

# take hold of God and pull

by Calvin Seerveld



*Love your neighbor  
face to face  
Put your heart into  
tending the sheep  
and goats*

## Proverbs 27 again

The booming voiced "God-bless-you-neighbour!" fellow who does it eager beaver much too early in the morning should know It counts like a curse coming from him. And a woman who keeps on, keeps on zanniking her point is like the dribbling drivel of a leaky roof on a day of pounding rain: to stop it up would be like holding back condensing moisture - dirty globs of vapour is all your hand makes contact with -

"Iron gets sharpened by scraping with other flinty iron."

But let a man's face be sweetly joined to that of his neighbour.

Like in the water faces mirror faces sheer,

just so let the hearts of men reverberate when near.

The grave and hell never get fed up with destroying things;  
neither do the eyes of man ever get tired of desiring more and more.

Well, a melting pot takes care of silver, and a blast furnace dissolves your gold,  
and a man vapourizes before the fulsome, honoring praise. [of the crowd].

Even if you pound such a fool of a man to pieces with a pestle in the mortar  
right along with the pulverized kernels of corn, his blubbering, closed-to-God  
stupidity will not at all be separated out.

Get to know thoroughly - of course! - study the actual condition of your  
sheep and goats intently; put your heart into tending the herds!

[It's true:] "Treasure never lasts forever"

- even a king's crown doesn't make it through many generations!

Hay has to be cut, tender spring grass get shorn, and sweet mountain pasture  
raked into the garner; lambs are there ... for your clothing, and a goodly number  
of rams makes the price of a piece of open -field; given enough milk from the  
goats you have daily bread, food for the household, and a livelihood for your  
maidservants:

Whoever keeps on watchfully caring for a fig tree will eat its fruits, and

Whoever respectfully keeps track of things for his lord will receive honor  
and glory.

(Proverbs 27:14-17,19-27,18)

Some people who witness make a nuisance of themselves. They come on like a cold shower, when the person who receives the attention was expecting simply a warm, spring rain. And some people, man or woman, persist in making their point long after

it has been made. It happens in the family setting, between those who are married, on the job with your boss, and sometimes during a Sunday sermon. An old Arabian saying calls it "killing a dead horse."

Such abrasive, obstinate folk tend to justify their one-track selves, points out Proverbs 27. "Iron gets sharpened by scraping with other flinty iron." Stand up and be counted like a man! You can't cut dead wood! If you can't take the heat, get out of the kitchen! If you understand what's up, why don't you do it? –

No, says the Bible. To love your neighbor means to mirror his face with yours so that you can be joined! Until you have a heart-to-heart openness and sensitivity for your neighbour's need, any witness, point, or help you want to give, in Christ's name too, will only look like a tough-minded establishing of your own self. It may take iron to sharpen iron, but a child's face in school and your husband's hurt ambition and a lonely woman's hand is not a piece of iron.

The same holds true for the human relation to plants and animals in God's world, says Proverbs 27. Like the grave keeps on swallowing what God made good, just so covetous human desiring of forests and seas, food and minerals and space, never tires of their destruction. Curiosity killed the cat. Well, human greed vapourizes a man into a hurried, evil snort *and* rapes the world. No matter how much the blubbing sales pitch and seductive color advertisements get exposed for their stupidity.

The pride to reach the moon first (so everything got shipped airmail and pay was constant overtime) rather than feed the poor, even in America, was a Babel foolishness that is boomeranging on more than the Hearst family. And the corner supermarket for us supermen who want convenience has largely killed in suburban and metropolitan chain-stored man the knowledge of produce fresh like manna from the Lord's bountiful hand. Instead, we come armed with the snowmobile-thrill mentality that treats field and stream and all wild life as if it too were iron.

Proverbs 27, however, is not a brief for the Rousseauian world of friendly brotherhood, idyllic fishing trips to Northern Canada, and a generally relaxed, connoisseur attitude toward fellow man and homeland. God's Word has *blessing* to give! not just exit signs for our secularized life.

**Put your heart into tending the sheep and goats** - thank God for such biblical revelation!

"Treasure never lasts forever"; so don't push to stack up possessions in a big new barn, or bank vault (and Solomon adds the ironic commentary - even a king's crown doesn't last through too many generations). But mountain pasture, the lamb and fig tree, are there for your respectful use and to enjoy forever, says Proverbs 27. Give yourself wholeheartedly to the task at hand of milking goats, polishing woodwork, setting the children's consciousness to praise the Lord, analyzing Kant, selling real estate, protecting the helpless from violence –

I'm telling you, the one good thing I saw, a wonderful good! is eating, drinking, finding joy inside all the miserably hard work a man sweats at daily under the sun for the so few days of life God gives him. It's a wonderful good! allotted him - I mean this: whatever motley or possession God has given him, every man who is enabled ~ this is *God's* giving! - enabled to eat from it, enabled to freely, fully, actively receive what God has specially portioned out for him, who is enabled to be genuinely happy in his sin-cursed labouring - That is a wonderful good! because then a man does not cumber himself so much thinking about the meager span of his lifetime: God keeps him preoccupied with a heart full of gladness! (Ecclesiastes 5: 18-20)

To work with integrity at cultivating what the Lord has created is a livelihood! a living, lively man and womanhood calling of obedience which the Lord shall establish by His Word and use to proclaim salvation. That is the promise of Proverbs 27: whoever faces his neighbor in love and puts his heart into tending the sheep and goats for his Lord will receive honor and glory, power and dominion, forever and ever, when the Son of God returns.

The New Testament Amen to Proverbs 27 resounds in many places - James 3, Luke 12, Matthew 25. But there are especially two things that must be said:

(1) Nobody may preach the good news of Proverbs 27 about work if he does not lift a finger to make the dehumanizing jobs his hearers suffer under today into tasks the Lord could

fill with shalom, albeit in the presence of enemies. Otherwise it will be the Pharisaic preaching which binds guilt on men's shoulders, and treats believers as if they be heavenly souls with iron bodies.

And nobody may buy and sell houses or teach philosophy mindlessly following the speculators' price of gold and land and secular university techniques; for then he has denied the Lord's claim on his modern-day pasture and goatherd and become a foolish, faithless steward, good for nothing!

(2) Indeed, our face must mirror the face of our neighbour, and not vice versa, if we wish to show Christian love. Paul said he found peace in restraining the exercise of his Christianly disciplined freedom in order to bring Life to those who were legalists (I Corinthians 9:12-23). [To "become all things to all men" does not mean "when in Rome, do as the Romans do"!] Proverbs 27 asks even more those who have found themselves as creatures in Christ: get past your own preoccupations' and unimaginative, uncritical, selfish position of security if you would indeed love those for whom Christ died.

Do not pray for the sick in church but prepare his meals. Do not talk to the lonely but play games with them. Do not take a 'collection for the poor without fasting in prayer so you will know how to present the gift to them with a broken spirit. Do not talk about love to those who lack comeliness unless you are prepared to enjoy their presence. Do not presume to teach the ignorant if you are not truly ready yourself to learn from them. Do not try to comfort the dying unless you are ready to be absent from earth with the Lord yourself. Do not try to walk the first mile with somebody unless the first mile has second mile character, face to face ....

I know, even we Christians tend to shut out of our seeing and hearing whatever of God's Word would really change our own particular life style and sloughed off habits. But whoever hears Proverbs 27 and continues to treat his neighbour like iron or dirt and use the world at large as a disposable diaper, grieves the Holy Spirit.