

Prayer

We give You praise and glory Lord Jesus Christ. By Your presence with us in the Spirit, You know and understand the difficult things we face. You can see the wider picture of our responsibilities and the consequences of our actions, so may we learn to trust You, to receive Your discernment and wisdom, and therefore do what is right. Guide us daily by Your Spirit, and help us grow in the things of God, we pray, AMEN.

Other Prayer Suggestions

Weekly Theme: Fire Services

Pray for all who seek to improve the fire services through studying fire and its effects, and understanding how things burn. May good quality research help to save lives

On-going prayers

- *Lift up to God in prayer the plight of those affected by drought*
- *Give thanks for God's protection for you and your family*
- *Pray for President Obama as he deals with issues in the Middle East*

Meditation

When we, quite rightly, enjoy the benefits of our life and faith,
Lord God, give us hearts which reach out to the deprived.
When we are carried along by the joy of the life You have given us,
May we remember those who are trapped in trouble or strife.
When we are full of happiness in the presence of those we love,
Fill us with compassion for the unloved of this world.
When we are content with our life and grateful for what we have,
Open our hearts and our pockets to the poor around us.
When we are delighted by the beauty of the world in which we live,
Give us a heart for all who suffer its dangerous extremes.
When we are challenged by our Lord to show love and compassion,
May we not be found wanting in discipleship and faith.
When we live the life of faith, may we do the work of the Kingdom!

Bible Study -

- ¹² *A mischief-maker, a villain,
goes around with devious speech,*
¹³ *with a wink of the eye, shifty movements,
and making secret signals,*
¹⁴ *He has a perverted mind, devising evil,
continually stirring up trouble;*
¹⁵ *Disaster will come suddenly upon a person like this;
in an instant he will be ruined beyond healing.*
¹⁶ *There are six things that the LORD hates,
seven that are repugnant to him:*
¹⁷ *a superior attitude, a lying tongue,
hands that kill the innocent,*

- ¹⁸ *a heart that plots wickedness,
feet that scurry into rebellion,*
¹⁹ *a false witness who testifies with deceit,
and one who sows conflict in a family.*

Review

There are two halves to our passage today. The first is a colourful description of a villainous and devious person who creates trouble for others and for themselves. Such word pictures are common in Proverbs and serve as a warning to the young; however, it does have some interesting features. The second half is unique in Scripture, and it describes seven things God 'hates'; it is powerful language and it draws our attention more quickly than the first half. Both of these are fascinating insights into the intentions of the writer of Proverbs, and also to the character of God.

Most of us recognise the caricature painted in verses 12 to 15, which describes someone who enjoys twisting situations to their own advantage despite the human cost. A literal translation of verse 13 would read 'winking his eye, scraping his foot, and throwing his fingers!' These strange words clearly describe shifty signals or bodily movements, the meanings of which were known in ancient times, but not to us now. However, they are the equivalent of expressions such as 'a nod and a wink' or 'sleight of hand', and the translation above attempts to portray what all this generally means. Our passage declares that such activities are characteristic of those who create trouble for themselves as well as those around them. We should keep clear of them.

What is not obvious to us is what is meant by the word for 'mischief-maker', which in ancient Hebrew is 'belial'. Literally, this means someone who is worthless and wicked. As time went by, the meaning of the word changed, and in the centuries just before the time of Christ, the word was caught up in the general tendency to describe evil in personal terms. In the New Testament, 'Belial' meant something like 'the devil!' (2 Cor 6:15). In a similar way, the Hebrew word 'satan' which meant 'adversary' in the Old Testament was used to refer to the Prince of all evil, Satan, in the New! We do not always perceive the way that language changed in the course of time, particularly in the Old Testament; nevertheless, all this will help us understand why it is possible that our passage from Proverbs lies behind Peter's description of the devil, who 'prowls around looking for someone to devour ... resist him!' (1 Peter 5:8). Look carefully, and you will see the similarities!

The second half of the passage describes six things which God 'hates', and 'seven that are repugnant to him'. In verse 16, the words used for 'hate' and 'repugnant' are similar, both expressing revulsion; this is just a poetic way of saying that there are seven things in opposition to the character of God. Some of these are the same as those banned in the Ten Commandments, that is, 'lying' and bearing 'false witness' (6:17,19), and 'hands that kill' (6:17). Of the others, one is 'a superior attitude', which is close to what the Ten Commandments means by 'idolatry'. This is because a superior attitude is shown when someone considers themselves better than or in authority over others without reference to the rest of the Body of Christ, and it leads to the exercise of ungodly power which can be devastating amongst God's people. Then, the plotting of wickedness and recourse to rebellion (6:18) are most evil when practised by those who profess faith. It is often done out of frailty of faith, and therefore weakens the whole of God's people. Lastly, the 'sowing of conflict' within a family strikes at the heart of God's purposes for people as individuals, and also the family of His people. It is an abomination to him.

All in all, Proverbs tells us that God hates those who willingly disobey His will and His laws, consider themselves better than others and also attempt to play with evil and wickedness

whilst claiming to be part of God's people. We can see all of this around us today. Proverbs warnings are timely and just.

Questions *(for use in groups)*

1. What are the characteristics of a 'shifty character' which we might observe today and match with verse 13?
2. The passage describes seven things God 'hates'. Could you add to the list, and give Biblical reference for your opinion?
3. In what ways do you experience 'a superior attitude' shown to you within the church? What should be done about it?

Discipleship

Personal comment:

This Scripture, as many others, contains warnings about wrongdoing and also things which are unacceptable amongst God's people. To what extent should we be involved with rooting out the evil which is around us in Jesus' name? To what extent should we wait on the Lord for His Word about what we should do? What happens when we do not hear anything specific? These questions raise an important issue. To what extent are we aware of the work of the Spirit within us and therefore able to discern how to act when we see things that are wrong? This, perhaps, is the nub of it all for us now.

Ideas for exploring discipleship

- *Read through this passage and explore the many things it says about what is objectionable to God. Pray about them and ask yourself whether they represent anything either in your own life or in that of your church, that require your attention*
- *Pray for God's people, and pray against the powers of evil that stalk our churches, attempting to disturb them and make them places of discord instead of concord.*

Final Prayer

You have given each of us a home, our families, our places of work and our places of worship. May we honour You by respecting these gifts and by fulfilling Your command to 'love one another' within each setting. Hear this prayer, Lord Jesus, and establish Your Kingdom in our midst. AMEN