

Proverbs 13 Commentary

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Proverbs 13:13 The one who **despises** the **word** will be in **debt** to it, but the one who **fears** the **commandment** will be **rewarded**.

- Whoever despises the word and counsel [of God] brings destruction upon himself, but he who [reverently] fears and respects the commandment [of God] is rewarded. (Amplified)
- Whoever rejects what he is taught will pay for it. But whoever does what he is told will be rewarded. (ICB)
- Whoever despises the word brings destruction on himself, but he who reveres the commandment will be rewarded. (ESV)
- Contempt for the word is self-destructive, respect for the commandment wins salvation. (NJB)
- The one who scorns advice runs the risk of paying dearly (French Common language version)

- **Despises** - Pr 1:25,30,31; 2Sa 12:9,10; 2Chr 36:16; Jer 43:2; 44:16,17; Ezek 20:13,16,24; Lk 16:31; Heb 10:28,29
- **The one** - Ezra 10:3; Psalms 115:13; Isaiah 66:2; Malachi 3:16
- **Rewarded** - Psalms 19:11; 119:165; Matthew 5:12; 2 John 1:8

Proverbs 1:7 The **fear** of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge. Fools **despise** wisdom and instruction.

Proverbs 10:27 The **fear** of the LORD prolongs life, but the years of the wicked will be shortened.

Proverbs 11:31 If the righteous will be **rewarded** in the earth, how much more the wicked and the sinner!

Observe the contrasts in Proverbs 13:13...

Despises... word <> Fears... commandment
Be in debt <> Be rewarded
Ungodly <> Godly
Obedience <> Disobedience

The one who despises - In Hebrew **despises** (0936) (buz) is a participle and therefore is more literally rendered "the one despising" which pictures this as his habitual practice! (See parallel uses of **despise** [buz] in Pr 1:7, 23:9). The **LXX** translates it with **kataphroneo** (present tense = continuously) which means he continuously thinks down upon and thus despises, scorns, holds in contempt, refuses to give any care to the word because it is thought to be without value. This person "thinks little of" the Word,

always looking look down on it with contempt or even aversion, with the implication that he considers the precious truth of little value or unworthy of his time or consideration. He who does not fear God has need to fear everything else.

Charles Simeon wrote that...

THE word of God in every age has met with a very different reception from different people: from the antediluvian scoffers to the present moment, the generality have deemed it unworthy of their attention, while a few have regarded it with reverence and godly fear. ([sermon](#))

Harry Ironside wrote that...

The word of instruction brings favor with God and man, as was so abundantly proven by Joseph, Daniel, and a host of others. To despise this law of the wise is to expose oneself to shame **now** and loss in **eternity**.
(Bolding added)

Will be in debt to it - (or more literally "has been forced to give a pledge") In ancient times a debtor left with his creditor some article of value or mortgaged his house or land, and if the debt was not paid, the creditor could take the debtor's property, and if this did not suffice he could even take his wife and children! Note that other versions (e.g., KJV, NKJV, ESV, Amp) render **be in debt** ([02254](#)) (chabal/habal) as conveying the idea of bringing destruction on one's self as both meanings are included in this Hebrew word. In fact both meanings would be quite appropriate in this passage, for a debt unpaid brings destruction of a sort in life. As a parallel, Paul explains every sinner is a debtor and that the wages of sin (unless paid for by a Redeemer - Ro 3:23, 24 see notes Ro 3:23; 24) is death (Ro 6:23-note).

In essence Proverb 13:13 speaks of the divine principle of sowing and reaping. Every man reaps what he sows, and if, as in the case of this proverb, he sows to his flesh, he shall surely reap corruption (destruction, ruin, decay, breakdown, dissolution, death) (see Gal 6:7,8). In short, the one who despises God's Word of truth and life (Ro 2:4-note), will owe a debt he cannot pay and thus will be ruined, not only in this life but in the one to come. (Think eternally "bad credit rating", eternal "bankruptcy"!)

Fears the commandment - **Fears** means that this is the godly man's lifestyle. He continually has a reverential, filial awe of God's commands. Godliness is the fruit when proper fear is the root, for when we reverentially fear God we will be far more likely to be faithful when tempted. In other words although faith is surely the ultimate root of all godly virtues (2Pe 1:5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11 see notes), fear of God is the grace that guards all these godly virtues. This fear of course is not perfectly maintained, but when he does break God's law, he is grieved for he knows he has grieved the heart of His loving Father (see Ezekiel 6:9-note). His grief is not out of fear of punishment, for there is no longer condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus (Ro 8:1-note).

Spurgeon writes that...

The man that abhors evil and injustice; the man that would do good if it cost him his earthly all; the man who would not do wrong though the world should be his reward for doing it—this is the man who walks in the light, and he is the man that shall have fellowship with God and a sense of cleansing from sin.

Adam Clarke comments that fear is not just an attitude by is linked to an appropriate action for such a "**commandment fearer**"...

respects it so as to obey it, walking as this revelation directs (and) shall be rewarded (which conveys the idea that he) shall find it to be his highest interest, and shall be in peace or safety, as the Hebrew word shalom may be translated.

Charles Bridges asks "But what is this fear of the Lord? It is that affectionate reverence, by which the child of God bends himself humbly and carefully to his Father's law... The keeping of it (the commandment) is our security. Keep the word, and the word will keep us securely. (Regarding the **fear of the Lord** Bridges describes it as...) That affectionate reverence by which the child of God bends himself humbly and carefully to His Father's law. His wrath is so bitter, and His love so sweet; that hence springs an earnest desire to please Him, and—because of the danger of coming short from his own weakness and temptations—a holy watchfulness and fear, 'that he might not sin against Him.'

The author of Pilgrim's Progress, **John Bunyan**...

The fear of God is the beginning of wisdom, and they that lack the beginning have neither middle nor end.

The respected commentator **James Denney** exhorts us...

Let us familiarize our minds with the fear due to Christ the Judge, and a new power will enter into our service, making it at once more urgent and more wholesome than it could otherwise be.

As **Richard Alleine** rightly states...

He who knows what it is to enjoy God will dread his loss. He who has seen his face will fear to see his back.

John Calvin wrote that...

Nothing is more powerful to overcome temptation than the fear of God... (and that) Righteousness flows from only one principle—the fear of God... (for) the fear of God is the root and origin of all righteousness.

Tozer put it this way...

No one can know the true grace of God who has not first known the fear of God.

Spurgeon observes...

Unregenerate fear drives from God, gracious fear drives to Him... We have no terror of the Word, but we have a filial awe of it. We are not in fear of its penalties, because we have a fear of its commands.

Spurgeon gives this illustration of fear of God and sinning against Him (for all sin is first against Him, cp Genesis 39:9, Psalm 51:4)

...

The old naturalist, Ulysses Androvaldus, tells us that a dove is so afraid of a hawk, that she will be frightened at the sight of one of its feathers. Whether it be so or not, I cannot tell; but this I know, that when a man has had a thorough shaking over the jaws of hell, he will be so afraid of sin, that even one of its feathers—any one sin—will alarm and send a thrill of fear through his soul. This is a part of the way by which the Lord turns us when we are turned indeed.— Feathers for Arrow

Will be rewarded - This is the Hebrew word **salam** or **shalam** ([07999](#)) which means to be safe or uninjured in body or mind. It includes the idea of wholeness, of being sound and/or healthy which in fact is the way the **Septuagint (LXX)** translates this phrase, using the Greek word **hugiaino (word study)** (Think "hygiene") = sound, free from error, good health. Paul uses it in 2Ti 4:3 (note) of **doctrine** which is "healthy" (health giving). In short, the idea of reward appears to be not as much a future reward (although that is certainly a promise - see bema or judgment seat of Christ) per se as a reward now in this life of being "soul sound" of our soul being safe, whole, "healthy", which reminds one of 1Ti 4:8 (note) where...

bodily discipline is only of little profit, but godliness is profitable for all things, since it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come.

Paul reminds us that this statement is trustworthy and serves as a motivation for him to labors (to the point of exhaustion) and strive (agonize) to attain or obtain. (see notes 1Timothy 4:9; 10; 11, 12)

May God's Spirit strengthen each of His children (see John 1:11, 12, 13 contrasted with John 8:44, cp Acts 26:18, 1Co15:22) with the grace that is in Christ Jesus that we might truly, reverentially -- motivated by love for our Father and a desire to please Him -- fear His commandments and seek diligently to bind them continually on our heart and tie them around our neck (see Pr 6:20, 21, 22, 23), so that they will be our lamp as we walk in this dark, crooked and perverted generation. Through our one Mediator and Great High Priest Christ Jesus. Amen.

Soldiers of the Lord below,
Strong in faith resist the foe:
Boundless is the pledged reward
Unto them who serve the Lord.

Proverbs 13:13 reminds one of **Psalm 19** especially the section in which David focuses on the inestimable worth of the Word of God, in verse 11 noting that...

Moreover, by them (law... testimony... precepts... commandment... fear... judgments) Your servant is warned.
In keeping them there is great **reward**. (Psalm 19:11)

As someone has said regarding the rewards for godly living...

The pay isn't much, but the retirement benefit is out of this world. Amen. Praise the Lord!

Billy Graham once gave a devotional for the office staff and said that he believed some of them would be ahead of him in line for the Lord's rewards. They chuckled with skepticism. He became serious and said that he really meant it because the Lord rewards faithfulness above fruitfulness, which puts us all on the same footing, whether famous for our effectiveness or unknown in our faithfulness.

Spurgeon phrased it in a similar way noting that...

God is a sure paymaster, though he does not always pay at the end of every week. He can labor without present reward who looks for a reward in the world to come.

Spurgeon has some interesting thoughts on a believer's **reward** writing that...

We are soon coming out of the eggshell of time, and when we break loose into eternity and see the vastness of the divine purposes, we shall be altogether amazed at the service bestowed, which will be the **reward** of service done.

The service of God is a **remunerative** service; He gives wages in the work, and an abundant **reward**, according to His grace, when the work is done.

Your reward is not what you get at present, but it lies in the glorious future. When the Lord Jesus comes He will **reward** all His stewards and servants. No truth is more plain in the four Gospels than this fact, that when Jesus returns to this earth He will distribute **recompense** in proportion to work done.

I cannot imagine a fuller present **reward** than complete rest from all anxiety and calm confidence in a Providence which can never fail.

He will certainly come in His own person to **reward** His saints; and ere He comes He sees what you are doing. If this does not nerve you to tireless diligence in holy service, what can?

Eternal life must be our possession now; for if we die without it it will never be our possession in the world to come, which is not the state of probation but of fixed and settled **reward**.

A fuller **reward** will be ours when the Lord shall come a second time and our bodies shall rise from the grave to share in the glorious reign of the descended King. Then in our perfect manhood we shall behold the face of Him we love and shall be like Him.

John Piper has the following comments that relate to a saint's rewards...

A Godward life is lived with a constant view to the reward of eternal fellowship with God. This Godward hope is the power that unleashes sacrificial love (see **notes** Colossians 1:4; 1:5) in a restless world that wants it all now. (A Godward Life)

Inductive Bible study: Remember to always check the **context**

[Click here](#) to study the 10 Scriptural uses of **fear** and **commandment**.

[Click here](#) to study the other OT uses of the English word **reward** (not all however are the Hebrew shalom). If you are still interested study the [24 NT occurrences of reward](#). Note especially our Lord's promise...

Behold, I am coming quickly, and My **reward** is with Me, to render to every man according to what he has done (Rev 22:12- [note](#))

He comes, He comes, to call
The nations to His bar,
And raise to glory all
Who fit for glory are:

**Make ready for your full reward;
Go forth with joy to meet your Lord.**

Spurgeon in Faith's Checkbook...

Holy Fear

"He that feareth the commandment shall be rewarded."—Proverbs 13:13

HOLY awe of God's Word is at a great discount. Men think themselves wiser than the Word of the Lord, and sit in judgment upon it. "So did not I, because of the fear of God." We accept the inspired Book as infallible and prove our esteem by our obedience (**Ed**: Read that again. See related studies - Obedience of faith and Relationship of faith and obedience). We have no terror of the Word, but we have a filial awe of it. We are not in fear of its penalties, because we have a fear of its commands.

This holy fear of the commandment produces the restfulness of humility, which is far sweeter than the

recklessness of pride. It becomes a guide to us in our movements, a drag when we are going downhill, and a stimulus when we are climbing it. Preserved from evil and led into righteousness by our reverence of the command, we gain a quiet conscience, which is a well of wine; a sense of freedom from responsibility, which is as life from the dead; and a confidence of pleasing God, which is heaven below. The ungodly may ridicule our deep reverence for the Word of the Lord, but what of that? The prize of our high calling is a sufficient consolation for us. The **rewards of obedience** make us scorn the scorning of the scorner. (**Ed**: "Amen!")

Charles Bridges (Commentary on Proverbs) writes...

God as a God of holiness will not be trifled with. As a God of grace, none "serve Him for nought." The presumptuous despiser of His word cannot escape. The world before the flood was the object of His long-suffering. "A preacher of righteousness" warned them of their danger. But the despisers provoked their own ruin. (1Pe 3:20-note, 2Pe 2:5-note) Pharaoh, often reprov'd, sometimes half-resolved, yet at length despising the word, was destroyed. (Ex 5:2; 10:16,17; 14:28.) Jehoiakim's daring rebellion met with its righteous recompense Jer. 36:23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32.) The warnings of Sinai are as a voice of thunder--

If every transgression of the word spoken by angels received its just recompence of reward; how shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation, spoken by the Lord? If they escaped not, that refused him that spake on earth; much more shall not we escape, if we turn away from him that speaks from heaven. See that ye refuse not him that speaks. (Heb 12:25-note)

Let God and his word be our fear, not our terror. Faith is the principle of fear, of reverential child-like obedience. (Heb 11:7-note) Indeed the heart can never be right, till it fears the commandment above every earthly consideration. The slave fears the penalty; the child the commandment. And this he fears more, than if an angel from heaven were standing in his way with a flaming sword. He fears the father, not the Judge. Here is no bondage, no legality. It brings its own reward. The "heart that stands in awe of God's word," rejoices in it, "and is largely enriched with its spoil." (Ps. 119:161, 162 - [Spurgeon's note v161](#), [Note v162](#)) Here too is sunshine in the special favour of God--

To this man will I look, even to him that is poor, and of a contrite heart, and that trembles at My word. (Is 66:2. cp Ezra, 10:3)

John Gill's Commentary on the Whole Bible

Whoso despises the word shall be destroyed...

The word of God. Either Christ, the essential Word; which must be a great evil, considering the dignity of His person; great ingratitude, considering the grace of His office; very dangerous, considering what a quick, sharp, and powerful Word He is: and such may be said to despise Him who despise His ministers, and the Gospel preached by them; and which may be meant by **the word**, that being the word of God and of truth, the word of righteousness, peace, life, and salvation; and is to them that perish foolishness; and to whom it is so, they shall perish, and be punished with everlasting destruction, for their contempt of it, and disobedience to it.

Or the written **word** may be meant, the Scriptures, which are given by inspiration of God, and therefore ought to be had in the greatest reverence; and yet are greatly slighted and despised by the man of sin and his followers; who set up and prefer their unwritten traditions to them, and so make them of none effect: such are all false teachers, that despise or abuse them, they bring destruction to themselves; for so the words may be rendered, "shall bring destruction to himself", or shall receive detriment from it: so the Targum, from the word itself; the Syriac version, "by it"; and the Arabic version, "by the commandment itself"; by the threatenings in it, and according to them: or, "because of it"; because of the contempt of it;

but he that feareth the commandment; receives the word with reverence, trembles at it; fears God, and keeps His commandments, and fears to break them: he shall be rewarded; with good, as the Targum adds; for in keeping the commandments of God there is great reward:

or, "shall enjoy peace", or "be in safety"; for great peace have they which love the law of God, and serve it:

or, "shall be sound, [and] in health";

when those that despise it "shall be corrupted"; as the word in the preceding clause may be rendered.

Matthew Henry's Commentary

1. The character of one that is marked for ruin: He that **despises the word** of God, and has no regard to it, no veneration for it, nor will be ruled by it, certainly he shall be destroyed, for he slights that which is the only means of curing a destructive disease and makes himself obnoxious to that divine wrath which will certainly be his destruction.

Those that prefer the rules of carnal policy before divine precepts, and the allurements of the world and the flesh before God's promises and comforts, despise His word, giving the preference to those things that stand in competition with it; and it is to their own just destruction: they would not take warning.

2. The character of one that is sure to be happy: He that **fears the commandment**, that stands in awe of God, pays a deference to His authority, has a reverence for His word, is afraid of displeasing God and incurring the penalties annexed to the commandment, shall not only escape destruction, but shall be rewarded for His godly fear. In keeping the commandment there is great reward.

J C Ryle - see full treatise - [Thoughts for Young Men](#)

Young men, I charge you to make a habit of reading the Bible, and not to let the habit be broken. Do not let the laughter of friends, do not let the bad customs of the family you live in, don't let any of these things prevent your doing it. Determine that you will not only have a Bible, but also make time to read it too. Allow no man to persuade you that it is only a book for Sunday school children and old women. It is the book from which King David got wisdom and understanding. It is the book which young Timothy knew from his childhood. Never be ashamed of reading it.

Do not "scorn instruction" (Proverbs 13:13).

Read it with the prayer that the Holy Spirit's grace will help you understand it. It has been said,

"A man may just as soon read the Scripture without eyes, as understand the spirit of it without grace."

Read it reverently, as the Word of God, not of man, believing implicitly that what it approves is right, and what it condemns is wrong. Be very sure that every doctrine which will not stand the test of Scripture is false. This will keep you from being tossed to and fro, and carried about by the dangerous opinions of these latter days.

Be very sure that every practice in your life which is contrary to Scripture, is sinful and must be given up. This will settle many a question of conscience, and cut the knot of many a doubt. Remember how differently two kings of Judah read the Word of God:

Jehoiakim read it, and at once tore the page to pieces, and burned it in the fire (Jeremiah 36:23). And why? Because his heart rebelled against it, and he was resolved not to obey.

Josiah read it, and at once tore his clothes, and cried mightily to the Lord (2 Chronicles 34:19). And why? Because his heart was tender and obedient. He was ready to do anything which Scripture showed him was his duty. **Oh that you may follow the last of these two, and not the first!**

And read it regularly. This is the only way to become "mighty in the Scriptures." A quick glance at the Bible now and then does little good. At that rate you will never become familiar with its treasures, or feel the sword of the Spirit fitted to your hand in the hour of conflict. But store up your mind with Scripture, by diligent reading, and you will soon discover its value and power. Texts will rise up in your hearts in the moment of temptation. Commands will suggest themselves in times of doubt. Promises will come across your thoughts in the time of discouragement. And thus you will experience the truth of David's words, "I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you" (Psalm 119:11); and of Solomon's words, "When you walk, they will guide you; when you sleep, they will watch over you; when you awake, they will speak to you" (Proverbs 6:22). (J. C. Ryle. Thoughts for Young Men)

Solomon...

The conclusion, when all has been heard, is: **fear** God and keep His **commandments**, because this applies to every person. For God will bring every act to judgment, everything which is hidden, whether it is good or evil. (Ecclesiastes 12:13, 14)