

The Bread of Wickedness

by Tricia Berg

For they cannot sleep unless they have done wrong; they are robbed of sleep unless they have made someone stumble. For they eat the bread of wickedness and drink the wine of violence. Proverbs 4:16-17

The full context of the above passage is as follows:

Hear, my son, and accept my words, that the years of your life may be many. I have taught you the way of wisdom; I have led you in the paths of uprightness. When you walk, your step will not be hampered, and if you run, you will not stumble. Keep hold of instruction; do not let go; guard her, for she is your life. Do not enter the path of the wicked, and do not walk in the way of the evil. Avoid it; do not go on it; turn away from it and pass on. For they cannot sleep unless they have done wrong; they are robbed of sleep unless they have made someone stumble. For they eat the bread of wickedness and drink the wine of violence. But the path of the righteous is like the light of dawn, which shines brighter and brighter until full day. The way of the wicked is like deep darkness; they do not know over what they stumble. My son, be attentive to my words; incline your ear to my sayings. 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. Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life. Put away from you crooked speech, and put devious talk far from you. Let your eyes look directly forward, and your gaze be straight before you. Ponder the path of your feet; then all your ways will be sure. Do not swerve to the right or to the left; turn your foot away from evil. Proverbs 4:10-27

Please don't forget that the foolish virgins in the parable Jesus taught needed wisdom. They were told to go to those who buy and sell to get oil for their lamps. (Matt. 25) Actually, we're ALL told to "buy wisdom and not sell it" (and the wise virgins obviously already had, and had not "sold" it.) (Prov. 23:23) God's word is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path. (Psa. 119:105) The foolish ones had no way to see the right way to go. To fear (respect, obey) God is the firstfruits/beginning of wisdom. (Psa. 111:10) As I've said before, using the word firstfruits (as it is actually written in the Hebrew) carries the meaning of there being observable results of the wisdom that has been gained - just like the fruit of the Spirit is good and observable. (John 3:8, Gal. 5:16-25, Titus 2:11-3:8, Rom. 8:13-14, 2Pet. 1:3-15)

All of these examples relate to one another. Those who are wise will read their Bibles for themselves instead of finding time for everything but that - instead of going along with the deceived, blinded crowd. (Matt. 7:12-29, Luke 6:43-49, 2Tim. 3:12-13, John 3:19-21) Notice that Jesus continues on in those passages about [the one who knows the way, or we could also say the Way - John 14:6] bearing good fruit. Empty confessions of faith and claims to know God will not cut it - God is not fooled by them. (Gal. 6:7-10, Heb. 4:12-13, Rom. 2:6-11, Rev. 22:10-15) He wants to be worshiped in spirit and truth. (John 4:20-26)

We're to fight the good fight until the end. (1Cor. 9:27-10:13, Phil. 3:8-21, Jam. 1:12-27, Rev. 3:11-13, Heb. 12:1-4) Whoever turns back is not worthy of the blessings and privileges that await the children of God. (Luke 20:34-36, Matt. 10:38, Luke 9:62, Rom. 8:16-19, 1Cor. 2:9) We can be forgiven of ANY sin that we will acknowledge and ask God to forgive and wash us clean of (1John 1:5-10), but we mustn't put God to the test by sinning deliberately and refusing to heed the prompting of the Holy Spirit and quenching His voice. (Heb. 12:5-11, Rev. 3:19, Heb. 3:12-15, 1Cor. 15:34, 2Cor. 12:20-21, Eph. 4:30, 1Thess. 5:19, Jam. 5:19-20, Gal. 6:1) To do so is to endanger our faith, which is a gift given ONLY through Him, through the hearing of the Word of God. (Rom. 10:17)

Contrary to what is traditionally taught by many, there is NO religious ritual that will impart faith. The Holy Spirit works faith in the hearts of people through the Word. Period. (John 6:63-69) There are no instances of someone being told to do anything but hear (and accept it as truth) in order to believe. Belief always comes before baptism, the Lord's Supper and good works done with the help and prompting of the Holy Spirit. These are the result of salvation, not a means to it.

We've all heard of people (many of them famous) who have recently announced to the world that they no longer believe. What happened? They apparently indulged their flesh by entertaining thoughts about their own wisdom and that of this lost and forsaken world being more desirable and reliable than the eternal truth of God. (2Tim. 4:3-4, 2Pet. 3, 1Cor. 2:14, 3:18-20, Heb. 11:6, John 14:6) We do have the free will to "trade in" our eternal inheritance for the worthless things and "pleasures" of this world, but only fools actually do so. (Psa. 14:1-3, Ecc. 10:2, 12:11-14, Prov. 14:12, Isa. 32:6-8, Heb. 12:12-29, 6:4-12, 10:26-39, 2Pet. 2:20-21)

The one who conquers will have this heritage, and I will be his God and he will be my son. But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the detestable, as for murderers, the sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their portion

*will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death.”
Revelation 21:7-8*

People who make such a horrible trade have not been set free. They're still slaves to sin (John 8:34-36, Rom. 6:12-23, 2Pet. 2:19, 2Tim. 2:24-26), whether that of defiling their flesh (Jude 1:5-8, 16-25, 2Tim. 3:1-7, Gal. 5:13, 1John 2:15-17, 2:28-29, 1Thess. 4:7-8), of loving money (1Tim. 6:10, Matt. 6:24), or whatever else that they love more than God (which is idolatry - Col. 3:5-25). They profess to know (or have known) God, but by their works prove otherwise. (Titus 1:15-16, 1John 2:19, 2:1-7 - notice the reference to the command to love, also see Rom. 13:8-14, Matt. 22:36-40; 1John 3:4-11 - again, notice the reminder to love in v. 11 and also in 1John 3:23-24 - these commands are not about obeying the letter of the law, but the spirit of it. Rom. 7:4-6, 2Cor. 3:6, Eph. 2:15, Col. 2:23) (I don't think it's necessary to go into depth again right now that "love" is according to God's definition, which is NOT "anything goes." 1Cor. 6:9-20)

*If we receive the testimony of men, the testimony of God is greater, for this is the testimony of God that he has borne concerning his Son. Whoever believes in the Son of God has the testimony in himself. Whoever does not believe God has made him a liar, because he has not believed in the testimony that God has borne concerning his Son. And this is the testimony, that God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life. I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God that you may know that you have eternal life.
1 John 5:9-13*

This is not to lump people who do believe, yet have very little visible fruit of the Spirit showing in their lives together with those who outright deny that God exists or those who preach a different Gospel - one where people earn all or part of it by their works - or perhaps one where everyone goes to heaven without needing Jesus. Some will enter in as through the fire with nothing to show for their lives, but saved nevertheless. (1Cor. 3:10-17) But we need to make sure that we don't lose our own reward by being led astray by people who confidently assure us that the Bible doesn't say what we think it does. (1Tim. 1:5-11, Heb. 6:11-12, 2John 1:5-11, 2Pet. 3:16-18) Needless to say, no one will get any inheritance if they are not a child of God, i.e. they do not even believe. (John 1:12-13, Rom. 8:14-25)

Let's recognize who is our brother or sister in the Lord by their fruits and avoid the wolves in sheep's clothing as we were instructed to do, rather than being deceived by them. (Acts 20:26-35, Matt. 7:15-29, 12:33, 13:18-23, 2Tim. 3:5,

2Cor. 11:3-4, 2John 1:10-11, 2Thess. 3:6, 1Cor. 5:11-13, 15:33-34, 16:22, 2Cor. 11:13-15, John 14:24, Mark 8:36-38, Eph. 5:6, Gal. 1:6-9, Titus 3:10-11, 2Tim. 3:13, 2Pet. 2:14-16, Eph. 5:9-10, Col. 1:10, Jam. 1:22 - keeping in mind what has been said above.) And let's read our Bibles - a solid translation, not a loose paraphrase that takes liberties with God's word, and not a "special" version twisted to support unbiblical doctrine.

I appeal to you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and create obstacles contrary to the doctrine that you have been taught; avoid them. For such persons do not serve our Lord Christ, but their own appetites, and by smooth talk and flattery they deceive the hearts of the naive. For your obedience is known to all, so that I rejoice over you, but I want you to be wise as to what is good and innocent as to what is evil. The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Romans 16:17-20

Just a final note for any believers who obsess over every little mistake they make, worrying that they will lose their salvation. That will not happen. According to John (who wrote under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit), we maintain our fellowship with God by walking in the light (remember, God's word is our light) and confessing to God (it is not necessary to have a "go-between" - He hears even our thoughts) when we have slipped. Those who love their sins more than God and are not willing to give them up run the risk of eventually blocking out the Holy Spirit's voice completely. A person who has done this (and it takes time and persistence) no longer has any concern whatsoever for their sin - sadly, they very likely no longer believe they need salvation or that Jesus is the only way.

So if you're concerned about dishonoring God with your behavior, then you have not reached a point of no return. And remember, unsaved people have not "fallen away" since they have never come to know Him as yet - they may be defiant about their sin and hostile toward God right up to the moment of receiving salvation, at which time they are made a new creation. (2Cor. 5:17). If their priorities and values do not make progress toward aligning with God's after that, then there is reason for concern. (Rom. 12:1-2, Eph. 4:11-32, 2Cor. 13:5) Our response to the unfathomable gift of salvation we have received should be a strong desire to please God. (2Cor. 5:14-15, Eph. 2:8-10)

When we have worries, it may help us to remember that John also said: *"There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love."* 1 John 4:18 Jesus took our punishment. (1John 4:10) Whoever believes (present tense,

continuing) will not be condemned. (John 3:16-18, Rom. 8:1) There is discipline of God's children during this earthly lifetime, but not eternal judgment (condemnation). (Heb. 12:5-11, 1Cor. 11:30-32) If someone struggles with holding onto their faith, then perhaps they should examine what (or who) they surround themselves with. We all desire to reach the lost, but we need to be careful not to be adversely influenced by them. (Gal. 6:1, 1Cor. 15:33-34, 2Pet. 3:17)

Also, a person who feeds on junk food will crave more junk food. A person who uses discrimination in their tastes will crave higher quality fare. This concept applies not only to earthly food, but to living bread, which is Jesus. (John 6:35) He said that our eye is the lamp of the body. (Matt. 6:22-23, Luke 11:34-36) If we watch or read things with corrupt humor or filth, then we are taking in darkness. (Eph. 5:7-17, 1John 1:5-10, John 8:12) Even television shows and movies that we think of as being harmless have made it their goal to work in as much worldliness as possible. We can't watch it and remain unaffected, whether we realize it at the time or not - it's gradual (like the analogy of the frog in a pot of water being brought to a boil).

The same goes for listening to the false teachers we were warned against - people who are in it to make a profit (and perhaps achieve fame) - people who preach a different gospel. (1Tim. 4:3-5, 2Pet. 2:1-3, 14-22, Jude 1:11, Jam. 3:1) Saying that we'll "spit out the bones" is like saying that "a little bit of poison" won't hurt us. Our time would be better spent for our eternal souls if we used it to pray, praise God, read our Bibles, and serve God in some way - perhaps by praying for others, making encouraging phone calls or writing notes to people we know are struggling, volunteering for godly charities (those that serve the poor and share the Gospel), etc. (Eph. 4:20-32, 5:18-21, Col. 3:5-25)

Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. Ephesians 5:15-17

As I have often said, we will be worshiping, praising and serving God for eternity - so the best time to start is now. He doesn't only want our fellowship according to a set schedule or routine, in a particular place, but on a continual basis. Believers are members of the Body of Christ. They ARE the Church. Gather together, but remember, the Church is not a man-made building or service. No one goes "to and from church." It's NOT a place or activity. It's us who believe.

Here are some additional passages that are related to the verse for today's layout:

Now we command you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep away from any brother who is walking in idleness and not in accord with the tradition that you received from us. For you yourselves know how you ought to imitate us, because we were not idle when we were with you, nor did we eat anyone's bread without paying for it, but with toil and labor we worked night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you. It was not because we do not have that right, but to give you in ourselves an example to imitate. For even when we were with you, we would give you this command: If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat. For we hear that some among you walk in idleness, not busy at work, but busybodies. Now such persons we command and encourage in the Lord Jesus Christ to do their work quietly and to earn their own living. As for you, brothers, do not grow weary in doing good. If anyone does not obey what we say in this letter, take note of that person, and have nothing to do with him, that he may be ashamed. Do not regard him as an enemy, but warn him as a brother. 2 Thessalonians 3:6-15 (So much for the "Green New Deal" with its guaranteed "wage" even for those who refuse to work...)

Since therefore Christ suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves with the same way of thinking, for whoever has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, so as to live for the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for human passions but for the will of God. For the time that is past suffices for doing what the Gentiles want to do, living in sensuality, passions, drunkenness, orgies, drinking parties, and lawless idolatry. With respect to this they are surprised when you do not join them in the same flood of debauchery, and they malign you; but they will give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead. 1 Peter 4:1-5

For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works. Declare these things; exhort and rebuke with all authority. Let no one disregard you. Remind them to be submissive to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good work, to speak evil of no one, to avoid quarreling, to be gentle, and to show perfect courtesy toward all people. For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another. But when the

goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life. The saying is trustworthy, and I want you to insist on these things, so that those who have believed in God may be careful to devote themselves to good works. These things are excellent and profitable for people. Titus 2:11-3:8

These are waterless springs and mists driven by a storm. For them the gloom of utter darkness has been reserved. For, speaking loud boasts of folly, they entice by sensual passions of the flesh those who are barely escaping from those who live in error. They promise them freedom, but they themselves are slaves of corruption. For whatever overcomes a person, to that he is enslaved. For if, after they have escaped the defilements of the world through the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the last state has become worse for them than the first. For it would have been better for them never to have known the way of righteousness than after knowing it to turn back from the holy commandment delivered to them. What the true proverb says has happened to them: "The dog returns to its own vomit, and the sow, after washing herself, returns to wallow in the mire." 2 Peter 2:17-22

Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds. They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart. They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity. But that is not the way you learned Christ!— assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus, to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness. Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another. Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and give no opportunity to the devil. Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need. Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and

slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you. 5:1 Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. But sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints. Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking, which are out of place, but instead let there be thanksgiving. For you may be sure of this, that everyone who is sexually immoral or impure, or who is covetous (that is, an idolater), has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. Therefore do not become partners with them; for at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true), and try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord. Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. For it is shameful even to speak of the things that they do in secret. But when anything is exposed by the light, it becomes visible, for anything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it says, "Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you." Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ. Ephesians 4:16-5:21

And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ— by grace you have been saved— and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works,

which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them. Ephesians 2:1-10

Finally, then, brothers, we ask and urge you in the Lord Jesus, that as you received from us how you ought to walk and to please God, just as you are doing, that you do so more and more. For you know what instructions we gave you through the Lord Jesus. For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality; that each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honor, not in the passion of lust like the Gentiles who do not know God; that no one transgress and wrong his brother in this matter, because the Lord is an avenger in all these things, as we told you beforehand and solemnly warned you. For God has not called us for impurity, but in holiness. Therefore whoever disregards this, disregards not man but God, who gives his Holy Spirit to you. 1 Thessalonians 4:1-8

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