

# *Turning Away, Complacent or Listening?*

*Proverbs 1:32-33*

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<sup>32</sup> *For the turning away of the simple will slay them,  
And the complacency of fools will destroy them;*

<sup>33</sup> *But whoever listens to me will dwell safely,  
And will be secure, without fear of evil.”*

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Solomon, here in the Book of Proverbs, seems like he felt it his duty to speak to several specifics about how men and women conduct themselves and/or misconduct themselves. That is surely what he does and what he lays out for his readers to take in and consider.

He has just finished in vss. 28 and following putting forth the idea that there is the possibility that one's spiritual condition may result in their calling out to God but receiving no response from Him. For many this may be something that speaks of blasphemy and even heresy. But nevertheless, there are numerous places where Scripture puts forward this idea as something we need to grapple with. Obedience and seeking after God, actively and energetically is something that we, as God's children, are responsible to concern ourselves with. It seems clear that Solomon here (as he does in a number of other places in Proverbs) is emphasizing that, in regard to sinners, those who respond with indifference and mockery at God's indictments increase their guilt (cf. Rom. 2:5) and bring upon themselves the wrath of God's mockery and indifference (vv. 26, 27). Some wait to seek God until it is too late.

Certainly, especially in this modern age, there are those refuse to seek after, let alone embrace anything about the Lord God. Solomon clearly tells us that there will come a time in their lives when they cry out to God, on their own terms, and God will refuse to answer them. Many struggle with this idea. They think that God will always answer anyone who cries out; but Solomon demonstrates that this is not so.

However, there are many, an immense amount who claim to be followers of the Lord Jesus, but whose manner of life and beliefs demonstrate that they are, in reality, unredeemed and those who have refused to submit themselves to the call of God and turn to Him for redemption.

Solomon addressed this group of people again and again throughout the Book of Proverbs, speaking, not only of the demonstration of those who do not know the Lord; but also pointing out and calling God's children to consider how their behavior might be such that dishonors God and possibly even demonstrate that they are NOT what they profess to be.

This is one of large number of passages that does this very thing. Just to begin, it seems clear that the implication in this verse is that those being spoken of are some who the Lord had given their promise to follow after the Lord

and to obey Him, at least to some degree. This sense of the verse helps us get an understanding of what exactly Solomon has in mind more easily.

The Hebrew word translated “falling away” is “*māshubah*” which is said “mesh·oo·**baw**”. It is a relatively rare word in the OT appearing only 12 times. It is rendered “backsliding” 11 times, and “turning away” once. The essence of the word is that of turning away or even turning back; both with the understanding that the object (or subject) is turning from their intended destination; hence it carries the idea of apostasy or even the more modern concept of backsliding. So we can see that Solomon’s idea here at the beginning of the verse is that if one is “simple” (simple or naïve, not knowing the way in which it best to conduct oneself) then when they act in a fashion consistent with this nature will ultimately “slay” them.

As is often the case, Solomon is not talking, necessarily, about physical death. Rather he is using that obvious parallel to make clear the truth that, in spiritual matters, having to do with seeking to be what God wants one to be, acting in a “simple” fashion and dropping away or turning back into apostasy or the old matter of living will result in the “death” of our spiritual walking with the Lord. We should note that even should this happen, the one in view CAN return to his pursuit of God by means of repentance and confession of his sin. But still, the fact of what Solomon says stands before us.

Carrying much the same idea, the second phrase uses the Hebrew word “*šalwā* - spoken as *shalvah* /shal·**vaw**”. Again, it is a rarely used word, appearing only 8 times in the OT. It carries mostly a positive sense - that of “prosperity” three times, “peaceably” twice, “quietness” once, “abundance” once, and “peace” once. But... in a context like the one we find here, it takes on a negative sense - that of having the attitude of “peacefulness or lack of activity when this activity or action ought to present and could be needed or due.

Actually, we could seize on the positive versus negative sense of the word to give us some understanding of Solomon’s intent for us. The one being “complacent” in this phrase is termed a “fool”, a word used a good bit more than the word used in the last phrase. It is a more common Hebrew word - “*kāciyl* spoken *kês·eel*” and translated as “fool” some 61 times, and “foolish” 9 times. Solomon uses it to speak of a fool, meaning a stupid fellow, a dullard, a simpleton, even an arrogant one - given the context he uses it in.

“Destroy” speaks of much the same as we saw “slay” used in the prior phrase. It is a quite frequent word that is used 184 times in the OT. It can mean anything from getting lost, going astray, being physically destroyed, and can even speak of the act of fleeing. It seems that the idea here is that, should one who ought to be giving energy and attention to a given task or pursuit, instead give him/herself over to complacency or being at rest or ease, the result will be that the goal or purpose they were seeking for the Lord and His purpose will, instead, be cast aside, destroyed or he/she will be prevented from attaining them!

We must remember that the case of this conducting ourselves as a simple, young or naïve person, one who can be easily led astray by whatever appeals to

them. Likewise, one who is stupid, brutish or unthinking in a deliberate fashion will, likewise, see all of those things lost or missed because they have veered astray.

So, we are forced to conclude that Solomon has made these things clear to us so that we can see to it that we take this matter seriously and keep watch on just how we think of and treat tasks and pursuits that we take on for the Lord and His service. Naivete and complacency can exact an incredible and awful price on what we seek to do for Christ.

Rehearsing and summarizing our interpretation **we can see that** in the intent of God through our lives and work, should that work be turned away because of our naivete or perhaps fall down because we were too relaxed, lazy or complacent in our pursuit of it, we likely will fail in the accomplishment of whatever goal God has set before us.

As always, the Bible has several illustrations for us to use to clear our thinking -

- See Nebuchadnezzar so intoxicated with prosperity as that his brain reels, and he falls to the condition of a beast.
- See King Saul so misunderstanding and misusing the success God gave him, as, after having conquered Amalek, to destroy his own fortunes.
- See the inhabitants of the well-watered plain of Sodom, tempted, through “fullness of bread,” to evils which called for fire from heaven.
- What shall we say of Haman, whose success in self-aggrandizing schemes emboldened him to take one fatal step too many?
- What of Ahab and Jezebel, and Herod and the rulers in our Lord’s time, who, relying on their impunity, added sin to sin till they had filled up the measure of their iniquities, and provoked their ruin?

Let’s look to the matter of application for a bit - There is a prosperity which God bestows as the reward of virtue, which may be accepted thankfully and without distressing fears; though in all cases the prayer should ascend from the heart against temptations engendered by “wealth.” But the warning of to-day’s text is specially directed against success in evil doing, and should make me tremble if I am prospering in any wrong way. Better far to be found out in my sin, and brought through shame to repentance, than to go on in it to my utter destruction. For impunity, though it may seem to be a gain, is really a deadly snare. The young pilferer undetected goes on (how often!) to become a systematic thief. A few successful throws of the dice, and an honest trade has been exchanged for the ruinous profession of the gambler. Secret sins, unknown to all but God, have burst forth at last into open transgressions, to the irretrievable loss of character. Or, again, there is a prosperity which, not being justly earned, or not gratefully accepted at the hands of God, tends to harden the heart and to lull into a false security. Those rich men who oppress the poor or allow them to lie starving at their gates, while they congratulate themselves on having the means to eat and drink and be merry, - will they not wish one day that they had been rather in the place of Lazarus? To be “let alone,” “without

chastening,” in enjoyment of unmixed prosperity, - what more dangerous than this?

*Far, far from me be the short-lived triumph of sin! Rather, O my God, pluck me from the “seat of folly,” and give me present shame with future glory!*

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