

A HERMENEUTICAL AND EXEGETICAL EXAMINATION
OF PROVERBS 22:6

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Generations of Christians have indeed been puzzled as to the practical outworking of the truths of Proverbs 22:6. The interpretation which has been most widely accepted and popularized is herein viewed as directly culpable for the majority of this widespread incredulity. This popular view basically sees the proverb as a celestial bargain between the creature and the Creator. In other words, if the creature keeps his part of the bargain, God strictly "promises" to keep His part as well. Shallow homilies have dangerously guaranteed perfect progeny if the parent could somehow perfectly and flawlessly train up his offspring in strict adherence to the one straight and narrow Christian pathway. When this "rock-hard promise" seems to fail, the parent is crushed and often blames himself for his youngster's faults and resigns himself to the position of personal failure.

Two main lines of argument clearly demonstrate that this view does not do justice to the intended thrust of the passage. First, the establishment of a proper hermeneutical basis of presupposition as one approaches the proverb is indispensable. The milieu of ancient Near Eastern Wisdom literature, the nature and scope of the Hebrew word מַשֵּׁל, and the literary context of the book of Proverbs form such a basis. Here, it becomes clear that the Proverbs offer wise and morally astute observations of general truth, rather than propounding systematic, fail-safe dogma. This is not to be viewed as an undermining of Biblical authority or its literal sense, but rather as a properly perceived hermeneutic.

Further, an extensive exegesis of the verse yields fruit which will not parallel the common understanding of this proverb. The verse is clearly divided for exegetical treatment into a "Requirement" in the first half of the verse and a "Result" in the second half (the latter being introduced by the adverbial אֲנִי).

The training up of youth is an individualized program of instruction which consistently recognizes the personal capabilities, strengths, weaknesses and psychological make-up of each youngster. When such a program of instruction is pursued upon the basis of sincere dedication and consecration of self, subject, and sovereign outcome, the generally observed axiom of the second half of the verse can be of great comfort as the creature reposes in the wise care of the sovereign Creator.

Accepted by the Faculty of Grace Theological Seminary
in partial fulfillment of requirements for the degree
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A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of several loops and flourishes, positioned above the word "Adviser".

Adviser

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PREFACE

The misunderstanding of Scripture is perhaps the gravest danger confronting the student of God's Holy Word. Whether this misunderstanding is the direct result of careless exegesis, hasty sermonizing, or even the end product of careful and thorough research, the results can be devastatingly tragic. Entire systems of theology, militant denominations and sects, and shockingly heretical philosophies have occurred as a result of the twisting of Scripture, whether intentional or accidental. The proper deciphering of the thrust of any verse, context or subject is the sine qua non of Biblical application.

The sincere desire of this author is to be faithful to the intended thrust of Scripture in a somewhat enigmatic arena. Much improper sermonic construction has resulted from what is herein contended to be a less than accurate interpretation of Proverbs 22:6. Much traditional dogma has been built upon the main line interpretation of this verse and this has brought about an intriguing phenomenon. There is an amazing lack of quality material written upon this passage. Many authors from whom one would anticipate better were found to either evade the issue in its entirety or to take only token jabs at the passage. The scholarly

journal and periodical world is literally at an anemic level in its lack of contribution.

Perhaps many have avoided a thorough investigation due to the skepticism which a dissenting voice might evoke. The popular, though enigmatic, interpretation of this verse has been largely unchallenged due in part both to the King James rendering as well as the popular understanding. Stuart writes that "many a good sermon, and much excellent advice, have been founded on the text thus translated, and one feels a kind of regret to part with a precept so excellent." He later continues by stating that "an interpreter's business is rather to inquire what is said, than to conjecture, however ingeniously or piously, what ought to be said."¹ The tenor of this last statement effectively describes the obligation this writer feels to be mandatory in his approach to Proverbs 22:6.

With the sentiment of the preceding preface clearly presented and kept in mind, may God the Holy Spirit direct the progress of this product and receive all glory to Himself as a result.

¹Moses Stuart, A Commentary on the Book of Proverbs (Andover: Warren F. Draper, 1852), pp. 338-39.

INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Tension

Perhaps an incident which occurred early in the development of this thesis best introduces the issues at hand. The author had the kind attention of a listener and reader with the discussion and inspection of Proverbs 22:6 as the subject. Once the author had expressed some suggestions for a more faithful interpretation on the basis of careful exegesis and after he had suggested a challenge to the traditional interpretation on the basis of contextual and presuppositional inspection, the second party had opportunity to respond. This party thought the effort and exegesis to be quite noble, the interest and sincere attempt at proper understanding to be commendable, yet clearly indicated that, as for his part, he still preferred the "literal" interpretation.

Therein lies the tension. Must the only "literal" translation be the surface-only feelings generated by a perusal of the common language rendering of this proverb? If one answers in the affirmative, he also either cognitively or subconsciously places any alternate approach in a tainted light of suspect theology.

The literal, grammatical and historical system of hermeneutics is here clearly confirmed to be indispensable

to this paper. Yet, the word "literal" will not confine this author to a wooden and cramped style or system. Such a system would refuse to admit the wider presuppositions and contextual considerations (or lack thereof) which are imperative to this subject. God's literal Word uses symbol, allegory, literary device, proverb and much more while retaining its literal foundation. This author recognizes the need to be aware of these facts as he attempts the literal and faithful translation of Proverbs 22:6.

The basic question, then, is whether one must view Proverbs 22:6 as a straightforward, rock-hard promise written in assurance that God will "do His part" if man first does his part. Typically, the verse has been understood as a promise of persevering Christian fidelity on the part of one's offspring if the parent will be faithful in discipline and training. Generations of Christians have been puzzled when they have, in their estimation, "kept their end of the bargain," yet their children stray far from their Christian heritage. It is the belief of the writer that a thorough investigation as is here commenced will not allow such a theory. This thesis will recognize the nature, scope, philosophy and parameters of the proverbial form of Scripture. Much that is latent within that recognition will greatly enhance the proposed answer to the tension at hand.

Statement of Purpose and Procedure

The purpose of this thesis will be to arrive at a correct understanding of Proverbs 22:6 on the basis of a faithful and thorough hermeneutical and exegetical examination of Proverbs 22:6. The author believes this project to be warranted because of at least two major reasons. First, any Scripture touching upon familial standards and procedures can only aid in an era when such guidelines sorely need to be understood. Also, it is herein contended, as previously inferred, that the popular understanding of this verse may not grasp accurately the intention of the proverb.

The intended procedure which will be employed is designed to arrive at the previously stated goals. Following the necessary orientation of this introductory section, Chapter One will be concerned with the establishment of necessary guidelines and presuppositions. An entire thesis could be produced here alone, so some reductive structuring will be necessary. However, such topics as the place the book of Proverbs occupies in Wisdom literature, the meaning of the term מִשָּׁל, and the contribution of context will be briefly inspected. Such subjects will be presented in the order of their relative merit and, thus, length.

Chapter Two, then, will deal with in-depth exegetical matters pertinent to a proper conclusion. Because of the great dearth which the author has encountered here in his

research, this chapter will necessarily form the bulk of the thesis.

Chapter Three will serve as a place where the author can set the parameters of application resultant from the preceding research and presentation. The conclusion, which follows Chapter Three, will be a general summing up and will serve as a brief opportunity to re-affirm the conclusion of the author. It is expected that Chapter Three will be comparatively brief relative to Chapters One and Two. This has become evident as earlier portions of the thesis take form. As each section or sub-section is concluded, the author intends to state briefly that section's contribution to the understanding of the whole. Such precursory summary statements will obviously contribute much to conclusion and application as the treatment unfolds.

CHAPTER I
ESTABLISHING GUIDELINES AND
PRESUPPOSITIONS

The subject of presuppositional hermeneutics as one approaches the book of Proverbs is a field which desperately needs further study. Much material in this area is sadly lacking in a wide variety of areas. Setting such guidelines and establishing working presuppositions is extremely critical to the proper unfolding of Proverbs 22:6. However, much of the research accessible to the student is of little help. A previous thesis on this subject also speaks of "certain recurrent difficulties"¹ as a cause for frustration in exegesis of the passage.

It was discovered quite early that the presuppositional approach of every author had direct bearing upon his interpretation of not only Proverbs 22:6 but upon his entire treatment of the book. However, many issues necessary to a full study of the Proverbs must herein be avoided in deference to length as well as to other more pertinent issues. The original intention of this author was to produce a thesis dealing thoroughly with the overall hermeneutics

¹William R. Reich, "Responsibility of Child Training: Proverbs 22:6" (M.Div. thesis, Grace Theological Seminary, 1971), p. 11.

of Proverbs and then to apply those hermeneutics to 22:6. Obviously, however, the sheer volume of such a project is prohibitive and has been tailored accordingly. Therefore, much in this section will be introduced and established as presupposition to be assumed throughout the remainder of the paper.

The Uniqueness of Proverbs Among Similar Literature

To begin, the proper understanding of the place of the book of Proverbs in its literary milieu is considered important as a presupposition. Here, the reader is referred to an excellent thesis on this subject by Lorne McCune in the Grace Theological Seminary Library.¹

The book of Proverbs definitely does have a recognizable context within a body of similar literature. This is generally recognized and is commonly given the title of Wisdom Literature. Within the Old Testament itself, the books of Job, Ecclesiastes and part of Psalms can be considered as a part of this literary genre. Other scattered portions within the Old Testament can also be argued to fall within this category.

Since the early part of this century, the liberal view has scrutinized Proverbs as a product of borrowing or

¹Lorne McCune, "Wisdom Theology and Proverbs: A Historical and Theological Evaluation" (Th.M. thesis, Grace Theological Seminary, 1979).

editorial compilation from common Wisdom sources. Such wisdom literature, particularly that of Amen-em-ope in Egypt, is seen as the primary source.¹ Many commentators writing since this view was popularized are indeed surprising in their readiness to imbibe this theory. Kidner, for example, seems to be heading elsewhere before he suddenly aligns himself with the liberal position.

Close scrutiny of the wording and contents of the parallels, however, has led almost all scholars to the opposite conclusion, since it is the Hebrew text that tends to be clarified when it is read by the side of its longer Egyptian counterpart. The contention that Proverbs has made use of Amenemope (and not vice versa) has now been greatly strengthened, if not clinched, by chronological evidence.²

McCune aptly points out the negative influence of this pre-supposition.

In particular, Wisdom Theology has had a negative impact upon the integrity of Proverbs. An ever increasing body of foreign materials is postulated as being source material for it, which has resulted in a proportionate decrease of material that is accepted as genuine.³

The problem is odiously clear. A liberal stance would refuse all, or nearly all, uniqueness to the book of Proverbs. Further than just seeing it properly within its literary context, many would be willing to relegate it to a

¹John Ruffle, "The Teaching of Amenemope and its Connexion with the Book of Proverbs" (M.A. thesis, The University of Liverpool, 1964). See Ruffle for an excellent inspection of this tension.

²Derek Kidner, Proverbs: An Introduction and Commentary, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Chicago: Inter-Varsity Press, 1964), pp. 23-24.

³McCune, "Wisdom Theology and Proverbs," pp. 2-3.

position of equality with non-divine, humanly produced literature. It is not mandatory that one follow such a path once he recognizes the definite Wisdom context.

Perhaps the best place to start here is with an adequate definition of Wisdom. A very fine, yet brief, treatment of this subject can be found in Horace D. Hummel's great work. It is within this volume that he comments of wisdom that

On the lowest or most elemental level, it is the "natural law," an all-embracing cosmic order, immanent in all existence and by which everything is ruled and governed. Subjectively, it is the awareness of these universal, eternal norms, and the ordering of one's life and behavior accordingly. From observation of cosmic order follows the advice to attune one's own life to its eternal rhythms. Such a man is "wise" in contrast to the "fool" who tries to be a law unto himself.¹

The present author finds this description to be an acceptable, working definition providing one includes God within the framework. The present day evangelical, so concerned to avoid any taint of liberalism, does not have to see this definition as anti-God or awful if he properly understands it. It is obvious from such passages as 1 Corinthians 1:20 that the above definition without recognition of a Sovereign God would be ludicrous to the Christian.

In its simplest sense, it is here contended that the Wisdom framework of the book of Proverbs could well be called sanctified common sense. When much of the Old

¹Horace D. Hummel, The Word Becoming Flesh, An Introduction to the Origin, Purpose and Meaning of the Old Testament (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1979), p. 388.

Testament becomes difficult not only to understand but also to emulate in one's life, the book of Proverbs and other Old Testament Wisdom literature becomes the common sense, "how-to" practical encouragement. Hummel points out a real divergence between secular and Scriptural Wisdom here. The Wisdom of the ancient Near East tended to cynicism, situational ethics, resignation to unalterable destiny, and eventual fatalism.¹ Conversely, the Wisdom of the Old Testament is precisely what keeps the thrust of the Old Testament philosophy from fatalism. Perhaps this lofty, life-practical characteristic of scriptural Wisdom is what sways the liberal to reject its authenticity and ascribe unrealistically late dates to it.

It is herein contended that liberal, form-critical theology has precariously over-stressed the high place of Wisdom theology and its resultant effect upon God's Word to an unwarranted degree. Particularly at certain eras, this posture has caused some to see nearly all of the Old Testament's poetical contribution through their Wisdom-colored glasses. Such a position has destroyed the unique position of Scripture for many, having reduced it to little more than generic, humanistic philosophizing.

¹Hummel, The Word Becoming Flesh, p. 393.

The fact of the unique nature of Israel's God and religion has been grossly misrepresented by the liberal.¹ The "god" concepts of the pagan contemporaries of Israel were either so totally immanent as to be sheer humanism, or so completely transcendent as to be mystical. Such is not the case with Israel's jealous God.

Consequently, to contend that Scriptural Wisdom literature, including Proverbs, is totally borrowed and entirely non-unique is a foolish position. To assume this position is much like saying the same of the use of electricity or television in any given part of the world today. Rather, Wisdom literature as a genre was a cultural norm, as much as one can be found in the ancient Near East.

Important points can now be adduced in application to Proverbs 22:6. It is clear that Scripture took a common literary form and with its addition of a unique, self-authenticating revelation from God, gave it new impetus. Therefore, Proverbs 22:6 becomes unique as Wisdom and imperative as Revelation.

The Meaning and Scope of מִשְׁלַּל

The purpose of this section is that of establishing as a presupposition a working definition of the Hebrew term מִשְׁלַּל (English, 'proverb'). This will greatly aid the proper

¹Ibid., p. 71. Hummel offers an excellent rebuttal here.

understanding of Proverbs 22:6 as well as establish some allowable limits of application.

It is here presupposed that the Biblical proverbs cannot be viewed as first and foremost theological dogma. This is not to say that such theology cannot be distilled from them. However, this is not their first purpose and a ready recognition of this fact will greatly aid the interpreter. This author contends that just as a study of apocalyptic literature current to John can aid in an interpretation of the Revelation, so can a study of proverbial literature aid in interpretation of the Proverbs without sacrificing their theological integrity.

It appears evident that the often heard and overly simplified definition of a proverb as "a pithy statement" or "wise observation" is insufficient for describing everything the Proverbs (and indeed the entire Old Testament) include under the umbrella of a מִשָּׁל. Scott states the tension well when he queries

How can the same term "proverb" (Heb māšāl) be applied to such heterogeneous materials as the admonitory discourses of chapters i-vii, the theological poem of chapter viii, the moralizing couplets of x 1-xxii 16 and chapters xxv-xxix, the dialogue with a skeptic in chapter xxx, and the acrostic verses about the Capable Housewife in chapter xxxi? . . . How it came about that such various materials were subsumed under the term "proverbs" also requires examination. The Hebrew word māšāl means primarily "a likeness," in which the real nature of something is exhibited by comparing it with something else. It can also mean a "rule" or standard of behavior, or a saying or poem setting forth the mysterious unseen order with which all things must conform because God wills it so. Thus the word māšāl has a much wider range

of meanings than the English word "proverb." It is used not only of short and pithy popular sayings and of didactic poetic couplets, but also of prophetic oracles, as in Isa xiv 4; Mic ii 4. The māšāl is an utterance of truth, hidden meaning, and right order.¹

Properly understood, the מִשָּׁל is seen as only one of a variety of Old Testament expressions of Wisdom literature. Hummel includes riddles, fables, allegories, hymns, prayers, dialogue, confessions and autobiographical narrative within this variety of expressions common with the מִשָּׁל.²

Speaking of the מִשָּׁל and its place in the Wisdom literature of Proverbs, Harrison, in his work on Old Testament introduction, notes that "these writings preserved in one form or another the maxims and observations of generations of sages, and in so doing fostered among the Hebrews a didactic tradition that had its roots in Near Eastern antiquity."³

In Old Testament times Israel was ruled by such groups as priests, prophets, scribes, historians, singers and "wise men," or philosophers. Hebrew "wise men" were usually elders associated with schools of wisdom, who shared their practical views of life and the world with their Jewish brethren.⁴

¹R. B. Y. Scott, Proverbs and Ecclesiastes, The Anchor Bible (Garden City: Doubleday and Co., 1965), pp. 9, 13.

²Hummel, The Word Becoming Flesh, p. 393.

³Roland Kenneth Harrison, Introduction to the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1969), p. 1004.

⁴Irving Jensen, Old Testament Survey (Chicago: Moody Press, 1975), p. 465.

Proverbs 22:6 is such a מִשַׁל as understood in the preceding treatment. Wise, Spirit-filled and divinely inspired sages communicated the distillation of their philosophy of life and how to live it as pleasing to God. To see this approach as an attempt by these men to produce rigid theology is perilous at best, seeing that this would both obviate the meaning and use of the מִשַׁל and violate the presuppositions formerly established in this treatment.

For further enlightenment in regard to the Old Testament מִשַׁל, the reader is here referred to an excellent 1975 Master of Theology thesis produced by Stuart Sheldon Cook at Dallas Theological Seminary.¹

Establishing a Context

The subject of this particular section concerns the contextual framework of Proverbs 22:6 and, by extension, the entire book. Much debate rages over whether and how a context can be discerned for individual proverbs. A study of the flow of the entire book of Proverbs definitely will unearth some contextual connections within chapters as well as among various chapters, sections and divisions. Such a wide study, however, is hardly germane to the specific task at hand. Suffice it to say that the comments to follow

¹Stuart Sheldon Cook, "The Nature and Use of the Proverbs of Solomon" (Th.M. thesis, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1975).

concerning a context for Proverbs 22:6 will not apply equally to each individual verse in the book.

The author believes that the foregoing sections of this treatment have already established the wider context discernible and necessary to this study. The corpus of Wisdom literature, both biblical and otherwise, provides the general context for the entire book. This context is at once one of history, philosophy, religion, life view and a personal relationship to a Supreme Being. Further, the pre-suppositions gained and established from a study of the Old Testament מִשְׁלֵי adds to the wider context in which one must see Proverbs 22:6.

However, a dogmatic assertion of observable context can likely not become more specific or narrow than are the preceding comments. Although Scriptural context is admittedly important, it also appears necessary to admit to no real value in looking for a context nearer to Proverbs 22:6. This author believes it to be wooden and futile to attempt a contextual theory more narrow to that of 22:6 than that of general division. It appears that Proverbs chapters one through nine deal greatly with the subject of wisdom, speaking of its invitation to men, its rewards, praise and the like. Chapters ten through nineteen then deal with the contrasts of good and evil, much of the time expressed by parallel yet diametrically opposed thoughts in each verse.

When one reaches the immediate context of chapters twenty through twenty-two verse sixteen, the writer begins a series of warnings and exhortations. In contrast with the previous format of chapters ten through nineteen, the truths are now mainly expressed by restating or further expanding and developing in the second part of the verse that which has been stated in the first part of the verse. It is within this framework that the particular proverb in 22:6 is recorded.

If determination of a more immediate context is possible, this student admits to a real difficulty in ascertaining it. As has been previously intimated, parts of this pithy book of Proverbs appear as somewhat loosely related, wise generalizations which are often diametrically positioned as to subject matter. Such seems definitely to be the case with the specific proverb in focus.

This section has contributed to the study of Proverbs 22:6 some very important observations. If it be assumed that the immediate context of Proverbs 22:6 offers no ready aid for the person concerned with an exegetically and hermeneutically sound interpretation, then at least two things are true. First, the wider context which has been inspected for presuppositions previously becomes even more important for a clear understanding. Secondly, great care must be taken that the exegesis of Proverbs 22:6 must be prayerfully

and painstakingly precise. After all, the bulk of evidence for any true interpretation will come from that arena.

Precursory Comments Concerning the
Parameters of Application

Certain very clear conclusions can already be drawn from the preceding considerations. The application and conclusion proper will wait till nearer the end of this paper. However, the salient points of a hermeneutical attention to Proverbs 22:6 can here be drawn together.

Conclusions drawn to this point would appear to alter the conservative, main line approach to Proverbs 22:6 to a considerable extent. One cannot, in this writer's opinion, see in the first part of verse six a protasis of imperatival charge concerning parental obligation followed by a quasi-magical blanket promise in the apodosis. Many generations of Christians have been left incredulous when this understanding seemed to fail them. In many cases, it has only served to create self-doubt and guilt on the part of the puzzled party. The concerned Christian community deserves a more faithful interpretation of the truths of this passage.

If it be granted that the context of Proverbs 22:6 is the Wisdom literature as earlier defined in this treatment, it should be self-evident that such a bold statement of doctrinal dogma as indicated above would be foreign to

the tenor of this proverb. This author would also question the picture of a Sovereign God waiting in anticipation on fallible human parents before that God is free to bless or curse their efforts in child rearing.

The very nature of the מִשְׁלַּל as discussed earlier also militates against the main line view. The pithy observations of the wise would better be seen as generally cogent life principles. It must not be written off as godless humanism to view the Proverbs as the product of God-inspired sages who offered their inspired wisdom within the framework of sanctified common sense. One would truly be surprised if he were woodenly to press as theological dogma every single proverb in the book. Some very fantastic and fanatical interpretations and applications would most assuredly result. The fair and God honoring, Scripture-exalting principles delineated thus far must be consistently and evenly applied throughout this great book of Proverbs.

The groundwork has now been laid for a smooth transition on to exegesis in Chapter Two. It is believed that the presuppositions previously considered provide for firm and clearly stated footing as this treatment proceeds.

CHAPTER II

EXEGETICAL TREATMENT

The hermeneutically based presuppositions of the preceding chapter will be assumed throughout. Due to the necessary limits of this treatment, very little if any additional space will be given to refreshing the reader or author concerning what has gone before.

This section of the study of Proverbs 22:6 was definitely the area which took the most careful research. The major reason for this has been intimated earlier. There is a sad lack of quality, in-depth exegesis on this verse. The author found very little which took each word in its syntax and etymology and fully presented its scope of Old Testament use and thus its contribution to Proverbs 22:6. Thus, the vast bulk of this chapter is of necessity the result of much original Hebrew lexical and concordance study. Close attention has been paid to cataloguing the Old Testament's use of words and phrases common to Proverbs 22:6. From there, it has been observed if and where words occurring together in Proverbs 22:6 also appear together elsewhere. A third observation, then, was concerned with other uses of these same words elsewhere within the book of Proverbs. This third observation was not always

productive, but did yield a degree of fruit. Many other considerations have entered in, but the above three angles of inspection were applied throughout.

Basically, the verse seems to be divided for exegetical treatment into two main divisions. The first is the portion herein entitled Requirement. This is voiced by the familiar King James rendering, "Train up a child in the way he should go" (תִּנְחֵם לַנְּעָר עַל־פִּי דָרְכּוֹ). The second subdivision of the verse could then be entitled Result and would include, again, the familiar "when he is old, he will not depart from it" (כִּי־יִזְקֵן לֹא־יִסּוּר מִסְּבִילָה). It is here contended that the connective וְגַם would very clearly bear out this subdivision both as the intended format of the Hebrew and also for exegetical treatment. Thus, the subdivision entitled Requirement and the second subdivision entitled Result will be used.

Some words within the verse have clearly come to be seen as most critical as to a proper understanding. These will be considered intricately within the above two subdivisions. Other parts of the verse can be considered as syntactical units or phrases. When the latter has been true, this is how the author has also considered them, mainly, in lexical and concordance oriented exegesis.

The Requirement

Hebrew Text:

תִּנְחֵם לַנְּעָר עַל־פִּי דָרְכּוֹ

One of the very basic issues which faces the interpreter in the first half of this verse concerns the very interesting word הִנֵּחַ. Most commentators have probably spent more time on this first word of the Hebrew text of Proverbs 22:6 than any other word in the verse.

The noun or adjectival usage of the root הִנֵּחַ occurs in only eight passages of the Hebrew Old Testament. A quick perusal of the concordance will yield the fact that five of these eight passages speak of the "dedication" (הִנֵּחַ) of the altar (Num 7:10, 11, 84, 88; 2 Chr 7:9). In each case, the altar has reference to that altar used in the legitimate worship of Yahweh by Israel. A sixth use deals with the "dedication" (הִנֵּחַ) of God's House in the Hebrew version of Psalm 30:1. Here again, the reference is to a positive, legitimate worship.

Two more instances deal with the dedication of the wall of Jerusalem once it was completed by Nehemiah and his associates. Both of these references are found in Nehemiah 12:27.

It is extremely interesting to note that all of the above seven noun uses of the root הִנֵּחַ deal with the formal consecration or setting-apart to Yahweh of the object mentioned. In each case, before the object has been used and before it can be misused it is formally and publicly handed over to Yahweh in ritual ceremony.

The eighth use mentioned above is found in Genesis 14:14. The context is that of the taking captive of Abram's nephew Lot. The verse speaks of three hundred and eighteen men who were raised and apparently schooled for action in Abram's home. Herein, the adjectival form גִּבְיָיִךְ is used of these men. This use will perhaps have an interesting application to גִּבְיָיִךְ in Proverbs 22:6.

As for the verbal usage of גִּבַּח , only four instances exist in the Old Testament in addition to this usage in Proverbs 22:6. These four are in three different passages (Deut 20:5; 1 Kgs 8:63; 2 Chr 7:5) and definitely lend further credence to the basic meaning of formal dedication or consecration. Two usages once again refer to the public consecration of the House of Yahweh, while two occurrences in Deuteronomy 20:5 refer to a private home whose dedication is considered imperative.

There has been much discussion as to the assumed root of גִּבַּח . That which is often assumed is the bi-consonantal word גִּבַּח , a noun meaning "palate" or "mouth" in contexts of taste or speech. The noun is simple and straightforward in its occurrences. Approximately one half of the Old Testament occurrences of this noun are found in the book of Job.¹

¹Gleason L. Archer, Jr., R. Laird Harris, Bruce K. Waltke, eds., Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament, Vol. 1 (Chicago: Moody Press, 1980), p. 301.

Commentators often point to an Arabic root which refers to a mother applying syrup to the palate of an infant to initiate sucking action. This colorful etymology gives rise to some helpful possibilities as to the interpretation of Proverbs 22:6. McKane comments that $\eta\eta\eta$ includes "'to give to be tasted'; as nurses give infants food which they have masticated in order to prepare it for their nurslings; thence it comes to signify 'to give elementary instruction'; 'to imbue'; 'to train.'"¹

Perhaps the salient feature of this suggested similarity is that there is somewhere inherent in this proverb's use of $\eta\eta\eta$ the idea of making the dedication or consecration palatable or reasonable and agreeable to the object yet to be mentioned. Speculative etymology alone would not give rise, perhaps, to this idea. However, considerations to follow make it entirely plausible.

The one Old Testament use of $\eta\eta\eta$ which is perhaps closest to that of Proverbs 22:6 is in Genesis 14:14. This passage has already been mentioned and thus the use of $\eta\eta\eta$ here has been set in its context. It is obvious in Genesis 14:14 that this large group of men was not a group of novitiates. Abram would need to rely on their capabilities in open conflict and would certainly employ the aid of men who had been properly instructed in the necessary disciplines.

¹William McKane, Proverbs, Old Testament Library (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1977), p. 563.

It is in this sense that the men are called מְנִי־קֵיָן men. It is interesting to note here that the BDB lexicon speaks of an Arabic cognate which means "to make experienced, submissive, etc. (as one does a horse by a rope in its mouth)."¹

Major conclusion is better postponed until further context is inspected. However, some comment is in order here. First, the word is written in the imperative, one which McKane suggests as an "imperative with an asyndetic motive clause."² In other words, even in the framework of a wise general principle, the activity expressed here is supremely necessary in order to reach the result.

Further, more attention must be given to the idea of formally dedicating or consecrating than to "child-rearing" in this author's opinion. It seems foreign to import the notion of purely educational or religious training into a word which fails to carry that meaning in the Old Testament or the cognate uses. One can even view the men of Genesis 14:14 as ones formally dedicated or consecrated to the art of warfare. Though the idea of training would be inherent in both Genesis 14:14 and Proverbs 22:6, it would seem inconsistent to make it the primary thrust intended.

The Hebrew root נָעַר provides the direct object for the verb חָנַךְ just considered. The לְ prefixed at the

¹BDB, p. 335.

²McKane, Proverbs, p. 563.

beginning of the word is the obvious use of ׀ as the direct object marker for certain words.

Of approximately six words used in the Old Testament which can be translated "child, youngster, infant," etc. this is the most general. It is used over two hundred times in the Old Testament and refers to such things as a servant or retainer (2 Sam 16:1), Moses as a few months old infant (Exod 2:6), Bathsheba's baby (2 Sam 14:21: 18:5), "and even guild members, servitors, and soldiers in a Ugaritic cognate (UT 19: no. 445)."¹

This word is seen as a real key to the proper understanding of Proverbs 22:6. Thus, the time was taken to inspect every occurrence in both the Hebrew and English versions of the Old Testament. This activity yielded a helpful cataloguing of the two hundred plus occurrences and provided some helpful insights as well. An entire treatise could concern itself with this word alone. However, only pertinent aspects of such a study need be considered here.

An exhaustive study of this word demonstrates that the word is used in three major categories of meaning. The first meaning is that of "servant." The word נַעַר is used many times in this sense. One example can suffice here to establish this meaning. In 1 Samuel 20:38, the young

¹Gleason L. Archer, Jr., R. Laird Harris, Bruce K. Waltke, eds., Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament, Vol. 1 (Chicago: Moody Press, 1980), p. 301.

individual who attended Jonathan, Saul's son, is called הַנֶּעֶר. In the very same verse, Jonathan is called אֲדֹנָיָךְ ("his master"), with the "his" obviously referring to הַנֶּעֶר. The sense of "servant" is seen in contexts which speak of armour-bearers, court attendants, personal retinue members, and so forth.

A second major category of reference pertinent to נֶעַר is the meaning "child" or "infant." The scope of age here obviously runs from a new-born infant on through and including pre-adolescence. Exodus 2:6 uses the root נֶעַר of Moses while he was still an infant of nursing age (יִנֵּק) in a basket. The root is used here in parallel with יִלֵּךְ. Judges 13:8 uses נֶעַר of Samson while he was still in his mother's womb, while 1 Samuel 1:22 uses נֶעַר of Samuel at a pre-weaning age. Perhaps the verse which best establishes the reference of נֶעַר to infants is 2 Samuel 12:16. Here, נֶעַר is used of the sickly child of David while the child is less than seven days old. The whole age termed "childhood" seems to be in view in such passages as Isaiah 7:16; 8:4; 10:19. Here, certain things are singled out which a נֶעַר can or cannot do solely on the basis of his very young age.

The third category for this study is that of "young man" or "lad." The general time frame here would seem to be from adolescence to young manhood. Two passages precisely fix a נֶעַר in his teen years. One is Genesis 37:2. Here, Joseph is called a נֶעַר and is also said to be seventeen years

old. Second Chronicles 34:3 similarly fixes the נער, Josiah, at sixteen years of age.

נער is also used in an abstract sense as expressive of "youth" as a time period (Ps 88:16; Job 33:25; 36:14). Various other figurative uses of נער were observed but are not germane to this study.

It was also interesting to notice throughout the Old Testament the various Hebrew words which were used in parallel or contrast constructions with נער. These related words certainly help in developing a more precise definition for נער. Listed with a representative passage, these parallels or contrasts are בן (son, Gen 22:5), ילך (boy, youth, Exod 2:6), משרת (minister, servant, 2 Kgs 6:15, 17), עבד (servant, 1 Sam 16:14-18), איש (man, 1 Sam 1:2, 5), בחורי־ים (choice young men, Lam 5:13), זקן (old, Gen 19:4), פרי־בטן (fruit of the womb, Isa 13:18), and עלומיו (youthful vigor, Job 33:25).

Some valuable facts can be gleaned from such a study of נער before exegesis continues in Proverbs 22:6. First, outside of several figurative or symbolic uses (for example, Eccl 10:16), it cannot be demonstrated that נער is specifically used of middle or old age. Further, נער definitely seems to be used for various ages beginning with early infancy and continuing through and including young manhood. It is evident that "reference to a youngster of ages between weaning and (especially) marriageable young manhood is

primary (puberty is implied in Genesis 34:19, etc. and early childhood in I Samuel 1:24, hanna 'ar na'ar, 'the boy was a child')." ¹

Within the book of Proverbs itself, the root נער is used seven times in addition to Proverbs 22:6. An inspection of these seven passages will clearly demonstrate that the general scope of meaning in the book's use of נער is basically identical to that reflected in the remainder of the Old Testament. One important fact, however, stands out quite boldly. The word נער seems to be largely presented in somewhat of a "negative" sense in Proverbs. Three of the total eight references present the urgent need to consistently discipline the נער who will certainly need it (Prov 22:15; 23:13; 29:15). Two more passages seem to use נער in a figurative sense as an expression of the relative naivete of youth (Prov 1:4; 7:7). Only two passages seem to use נער in a neutral or, at best, positive sense (Prov 20:11; 29:21).

This author believes at this point that the issue of discipline may well be inherent to a degree in Proverbs 22:6. The general use of the word in Proverbs would seem to support this. Such discipline may well be negative, as with the rod so frequently mentioned (Prov 13:24; 22:15; 24:14), as well as positive by means of patient instruction (Prov 1:9; 3:1, 23; 4:8, 9, 12; 7:2). However, it is believed

¹Ibid., Vol. 2, p. 586.

that the earlier proposed thrust of consecration and dedication to someone or something must take precedence in meaning over an attendant theme of faithful discipline. This author does not see Proverbs 22:6 as primarily a text on the art of child-rearing through discipline, though that art can be distilled from the verse as a sub-theme.

Some comments by William Reich in an earlier treatment are insightful here.

A study of these various usages of this word will disclose a situation common to the majority. The word seems to speak of dependency. No matter how old the person is, if he was dependent, this word was used. Therefore, the best interpretation of this word in this verse is that of a dependent.¹

The next, and last, unit to be considered for exegesis in this division entitled "Requirement" is the prepositional phrase *על־פי דרכו*. Properly viewed, the first half of this verse as considered here begins with the imperatival charge reflected by *תנח*, which is then followed by the direct object of that action, *לנער*. The adverbial prepositional phrase treated here completes the thought of the protasis. It details how the one being charged is to fulfill the imperative or at least what direction the action urged upon him is to take.

The phrase *על־פי דרכו* is literally rendered "according to (or 'upon') the mouth of his way." The antecedent of "his" in this verse would clearly be the *נער*. From that

¹Reich, "Child Training: Proverbs 22:6," pp. 27, 28.

point, however, much debate rages as to the precise application of this unique idiom. The author has entertained the possibility that this particular idiom has been used for literary effect. Seeing that the earlier word פִּי has as its supposed root פָּה (mouth or palate), this use of פִּי may well be for literary compliment. The word פִּי comes from the Hebrew פִּה , a general word for mouth, opening, or speech.¹

Effort will be expended here to present a full yet edited inspection of this phrase. Much more could be said, but the phrase must remain within its relative place of import within the verse.

Perhaps the first step in exegeting this phrase is to arrive at a correct understanding as to the meaning of דְּרָכָיו ("his way"). A lexical and concordance search did not yield the useful fruits as was the case with נֶעַר . The word דֶּרֶךְ is an extremely general word which is used several hundred times in the Old Testament. Its range of meaning includes way, road, distance, journey, manner, direction, and path as only a representative list.² Much here, then, will be dependent upon the rest of the verse itself as well as, to a degree, the presuppositions delineated earlier.

Basically, four major views have been discovered by this author in the sources consulted. They will be briefly presented here in their order of relative preference from least to greatest.

¹BDB, pp. 804, 805.

²Ibid., pp. 202-4.

One view encountered several times is what one might call the "straight and narrow" view. This is certainly vague in its opinion that דִּרְכּוֹ refers to that one ideal and correct path of life. This writer found this particular view rather poorly and vaguely presented. Its evasiveness alone is enough to argue against it. The sense of Proverbs 22:6 is nearly relegated to the mystical realm, when the thrust of biblical Wisdom is to be anything but mystical. Deane represents this view when he interprets דִּרְכּוֹ as "the right path of obedience and religion."¹ McKane also seems to opt for this.²

A second view which seems equally untenable to the first is the so-called "vocation" view. This interpretation sees דִּרְכּוֹ as a reference to the particular vocation which parents or society determine to be proper for the בֶּנֶן. There honestly seems to be nothing in the text, in presupposition or in context which would support this view. It is perhaps entirely an importation from the stereotype of Jewish youngsters following in Papa's footsteps which the Occidental world has read into such passages as this. Authors Nowack and Bertheau were found to uphold this view.³

¹W. J. Deane; S. T. Taylor-Taswell; W. F. Adney, Proverbs: The Pulpit Commentary, Vol. 20 (Chicago: Wilcox and Follet Co., n.d.), p. 422.

²McKane, Proverbs, p. 564.

³Deane et al., Proverbs, p. 422.

The remaining two views have much in their favor, and in this author's opinion they become the two viable options for interpretation. The first of these could be called the "parental" view. Here, reference is seen in Proverbs 22:6 to the parents' responsibility to bend or mold the child in just the right direction via conscientious discipline. This has perhaps been the most "popular" view through the years. Such a standard for biblical child-rearing is herein confessed to be indeed Scriptural. Many parts of God's Word uphold just such a conscientious program, not the least of which is the book of Proverbs. However, this writer questions the contention that such is the precise intention of נְקַטְבֵּנוּ in this particular verse. This view revolves around the assumption that the primary thrust of חֻנְקָה לַצֶּעֶר is that of discipline, an assumption which has already been demonstrated to be secondary at best. Zöckler can be consulted as a representative of this view, along with many other authors.¹

The fourth view presented here is contended to be the correct view. This could be labeled as the "personal aptitude" view in its reference to the נֶעֱר of the נֶעֱר . When all of the previously expressed presuppositions concerning Wisdom and the חֵשֶׁל , the general context of Proverbs, and previous

¹Otto Zöckler, *The Proverbs of Solomon*, trans. Charles Aikens (New York: Scribners, 1870; reprint ed., Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, n.d.), p. 192.

exegetical material is kept in mind as the framework of דָּרְפוֹ, this view seems to clearly be the most consistent. Here, the דָּרְפוֹ is seen as a reference to the particular capabilities, aptitudes, potential and psychological make-up of the נַעַר. In other words, the primary reference to dedication of the נַעַר with its overtones of consistent discipline has to do with action individually fitted to each particular youth or dependent. Several qualified scholars do a fine job of presenting this view. Kidner speaks of דָּרְפוֹ "implying, it seems, respect for his individuality . . . though not for his selfwill (see verse 5, or 14:12)."¹ Also, Delitzsch says that דָּרְפוֹ does not refer to

his calling, which he "must by and by enter upon" (Bertheau, Zöckler), or "to his way during life." Rather, דָּרְפוֹ is the child's way, as e.g. derek colhaarets, Gen. xix. 31, the general custom of the land; derek Mitsrâyim, Isa. x. 24, the way (the manner of acting) of the Egyptians.²

"It seems more in conformity with the moralist's age and nation to see in the maxim an injunction to consider the child's nature, faculties, and temperament in the education which is given to him . . . this education (is) in accordance with his idiosyncrasy."³

¹Derek Kidner, Proverbs: An Introduction and Commentary, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Chicago: InterVarsity Press, 1964), p. 147.

²Franz Delitzsch, Biblical Commentary on the Proverbs of Solomon, Vol. II (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1875), p. 86.

³Deane et al., Proverbs, p. 422.

Cook adds that דַּרְכּוֹ means

according to the tenor of his way, i.e., the path specifically belonging to, specifically fitted for, the individual's character. The proverb enjoins the closest possible study of each child's temperament and the adaptation of "his way of life" to that.¹

Having thus understood the proper sense of דַּרְכּוֹ, the particular use of the combination עַל-פִּי is much clearer in Proverbs 22:6. Much of the material quoted or referred to above has already considered דַּרְכּוֹ within the phrase עַל-פִּי דַּרְכּוֹ as a whole, thus aiding in the exegesis here.

The preposition עַל is indeed very broad and has a wide range of possible meanings, largely determined by contextual consideration. Such is the case here. The word עַל most generally means "upon, on, or according to."² Its meaning in the context becomes much more clear in its connection with פִּי.

The BDB lexicon reserves a major section heading of its treatment of פֶּה for this word's use with various prepositions. It is used variously with אֶל, כִּי, ל, and עַל. In each case, the most common and contextually the best way of interpreting the combination is "according to" or "in proportion to" a measure or standard expressed. This is especially true of the use of עַל with פֶּה.³ A major division of the use of עַל delineated earlier in this same lexicon

¹Cook, "Proverbs of Solomon," p. 62.

²BDB, pp. 752-54.

³Ibid., p. 805.

concludes "thence the basic being conceived as regulative, על comes to denote the norm or standard."¹

As a result of the preceding study the phrase על־פִּי דָרְכּוֹ would best be translated "according to (or 'in accordance with') the measure, standard or aptitude of his way." Reference is primarily to the individual make-up of each נֶעֱרָ. Herein, the imperatival charge of the earlier הִנְחֵה finds its specific framework and adverbial qualification as it directs the activity of the reader to the נֶעֱרָ. There are no unique occurrences of this idiom within the rest of the book of Proverbs which would significantly change the meaning or thrust of the syntax as discussed above.

Thus is concluded an exegesis of the first half of Proverbs 22:6 under the major heading "Requirement." Some conclusion and application pertinent to individual words or word groups has been made already. This drawing of conclusions will be more pointedly addressed in the last chapter. The framework of Chapter One's presuppositional hermeneutics and the background of the exegesis to this point in Chapter Two now provides the footing on which to continue.

The Result

Hebrew Text:

גַּם כִּי־יִזְקֶיךָ לֹא־זָסִיר מִמְּצָה

¹Ibid., pp. 753, 754.

In this exegetical chapter, the second half of Proverbs 22:6 is expressive of the principles or conclusions which can be drawn in the form of an apodosis from the first half of the verse. This is the portion of the verse which the author has come to see as the source of much divergent theologizing and faulty application. Curiously, however, it is by far the simpler portion of the verse for exegetical treatment. The wording and syntax is far less enigmatic and much more straightforward. The words and combinations are very common in the Old Testament. This fact is one reason why the exegetical treatment here is more brief than in the first half of the verse.

However, another more insightful fact contributes to a ready exegetical understanding here. This portion of the treatment of Proverbs 22:6 is that portion which must most directly benefit from the firmly stated and established presuppositions of Chapter One. It is believed that one could be somewhat less than clear in his understanding of the "Requirement" half of the verse, yet properly conceive the intended meaning if he were to interpret the "Result" portion consistent with proper presuppositions. Much more could be said here, but that is best left for a remaining conclusion and application chapter. With the above in mind, the reader is advised to refresh himself with the philosophy of Chapter One in order to understand properly the author's handling of this portion of Proverbs 22:6.

As one begins this portion of exegesis, the connective וְ stands in an interesting position. As stated much earlier, this adverb provides much of the syntactical basis for dividing the verse into protasis and apodosis or into "Requirement" and "Result." The Hebrew word וְ is used adverbially as a qualifier and often conveys the sense of further meaning. Lexical entries here include the meanings "Also, moreover, even, yea, but, though, and although."¹

As one considers the important role of וְ in this verse, it is instructive to note that this adverb is often used as "emphasizing sometimes the thought of an entire sentence, but more usually the word immediately following."² This is most helpful to bear in mind as the exegesis continues.

Properly seen, then, וְ introduces the result contingent upon the requirement in part one of the verse. Exegetical treatment can now be divided into two phrases as follows:

The Hebrew זָקֵן is an Hiphil imperfect. The Hiphil of זָקַן is only used in the Old Testament in this third person, masculine singular form of the imperfect. The verb זָקַן is one which conveys the stative sense. In other words, its concern deals with the state of being or having become elderly, or old.

¹Ibid., pp. 168, 169.

²Ibid., p. 169.

The addition of the adverbial כִּי is of further help as following אֲנִי. The BDB lexicon stresses the meaning "even" or "even when" when אֲנִי is followed by the adverb כִּי.¹

Gesenius opts for more of a concessive idea in his treatment of this combination.² The resultant meaning might be "even though he is old." This author, however, prefers the meaning which would see an intended contrast between אֲנִי and אֲנִי due to the progress of having aged which is inherent here. The reason for choosing this view will be apparent in the following treatment.

The proper understanding of אֲנִי in Proverbs 22:6 was another occasion for thorough Hebrew concordance research. Much of great interest was discovered of which some points are particularly germane to this study.

Some authors seemed too prone to stereotype all occurrences of אֲנִי. One such source lumped all of the scores of Old Testament occurrences into a category which "is always used to speak of one old and decrepit with age."³ This was found to be an unfair assessment of אֲנִי. Concordance studies yield the fact of contrast with youth or younger, more vigorous age when אֲנִי is used. Although this is the Hebrew term for one old and decrepit with age, it

¹Ibid.

²A. E. Cowley, ed., Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1909), p. 498.

³Reich, "Child Training: Proverbs 22:6," p. 53.

often has reference outside that category. It is also used more than one hundred times to denote an elder as one having authority. Thus, it becomes sometimes a quasi-technical term of experience and authority as opposed to the inexperience of the נער.

It was of particular pedagogic interest to notice the many passages in which קטן and נער are used together in one verse, as in Proverbs 22:6. There is consistently an intended contrast in age, experience and relative quality between these two words when they are thus paralleled. This would provide the firm basis for seeing the נער of the first half of Proverbs 22:6 as one who is definitely in a later stage of life when viewed in the second half of the verse. However, to make קטן here the old man who returns to an earlier confession upon his death bed of old age is hardly consistent with proper exegesis.

The thrust of קטן, then, seems to be an issue of relative maturity in age and experience. The principle being propounded in Proverbs 22:6 is one that conveys a general axiom of observation. Briefly stated, this axiom observes that the mature, grown and self-sufficient man will generally align himself by choice and intent with those morals, philosophical moorings, and values inculcated in him as a youth. If the wise parent has tailored a consistent program of instruction to the individual bent of the נער, he may generally expect a "successful" older man as far as

biblical Wisdom is concerned. With great care, however, all must face the observable fact that "even a good home may produce an idler."¹

Within a section which needs the presuppositional help of Chapter One, this last phrase needs said help perhaps more than any. Here exists the phrase that has been "claimed" as an ethereal, mysteriously magic blanket promise by so many well-intentioned Christians. Herein as well lies the very tension that necessitates this very treatment.

The phrase being discussed here is לֹא-טָרַר מְטֻבָּה. There must be an equitable solution to this dilemma which both satisfies the veracity of Scripture and the guilt-ridden conscience of the parent who believes he stands condemned by Proverbs 22:6.

The best course is perhaps to determine the antecedent of the pronoun within מְטֻבָּה. This word is clearly a combination of the Hebrew preposition לְ with the third person, singular, indefinite pronoun suffixed. Thus, one must determine the antecedent of "it." This antecedent plainly appears to be the training or consecrated dedication inherent in the מְטֻבָּה of Proverbs 22:6. One might perhaps consider the entire first half of the verse, the "Requirement" phrase, to be the antecedent. In a practical sense this would not significantly alter the meaning, yet seeing

¹Kidner, Proverbs: An Introduction, p. 51.

תָּנִיחַ and its sense as the more specific antecedent seems closer to the truth.

One is left only with the phrase לֹא-יָסוּר ("he will not depart") as exegesis is pursued. The Hebrew יָסוּר is a qal stem imperfect of the root סָר. The third person singular form obviously refers to נָעַר as antecedent.

The verb סָר is used 191 times in the Old Testament and is often the simple verb of motion.¹ As such, the meanings "turn aside, depart, leave, abandon" would express the meaning of סָר sufficiently. However, the verb is also used of what could even be termed spiritual apostatizing. As such, it would express the turning aside from, abandoning, or rejecting in practice the Biblical ethic.² It is often used as a reference to Israel's apostasy (Exod 32:8; Deut 9:12; 11:16). The Old Testament also uses it of Yahweh's "departing" from men, as with Samson (Judg 16:20) and Saul (1 Sam 16:14). The word can also be used for the general removal or putting away of idols.³

It is this last meaning, one with more of a "spiritual" overtone in meaning, which is in view at Proverbs 22:6. Interestingly, the word appears frequently in the

¹Archer, Theological Wordbook, Vol. 2, p. 621.

²BDB, p. 693.

³Archer, Theological Wordbook, Vol. 2, p. 621.

Wisdom literature of the Bible and is often used to refer to the basic spiritual concepts dealt with therein.

Having already used the word "apostasy," a further point is in order. This author found nothing which would lead one to believe that יָסוּר here must be a reference to ultimate, irreversible spiritual departure. In this context, perhaps "apostasy" could be misleading. The verb סוּר can be used of such a departure, though Proverbs 22:6 is not using it to deal with eventual and eternal perdition. Some have built straw-houses from the verse as to guaranteed salvation if children of parents can portray the abundant Christian life which their parents have expressed on a regular basis. Such thoughts might make for popular preaching, but certainly contribute nothing to meaningful exegesis here.

This phrase considered last here in exegetical treatment expresses in capsule form the outlook based on observable principle for one who pursues the requirement of the first half of the verse. Its teaching refers back to the ideal instruction inherent in אָנִי. The parent must strive to inculcate Godly Wisdom and reverent fear of Yahweh in the נֶעַר. The goal, obviously, is a lifetime of adherence to God once the dependent is a grown and matured adult. All of the pedagogic value distilled from this verse hinges upon the faithful and insightful steering of the capabilities of

the youth. "This is to be learned throughout one's youth so that it will become a pattern throughout life."¹

¹Ibid.

CHAPTER III

APPLICATION AND INTERPRETATION

It has become increasingly clear throughout the completion of this entire project that a harmoniously balanced contribution of both presuppositional hermeneutics and consistent exegesis is the only viable pathway to a proper understanding of this enigmatic proverb. Attendant upon this has been a necessary attitude of humility before God and reliance upon His Spirit for correct insight and articulation. Upon this basis, the author believes that the conclusions drawn and positions assumed thus far in this treatment have been fair to Scripture and true in interpretation.

As stated in the very early stages of this thesis, this concluding chapter would only be pedantic if it were overly long. However, the foregoing conclusions must be capsulized here in order to give the reader the clearest possible conception of the assumed position.

An original and extensively amplified translation at this point will greatly help to crystalize the interpretation of Proverbs 22:6 upon the basis of all which has gone before in Chapters One and Two. Here, then, follows this author's amplified translation of this proverb. "Consistently pursue a program of training and instruction with your

dependent youth which is based upon a caring and insightful evaluation of his potential, aptitudes, strengths, weaknesses and particular psychological make-up and which is focused upon a persistent inculcating of Scriptural life-principles. All of this must be founded upon the basis of your having thoroughly dedicated, consecrated and entrusted that dependent youth (as well as yourself) to the eventual and certain Sovereign hand of God and His purposes. The generally observed result of such a commitment to consecrated upbringing is that the youth will mature into a responsible adult who reflects his Biblical moorings and faithfully adheres to a life-style of God-honoring activity."

To begin, such an interpretation destroys the view which has laden so many parents with guilt. Proverbs 22:6 is not a celestial bargain with the Creator. There is not inherent in this verse a magical promise based upon stringent adherence to an individual's end of the "deal." It is here contended that the parent or parents may, humanly speaking, pursue a very consistent and thoroughly Scriptural pattern with their youngster, yet see that youth mature into an individual who verbally and actively repudiates all he has been taught and shown. This is the sad, yet true, case. The parent's first response must not be to assume total responsibility for supposed moral and spiritual failure. Such a recourse drastically misunderstands Proverbs 22:6.

Much has been pointed out throughout this treatment that Proverbs 22:6 does not say. Let it be understood that much which this author believes the verse to not say is nevertheless fully scriptural. The parent should guide the child in the "right path." He also should, when possible, nudge the youth toward a worthwhile vocation. Further, there is a דרך which is the right path for each child. However true and right these things are, they are not first and foremost the thrust of Proverbs 22:6.

When the supposed "only interpretation" of an individual passage clashes with observable fact, the Bible student must be driven to his knees in prayer as well as being driven back to God's Word in persistent research. God's Word must, in the end, stand as the ultimate absolute when such clashes cannot be resolved. In such a case, this writer is willing to hold such clashes in tension until he is granted further insight. However, it is here assumed that Proverbs 22:6 does not present such an inscrutable clash. Upon the basis of the preceding research, this verse is a case in point of the ability to harmonize observable fact with true and consistent biblical interpretation.

Historically, the extent of application of this verse has been misunderstood and poorly taught. Experience alone, though not the highest court of appeal, weakens the traditional view frequently alluded to herein. Further, the very nature of the חכמה, the scope of Wisdom literature,

the contextual data of Proverbs and many other points of hermeneutics discussed earlier militate against such a view. Verbalizing a consistent interpretation of Proverbs 22:6, therefore, nearly becomes a polemic aimed at this view.

For centuries, psychologists and sociologists have recognized the pliable and moldable nature of the early years of dependent children. The Bible fully understood the critical nature of this arena three millenia ago in Proverbs 22:6. This author remembers an early seminary class which dealt somewhat with this proverb. The instructor considered consistent instruction, motivation, and dedication to all be involved in training up the child. Further, he saw that training must be according to the youth's own capabilities at each stage of his development.¹ Such an approach is a proper conception of the biblical Wisdom of Proverbs 22:6.

To conclude, Proverbs 22:6 is a wise and trustworthy statement of general truth. Morals and values carefully implanted within the youngster will, as a general principle of life, stand him in good stead and be his point of anchor (and re-anchor) throughout his life. Even the very book of Proverbs, however, would agree that its own principles cannot be pressed into fail-safe promises in every case.

¹Paul Fink, Homiletics II: Unpublished Class Notes (Winona Lake: Grace Theological Seminary, 1979).

CONCLUSION

The writer is reminded of the proverbial Little Engine who stood at the base of a seemingly insurmountable summit and seriously questioned his ability to scale it. Such must be the humble concern of the godly, Christian parent as he or she faces the prospect of fulfilling Proverbs 22:6 with his or her offspring.

To author all of the preceding results of tedious research and to state carefully and dogmatically at times conclusions is relatively simple when one ponders carrying all of this out. It has been with sincere prayer that the fruits of long consideration of Proverbs 22:6 have been offered. Even more fervent prayer goes to the concern that this generation of Christian parents be one which dutifully and with great effort trains up its children in line with biblical Wisdom. May all such parents be willing, at that point, to trust the future of their children into the hands of a Sovereign God Who desires the very best of everything for the creatures for whom He gave His life.

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