, 51,
 55, 57, 60, 67, 71, 73, 74,
 75, 77, 80, 81, 85, 90, 92,
 97, 102, 104, 107, 116, 117,
 119, 121, 130, 137, 139,
 140, 146, 153, 158, 164,
 172, 179, 180, 186, 189,
 190, 193, 195, 198, 202,
 210, 211, 212, 214, 216,
 218, 219, 223, 234, 238,
 239, 240, 251, 254, 256,
 260, 263, 264, 269, 270,
 272, 276, 280, 287, 289,
 291, 297, 300, 303, 305,
 307, 308, 309, 315, 317,
 320, 330, 332, 336, 338,
 339, 355, 356, 359, 362,
 370, 384, 387, 388, 389,
 390, 392, 394, 396, 397,
 398, 405, 412, 413, 415,
 421, 422, 424, 440, 442,
 453, 454, 457, 459, 460,
 461
 good and evil?, 22, 23, 24, 26,
 34, 42, 45, 46, 67, 71, 76,
 77, 90, 92, 97, 164, 198,
 216, 223, 256, 264, 442,
 459
 good eye.....360
 good man...60, 202, 240, 251
 gospel...8, 33, 36, 38, 42, 50,
 59, 87, 89, 136, 157, 166,
 167, 277, 417, 447, 464
 gossip.....189, 291, 336, 394,
 408, 409
 government. 2, 19, 21, 51, 134,
 141, 142, 143, 147, 155,
 206, 241, 284, 319, 350,
 365, 419, 436, 453
 grace...3, 12, 16, 30, 31, 37, 38,
 41, 42, 43, 49, 51, 69, 71,
 74, 78, 81, 82, 83, 86, 88,
 89, 93, 105, 114, 119, 136,
 137, 147, 148, 152, 158,
 165, 168, 169, 174, 181,
 190, 193, 195, 203, 210,
 213, 220, 221, 226, 235,
 237, 254, 259, 271, 281,
 287, 289, 299, 300, 303,
 322, 340, 345, 354, 355,
 360, 361, 373, 375, 376,
 414, 431, 435, 441, 453,
 458, 463, 464
 gravity.....299
 greater good.....25
 greed 2, 18, 20, 22, 25, 26, 47,
 76, 77, 98, 130, 166, 253,
 274, 281, 359, 428, 432,
 438
 Greek myth.....131
 Green, Jay 25, 49, 88, 97, 130,
 139, 148, 151, 191, 194,
 213, 235, 240, 241, 242,
 265, 273, 275, 278, 280,
 285, 292, 307, 310, 315,
 316, 320, 321, 323, 325,
 326, 327, 329, 330, 334,
 339, 343, 355, 357, 359,
 362, 363, 364, 370, 373,
 374, 382, 388, 391, 401,
 405, 418, 420, 421, 425,
 435, 438, 439, 443, 444,
 446, 453, 459
 greyhound.....453
 guarantee. 2, 64, 104, 111, 112,
 166, 191, 196, 302, 334,
 366
 guilt of sin.....11, 345
 gullibility.....18
 habit ..22, 103, 264, 288, 289,
 322, 323, 341, 352, 358,
 368, 374, 387
 habitation 74, 77, 78, 154, 385
 half-truths.....3
 happiness...36, 64, 65, 66, 71,
 79, 107, 121, 152, 201, 218,
 219, 255, 269, 272, 287,
 322, 347, 384, 414, 426,
 438, 446, 463
 happiness, pursuit of.....65
 harlot...29, 126, 130, 177, 376,
 377, 433
 harmony 77, 81, 112, 252, 279,
 318, 320, 420, 422
 harvest.....110, 112, 169, 194,
 230, 330, 395, 401, 420,
 464
 hate.....18, 28, 32, 34, 36, 75,
 137, 140, 149, 153, 154,
 157, 158, 172, 187, 200,
 201, 220, 225, 253, 255,
 277, 308, 319, 374, 396,
 397, 410, 412, 427, 435
 hate crimes.....18
 hate knowledge.....27, 28, 32
 hate, God's.....115
 head knowledge.....8, 29, 80,
 206, 269
 health...53, 56, 60, 62, 66, 71,
 72, 83, 90, 93, 127, 171,
 179, 190, 213, 235, 236,
 260, 264, 270, 289, 304,
 308, 322, 340, 378, 459
 hear.?, 8, 10, 12, 14, 15, 21, 31,
 34, 78, 80, 85, 86, 89, 90,
 96, 97, 98, 101, 108, 109,
 127, 131, 136, 146, 149,
 151, 201, 216, 217, 222,
 223, 227, 228, 245, 252,
 275, 292, 295, 298, 311,
 312, 313, 321, 324, 326,
 327, 332, 337, 342, 346,
 352, 363, 364, 372, 374,
 390, 394, 397, 399, 424,
 440, 458
 hearken.....8, 32, 36, 53, 127,
 149, 211, 257, 324, 336,
 370, 374, 407, 436, 453
 heart knowledge 80, 206, 269
 heaven...26, 50, 54, 62, 64, 67,
 68, 87, 108, 136, 148, 150,
 185, 198, 221, 259, 305,
 310, 323, 354, 369, 393,
 398, 444
 heavens.....150
 heed..8, 14, 30, 31, 34, 36, 39,
 80, 89, 96, 105, 109, 134,
 136, 153, 157, 158, 169,
 217, 222, 223, 232, 238,
 267, 276, 295, 298, 358,
 415
 hell.....3, 26, 96, 99, 104, 127,
 131, 159, 162, 163, 185,
 187, 207, 226, 227, 267,
 273, 320, 337, 353, 373,
 387, 418, 432, 449
 Henry, Matthew 172, 260, 278
 hidden...39, 60, 77, 108, 132,
 145, 162, 173, 216, 228,
 233, 267, 271, 286, 340,
 350, 361, 393, 410, 416,
 425
 hiding knowledge.....216
 hierarchy.....113, 128, 294
 high places. 132, 136, 155, 159,
 161
 highway.....286
 history....5, 23, 35, 42, 56, 59,
 67, 105, 121, 135, 167, 170,
 206, 229, 290, 364, 424,
 448
 hoary head.....292
 holy 10, 67, 143, 159, 166, 217,
 236, 249, 338, 339, 443,
 444
 Holy Spirit...1, 31, 38, 61, 69,
 70, 83, 99, 114, 120, 127,
 144, 149, 151, 157, 160,
 179, 181, 200, 202, 217,
 223, 226, 236, 248, 286,
 287, 289, 293, 312, 321,
 360, 374, 375, 391, 427,
 431
 homeless.....27, 28
 honey..99, 289, 384, 399, 413
 honor....16, 29, 47, 50, 51, 62,
 64, 66, 67, 84, 86, 87, 98,
 101, 103, 122, 129, 132,
 143, 146, 166, 168, 187,
 190, 204, 206, 207, 218,
 231, 236, 238, 257, 259,
 261, 267, 277, 292, 296,
 311, 321, 327, 329, 330,
 331, 337, 350, 352, 357,
 367, 372, 374, 392, 394,
 399, 401, 403, 404, 406,
 411, 417, 422, 433, 440,
 462, 463

- honor among thieves.....20
 hope. .25, 35, 49, 58, 105, 145,
 178, 179, 185, 186, 193,
 194, 202, 219, 230, 243,
 250, 259, 261, 290, 319,
 323, 348, 350, 374, 376,
 377, 384, 406, 438, 439,
 447
 household.....12, 82, 197, 206,
 265, 270, 274, 300, 304,
 322, 375, 376, 420, 453,
 460, 461, 462
 human nature.....7, 123, 349,
 369
 humanism.....138, 150, 403
 humility. 11, 14, 26, 33, 36, 61,
 78, 79, 110, 111, 183, 245,
 247, 254, 255, 256, 273,
 277, 287, 311, 315, 357,
 372, 394, 429, 432, 440
 Humpty-Dumpty.....23
 husband 12, 15, 16, 28, 30, 60,
 74, 101, 128, 130, 133, 165,
 203, 368, 412, 416, 451,
 459, 460, 461, 462, 463,
 464
 husbandry.....103
 hypocrite.....3, 186
 ideal.....12, 84, 102, 155, 371,
 448, 449, 453, 456, 459,
 464
 idealism.....3
 ideology.....28, 30
 idolatry.....359
 ignorance 28, 30, 59, 129, 131,
 133, 157, 162, 168, 179,
 232, 248, 303, 352, 353,
 364, 384, 402, 432, 448
 illegal .18, 75, 76, 81, 162, 210
 illicit. .121, 128, 129, 130, 131,
 162, 433
 imagination...46, 91, 115, 214,
 293, 311
 immaturity.....92, 156, 157
 immoral...18, 21, 47, 179, 210,
 336, 359, 435, 451
 impose. .74, 85, 150, 291, 297,
 415
 inability.....32, 100, 211, 253,
 404
 incentive.....18, 424
 incorruptible.....49
 indentured servitude.....302
 independence.....24, 464
 inexperience...6, 28, 116, 326,
 341, 346, 415
 inexperienced.....6
 infidelity.....106, 107, 109, 361,
 362
 infinite.....48
 inherit.....48, 50, 74, 78, 101,
 103, 122, 142, 143, 146,
 147, 197, 240, 253, 294,
 296, 322, 327, 337, 424,
 433, 440, 452
 iniquity.....134, 179, 215, 281,
 327, 347, 359
 injustice. 21, 25, 118, 180, 187,
 291, 301, 328, 347, 359,
 387, 431, 438, 442
 innocence.....23
 innocent...16, 18, 20, 113, 115,
 118, 205, 240, 408, 424,
 428, 447
 insanity.....91, 136, 408
 inspiration.....120, 127
 integrity. .44, 47, 49, 101, 104,
 111, 113, 114, 115, 129, 158,
 184, 188, 192, 203, 219,
 225, 226, 236, 244, 264,
 273, 274, 283, 310, 317,
 325, 327, 331, 334, 377,
 381, 403, 404, 422, 423,
 432, 435, 443, 458, 464
 intellectual...8, 41, 63, 80, 93,
 94, 234, 235, 324
 intelligence.....6, 59, 100, 133,
 134, 137, 138, 139, 149,
 150, 156, 176, 235, 277,
 381, 415
 intention. 52, 60, 97, 103, 145,
 203, 210, 219, 264, 266,
 267, 279, 342, 343, 357,
 364, 382, 393, 397, 398,
 409, 412
 intergenerational.....82
 internal conversation.....58
 interpretation. 7, 8, 10, 19, 84,
 120, 180, 283, 325, 404,
 417
 interpretative difficulties.....9
 intervention...8, 124, 175, 200,
 298, 360
 intimate relationship...50, 77,
 101
 irresponsible. 83, 110, 111, 113,
 129, 190, 366
 irrevocable.....51
 is God playing a trick?.....135
 Islamic terrorists.....218
 James.....74, 291
 jealous 119, 124, 281, 380, 412
 Jesus. .8, 9, 10, 14, 22, 25, 31,
 34, 37, 47, 52, 54, 56, 64,
 67, 69, 70, 72, 75, 77, 84,
 85, 87, 89, 94, 97, 100,
 105, 108, 114, 119, 135,
 138, 146, 152, 157, 167,
 168, 172, 178, 179, 184,
 191, 193, 195, 196, 205,
 217, 218, 221, 226, 229,
 237, 261, 277, 290, 294,
 296, 299, 302, 310, 343,
 350, 389, 390, 397, 414,
 426, 428, 435, 439, 440,
 464
 Job 16:20.....9
 Job's friends.....9
 judgment....1, 2, 5, 10, 11, 23,
 25, 30, 42, 44, 45, 48, 61,
 77, 78, 139, 143, 147, 167,
 168, 171, 178, 180, 184,
 193, 196, 202, 203, 211,
 221, 226, 230, 234, 239,
 241, 250, 259, 269, 279,
 280, 282, 286, 292, 296,
 297, 298, 299, 304, 309,
 319, 327, 331, 336, 342,
 343, 344, 347, 349, 378,
 379, 387, 388, 389, 403,
 413, 415, 422, 429, 433,
 436, 441, 456, 458
 judicial system.....27
 junk food.....239
 jurisdiction. 18, 20, 56, 65, 81,
 134, 140, 298
 justice...1, 5, 12, 18, 19, 21, 25,
 29, 30, 31, 40, 44, 46, 54,
 124, 137, 141, 142, 147,
 172, 176, 177, 180, 187,
 190, 192, 195, 197, 198,
 199, 229, 236, 238, 240,
 241, 250, 254, 275, 280,
 283, 291, 299, 304, 305,
 327, 331, 335, 338, 339,
 343, 344, 347, 349, 384,
 388, 405, 422, 424, 429,
 431, 432, 433, 434, 436,
 438, 441
 kidneys.....373
 killed by train.....159
 kindness...57, 208, 234, 256,
 288, 289, 302, 321, 325,
 350, 381, 398, 462
 kingdom of God.....23, 50, 87,
 113, 114, 141, 166, 177, 193,
 199, 250, 294, 353, 373
 knowledge of God.....4
 knowledge of the world.....4
 lack of knowledge.....28, 174
 last trump.....49
 latter rain.....285
 laugh.....27, 30, 177, 251, 272,
 304, 435
 laugh at your calamity.....27
 laws, 12, 14, 15, 16, 18, 19, 21,
 33, 44, 46, 47, 53, 55, 57,
 61, 65, 75, 80, 81, 86, 89,
 92, 117, 119, 120, 122, 126,
 127, 128, 135, 150, 159,
 181, 187, 202, 210, 221,
 223, 226, 233, 241, 242,
 249, 250, 254, 273, 275,
 283, 302, 305, 327, 328,
 342, 366, 369, 372, 383,
 388, 396, 405, 411, 418,
 421, 422, 423, 425, 427,
 428, 430, 437, 438, 440,
 445, 447, 448, 450, 452,
 456, 457, 462
 law unto itself.....242
 laws of nature...117, 118, 123,
 150
 lazy...178, 218, 220, 225, 271,
 310, 322, 326, 351, 361,

- 374, 390, 391, 406, 430, 462
- leader...2, 11, 27, 72, 103, 132, 134, 143, 147, 161, 284, 285, 331, 350, 361, 392, 393, 395, 400, 421, 422, 427, 432, 461
- leap of faith.....58
- legal...5, 17, 27, 29, 70, 75, 81, 103, 128, 133, 142, 326, 382, 440
- legalism.....81
- Lemuel.....455, 456, 458
- level playing field.....5
- Levites.....48, 323
- liberalism.....33
- libertarian.....91
- liberty of conscience.....298
- life knowledge.....8, 29
- life raft.....94, 136
- lifestyle.....158, 225, 252, 420
- like-minded.....17, 49
- Limborch, Philip.....38
- limitations. 23, 35, 48, 56, 58, 140, 150, 200, 201, 204, 217, 251, 277, 297, 356, 445
- lips...90, 94, 96, 98, 127, 130, 132, 134, 173, 175, 176, 209, 212, 216, 218, 224, 236, 245, 247, 256, 265, 282, 288, 290, 292, 295, 296, 303, 306, 309, 314, 317, 334, 336, 352, 355, 360, 361, 363, 364, 373, 380, 388, 389, 409, 411, 423, 450, 457
- lizard.....453
- loathsome.....226
- locusts.....453
- logic...17, 91, 97, 119, 151, 250
- longevity...53, 56, 66, 72, 129, 155, 157, 166, 267, 289, 413
- lost.....7, 30, 41, 49, 136, 143, 185, 210, 249, 271, 281, 456, 457
- love.....3, 5, 14, 21, 27, 28, 29, 30, 33, 35, 40, 60, 61, 64, 65, 75, 78, 80, 82, 84, 85, 90, 101, 106, 107, 109, 118, 121, 124, 126, 128, 129, 140, 141, 143, 144, 148, 149, 151, 153, 154, 158, 161, 172, 192, 200, 220, 221, 225, 226, 231, 232, 237, 242, 245, 255, 264, 266, 268, 270, 271, 272, 277, 281, 284, 297, 299, 301, 302, 314, 316, 320, 333, 337, 348, 352, 360, 361, 372, 389, 397, 402, 410, 412, 433, 437, 452, 458, 463
- love is not a feeling.....140
- love, biblical.....140
- love, eliminate.....22
- loyal.....124, 246, 271, 350
- luck.....30, 401
- lure.....18, 21, 233
- lust 52, 118, 121, 122, 123, 185, 368, 369, 438
- lying princes.....297
- madness.....23
- maiden.....154, 155, 156, 161, 420, 460
- maintenance of equipment246
- male.....6, 12, 14, 96, 142
- managers.....70
- manipulate God.....145
- marketplace.....283
- marriage...29, 50, 52, 75, 106, 107, 111, 121, 123, 128, 130, 141, 312, 315, 335, 362, 377, 378, 451, 452, 458
- marriage, healthy.....459
- marriages.....322
- math.....48, 211, 241
- maturity...157, 202, 238, 273, 285, 325, 398, 418
- meaning in life.....85
- meaningless...42, 81, 85, 139, 335, 350, 404, 439
- meek.....65, 78, 256, 311, 353
- meet together.....356, 436
- mercy...12, 29, 31, 36, 38, 55, 57, 81, 106, 131, 136, 168, 169, 190, 195, 234, 255, 261, 281, 287, 299, 300, 340, 345, 349, 350, 425, 435
- Messiah.....10, 193
- methodology of sin.....51
- miracle.....4, 69, 333
- miraculous.....7, 69, 197
- mischievous...90, 92, 115, 117, 177, 196, 197, 215, 235, 303, 380, 381, 385, 386, 409, 426, 457
- misfortune is not without a cause.....402
- mistake 57, 105, 145, 167, 186, 200, 222, 239, 256, 265, 286, 387
- mixed.....10, 236
- mock 9, 27, 30, 140, 248, 251, 272, 296, 326, 327, 329, 383, 419, 450
- modern...47, 75, 86, 102, 147, 178, 188, 266, 271, 282, 290, 293, 295, 299, 320, 323, 326, 328, 333, 336, 339, 343, 347, 363, 365, 372, 389, 402, 407, 421, 439, 446, 459
- monetary policy. 112, 180, 241
- money 40, 59, 62, 66, 84, 104, 111, 113, 114, 124, 126, 146, 166, 183, 188, 190, 194, 225, 241, 311, 318, 320, 346, 350, 356, 358, 365, 420, 430, 460, 464
- moral.....398, 451
- mother. 12, 14, 15, 80, 82, 118, 119, 120, 164, 165, 271, 295, 305, 327, 337, 373, 374, 376, 430, 437, 440, 448, 450, 455, 463
- motivation 2, 17, 92, 258, 260, 287, 340, 410, 438
- murder.....18, 19, 20, 22, 26
- mystery.....392
- naive. 6, 28, 161, 253, 346, 415
- naturally sinful.....200
- naughty.....114, 295
- navel.....60, 62
- neck. 12, 16, 55, 57, 69, 71, 72, 118, 120, 432
- neighbor 73, 75, 162, 186, 187, 194, 219, 225, 254, 255, 291, 301, 302, 313, 318, 319, 337, 345, 352, 389, 390, 394, 396, 408, 413, 415, 433
- neither poverty nor riches 446
- new heart.....8
- Noah.....68, 114, 234
- nobility.....132, 134, 137, 142
- non-doctrinal.....81
- nonbelievers.....5, 6, 7
- nonsense. 6, 28, 212, 293, 439
- not everyone...8, 13, 44, 134, 136, 226, 299, 463
- obey...8, 33, 39, 41, 57, 84, 89, 98, 101, 105, 120, 131, 150, 151, 152, 153, 160, 161, 168, 173, 180, 182, 224, 232, 239, 255, 305, 324, 363, 441, 450
- objective...47, 57, 58, 90, 139, 253, 279, 342, 388
- obligation. 29, 52, 62, 75, 130, 284, 321
- obscurity.....17
- obstinate.....49, 117
- occult.....61
- old age.....104, 292, 327, 351
- omnipotence.....73
- omniscience.....73
- open-minded.....28, 253, 415
- opinion 34, 58, 238, 260, 262, 276, 279, 325, 344, 372, 407, 435
- opinions.....91
- ordinary...4, 8, 20, 35, 74, 90, 101, 175, 183, 338, 381, 416, 464
- orgy.....156
- outcast.....27
- outside the box.....117
- overpopulation (see population density).....47
- pagan.....2, 6, 132
- parable.....10, 84, 261, 404
- passion.....123, 140, 156, 188, 212, 258, 270, 358, 365,

- 412, 440
 Paul...4, 9, 10, 15, 38, 48, 50,
 52, 72, 97, 122, 165, 288,
 337, 390, 397, 417, 427,
 442, 447
 peace...36, 55, 56, 64, 66, 126,
 152, 156, 189, 214, 233,
 240, 256, 281, 294, 306,
 408, 427, 432
 pearls before swine...10, 217,
 262
 perception4, 6, 10, 23, 24, 26,
 138, 186, 250, 251, 253,
 333, 379, 413
 permission...23, 89, 107, 140,
 141, 201, 221, 415, 445
 personal...2, 6, 11, 13, 18, 29,
 38, 44, 57, 66, 69, 73, 77,
 82, 87, 88, 89, 92, 93, 99,
 103, 110, 111, 112, 113, 120,
 127, 131, 136, 146, 160,
 166, 168, 169, 170, 173,
 177, 181, 185, 186, 190,
 192, 201, 208, 219, 266,
 286, 308, 319, 325, 327,
 332, 342, 373, 377, 383,
 388, 413, 427, 428, 431,
 433, 436, 438, 444, 451,
 460
 perversity...90, 94, 117, 132,
 180, 181, 184, 192, 206,
 244, 245, 264, 272, 303,
 317, 318, 378, 423, 427
 Pharaoh...4
 Pharisee...3, 37, 97, 138
 philandering...29
 philosophy...14, 58, 81, 91
 physically handicapped...458
 Pilate...135
 pity...255, 323, 424
 politically correct...32
 popular...3, 86, 192, 212, 281,
 334, 386, 410, 421, 422,
 425, 435
 population...102, 167
 population density...47, 53
 pornography...17
 poverty...3, 78, 110, 112, 113,
 123, 148, 167, 169, 174,
 177, 194, 197, 228, 237,
 238, 239, 243, 255, 257,
 282, 287, 317, 322, 323,
 325, 333, 343, 346, 348,
 357, 363, 374, 391, 423,
 424, 426, 428, 429, 431,
 440, 445, 449, 456, 457,
 458
 practical...1, 3, 8, 13, 71, 137,
 141, 163, 173, 174, 232,
 303, 325, 364, 374
 prayer...31, 160, 265, 266, 275,
 424
 preach...21, 33, 138, 213, 216,
 236, 417, 445, 447
 preservation...42, 45, 47, 80,
 84, 120, 190, 236, 245,
 258, 286, 324, 340, 361,
 384
 presupposition...41, 94, 127,
 151, 250, 297, 324, 372,
 403
 pride...9, 15, 28, 33, 50, 61, 73,
 79, 92, 118, 134, 137, 141,
 171, 183, 207, 227, 229,
 245, 247, 254, 272, 273,
 277, 280, 286, 290, 303,
 311, 315, 343, 350, 351,
 359, 360, 382, 394, 395,
 399, 401, 406, 411, 429,
 430, 432, 434, 440, 448,
 454
 primary theme of Scripture53
 process of understanding390
 promiscuous...99, 377
 promise18, 20, 21, 24, 36, 50,
 56, 104, 110, 111, 115, 119,
 122, 129, 148, 190, 193,
 210, 215, 230, 233, 273,
 323, 335, 336, 337, 377,
 385, 387, 395, 428, 433,
 441, 459
 promissory note...103
 proper upbringing...83
 property rights...366
 prophecy...2, 283, 390, 438,
 443, 455
 prophet...9, 191, 218, 299, 357
 propitiation47, 108, 145, 299
 prosecute...18
 prosperity...2, 32, 35, 63, 83,
 122, 152, 187, 188, 195,
 197, 430
 protect...19, 21, 44, 89, 120,
 128, 159, 173, 202, 205,
 219, 233, 242, 250, 258,
 267, 296, 299, 300, 310,
 336, 340, 361, 363, 400,
 402, 421, 426, 427, 430,
 445, 454, 462
 Protestant...37, 38
 prudence...5, 6, 48, 137, 138,
 139, 288, 312, 321, 322
 public view...286
 publicans...75
 punish...9, 14, 61, 72, 78, 105,
 108, 121, 131, 168, 172,
 173, 178, 187, 192, 203,
 222, 237, 238, 242, 276,
 280, 296, 298, 300, 305,
 319, 320, 323, 324, 328,
 346, 356, 372, 387, 401,
 402, 414, 425, 437, 457
 purchase...62, 83, 149, 301,
 334, 375, 418
 pure heart...93, 360
 purity10, 22, 93, 114, 116, 215,
 236, 247, 274, 279, 295,
 331, 332, 344, 360, 398,
 435, 445, 448
 purpose...7, 8, 15, 19, 29, 55,
 56, 65, 75, 85, 88, 89, 94,
 107, 114, 139, 144, 145,
 147, 151, 154, 187, 198,
 214, 225, 233, 267, 272,
 279, 280, 313, 336, 351,
 382, 401, 444
 purpose, created...116
 qualification...5, 176, 239
 rage...119, 124, 258, 435
 ransom...119, 227, 348
 rapture...31
 realistic...8
 rebellion...21, 94, 142, 229,
 299, 300, 302, 303, 440,
 464
 rebuke...121, 154, 158, 222,
 223, 227, 228, 237, 238,
 276, 308, 326, 388, 412,
 429
 reconciliation...30
 redeem...281
 reformation...38, 71, 298
 rejoice...46, 49, 106, 151, 187,
 218, 220, 228, 271, 276,
 296, 304, 373, 375, 385,
 413, 425, 432, 434, 462
 relativity...58, 90, 413
 religion...56, 64, 81, 135, 266
 repentance...32, 84, 94, 133,
 173, 300, 457
 repentant sinners...31, 105,
 229, 240
 repetition45, 96, 97, 127, 172,
 185, 246, 332, 338, 366,
 387, 398, 409, 415, 449
 replenish...47, 52, 107, 114
 reproof27, 29, 30, 32, 33, 101,
 104, 118, 121, 175, 200,
 237, 238, 264, 267, 276,
 298, 395, 432, 437
 reputation.101, 103, 190, 196,
 276, 291, 310, 314, 321,
 351, 355, 461
 require...2, 3, 4, 19, 22, 31, 35,
 38, 43, 46, 58, 61, 63, 65,
 69, 70, 74, 77, 81, 84, 87,
 89, 93, 96, 99, 104, 107,
 114, 131, 140, 141, 142,
 144, 147, 152, 155, 157,
 160, 161, 166, 169, 170,
 175, 176, 180, 183, 186,
 187, 196, 197, 200, 201,
 207, 212, 215, 221, 224,
 226, 230, 238, 241, 243,
 246, 248, 253, 259, 267,
 276, 283, 293, 298, 314,
 320, 324, 326, 330, 331,
 333, 334, 336, 338, 339,
 353, 356, 358, 381, 385,
 395, 398, 401, 403, 404,
 408, 412, 415, 420, 421,
 422, 425, 428, 439, 445,
 453, 456, 458, 464
 respect...10, 13, 29, 48, 66, 86,
 94, 98, 101, 117, 128, 135,

- 145, 158, 160, 190, 204,
231, 238, 242, 245, 249,
257, 258, 292, 298, 319,
321, 327, 350, 366, 387,
399, 428, 433, 450
respect of persons...387, 428
responsibility...36, 50, 69, 70,
73, 89, 98, 107, 109, 110,
112, 113, 114, 129, 136,
160, 165, 168, 175, 181,
204, 228, 230, 237, 244,
255, 271, 284, 286, 362,
366, 375, 389, 423, 431,
433, 440, 464
responsive...8, 17, 69, 71, 83,
111, 113, 130, 161, 165,
184, 190, 204, 229, 280,
286, 375, 461, 464
restoration...23, 123, 124, 233,
258
reveal 8, 34, 35, 39, 59, 72, 91,
93, 100, 115, 130, 138,
144, 147, 171, 173, 180,
188, 189, 193, 205, 212,
213, 214, 216, 219, 226,
228, 229, 246, 253, 263,
269, 281, 296, 297, 303,
306, 311, 313, 314, 331,
332, 336, 340, 342, 360,
365, 369, 382, 392, 394,
410, 416, 420, 440, 458
revenge 77, 124, 172, 253, 263,
275, 335, 337, 338, 365,
386, 412, 435, 441
revenue...143, 146, 265, 282,
317, 423, 464
revolutionary...92, 117
revulsion...141, 402
reward 2, 75, 83, 87, 119, 190,
191, 192, 210, 220, 231,
232, 300, 347, 357, 384,
386, 389, 397, 398
riches 2, 64, 66, 143, 146, 148,
174, 184, 190, 196, 209,
227, 257, 322, 355, 357,
363, 369, 381, 419, 445
riddles...9
righteousness...5, 10, 29, 33,
42, 45, 51, 53, 54, 67, 77,
90, 92, 114, 132, 135, 136,
139, 143, 146, 147, 166,
168, 169, 172, 173, 175,
176, 177, 178, 179, 184,
185, 187, 191, 192, 193,
194, 196, 198, 202, 203,
205, 206, 207, 209, 210,
212, 213, 219, 221, 222,
226, 228, 229, 237, 240,
241, 243, 244, 250, 254,
261, 265, 266, 272, 275,
281, 283, 286, 292, 304,
310, 331, 336, 345, 349,
358, 375, 376, 381, 384,
388, 393, 399, 402, 410,
421, 422, 423, 424, 425,
431, 432, 434, 437, 442,
462
righteousness, inherited...147
rock-badgers...452
Rocky Mountains...53
rod 173, 242, 245, 359, 362,
372, 402, 403, 419, 437
Roman Catholic...37
romantic...140, 299
Rome...37, 334
rotten apple...247
sacraments...37
safe...36, 42, 69, 72, 160, 171,
189, 203, 205, 258, 259,
310, 329, 354, 382, 396,
413, 427, 441, 456, 459
salvation 2, 11, 22, 38, 43, 49,
58, 67, 69, 71, 73, 82, 83,
85, 93, 98, 102, 124, 136,
142, 144, 146, 148, 174,
180, 184, 185, 189, 210,
226, 228, 229, 231, 232,
249, 256, 258, 259, 261,
270, 277, 281, 286, 299,
304, 310, 312, 338, 348,
354, 356, 358, 373, 374,
376, 387, 406, 424, 427,
431, 441, 455, 456
Samuel...283
sanctification...49, 108, 165,
237, 287, 295, 312, 352,
382, 431, 458
Satan...23, 24, 25, 26, 52, 72,
73, 91, 94, 99, 121, 137,
138, 139, 220, 267, 280,
281, 297, 300, 327
Satan's intelligence...139
Satan's way of life...25
Saul...283
saved...6, 7, 11, 38, 39, 54, 82,
136, 143, 177, 184, 210,
224, 229, 231, 254, 270,
279, 345, 354, 355, 427,
430, 435, 464
Savoy Declaration...298
scarlet...461
science...14, 43, 59, 101, 102,
293, 451
scorn...9, 27, 28, 30, 74, 78,
154, 157, 158, 159, 161,
222, 223, 246, 247, 251,
268, 320, 326, 327, 329,
346, 351, 360, 383, 434
Scripture talks...120
secret 25, 74, 77, 145, 159, 162,
163, 189, 331, 336, 347,
371, 394, 412
seduction...99, 219, 220, 377
seeing right...359
segregation...356
self-concern...21, 22, 33, 245,
248, 429, 430, 439, 449
self-confidence...73, 230, 259
self-deception...329, 446
self-effort...23, 84, 93, 303
self-esteem...15, 86, 190, 350,
454
self-help...7, 8
self-importance 134, 141, 183,
290
self-justification...59, 91, 92,
171, 176, 211, 218, 279,
309, 365
self-respect...399
self-righteousness...92
self-sufficient...59, 241
selfish...2, 21, 29, 55, 56, 86,
123, 124, 138, 161, 292,
320, 356, 359, 363, 408,
429, 430, 431, 438
semi-Pelagianism...38
senses...4, 371, 384, 404, 413
separation...10, 48, 49, 103,
147, 307
septre...362
Septuagint...259
serfs...142
sermon...39
sewing...461
sex 50, 52, 64, 67, 107, 129,
131, 142, 161, 162, 433,
451
sexist...6
sexual 7, 96, 99, 106, 107, 109,
121, 123, 128, 129, 131,
140, 141, 155, 177, 190,
362, 377, 378, 433, 464
sexual fulfillment...107
sexual intercourse...4
shame...74, 78, 124, 154, 157,
158, 169, 183, 203, 211,
212, 225, 237, 294, 308,
311, 327, 394, 398, 423,
437, 440
sheep...10, 48, 62, 239, 420
shepherd...10, 48
sheriff...13
shrewdness...6
silver 2, 37, 40, 62, 64, 65, 66,
132, 143, 146, 148, 176,
183, 285, 295, 355, 393,
394, 409, 418, 445
simple 1, 6, 26, 28, 32, 35, 52,
61, 92, 126, 132, 133, 154,
155, 156, 159, 160, 161,
163, 171, 176, 192, 202,
246, 252, 253, 326, 346,
351, 356, 406, 414
sin 9
sin merits death...52
sin's purpose...51
sinner 7, 11, 16, 18, 20, 21, 22,
25, 31, 33, 35, 54, 92, 94,
105, 109, 119, 121, 123,
124, 145, 173, 175, 183,
184, 198, 213, 219, 222,
223, 224, 226, 227, 232,
240, 241, 249, 252, 274,
281, 292, 318, 331, 353,
360, 369, 373, 375, 385,
414, 425, 427, 437, 451,
457
sister...126, 128, 295, 440

- slippery slope.....53
sloth. .217, 218, 220, 271, 310,
322, 326, 351, 361, 374,
390, 406, 407
sloppard.....110, 113, 178, 225,
326, 330, 407, 462
smartaleck.....61
snare. .6, 25, 53, 101, 110, 127,
131, 209, 212, 233, 259,
303, 309, 338, 339, 344,
357, 365, 377, 434, 441
soft.....263, 270, 395
Solomon's wives.....456
Solomon's reign.....1
soothsaying.....61
sorrow. 111, 166, 171, 177, 249,
251, 256, 263, 268, 303,
328, 359, 377, 381
soul 21, 46, 63, 69, 71, 82, 118,
124, 149, 151, 156, 166,
167, 169, 185, 190, 195,
198, 201, 223, 225, 238,
243, 257, 258, 275, 276,
286, 289, 295, 304, 309,
317, 318, 320, 322, 323,
329, 345, 351, 357, 365,
368, 373, 383, 395, 398,
413, 427, 430, 435, 437,
440, 456
souls.....40
sovereignty. 17, 34, 36, 39, 45,
51, 56, 73, 144, 167, 278,
282, 293, 313, 318, 338,
353, 405
space.....68, 150
spank.....144, 242, 245, 323,
328, 372
spider.....453
spindle.....461
spiritual engineering.....102
spiritual husbandry.....103
staff.....362
standard.....9, 31, 92, 97, 138,
141, 168, 175, 179, 203,
208, 211, 216, 227, 229,
309, 385, 390, 403, 407,
440, 446, 451
starve.....3, 123, 167, 242
state.....2, 18, 56, 65, 92, 298,
319, 339, 388
statutes.....3, 53, 81
stewardship.....45, 383, 464
stink.....226
strange woman.46, 50, 51, 52,
96, 99, 101, 106, 107, 118,
121, 126, 128, 334, 361,
376, 377, 415
strife. 172, 270, 291, 294, 298,
300, 301, 302, 303, 309,
329, 330, 349, 360, 408,
416, 430, 440, 454
strive.....73, 76, 111, 202, 221,
246, 310, 360, 385, 394,
438
structures of society.....27
stubborn.....49, 117, 126, 130,
180, 187, 272, 454
study....7, 8, 14, 43, 71, 77, 84,
87, 93, 120, 152, 159, 160,
186, 275, 322, 376, 464
stupid.....6, 28, 29, 161, 200,
348, 402, 406, 415
subjective.....43, 57, 84, 232,
249, 260, 268, 292, 413,
422, 428, 438
submit.....11, 13, 15, 16, 21, 72,
91, 152, 173, 180, 193,
202, 232, 240, 247, 292,
440, 447
subtle.....1, 6, 137, 237, 414
success. .26, 83, 101, 109, 214,
276, 367, 369, 370, 386,
414, 452
succession.....421
superior....4, 88, 117, 138, 139,
183, 234, 239, 254, 269,
287, 293, 294, 317, 334,
355, 426, 453
supervision, without.....113
supervisor.....112
surety....110, 111, 112, 114, 189,
302, 334, 366, 387, 415
sword....22, 23, 96, 213, 369,
387, 396, 449
symbol of God's grace.....16
tapestry.....461
taxes.....20, 21, 218, 241, 350,
363, 370
teach...2, 5, 7, 8, 12, 14, 17, 19,
31, 37, 41, 74, 81, 82, 84,
86, 89, 90, 94, 97, 99, 101,
102, 103, 105, 108, 111,
113, 115, 116, 117, 120, 122,
130, 131, 135, 138, 151,
154, 158, 159, 161, 164,
165, 166, 173, 175, 187,
205, 214, 216, 217, 222,
236, 245, 248, 265, 274,
288, 289, 293, 297, 300,
309, 320, 321, 326, 343,
356, 357, 406, 414, 437,
438, 444, 445, 464
technology.....2, 407
temptation.7, 56, 77, 101, 105,
106, 108, 109, 131, 158,
242, 279, 312, 423
Tenth Commandment.....260,
418, 427
testimony...16, 246, 258, 352,
357, 444, 447, 457, 464
theft.19, 20, 22, 123, 124, 188,
344, 430, 441
theme of the Book of
Proverbs.....6
thief. 19, 20, 24, 114, 118, 123,
146, 205, 241, 242, 287,
400, 410, 430, 440
thinking...9, 17, 22, 25, 43, 61,
91, 205, 211, 215, 275,
288, 290, 293, 297, 309,
318, 357, 392, 429, 436,
454
thinking God's thoughts.....43
Tillich, Paul.....58
timely advice.....273
tithing.....62, 138, 323
to whom it is due.....74, 75
tongue...67, 115, 118, 135, 176,
180, 181, 213, 263, 264,
278, 291, 295, 303, 314,
343, 351, 371, 395, 398,
409, 410, 429, 462
tools.....59, 139, 209, 246
torah.....15, 127, 233, 423
traitor.....158, 184, 235
transcend.....57
transfer of wealth.....241
trap....6, 25, 35, 94, 100, 131,
205, 209, 227, 233, 309,
339, 344, 357, 366, 377,
385, 434
tree of life...22, 23, 43, 46, 64,
67, 198, 230, 264
trespass.....248
trick.....135, 335, 350, 415
trust.....33, 36, 55, 58, 61, 73,
101, 104, 119, 124, 145,
153, 174, 181, 186, 196,
215, 252, 258, 261, 268,
287, 290, 298, 336, 338,
342, 350, 354, 364, 369,
392, 413, 416, 430, 441,
445, 446, 459
two groups.....5, 6
two-edged sword.....99
tyranny.....21, 22
Tyre.....2
unassuming.....6
unbelievers. 10, 109, 163, 335,
442
unbiased.....19, 21
unclean.....10, 48, 166, 236
unconventional.....117
undermine...52, 104, 111, 122,
123, 203, 298, 339, 377,
402, 433
understanding follows
experience.....119
uneducated.....443
unequal.....44
unequally yoked.....442
unfair 19, 21, 25, 134, 191, 194,
359, 435
unfaithful...3, 5, 83, 124, 162,
185, 189, 199, 206, 246,
357, 369, 396, 410
universal...2, 34, 64, 133, 134,
206, 218, 223, 249, 341
unmarried.....12, 161
unpretentious.....6
unqualified.....2
unrepentant sinners.173, 185,
229, 240, 299, 342, 457
unrighteous.....7, 10, 25, 177,
187, 265, 282, 359, 369,

- 442
 unsaved.....6, 38, 158, 165
 usurp.....56, 451
 vanity.....22, 25, 50, 135, 171,
 208, 209, 230, 231, 343,
 352, 359, 395, 428, 434,
 445, 463
 vindictive.....144
 violence.....76, 77, 90, 92, 93,
 170, 172, 178, 187, 205,
 223, 224, 275, 291, 324,
 366, 380, 385, 404, 409,
 427
 virgin.....6, 131, 156, 451, 459
 virtual wisdom.....6
 virtue.....19, 57, 138, 168, 186,
 204, 205, 459
 virtuous woman.....203, 458
 vomit.....371, 387, 396, 405
 wages of sin.....457
 war.....21, 167, 233, 240, 336,
 382, 396, 445
 watershed.....53, 423
 weakness...6, 11, 73, 131, 200,
 204, 274, 315, 319, 356,
 365, 381, 414, 452, 453
 wealth...2, 18, 62, 76, 88, 100,
 103, 104, 106, 122, 142,
 146, 148, 166, 169, 174,
 176, 177, 184, 190, 194,
 196, 197, 209, 220, 228,
 230, 240, 250, 253, 255,
 257, 259, 265, 270, 294,
 310, 318, 322, 343, 348,
 355, 358, 363, 369, 370,
 381, 386, 413, 419, 423,
 425, 428, 429, 433, 434,
 446, 456, 459, 461
 well-being.....14, 29, 62, 166,
 276, 413, 434, 461
 well-spoken fools.....297
 wellspring.....259, 288, 308
 Westminster Confession..298
 wheat.....10, 330, 419
 whirlwind.....27, 30, 178
 whole16, 20, 71, 187, 197, 214,
 233, 236, 293, 312, 317,
 392, 410, 418, 427
 whore.....50, 162, 376
 wicked...17, 46, 49, 50, 51, 54,
 69, 74, 76, 77, 86, 90, 91,
 93, 94, 106, 114, 115, 118,
 129, 132, 134, 139, 149,
 154, 157, 166, 168, 169,
 170, 172, 174, 176, 178,
 179, 181, 184, 185, 187,
 191, 193, 198, 202, 203,
 205, 206, 207, 209, 210,
 215, 220, 221, 225, 227,
 228, 229, 235, 236, 243,
 250, 253, 254, 261, 265,
 267, 274, 275, 280, 284,
 295, 299, 301, 303, 304,
 308, 309, 327, 332, 339,
 343, 344, 345, 346, 348,
 351, 353, 359, 382, 384,
 385, 387, 388, 393, 399,
 409, 421, 422, 424, 425,
 426, 431, 432, 434, 436,
 437, 441, 442, 451
 wicked mind.....351
 widow.....273, 274, 456
 wife.4, 15, 28, 50, 60, 99, 106,
 108, 118, 124, 128, 155,
 165, 186, 202, 204, 257,
 315, 321, 416, 451, 459,
 461, 463, 464
 willful...34, 78, 161, 163, 168,
 224, 231, 242, 344, 351,
 352, 382, 432
 willing...13, 17, 18, 35, 63, 143,
 152, 229, 287, 343
 wine....9, 60, 63, 90, 92, 154,
 156, 329, 374, 378, 456,
 457
 wink.....114, 116, 171
 wisdom.....2
 wisecre.....61
 witch of Endor.....283
 witchcraft.....282
 Withhold.....73, 75, 194, 195,
 224, 372
 witty inventions.....137, 140
 woe.....3, 236, 377, 378
 woman of ability.....460
 women.....12, 14, 50, 99, 100,
 101, 106, 107, 121, 128,
 129, 155, 156, 161, 244,
 257, 322, 345, 349, 361,
 378, 384, 406, 415, 420,
 455, 462, 463
 work.....351, 369
 works-righteousness...37, 38,
 62, 119, 152, 196, 254,
 279, 356, 376, 427, 430
 world...3, 6, 12, 22, 26, 35, 47,
 62, 67, 72, 73, 76, 77, 85,
 91, 97, 113, 117, 119, 135,
 148, 150, 152, 156, 158,
 166, 174, 177, 178, 186,
 188, 201, 204, 215, 229,
 233, 235, 247, 249, 250,
 255, 259, 265, 270, 280,
 281, 284, 286, 290, 296,
 299, 307, 312, 318, 319,
 353, 354, 356, 358, 360,
 362, 374, 375, 380, 388,
 402, 411, 414, 423, 424,
 439, 448, 452
 World Trade Center.....218
 worldly...3, 4, 6, 97, 138, 147,
 166, 169, 174, 184, 185,
 194, 196, 197, 207, 209,
 230, 247, 250, 270, 276,
 286, 318, 350, 354, 358,
 386
 worldly wisdom.....6, 138
 worldview.....81
 wrong action.....52, 186
 wrong desire.....26, 52
 yoke.....57
 yoke, unequal.....10
 young man 1, 6, 12, 37, 50, 93,
 96, 99, 101, 121, 126, 128,
 129, 131, 154, 155, 156,
 162, 322, 332, 340, 372,
 376, 384, 437, 464

SCRIPTURE INDEX

OLD TESTAMENT

Genesis 1:1.....	85	Numbers 5:14-30.....	412	Psalms 57:6.....	410
Genesis 1:3.....	233	Numbers 8:14.....	48	Psalms 69:2.....	308
Genesis 1:21.....	102	Numbers 16:21.....	48	Psalms 69:14.....	308
Genesis 1:22.....	107	Deuteronomy 4:24.....	41	Psalms 81:12.....	415
Genesis 1:28....	47, 52, 71, 114, 296, 315	Deuteronomy 5:21.....	225	Psalms 90:10.....	381
Genesis 1:31.....	137, 280	Deuteronomy 6:4-9.....	151	Psalms 101:3.....	280
Genesis 2:9....	43, 67, 76, 231, 264	Deuteronomy 11:1-8.....	4	Psalms 101:8.....	387
Genesis 2:15.....	45	Deuteronomy 14:2.....	143	Psalms 111:10.....	33
Genesis 2:17....	23, 34, 42, 43, 267	Deuteronomy 16:19.....	135	Psalms 111:10.....	85
Genesis 2:20.....	52	Deuteronomy 26:18.....	143	Psalms 119:51.....	9
Genesis 3:1. 137, 138, 139, 414		Deuteronomy 28:1-2.....	53	Psalms 127:2.....	257
Genesis 3:5....	23, 24, 26, 117	Deuteronomy 28:15.....	53	Psalms 132:9.....	462
Genesis 3:6.....	25, 297	Deuteronomy 28:20.....	387	Psalms 135:4.....	143
Genesis 3:14.....	401, 402	Deuteronomy 32:15-43....	380	Psalms 145:20.....	387
Genesis 3:16.....	15	Deuteronomy 34:9.....	2	Proverbs 1:1.....	46, 404
Genesis 3:16-17.....	256	1 Samuel 2:7-8.....	296	Proverbs 1:1-4.....	1
Genesis 3:18.....	357	1 Samuel 8:5-ff.....	453	Proverbs 1:5-7.....	7
Genesis 3:19.....	114	1 Samuel 28:6-20.....	283	Proverbs 1:761, 140, 252, 270, 277, 357, 362, 387, 463	
Genesis 3:24.....	22	2 Samuel 14:20.....	2	Proverbs 1:8.....	98
Genesis 4:1.....	4, 60	1 Kings 8:53.....	48	Proverbs 1:8-9.....	12
Genesis 6:5.....	91	1 Kings 11:3.....	456	Proverbs 1:10.....	18
Genesis 6:8.....	234	1 Kings 11:4.....	456	Proverbs 1:10-16.....	16
Genesis 7:11.....	68	1 Kings 12:19.....	206	Proverbs 1:13.....	146
Genesis 9:1.....	114	2 Kings 18:3.....	392	Proverbs 1:15-19.....	22
Genesis 9:6.....	427	2 Kings 18:4.....	392	Proverbs 1:19.....	26
Genesis 12:1.....	181	2 Chronicles 29:3-36....	392	Proverbs 1:20-28.....	27
Genesis 21:22-34.....	385	Job 27:4.....	135	Proverbs 1:22.....	268
Genesis 30:41.....	102	Job 29:14.....	462	Proverbs 1:28-33.....	32
Genesis 32:12.....	47	Psalms 1:6.....	442	Proverbs 1:31.....	35, 108
Exodus 12:49.....	440	Psalms 7:15.....	108, 410	Proverbs 2:1-5.....	37
Exodus 19:5.....	143	Psalms 9:5.....	387	Proverbs 2:6.....	43
Exodus 20:12.....	337	Psalms 9:15.....	108	Proverbs 2:6-9.....	42
Exodus 20:16.....	389, 396	Psalms 12:2.....	352, 434	Proverbs 2:8.....	45
Exodus 20:17.....	427	Psalms 14:1.....	332	Proverbs 2:10-17.....	46
Exodus 25:2.....	142	Psalms 19:1.....	136	Proverbs 2:17-22.....	51
Exodus 28:3.....	2	Psalms 37:23.....	60	Proverbs 3:1-5.....	55
Exodus 31:3.....	2	Psalms 37:38.....	387	Proverbs 3:5.....	369
Exodus 31:6.....	2	Psalms 50:6.....	136	Proverbs 3:6-12.....	60
Exodus 32:9.....	432	Psalms 52:2.....	409	Proverbs 3:7....	403, 407, 448
Leviticus 15:31.....	48			Proverbs 3:9.....	146
Leviticus 19:18.....	337, 427			Proverbs 3:13-20.....	64

Proverbs 4:7.....	276	Proverbs 11:9.....	186	Proverbs 13:15.....	234
Proverbs 4:7-14.....	86	Proverbs 11:10.....	187	Proverbs 13:16.....	235
Proverbs 4:14-27.....	90	Proverbs 11:11.....	188	Proverbs 13:17.....	235
Proverbs 4:20.....	96, 98	Proverbs 11:12.....	188	Proverbs 13:18.....	237, 264
Proverbs 5:1.....	96	Proverbs 11:13.....	189	Proverbs 13:19.....	238
Proverbs 5:1-8.....	96	Proverbs 11:14...189, 211, 272		Proverbs 13:20.....	103, 239
Proverbs 5:9-14.....	101	Proverbs 11:15...189, 302, 415		Proverbs 13:21.....	240
Proverbs 5:15-23.....	106	Proverbs 11:16.....	190	Proverbs 13:22.....	240
Proverbs 6:1.....	415	Proverbs 11:17.....	190	Proverbs 13:23.....	241
Proverbs 6:1-2.....	302, 366	Proverbs 11:18.....	191	Proverbs 13:24, 242, 245, 328,	
Proverbs 6:1-11.....	110	Proverbs 11:19.....	191	402	
Proverbs 6:9-10.....	351	Proverbs 11:20.....	192	Proverbs 13:25.....	243
Proverbs 6:12-19.....	115	Proverbs 11:21.....	192	Proverbs 14:1.....	244
Proverbs 6:20-35.....	119	Proverbs 11:22.....	193	Proverbs 14:2.....	244
Proverbs 6:32.....	156	Proverbs 11:23.....	193	Proverbs 14:3.....	245
Proverbs 6:33.....	124	Proverbs 11:24.....	194	Proverbs 14:4.....	245
Proverbs 7:1-27.....	127	Proverbs 11:25.....195, 323		Proverbs 14:5.....	246
Proverbs 8:1-11.....	132	Proverbs 11:26.....	195	Proverbs 14:6.....	246
Proverbs 8:10.....	270	Proverbs 11:27.....	196	Proverbs 14:7.....	247
Proverbs 8:12-16.....	137	Proverbs 11:28.....	196	Proverbs 14:8.....	248, 269
Proverbs 8:13...270, 277, 343		Proverbs 11:29.....	197	Proverbs 14:9.....	248
Proverbs 8:14.....	211	Proverbs 11:30.....	67, 198	Proverbs 14:10.....	249
Proverbs 8:17-21.....	143	Proverbs 11:31.....	198	Proverbs 14:11.....	250
Proverbs 8:22-36.....	149	Proverbs 12:1.....	200	Proverbs 14:12.....	250, 336
Proverbs 9:1-9.....	154	Proverbs 12:2.....	202	Proverbs 14:13.....	251
Proverbs 9:6.....	276	Proverbs 12:3.....	203	Proverbs 14:14.....	251
Proverbs 9:7-8.....	268	Proverbs 12:4.....	203	Proverbs 14:15.....	252
Proverbs 9:10-18.....	159	Proverbs 12:5.....	205	Proverbs 14:16.....	252
Proverbs 10:1...164, 271, 373		Proverbs 12:6.....	205	Proverbs 14:17.....	253
Proverbs 10:2.....	166	Proverbs 12:7.....	206	Proverbs 14:18.....	253
Proverbs 10:4.....	169	Proverbs 12:8.....	206	Proverbs 14:19.....	254
Proverbs 10:5.....	169	Proverbs 12:9.....	207	Proverbs 14:20.....	254, 318
Proverbs 10:6.....	170	Proverbs 12:10.....	207	Proverbs 14:21.....	255
Proverbs 10:7.....	170	Proverbs 12:11.....	208	Proverbs 14:22.....	256
Proverbs 10:8.....	170	Proverbs 12:12.....	209	Proverbs 14:23.....	256
Proverbs 10:9.....	171	Proverbs 12:13.....	209	Proverbs 14:24.....	257
Proverbs 10:10.....	171	Proverbs 12:14.....	210	Proverbs 14:25.....	257
Proverbs 10:11.....	172	Proverbs 12:15...211, 336, 403,		Proverbs 14:26.....	258
Proverbs 10:12.....	172	406, 407, 448		Proverbs 14:27.....	259
Proverbs 10:13.....	173	Proverbs 12:16.....	211	Proverbs 14:28.....	259
Proverbs 10:14.....	174	Proverbs 12:17.....	212	Proverbs 14:29...260, 275, 324	
Proverbs 10:15.....	174	Proverbs 12:18.....	213	Proverbs 14:30.....	260
Proverbs 10:16.....	174	Proverbs 12:19.....	213	Proverbs 14:31.....	261
Proverbs 10:17.....	175	Proverbs 12:20.....	214	Proverbs 14:32.....	261
Proverbs 10:18.....	175	Proverbs 12:21.....	215	Proverbs 14:33.....	261
Proverbs 10:19.....	176, 224	Proverbs 12:22.....	216, 332	Proverbs 15:1.....	263, 270
Proverbs 10:20.....	176	Proverbs 12:23.....	216	Proverbs 15:2.....	263
Proverbs 10:21.....	176	Proverbs 12:24.....	217	Proverbs 15:3.....	263, 361
Proverbs 10:22.....	177	Proverbs 12:25.....	218	Proverbs 15:4.....	67, 264
Proverbs 10:23.....	177	Proverbs 12:26.....	219	Proverbs 15:5.....	264
Proverbs 10:24.....	178	Proverbs 12:27.....	220	Proverbs 15:6.....	265
Proverbs 10:25.....	178	Proverbs 12:28.....	221	Proverbs 15:7.....	265
Proverbs 10:26.....	178	Proverbs 13:1.....	222	Proverbs 15:8.....	265, 352
Proverbs 10:27.....	179	Proverbs 13:2.....	223	Proverbs 15:9.....	266
Proverbs 10:29.....	179	Proverbs 13:3.....	224	Proverbs 15:10.....	267
Proverbs 10:30.....	179	Proverbs 13:4.....	225	Proverbs 15:11.....	267
Proverbs 10:31.....	180	Proverbs 13:5.....	225	Proverbs 15:12.....	268
Proverbs 10:32.....	181	Proverbs 13:6.....	226	Proverbs 15:13.....	268
Proverbs 11:1.....	183, 191	Proverbs 13:7.....	227	Proverbs 15:14.....	268
Proverbs 11:2.....	183	Proverbs 13:8.....	227	Proverbs 15:15.....	269
Proverbs 11:3.....	184	Proverbs 13:9.....	228	Proverbs 15:16...270, 282, 317	
Proverbs 11:4.....	146, 184	Proverbs 13:10.....	229	Proverbs 15:17.....	270
Proverbs 11:5.....	184	Proverbs 13:11.....	230	Proverbs 15:18.....	270, 275
Proverbs 11:6.....	185	Proverbs 13:12.....	230	Proverbs 15:19.....	271
Proverbs 11:7.....	185	Proverbs 13:13.....	231	Proverbs 15:20.....	271, 373
Proverbs 11:8.....	185	Proverbs 13:14.....	233	Proverbs 15:21.....	272

Proverbs 15:22.....	272	Proverbs 17:20.....	303	Proverbs 20:4.....	330
Proverbs 15:23.....	272	Proverbs 17:21.....	303	Proverbs 20:5.....	330
Proverbs 15:24.....	273	Proverbs 17:22.....	304	Proverbs 20:6.....	330
Proverbs 15:25.....	273	Proverbs 17:23.....	304	Proverbs 20:7.....	331
Proverbs 15:26.....	274	Proverbs 17:24.....	304	Proverbs 20:8.....	331
Proverbs 15:27.....	274	Proverbs 17:25.....	305	Proverbs 20:9.....	331
Proverbs 15:28.....	275	Proverbs 17:26.....	305	Proverbs 20:10.....	332, 338
Proverbs 15:29.....	275	Proverbs 17:27.....	305	Proverbs 20:11.....	332
Proverbs 15:30.....	276	Proverbs 17:28.....	306, 309	Proverbs 20:12.....	332
Proverbs 15:31.....	276	Proverbs 18:1.....	307	Proverbs 20:13.....	333
Proverbs 15:32.....	276	Proverbs 18:2.....	307	Proverbs 20:14.....	334
Proverbs 15:33.....	277	Proverbs 18:3.....	308	Proverbs 20:15.....	334
Proverbs 16:1.....	278, 282	Proverbs 18:4.....	308	Proverbs 20:16.....	334, 415
Proverbs 16:2.....	279, 403, 407, 448	Proverbs 18:5.....	309	Proverbs 20:17.....	335
Proverbs 16:3.....	279	Proverbs 18:6.....	309	Proverbs 20:18.....	336
Proverbs 16:4.....	279	Proverbs 18:7.....	309	Proverbs 20:19.....	336
Proverbs 16:5.....	280	Proverbs 18:8.....	309, 409	Proverbs 20:20.....	337
Proverbs 16:6.....	281	Proverbs 18:9.....	310	Proverbs 20:21.....	337
Proverbs 16:7.....	281	Proverbs 18:10.....	310	Proverbs 20:22.....	337
Proverbs 16:8.....	282, 317, 423	Proverbs 18:11.....	310	Proverbs 20:23.....	338
Proverbs 16:9.....	282	Proverbs 18:12.....	311	Proverbs 20:24.....	338
Proverbs 16:10.....	282	Proverbs 18:13.....	311	Proverbs 20:25.....	338
Proverbs 16:11.....	283, 338	Proverbs 18:14.....	311	Proverbs 20:26.....	339
Proverbs 16:12.....	283	Proverbs 18:15.....	312	Proverbs 20:27.....	339
Proverbs 16:13.....	284	Proverbs 18:16.....	312	Proverbs 20:28.....	340
Proverbs 16:14.....	284	Proverbs 18:17.....	313	Proverbs 20:29.....	340
Proverbs 16:15.....	285	Proverbs 18:18.....	313	Proverbs 20:30.....	341
Proverbs 16:16.....	285	Proverbs 18:19.....	313	Proverbs 21:1.....	342
Proverbs 16:17.....	286	Proverbs 18:20.....	314	Proverbs 21:2.....	342, 403, 407, 448
Proverbs 16:18.....	286	Proverbs 18:21.....	314	Proverbs 21:3.....	343
Proverbs 16:19.....	287, 317	Proverbs 18:22.....	315	Proverbs 21:4.....	343
Proverbs 16:20.....	287	Proverbs 18:23.....	315	Proverbs 21:5.....	343
Proverbs 16:21.....	287	Proverbs 18:24.....	315	Proverbs 21:6.....	343
Proverbs 16:22.....	288	Proverbs 19:1.....	317, 423	Proverbs 21:7.....	344
Proverbs 16:23.....	288	Proverbs 19:2.....	317	Proverbs 21:8.....	344
Proverbs 16:24.....	289	Proverbs 19:3.....	318	Proverbs 21:9.....	345, 349, 398
Proverbs 16:25.....	289	Proverbs 19:4.....	318	Proverbs 21:10.....	345
Proverbs 16:26.....	290	Proverbs 19:5.....	319	Proverbs 21:11.....	346
Proverbs 16:27.....	290	Proverbs 19:6.....	319	Proverbs 21:12.....	346
Proverbs 16:28.....	291, 298	Proverbs 19:7.....	319	Proverbs 21:13.....	346
Proverbs 16:29.....	291	Proverbs 19:8.....	320	Proverbs 21:14.....	347
Proverbs 16:30.....	292	Proverbs 19:9.....	320	Proverbs 21:15.....	347
Proverbs 16:31.....	292	Proverbs 19:10.....	320	Proverbs 21:16.....	348
Proverbs 16:32.....	293, 399	Proverbs 19:11.....	321	Proverbs 21:17.....	348, 456
Proverbs 16:33.....	293, 313	Proverbs 19:12.....	321	Proverbs 21:18.....	348
Proverbs 17:1.....	294	Proverbs 19:13.....	321	Proverbs 21:19.....	349
Proverbs 17:2.....	294	Proverbs 19:14.....	322	Proverbs 21:20.....	349
Proverbs 17:3.....	295, 398	Proverbs 19:15.....	322	Proverbs 21:21.....	349
Proverbs 17:4.....	295	Proverbs 19:16.....	323	Proverbs 21:22.....	350
Proverbs 17:5.....	296	Proverbs 19:17.....	323	Proverbs 21:23.....	351
Proverbs 17:6.....	296	Proverbs 19:18.....	323	Proverbs 21:24.....	351
Proverbs 17:7.....	296	Proverbs 19:19.....	324	Proverbs 21:25.....	351
Proverbs 17:8.....	297	Proverbs 19:20.....	324	Proverbs 21:26.....	351
Proverbs 17:9.....	297, 387	Proverbs 19:21.....	325	Proverbs 21:27.....	351
Proverbs 17:10.....	298	Proverbs 19:22.....	325	Proverbs 21:28.....	352
Proverbs 17:11.....	299	Proverbs 19:23.....	325	Proverbs 21:29.....	353
Proverbs 17:12.....	300	Proverbs 19:24.....	326	Proverbs 21:30.....	353
Proverbs 17:13.....	300	Proverbs 19:25.....	326	Proverbs 21:31.....	354
Proverbs 17:14.....	300	Proverbs 19:26.....	327	Proverbs 22:1.....	355
Proverbs 17:15.....	301	Proverbs 19:27.....	327	Proverbs 22:2.....	356
Proverbs 17:16.....	301	Proverbs 19:28.....	327	Proverbs 22:3.....	356
Proverbs 17:17.....	301, 319	Proverbs 19:29.....	328	Proverbs 22:4.....	357
Proverbs 17:18.....	302, 415	Proverbs 20:1.....	9, 329, 456	Proverbs 22:5.....	357
Proverbs 17:19.....	302	Proverbs 20:2.....	329	Proverbs 22:6.....	358
		Proverbs 20:3.....	329	Proverbs 22:7.....	114, 358

Proverbs 22:8.....	359, 371	Proverbs 24:16.....	385	Proverbs 26:26.....	410
Proverbs 22:9.....	359	Proverbs 24:17.....	385	Proverbs 26:27.....	410
Proverbs 22:10.....	360	Proverbs 24:18.....	386, 398	Proverbs 26:28.....	410
Proverbs 22:11.....	360	Proverbs 24:19.....	386	Proverbs 27:1.....	411
Proverbs 22:12.....	361	Proverbs 24:20.....	386	Proverbs 27:2.....	411
Proverbs 22:13.....	361	Proverbs 24:21.....	387	Proverbs 27:3.....	411
Proverbs 22:14.....	361	Proverbs 24:22.....	387	Proverbs 27:4.....	412
Proverbs 22:15.....	362	Proverbs 24:23.....	387	Proverbs 27:5.....	412
Proverbs 22:16.....	363	Proverbs 24:24.....	388	Proverbs 27:6.....	412
Proverbs 22:17.....	363	Proverbs 24:25.....	388	Proverbs 27:7.....	413
Proverbs 22:18.....	363	Proverbs 24:26.....	388	Proverbs 27:8.....	413
Proverbs 22:19.....	364	Proverbs 24:27.....	389	Proverbs 27:9.....	413
Proverbs 22:20.....	364	Proverbs 24:28.....	389	Proverbs 27:10.....	414
Proverbs 22:21.....	364	Proverbs 24:29.....	389	Proverbs 27:11.....	414
Proverbs 22:22.....	365	Proverbs 24:30-31.....	390	Proverbs 27:12.....	414
Proverbs 22:23.....	365	Proverbs 24:32.....	390	Proverbs 27:13.....	415
Proverbs 22:24.....	365	Proverbs 24:33.....	391	Proverbs 27:14.....	415
Proverbs 22:26.....	366	Proverbs 25:1.....	392	Proverbs 27:15.....	416
Proverbs 22:27.....	366	Proverbs 25:2.....	392	Proverbs 27:16.....	416
Proverbs 22:28.....	366	Proverbs 25:3.....	393	Proverbs 27:17.....	239, 417
Proverbs 22:29.....	367, 370	Proverbs 25:4.....	393	Proverbs 27:18.....	417
Proverbs 23:1-3.....	368	Proverbs 25:5.....	393	Proverbs 27:19.....	417
Proverbs 23:4.....	369	Proverbs 25:6-7.....	393	Proverbs 27:20.....	418
Proverbs 23:5.....	369	Proverbs 25:8.....	394	Proverbs 27:21.....	418
Proverbs 23:6.....	370	Proverbs 25:9-10.....	394	Proverbs 27:22.....	419
Proverbs 23:7.....	274, 370	Proverbs 25:11.....	394	Proverbs 27:23-24.....	419
Proverbs 23:8.....	371	Proverbs 25:12.....	394	Proverbs 27:25-27.....	420
Proverbs 23:9.....	371	Proverbs 25:13.....	395	Proverbs 28:1.....	421
Proverbs 23:10-11.....	371	Proverbs 25:14.....	395	Proverbs 28:2.....	421
Proverbs 23:12.....	372	Proverbs 25:15.....	395	Proverbs 28:3.....	422
Proverbs 23:13.....	328, 372	Proverbs 25:16.....	396, 399	Proverbs 28:4.....	422
Proverbs 23:14.....	373	Proverbs 25:17.....	396	Proverbs 28:5.....	3, 422
Proverbs 23:15.....	373	Proverbs 25:18.....	396	Proverbs 28:6.....	423
Proverbs 23:16.....	373	Proverbs 25:19.....	396	Proverbs 28:7.....	423
Proverbs 23:17.....	373	Proverbs 25:20.....	397	Proverbs 28:8.....	424
Proverbs 23:18.....	373	Proverbs 25:21.....	397	Proverbs 28:9.....	424
Proverbs 23:19.....	374	Proverbs 25:22.....	397	Proverbs 28:10.....	424
Proverbs 23:20-21.....	374	Proverbs 25:23.....	398	Proverbs 28:11.....	424
Proverbs 23:22.....	374	Proverbs 25:24.....	398	Proverbs 28:12.....	425
Proverbs 23:23.....	375	Proverbs 25:25.....	399	Proverbs 28:13.....	425
Proverbs 23:24.....	375	Proverbs 25:26.....	399	Proverbs 28:14.....	426
Proverbs 23:25.....	376	Proverbs 25:27.....	399	Proverbs 28:15.....	426
Proverbs 23:26.....	376	Proverbs 25:28.....	399	Proverbs 28:16.....	426
Proverbs 23:27.....	376	Proverbs 26:1.....	401	Proverbs 28:17.....	427
Proverbs 23:28.....	377	Proverbs 26:2.....	401	Proverbs 28:18.....	427
Proverbs 23:29.....	377	Proverbs 26:3.....	402	Proverbs 28:19.....	428
Proverbs 23:30-34.....	456	Proverbs 26:4.....	402	Proverbs 28:20.....	428
Proverbs 23:31.....	378	Proverbs 26:5.....	403	Proverbs 28:21.....	428
Proverbs 23:32.....	378	Proverbs 26:6.....	403	Proverbs 28:22.....	429
Proverbs 23:33.....	378	Proverbs 26:7.....	404	Proverbs 28:23.....	429
Proverbs 23:34.....	379	Proverbs 26:8.....	404	Proverbs 28:24.....	430
Proverbs 23:35.....	379	Proverbs 26:9.....	404	Proverbs 28:25.....	430
Proverbs 24:1.....	380	Proverbs 26:10.....	405	Proverbs 28:26.....	430
Proverbs 24:2.....	380, 457	Proverbs 26:11.....	387, 405	Proverbs 28:27.....	431
Proverbs 24:3.....	381	Proverbs 26:12.....	406	Proverbs 28:28.....	431
Proverbs 24:4.....	146, 381	Proverbs 26:13.....	406	Proverbs 29:1.....	432
Proverbs 24:5.....	381	Proverbs 26:14.....	407	Proverbs 29:2.....	432
Proverbs 24:6.....	382	Proverbs 26:15.....	407	Proverbs 29:3.....	433
Proverbs 24:7.....	382	Proverbs 26:16.....	407	Proverbs 29:4.....	433
Proverbs 24:8.....	382	Proverbs 26:17.....	408	Proverbs 29:5.....	433
Proverbs 24:9.....	383	Proverbs 26:18.....	408	Proverbs 29:6.....	434
Proverbs 24:10-12.....	383	Proverbs 26:20.....	408	Proverbs 29:7.....	434
Proverbs 24:12.....	389, 405	Proverbs 26:21.....	408	Proverbs 29:8.....	434
Proverbs 24:13.....	384, 399	Proverbs 26:22.....	409	Proverbs 29:9.....	435
Proverbs 24:14.....	384	Proverbs 26:23.....	409	Proverbs 29:10.....	435
Proverbs 24:15.....	384	Proverbs 26:24-25.....	409	Proverbs 29:11.....	436

Proverbs 29:12.....	436	Isaiah 6:5.....	236	Luke 6:35.....	389
Proverbs 29:13.....	436	Isaiah 6:9.....	146	Luke 6:38.....	195
Proverbs 29:14.....	436	Isaiah 6:9-10.....	10	Luke 12:19-20.....	411
Proverbs 29:15.....	437	Isaiah 10:13.....	2	Luke 13:3.....	277
Proverbs 29:16.....	437	Isaiah 29:13.....	219, 352	Luke 13:5.....	277
Proverbs 29:17.....	437	Isaiah 29:16.....	230	Luke 14:8-10.....	394
Proverbs 29:18.....	438	Isaiah 55:8.....	45, 58, 66	Luke 14:35.....	109
Proverbs 29:19.....	438	Isaiah 59:2.....	424	Luke 15:11-32.....	425
Proverbs 29:20.....	439	Isaiah 61:10.....	462	John 1:13.....	435
Proverbs 29:21.....	375, 439	Isaiah 64:6.....	139	John 6:66.....	424
Proverbs 29:22.....	440	Jeremiah 10:23.....	60	John 8:11.....	124
Proverbs 29:23.....	440	Jeremiah 11:14.....	31, 424	John 8:32.....	14
Proverbs 29:24.....	440	Jeremiah 13:23.....	7	John 8:36.....	14
Proverbs 29:25.....	441	Jeremiah 17:9.....	331, 332	John 10:10.....	52
Proverbs 29:26.....	441	Jeremiah 18:6.....	230	John 12:40.....	72
Proverbs 29:27.....	442	Jeremiah 24:7.....	8	John 14:15.....	85
Proverbs 30:1.....	455	Jeremiah 25:14.....	389	John 14:21.....	85
Proverbs 30:1-3.....	443	Ezekiel 11:19.....	38	John 15:5.....	196
Proverbs 30:4.....	444	Ezekiel 28:4.....	2	John 15:10.....	85
Proverbs 30:5.....	445	NEW TESTAMENT		John 18:37-38.....	135
Proverbs 30:6.....	445	Acts 5:29.....	89		
Proverbs 30:7-9.....	445	Acts 7:51.....	432		
Proverbs 30:10.....	447	Acts 10:34.....	135		
Proverbs 30:11.....	448	Acts 26:20.....	425		
Proverbs 30:12.....	448	Acts 28:26.....	146		
Proverbs 30:13.....	448	Matthew 5:18.....	54	Romans 1:6.....	224
Proverbs 30:14.....	449	Matthew 5:25.....	394	Romans 1:21-24.....	136
Proverbs 30:15.....	449	Matthew 5:28.....	52	Romans 3:12.....	332
Proverbs 30:16.....	449	Matthew 5:43-44.....	172	Romans 3:20.....	437
Proverbs 30:17.....	450	Matthew 5:44.....	75, 397	Romans 3:23.....	350
Proverbs 30:18-19.....	450	Matthew 5:46.....	75	Romans 5:8.....	145
Proverbs 30:20.....	451	Matthew 6:10.....	50	Romans 6:23.....	52, 350
Proverbs 30:21.....	452	Matthew 7:2.....	25	Romans 7:6-25.....	427
Proverbs 30:24-28.....	452	Matthew 7:6.....	10, 217, 262	Romans 8:14-23.....	288
Proverbs 30:29.....	453	Matthew 7:12.....	191	Romans 10:12.....	142
Proverbs 30:33.....	454	Matthew 7:13-14.....	22	Romans 11:7.....	72
Proverbs 31:1.....	455	Matthew 7:16.....	94	Romans 12:17.....	337, 390
Proverbs 31:2.....	455	Matthew 7:20.....	160	Romans 12:19.....	77, 337
Proverbs 31:3.....	455	Matthew 7:21.....	310	Romans 12:20.....	398
Proverbs 31:4-7.....	456	Matthew 11:15.....	8, 131	Romans 13:4.....	387
Proverbs 31:8-9.....	457	Matthew 12:50.....	302	Romans 16:18.....	434
Proverbs 31:10.....	458, 463	Matthew 13:3.....	10	1 Corinthians 2:5.....	97
Proverbs 31:11.....	459	Matthew 13:10.....	10	1 Corinthians 2:12-13.....	97
Proverbs 31:12.....	459	Matthew 13:13.....	10	1 Corinthians 2:14.....	4
Proverbs 31:13.....	459	Matthew 13:14-15.....	390	1 Corinthians 3:11.....	166
Proverbs 31:14.....	459	Matthew 13:46.....	277	1 Corinthians 3:11.....	166
Proverbs 31:15.....	460	Matthew 15:8.....	352	1 Corinthians 6:18-19.....	122
Proverbs 31:16.....	460	Matthew 15:9.....	445	1 Corinthians 7:14.....	166
Proverbs 31:17.....	460	Matthew 15:16-20.....	277	1 Corinthians 9:7-14.....	417
Proverbs 31:18.....	460	Matthew 16:27.....	384, 389	1 Corinthians 15:52.....	49
Proverbs 31:19.....	461	Matthew 21:28-31.....	84	2 Corinthians 3:14.....	72
Proverbs 31:20.....	461	Matthew 21:41.....	387	2 Corinthians 4:4.....	72
Proverbs 31:21.....	461	Matthew 22:37.....	21	2 Corinthians 6:14.....	10
Proverbs 31:22.....	461	Matthew 23:23.....	138	2 Corinthians 6:14-16.....	442
Proverbs 31:23.....	461	Matthew 23:25.....	3	2 Corinthians 6:17.....	10, 48
Proverbs 31:24.....	462	Matthew 25:32.....	10, 48, 62	2 Corinthians 10: 12-18.....	447
Proverbs 31:25.....	462	Matthew 25:40.....	261	Galatians 3:28.....	142
Proverbs 31:26.....	462	Matthew 28:20.....	71	Galatians 5:22-23.....	65
Proverbs 31:27.....	462	Mark 3:35.....	295, 440		
Proverbs 31:28.....	462	Mark 4:12.....	146		
Proverbs 31:29.....	463	Mark 4:24.....	34		
Proverbs 31:30.....	463	Mark 7:8.....	97		
Proverbs 31:31.....	463	Mark 13:22.....	424		
Isaiah 1:15.....	424	Luke 3:17.....	10	Colossians 3:18.....	15

1 Thessalonians 2:5.....434	James 1:26.....135	1 John 5:2.....85
1 Thessalonians 5:15.....390	James 1:27.....9	1 John 5:3.....85
	James 2:17.....210, 354	1 John 19-10.....425
	James 3:16.....291	
2 Thessalonians 2:8.....387	James 4:13-16.....411	2 John 1:6.....85
	James 4:17.....74	Revelation 2:23.....210
Titus 1:16.....210		Revelation 14:13.....210
Titus 2:14.....143	1 Peter 2:9.....143	Revelation 21:2.....67
	1 Peter 3:11.....390	Revelation 21:19-20.....445
Hebrews 12:6.....9, 35	1 Peter 5:8.....377	Revelation 21:27.....49
Hebrews 12:29.....41		Revelation 22:2.....67
Hebrews 13:8.....9	1 John 2:11.....72	
	1 John 4:10.....145	