

"The spirit of man *is* the candle [or lamp] of the LORD, searching all the inward parts of the belly [or heart]." (Proverbs 20:27)

This proverb has been a puzzle to me since I first read it in my bible many years ago. I have puzzled on it for years. And it was not until I began to gain a greater appreciation for the doctrine of man in Scripture that its meaning began to be opened for me. I want to do several things this morning: 1. To open the meaning of the words themselves; 2. To open the major figure in the proverb; 3. To make some applications.

I also want to preach on this theme for the next several weeks before we get into the Christmas season and the wonderful themes available to us at that time.

I. The words themselves

- A. "spirit" It simply means breath or spirit. It is used for the breath or spirit of God, of man, or of any living thing. It is translated breath, soul, spirit. But it doesn't mean the same thing in each of these uses, for it must be defined from the Scriptures.
 1. This verse indicates that there is a vast difference between the spirit of man and the spirit of God, for God's spirit is the master of man's spirit and is used by God, not the other way around. Your spirit does not use God's spirit as a servant to seek out the hidden things of God.
 2. This verse also indicate the vast difference between the spirit of an animal and the spirit of a man. There is nothing anywhere in the Bible that says anything remotely similar about an animal. No animal is in the image of God.
- B. "candle" means lamp or light. Literally it means "glisten" and is widely used in the Bible both literally for lamps and lights, and figuratively for mental or spiritual illumination, as it is used here. It referred to the lamp stands in the tabernacle and temple, and bore a profound religious significance.
- C. "LORD" is Jehovah, the God of the Covenant, who enters into the life of His elect and makes them His Own.
- D. "Inward Parts" means chambers, or rooms, everything inside.
- E. "belly" is the seat of hunger and desire. It literally means "hollow" and can mean the womb, the heart, or the body. The Old Testament often makes the bowels or the belly the seat of the emotions and desires; the New Testament most often uses "heart" in that regard. The modern usage is almost exclusively "heart" and modern translations use the word "heart." The meaning is identical.
- F. Summary. The soul of a man is used by God as a light to search out and explore all the hidden parts of the soul. The man is used to explore the man; the heart is used to explore the heart; God has created man with the very special gift of self-examination.
- G. See 1Corinthians 2:9-12
 1. It is impossible for you or me to know the mind of God unless He reveals these things to us.
 2. But He has revealed these things to us by His Spirit.
 3. God searches his own hidden things by His Spirit, and as His image He expects us to search our own hidden things.
 4. I will preach from this text later; but for now I want to emphasize this aspect of the image of God: that the spirit of God searches the hidden things of God; and as His image our spirit is to search the hidden things of our heart, for we have been so created in His image.

II. The major figure in this proverb is this: God has put his own light in every man, just as Calvin says. This light is the spirit of man, his very life. God has given to man the ability to examine and evaluate his own actions, and he MUST do so.

- A. Man's soul does not belong to himself: your soul is the property of God Himself and He will require it of your hand.
- B. The figure is of a man, with a lamp in his hand, searching through a mansion with many crooks and crannies, holding up the lamp to allow its light to penetrate to all the dark corners.
- C. Thus, the scripture is fulfilled: "For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged." (1Co 11:31 AV)
- D. Man is not capable of doing this correctly unless He has the spirit of God, for the natural man does not understand the things of God; he must be renewed by the Spirit to examine himself correctly.

III. Application:

- A. Even the heathen recognized that man must come to self-knowledge before they could become fully human; otherwise they were no better than the beasts of the field. Man is called to the image of God, but being deprived of God's Spirit by the curse that come from Adam's fall, man could not do this, except in caricature.

- B. The problem is that man because of sin has rejected the standard by which he must measure; he measures himself by other men, as Paul says: “For we dare not make ourselves of the number, or compare ourselves with some that commend themselves: but they measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise.” (2Co 10:12 AV)
- C. But being born again, we now have a measure, and this measure is Christ: Ephesians 3:14-17 read.
- D. But especially at the Lord’s Supper: 1 Cor. 11:28-32 This measure is not your own thought; your own ideas; your own righteousness; your very life is the candle of the LORD, and you belong to Him. The measure is Christ and God measures us in our own consciousness according to that measure. We cannot escape it; nor must we want to.

Conclusion. I have just scratched the surface of this great subject this morning, but will pursue this in the next several weeks, as I said. Meanwhile, let these words season in you. God bless you.