**Psychosomatics in the book of Proverbs. **

by Gerard Feller

The book of Proverbs gives us the practical application of the wisdom of God, Who created heaven and earth, concerning the various aspects of life in this world of confusion and desolation. God shows us in this book His immeasurable grace by relating His wisdom to the circumstances of our daily life. He shows us the consequences of all the ways in which man can walk. God does this, not is the form of a law book, but in a way that speaks about the world and God’s directives. Frequently one reads the principle that man reaps what he sows. Often there are two differing paths to follow. On one side the godly path for human conduct, and on the other the path which man’s heart, his inner being, dictates, and the results of this. For the person who submits to the Word of God the means are given to avoid the path of his own will and the foolishness of his heart. Acknowledgeably, it is clear that the human heart itself is not able to discern the scope of the various activities in which the heart involves us. Proverbs shows us the wisdom of God in order to protect us. Furthermore it helps us become accustomed to being subject to God’s thoughts. God’s directives lead to practical happiness in this world.

**Speak as from the Lord and trust in the Lord.**

Depending on the Lord is the beginning of all wisdom. The fool says in his heart “*There is no God*” (Psalm 14:1) and therefore does not depend on God. Proverbs 10:27 says: *“The fear of the Lord prolongs life*”. Proverbs 2:10-11 reads “*For wisdom will come into your heart, and knowledge will be pleasant to your soul, discretion will watch over you, understanding will guard you”.* Further in Proverbs 10:19, “*When words are many, transgression is not lacking, but whoever restrains his lips is prudent.”* Proverbs 24:13 and 14 gives us a psychosomatic comparison. Wisdom is to the soul, it says, as honey is to your taste. “*The words of a man’s mouth are deep waters; the fountain of wisdom is a bubbling brook.”* Proverbs 18:4. It can contaminate man but it can also strengthen and heal. As we read in Proverbs 16:4 *“Gracious words are like a honeycomb, sweetness to the soul and health to the body.”* Friendly words from a wise heart have therefore a good influence for the healing of our body. It is also more than evident in the book of Proverbs that our conduct and our thoughts have consequences for our body. There is a direct relationship between dependence on God and our physical well being. We find this for example in Proverbs 3:5-8: “*Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make straight your paths. Be not wise in your own eyes, fear the Lord and turn away from evil. It will be healing (medicine) to your flesh and refreshment to your bones.”* It is for this reason that Proverbs 4:10 encourages us: “*Hear my son, and accept my words, that the years of your life may be many.”* In contrast we can assume that living in a fleshly lifestyle, even for a born-again Christian, can result in a shortened life on earth. In the deepest sense according to the Bible, sickness and death are caused by sin. Naturally we are not saying that the life expectancy of a Christian is directly related to his life in the Spirit. The Bible gives more than adequate other reasons for sickness; for example the sins of another, circumstances, natural disasters, unhealthy milieu, that the works of God be revealed. (John 9:3), and as discipline (Hebrews 12:5), etc.

**Psychosomatic Relationships**

In this article we will limit ourselves to the complaints of a Christian, i.e. physical complaints that are the result of inner conflict which in turn comes about through a disturbed relationship with the Lord. Living with God under the direction of the Holy Spirit (Who is our life) however, generally has a large and blessed influence on our body.

Proverbs 4:20-22 “*My son, be attentive to my words, incline your ear to my saying. Let them not escape from your sight, keep them within your heart. For they are life to those who find them, and healing to all their flesh.”* One can achieve inner peace, according to the Bible, by keeping to God’s commands, and the result of this is a long and happy life.

Proverbs 4:4 says:” *Let your heart hold fast my words, keep my commandments and live.”* A born-again Christian who only looks to himself or to others or to the circumstances, and not to Christ will be weighed down by a guilty conscience and that is a burden for the body which is almost impossible to bear.

A person who does not look to or know Christ in his ways, depends on his own old nature, his old heart, from which nothing good comes. In Mark 7:21-23 the Lord Jesus says that what comes out of man’s heart makes him impure. “*From within, from the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person.”* Psychosomatic problems are clearly defined in these words. Biblical teaching about a born-again person is that the Holy Spirit, Who has been received by the believer, leads our spirit, and our spirit leads our body. If we live by the Holy Spirit, then that will have a healthy influence on our body. If we live by our flesh, out of our old heart, then we quench the Spirit’s work, and what comes from the old heart will defile the person and cause sickness. The contradiction between living by the Holy Spirit and a fleshly life and the result of this on our physical being is found in Proverbs 14:30: “*A tranquil heart*(living by the Spirit) *gives life to the flesh, but envy* (a fleshly life) *makes the bones rot”.* Rotting of the bones is seen here as the result of inward tensions of the body. Here is evidence that rotting of the bones causes pain not only in the skeleton, but in the whole body and is therefore also affected by sin. One of the most frequently encountered causes of inner tensions in a Christian’s life is unconfessed sin. Numerous psychosomatic complaints can be traced to this problem. Proverbs 28:13 W*hoever conceals his transgressions will not prosper; but he who confesses and forsakes them will obtain mercy.”* Just as in Psalms 51, 38 and 32, Proverbs speaks about physical infirmities resulting from emotional reactions of a crushed spirit.

**Confession**

God is a holy God, who does not permit sin in His presence. He has no fellowship with the fleshly life in which our bodies are not led by the healthy manifestation of the Holy Spirit, but by our old spirit. Psychosomatic complaints whose cause is unconfessed sin in our lives are an abomination to the Lord, Who knows everything about us. Proverbs 5:21-23:”*For a man’s ways are before the eyes of the Lord, and he ponders all his paths. The iniquities of the wicked ensnare him, And he is held fast in the cords of his sin. He dies for lack of discipline, and because of his great folly he is led astray”.* With this type of psychosomatic complaints, confession of guilt is the remedy that brings about relief and happiness. The Bible gives an example of this type of situation, and the solution. Psalm 32 speaks of a person who avoids his problem and the matter of his guilt: “*For when I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy upon me, my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer.”* (vss. 3-4). It is a remarkable picture of psychosomatic complaints such as we see in depression (“*Your hand was heavy upon me, my strength dried up…”)* Bodily fluids like thelubrication of joints ***,*** saliva, etc. dry up in the body; it is as if the aging process speeds up. It is obvious that this old Psalm brings the physical and inner being in relationship to each other. At the same time it gives in no uncertain terms the way to avoid such situations, or, if one is already thus involved, the way to be radically freed from them. The way of deliverance is always the way back to God. Not that we should be “groaning” about our circumstances (vs.3b) but “*Therefore let everyone who is Godly offer prayer to you at a time when you may be found”* (vs. 6a) The Lord will then be found, not as a judging or vengeful God, but as a merciful God, just as He has revealed Himself in Christ Jesus, the Lord. He will be a refuge for us and a hiding place in our troubles (vs. 7); and even more He will: “*surround me with shouts of deliverance. I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go.”*(vss. 7b & 8). Confession is; saying the same thing that God says about sin. Only by confession of sin can one be justified in God’s presence (be in fellowship with Him) or as we read in Proverbs 15:13: “*A glad heart makes a cheerful face, but by sorrow of heart the spirit is crushed.”* When a born-again person comes freely to God, with an upright heart, in full assurance of faith, with a heart that is cleansed (by confession) from an evil conscience, and a body that is washed in pure water (by the washing of the Word: Hebr. 10:22) his heart then is happy and he rejoices in the Lord, and it becomes medicine for the flesh and soothing for his bones. Just as we read in Proverbs 17:22: “*A joyful heart is good medicine, but a crushed spirit dries up the bones.”*

Confession of sin must be accompanied by repentance and forsaking the sin. Sin may n ever be brushed over lightly because that just makes the problem worse. James 4:8b-10: “*Cleanse your hands, sinners, and purify your hearts you double minded. Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves before the Lord and He will exalt you.”* Not facing up to reality in this matter is demonstrated in Proverbs with an analogy. *“Whoever sings songs to a heavy heart is like one who takes off a garment on a cold day, and like vinegar on soda.”(25:20)* We may not be “artificially happy” while our heart is sad. There is only one solution for a body and spirit that is cast down by the burden of sin. That is going to the mercy seat of God and telling God about our sin in its full reality and burden. And thereby through receiving the freedom of forgiveness restoring our fellowship with Him. This does not happen as a result of “external” therapy such as work- or playtherapy which only serve to temporarily distract the patient with the result that he no longer thinks about his sin. Even an extended period of hard labor or pouring oneself into various futile efforts will not lift up the broken spirit of one burdened down by a heart full of guilt.

**Spiritual laziness.**

The relationship between spiritual and physical problems is repeatedly emphasized in Proverbs. In Proverbs 18:14 we read: *“A man’s spirit will endure sickness, but a crushed spirit, who can bear?”* This verse shows us that emotional problems are much more serious than the physical pain felt by sickness. Painful emotions are generally more serious than physical pain. Too often attention is only given to the results of emotional complaints and thereby not getting any further than “external” therapy. In this way it can happen that what was originally thought to be extraneous actually turns out to be the core of problem. It could happen that feelings of depression which arise from the fact that a person is not performing his job properly are the cause and not the result of this.

Sometimes the deepest cause for depressive feelings is just laziness. Proverbs speaks of this in Proverbs 19:24 “*The sluggard buries his hand in the dish, and will not even bring it back to his mouth.”* Once again in Proverbs 24:33-34 we read a typical description of a lazy person. “ *A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest, and poverty will come upon you like a robber, and want like an armed man.”* In Proverbs 6:9-19 we read even more about this sluggard whose heart becomes confused and contemptuous, conceiving more evil and sowing dissention.

A sluggard gets into a vicious circle, a circle of increasing sin and the burdening of the heart and body. The guilt of neglect, the guilt of promises not kept, the guilt one feels when others are counting on him. This causes depressive feelings to be aroused with the result that one can’t perform his job and the circle is complete. Caught in the bonds of sin.

Laziness is one of the many examples of sins which encumber the heart and body of man. Complaints arise which generally are called psychosomatic and they weigh down and tire a person.

**Conclusion**

In Matthew 11:28-29 Lord Jesus says: *“Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your soul.”* Or as Proverbs 10:27-29a states: *“The fear of the Lord prolongs life, but the years of the wicked shall be short. The hope of the righteous brings joy, but the expectation of the wicked shall perish. The way of the Lord is a stronghold to the blameless.”* For those with psychosomatic problems there is also a healthy path. This person needs a Christian counselor who will make it clear that the proper advice can only be found by God and His Word. See Proverbs 19:20*:Listen to advice and accept instruction, that you may gain wisdom in the future”.* Christian counseling is aimed at help for the whole person. That leads to the fullness of Christ in body, soul and spirit. And finally. Proverbs 4:18:”*The path of the righteous is like the light of dawn, which shines brighter and brighter until full day.”*

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