

TWO ASSOCIATIONS TO AVOID

6 My son, if you have put up security for your neighbor, if you have shaken hands pledging yourself for a stranger, ²you are trapped by the words of your mouth, you have been snared by the words of your mouth. ³Now, my son, do this and deliver yourself, seeing that you have fallen into your neighbor's hand: Go, humble yourself and persistently plead with your neighbor. ⁴Allow no sleep for your eyes; no slumber for your eyelids. ⁵Free yourself, like a gazelle from the hand [of the hunter], and like a bird from the hand of the fowler ... ¹²A worthless person, a man of iniquity, is he who goes around with a perverse mouth. ¹³He winks with his eye, he speaks with his feet, he makes signals with his fingers. ¹⁴In his heart is perverseness. He is constantly devising evil; he sows discord. ¹⁵Therefore, his calamity will come upon him suddenly. All of a sudden he will be broken—and there will be no remedy. ¹⁶There are six things that Jehovah hates; indeed, seven things that are detestable to him: ¹⁷haughty eyes, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood, ¹⁸a heart that devises wicked schemes, feet that are swift in running to mischief, ¹⁹a false witness who utters lies, and a man who sows discord among brothers. (Prov. 6:1-5, 12-19)

Introduction

A long time ago the Greek philosopher, Socrates, asked a simple old man, "For what are you most thankful?" The man replied, "I am most thankful for the type of friends I have had." He was referring to friends who promoted his well being, as opposed to those who would drag him down to ruin. (*Our Daily Bread*, 4/22/93)

Our English word "friend" comes from the same root as the word "freedom." A genuine friend sets you free to be what God intends for you to be. Conversely, there are those so-called "friends" and acquaintances who can exert the opposite influence; far from contributing to your true freedom and well being, they bring you into bondage and lead you to destruction.

Let us now give our attention to this sixth chapter of Proverbs and consider two types of relationships and acquaintances that are detrimental to our well being; two associations to avoid.

I. Avoid Becoming a Pledge for Someone Else's Debts

Verse 1 warns us not to "*put up security for our neighbor;*" we are being warned not to pledge ourselves as surety. Surety means becoming legally liable for the debts or default of another person. By becoming surety, you are legally obligating yourself to pay the debt if that other person proves himself unable or unwilling to do so.

If you ever allow yourself to become surety you are allowing yourself to become *“trapped by the words of your mouth”* (vs. 2.) By the vow of commitment you have taken, whereby you have pledged yourself to be responsible for the other person’s debts, *“you have fallen into your neighbor’s hand”* (vs. 3.) You have subjected yourself to him and placed yourself in bondage to him by obligating yourself to be accountable for his financial responsibilities.

This is what the Scriptures say about the man who allows himself to become surety for another:

He who puts up security for a stranger will suffer for it; but whoever hates shaking hands in pledge is secure. (Prov. 11:15;) once again, *“to put up security”* literally means to become surety.

A man who lacks sense shakes hands in pledge and puts up security in the presence of his neighbor. (Prov. 17:18)

Do not be one of those who shakes hands in pledge and puts up security for debts; ²⁷if you lack the means to pay, your very bed will be taken away from under you! (Prov. 22:26-27)

What counsel does Scripture give?

“Now, my son, do this and deliver yourself, seeing that you have fallen into your neighbor’s hand: Go, humble yourself and persistently plead with your neighbor. ⁴Allow no sleep for your eyes; no slumber for your eyelids” (vs. 3-4.)

There is the note of urgency: act now; take no rest until you have done all you can to deliver yourself from being surety. There is the counsel to *“persistently plead with your neighbor;”* that is to say, approach him with an urgent persistence even to the point of imposing upon him, soliciting him to release you from your suretyship. As an example of such persistent pleading, consider the widow in Jesus’ parable:

In a certain town there was a judge who neither feared God nor had any regard for men. ³And there was a widow in that town who kept coming to him with the plea, “Grant me justice against my adversary.” ⁴For some time he refused. But finally he said to himself, “Even though I do not fear God or have any regard for men, ⁵yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will see that she gets justice, so that she will not eventually wear me out with her continual coming.” (Lk. 18:2b-5)

The counsel is to *“humble yourself”*—for the sake of your future and your well-being, forget your pride. If necessary, if it will be of any help, plead with your neighbor and even beg him to release you from the obligation you have taken upon yourself. Do not delay and do not rest until you have done all you possibly

can to extricate yourself from the perilous situation into which you have put yourself.

The father further counsels his son, *"Free yourself, like a gazelle from the hand [of the hunter], and like a bird from the hand of the fowler"* (vs. 5.) Recognize that your life is at stake—your whole future, your well-being and that of your family—and struggle as hard as you can to escape.

What is the message of this passage? You must appreciate exactly what you are doing, what you are getting into, when you allow yourself to become surety for someone else. You must be very sensible to the seriousness of your action and the devastating consequences that may result from it. This passage is not saying that suretyship itself is wrong, it is simply warning us that it is very dangerous. Note that the Apostle Paul allowed himself to become surety for the converted slave, Onesimus: *"If he has done you any wrong or owes you anything, charge it to me. ¹⁹I, Paul, am writing this with my own hand. I will pay it back"* (Philemon 18-19a.) The Lord Jesus made Himself surety for us: *"Jesus has become the surety of a better covenant"* (Heb. 7:22.)

When you are approached with the prospect of becoming surety for someone, remember that you are putting your life on the line: your future, the well-being of your family; therefore, think very carefully and pray very diligently before obligating yourself to such a course of action and commitment. In summary: do not naively allow yourself to become surety in a casual way, and certainly not for a casual acquaintance. This is not something you want to do as a desperate attempt to win friends. This is not something you want to be pressured into by a plea for your sympathy or by a challenge to demonstrate your friendship.

The counsel of verses 1-5 is this: Beware of becoming a pledge for someone else's debts; this is something you want to avoid doing as the safest course. Beware of those "friends" who are quick to transfer financial obligations upon your shoulders. These are "friends" who do not have your well-being in mind, they think first and foremost of their own selves and are willing to exploit others in the name of friendship. These are the kind of people who will exploit your friendship and expose you to unnecessary dangers and perils. Pay heed to the counsel of Scripture: *"Do not be one of those who shakes hands in pledge and puts up security for debts; ²⁷if you lack the means to pay, your very bed will be taken away from under you!"* (Prov. 22:26-27.)

II. Avoid the Company of a Perverse Man

In verses 12-19 our attention is directed to *"a worthless person, a man of iniquity."* The passage is referring to a man who is morally worthless and wicked.

Verses 12b-14 provide us with a character sketch of this scoundrel. By way of illustration, we may think of it in terms of an F.B.I. poster of a notorious criminal

hung on a post office wall. He goes around with "*a perverse mouth*" (vs. 12b.) He goes about speaking and acting in ways that are morally twisted and wrong; Proverbs 2:12-15 warn of such men: "*men who speak perverse things, ¹³who forsake the paths of righteousness in order to walk in the ways of darkness; ¹⁴who rejoice in doing evil, and delight in the perversity of evil; ¹⁵whose ways are crooked and whose paths are wayward.*"

"He winks with his eye, he speaks with his feet, he makes signals with his fingers" (vs. 13.) He is secretive, deceitful, cunning, as is evidenced by his subtle use of body language; his subtlety is a characteristic of the devil: "*Now the serpent was more subtle than any beast of the field that Jehovah God had made*" (Gen. 3:1.)

"In his heart is perverseness" (vs.14a.) The perverseness that characterizes his life (vs. 12b) springs from his heart; his is "rotten at the core." Verse 14 goes on to say that he is continually devising evil. Note what the Book of Micah says about such an individual:

Woe to those who plan iniquity, to those who plot evil on their beds! With morning's light they carry it out because it is in their power to do so. ²They covet fields and seize them, and houses, and take them. They defraud a man of his home, a fellowman of his inheritance. (Mic. 2:1-2)

"He sows discord" (vs. 14c.) He does so by spreading gossip, starting rumors, stirring up old wounds, exaggerating slight wounds, etc. According to Proverbs 16:28a, "*A perverse man scatters strife all around.*" According to Proverbs 6:16-19, the "sowing of discord" is the seventh, and most detestable, of the things listed that the LORD hates:

There are six things that Jehovah hates; indeed, seven things that are detestable to him: ¹⁷haughty eyes, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood, ¹⁸a heart that devises wicked schemes, feet that are swift in running to mischief, ¹⁹a false witness who utters lies, and a man who sows discord among brothers. (Prov. 6:16-19)

Verse 15 warns of the disaster that shall surely overtake such a man. It will come upon him suddenly: "*therefore* [because of his character and because of his life], *calamity* [or, disaster] *will come upon him suddenly* [without warning, without opportunity for repentance]." When that calamity comes, "*there will be no remedy*" (i.e.; there will not be the possibility of restoration; it will be final and eternal.)

Why does Scripture present to us this character sketch of an evil man? It does so as a means of warning us to beware of such men and to avoid their association, so that we do not become like them and suffer their same fate. Consider the counsel and admonition the Apostle Paul gives to the church at Corinth:

Do not be misled, "Bad companions corrupt good morals." (1 Cor. 15:33)

Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers, for what fellowship do righteousness and iniquity have with each other? Or what communion does light have with darkness? ¹⁵And what harmony does Christ have with Belial [the devil]? Or what does a believer have in common with an unbeliever? (2 Cor.6:14b-15)

Let us be careful, by the grace of God, to heed the counsel of Psalm 1:1-2a:
"Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of scoffers. ²But his delight is in the law of Jehovah."

Conclusion

In the world you will encounter men who, if you are not alert, will exert a very negative and detrimental affect upon your life. Far from contributing to your well-being, they will bring you into bondage and they will bring you to destruction, ... if you are not careful. Give your consideration and attention to the message of Proverbs, as it is presented here in the 6th chapter, a message that warns us of two relationships that are detrimental and even disastrous to our well-being.