



Proverbs - Chapter Seventeen

III Proverbs 10:1-22:16 - Wise Sayings of Solomon (continues)

Summary of Chapter Seventeen

A wise servant will rule over a shameful son. Starting a quarrel is like breaching a dam. Even a fool seems wise if he keeps silent.

- ¹ Better is a dry morsel with quiet
than a house full of feasting with strife.

Proverbs 17:1

Better is a dry morsel with quiet than a house full of feasting with strife. Like Proverbs 15:17, this proverb asserts that a poor but loving home is better than a home filled with feasting and strife. There is nothing appealing about a dry morsel. Yet the blessing of quietness and peace is so great, that it can make a dry morsel seem better than the alternative presented. Adam Clarke commented, “Peace and contentment, and especially domestic peace, are beyond all other blessings.”

Other Proverbs seem to put the blame for domestic strife on the wife: <<*It is better to live in a corner of the housetop than in a house shared with a contentious wife*>> (Proverbs 21:9), and: <<*It is better to live in a desert land than with a contentious and fretful wife*>> ((Proverbs 21:19). However, it seems clear from evidence that both parties are often to blame and the majority of violent incidences are perpetrated by the husband.

Feasting is literally ‘sacrifices’, specifically peace-offerings; such offerings would provide for a meal including meat – a luxury in ancient times. A home full of feasting would be wonderful; but not with constant strife. Peace and quietness in the home are so valuable that they make up for many other comforts denied.

- ² A slave who deals wisely will rule over a child who acts shamefully,
and will share the inheritance as one of the family.

Proverbs 17:2

A slave who deals wisely will rule over a child who acts shamefully, and will share the inheritance as one of the family. It is natural that a son should rule; the trust one has in family is often greater than the trust one has for their servants. Yet, should a son cause shame, God knows how to replace that son with a wise servant. The son has his natural place, but God does not see that natural place as giving absolute right to lead, and may give leadership to a wise servant instead. Through diligence one can overcome disadvantages of birth; through being undisciplined one can lose advantages of birth, as did Esau, refer to Genesis 25:29-34. Should the son prove to cause shame and if it is in God's will, God is able to even lift up a wise servant to a place of leadership and inheritance among the brothers. In similar vein Solomon also wrote: <<**Better is a poor but wise youth than an old but foolish king, who will no longer take advice**>> (Ecclesiastes 4:13).

- ³ The crucible is for silver, and the furnace is for gold,
but the Lord tests the heart.

Proverbs 17:3

The crucible is for silver, and the furnace is for gold. There are appropriate places where things are tested and purified. Silver and gold each have their place of refining and purification.

The Lord tests the heart. The most appropriate place for the human heart to be tested and purified is with the Lord himself: <<**I know, my God, that you search the heart, and take pleasure in uprightness; in the uprightness of my heart I have freely offered all these things, and now I have seen your people, who are present here, offering freely and joyously to you**>> (1 Chronicles 29:17), <<**Prove me, O Lord, and try me; test my heart and mind**>> (Psalm 26:2), and: <<**I the Lord test the mind and search the heart, to give to all according to their ways, according to the fruit of their doings**>> (Jeremiah 17:10). His word and his truth give a wise, loving standard that will both examine and refine the inner man or woman.

Crucible and furnace suggest that the Lord tests hearts by adversity. While this is true, the ultimate test by God is whether some submits to Christ or not: <<**In this you rejoice, even if now for a little while you have had to suffer various trials, so that the genuineness of your faith – being more precious than gold**

that, though perishable, is tested by fire – may be found to result in praise and glory and honour when Jesus Christ is revealed>> (1 Peter 1:6-7).

- ⁴ An evildoer listens to wicked lips;
and a liar gives heed to a mischievous tongue.

Proverbs 17:4

An evildoer listens to wicked lips. When it comes to lies spoken by false lips, evil people not only spread them, they also receive them: <<*For they are a rebellious people, faithless children, children who will not hear the instruction of the Lord; who say to the seers, ‘Do not see’; and to the prophets, ‘Do not prophesy to us what is right; speak to us smooth things, prophesy illusions, leave the way, turn aside from the path, let us hear no more about the Holy One of Israel’*>> (Isaiah 30:9-11), <<*An appalling and horrible thing has happened in the land: the prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests rule as the prophets direct; my people love to have it so, but what will you do when the end comes?*>> (Jeremiah 5:30-31), <<*For the time is coming when people will not put up with sound doctrine, but having itching ears, they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own desires, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander away to myths*>> (2 Timothy 4:3-4), and: <<*They are from the world; therefore what they say is from the world, and the world listens to them*>> (1 John 4:5). They seem to love to embrace a lie. Clarke observed, “An evil heart is disposed and ever ready to receive evil; and liars delight in lies.” And Derek Kidner commented, “Evil words die without a welcome; and the welcome gives us away.”

A liar gives heed to a mischievous tongue. Those who lie love to listen to lies as well as to tell them. It should concern a Christian if they love to hear lies and gossip about others. This proverb concerns both the one who spreads and the one who listens to malicious gossip.

- ⁵ Those who mock the poor insult their Maker;
those who are glad at calamity will not go unpunished.

Proverbs 17:5

Those who mock the poor insult their Maker. Some people find it easy to mock the poor. They love to think of themselves as better than those who have less than they do. Such people should understand that when they mock the poor, they insult the God who made both the poor and themselves: <<*Those who oppress the poor insult their Maker, but those who are kind to the needy honour him*>> (Proverbs 14:31). The fact that both the poor and the well off have the same Maker should give the richer person greater sympathy and greater sense of their

own relative wellbeing. Such mocking can involve saying that those who suffer deserve it, e.g. the attitude of Job's friends, or simply being callous or indifferent to their plight. Yet because of Christ, even the poor and some say especially the poor have hope: <<*So the poor have hope, and injustice shuts its mouth*>> (Job 5:16).

Those who are glad at calamity will not go unpunished. To be glad at anyone's calamity shows an unloving, unsympathetic heart: <<*But you should not have gloated over your brother on the day of his misfortune; you should not have rejoiced over the people of Judah on the day of their ruin; you should not have boasted on the day of distress*>> (Obadiah 12). Anyone who despises their fellow man this way should expect God to answer and defend the weaker one. Clarke noted, "He who is pleased to hear of the misfortune of another will, in the course of God's just government, have his own multiplied." John Trapp relates in his commentary how cruelly some take joy in the persecution, suffering, and death of innocent people - and how certainly judgement will come upon such.

⁶ Grandchildren are the crown of the aged,
and the glory of children is their parents.

Proverbs 17:6

Grandchildren are the crown of the aged. Grandchildren are like a crown of glory for a grandparent. They can give an almost indescribable sense of pleasure and satisfaction. They are a blessing from God: <<*The Lord bless you from Zion. May you see the prosperity of Jerusalem all the days of your life. May you see your children's children. Peace be upon Israel!*>> (Psalm 128:5-6).

The glory of children is their parents. This is true both as a fact and as an aspiration. It is natural for children to glory in their father and mother, and parents should live and parent in such a way that would cause their children to glory in them. Families depend on one another for their identity and joy. Both young and old should cherish their intergenerational relationships.

Kidner observed, "These fine family fruits need cultivating and protecting. A neglected crop, riddled with mutual antipathy, is seen in Isaiah 3:5; Micah 7:6; 2 Timothy 3:2-4."

⁷ Fine speech is not becoming to a fool;
still less is false speech to a ruler.

Proverbs 17:7

Fine speech is not becoming to a fool. It is not that excellent speech is not desired from the fool, but that it is such an unexpected surprise. Since people

usually express their wisdom or folly by what they say, it seems strange and almost inappropriate if a fool should say something wise and eloquent.

Still less is false speech to a ruler. False speech is especially disconcerting when coming from a ruler, whose job it is to promote justice. Any leader should be so known for truthfulness that it is regarded as a strange surprise that they would lie. This would be in keeping with Paul's requirements for leaders: <<*The saying is sure: whoever aspires to the office of bishop desires a noble task. Now a bishop must be above reproach, married only once, temperate, sensible, respectable, hospitable, an apt teacher, not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, and not a lover of money*>> (1 Timothy 3:1-3), and: <<*For a bishop, as God's steward, must be blameless; he must not be arrogant or quick-tempered or addicted to wine or violent or greedy for gain; but he must be hospitable, a lover of goodness, prudent, upright, devout, and self-controlled*>> (Titus 1:7-8). This is a lofty and rarely reached standard among leaders, especially political leaders.

⁸ A bribe is like a magic stone in the eyes of those who give it; wherever they turn they prosper.

Proverbs 17:8

A bribe is like a magic stone in the eyes of those who give it. It is human nature to regard a gift as something precious. Yet in this context the present is a bribe, because the same Hebrew word is used in both contexts. This proverb may simply state the fact that a bribe usually works. However, accepting such gifts or bribes is against the will of the Lord and acceptance brings the person under his condemnation: <<*You shall take no bribe, for a bribe blinds the officials, and subverts the cause of those who are in the right*>> (Exodus 23:8), <<*Many seek the favour of the generous, and everyone is a friend to a giver of gifts*>> (Proverbs 19:6), <<*Your princes are rebels and companions of thieves. Everyone loves a bribe and runs after gifts. They do not defend the orphan, and the widow's cause does not come before them*>> (Isaiah 1:23), and: <<*For I know how many are your transgressions, and how great are your sins – you who afflict the righteous, who take a bribe, and push aside the needy in the gate*>> (Amos 5:12).

Wherever they turn they prosper. The gain one receives from a gift or bribe so delights them that it accomplishes the purpose of the gift. This proverb observes but does not condone a fact of life; refer to the comment made on Proverbs 14:20. The wise person will ponder this reality and face it as a temptation.

Clarke noted, "In the latter clause there is an evident allusion to cut stones. Whichever way you turn them, they reflect the light, are brilliant and beautiful."

Introduction to Proverbs 17:9-19

These verses include two collections of proverbs (vv.9-13 and vv.14-19) that revolve around interpersonal conflict.

Introduction to Proverbs 17:9-13

This section begins by contrasting wise and foolish responses to situations where a person is either the offended (v.9) or offending (v.10) party. The remaining verses warn against the calamitous effects of pursuing the foolish path; a situation of mortal danger, e.g. a she-bear protecting her cubs, is more desirable than the possibly ruinous effect of meeting a fool in his folly (v.12).

- ⁹ One who forgives an affront fosters friendship,
but one who dwells on disputes will alienate a friend.

Proverbs 17:9

One who forgives an affront fosters friendship. There is a time and a place for the exposure of sin: <<*Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them*>> (Ephesians 5:11), but often the sins of others should be tactfully and lovingly covered: <<*you should know that whoever brings back a sinner from wandering will save the sinner's soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins*>> (James 5:20), and: <<*Above all, maintain constant love for one another, for love covers a multitude of sins*>> (1 Peter 4:8). The exposure of all belongs to God, not man: <<*Therefore whatever you have said in the dark will be heard in the light, and what you have whispered behind closed doors will be proclaimed from the housetops*>> (Luke 12:3).

One who dwells on disputes will alienate a friend. To uncover someone's sin or revealing something personal that should be kept secret by repeating it to others will ruin relationships and divide friendships.

- ¹⁰ A rebuke strikes deeper into a discerning person
than a hundred blows into a fool.

Proverbs 17:10

A rebuke strikes deeper into a discerning person than a hundred blows into a fool. Because a wise man or woman will respond to rebuke and learn from it, it can be truly effective for him or her: <<*Let the righteous strike me; let the faithful correct me*>> (Psalm 141:5a), and: <<*Strike a scoffer, and the simple will learn prudence; reprove the intelligent, and they will gain knowledge*>> (Proverbs 19:25). Correction may be administered deeply and repeatedly to the fool, yet they will not receive it: <<*Crush a fool in a mortar with a pestle along with crushed grain, but the folly will not be driven out*>> (Proverbs 27:22). The

problem is not in the correction itself, although the fool will likely blame it; the problem is in the fool.

The message is for Christians to accept the Lord's correction and acknowledge they are wrong, not God: <<*I reprove and discipline those whom I love. Be earnest, therefore, and repent*>> (Revelation 3:19).

- ¹¹ Evil people seek only rebellion,
but a cruel messenger will be sent against them.

Proverbs 17:11

Evil people seek only rebellion. The instinctive response of rebellion belongs to the evil, not to the wise. Those who seek only rebellion can offer nothing wise and good to replace that which they rebel against.

A cruel messenger will be sent against them. Repeated rebellion invites cruel retaliation. The evil man should not be surprised when it comes. Solomon used such messengers to avenge himself against those who had opposed his succession: <<*'Now therefore as the Lord lives, who has established me and placed me on the throne of my father David, and who has made me a house as he promised, today Adonijah shall be put to death.'* So King Solomon sent Benaiah son of Jehoiada; he struck him down, and he died>> (1 Kings 2:24-25), <<*The king replied to him, 'Do as he has said, strike him down and bury him; and thus take away from me and from my father's house the guilt for the blood that Joab shed without cause'*>> (1 Kings 2:31), and: <<*Then the king commanded Benaiah son of Jehoiada; and he went out and struck him down, and he died. So the kingdom was established in the hand of Solomon*>> (1 Kings 2:46).

- ¹² Better to meet a she-bear robbed of its cubs
than to confront a fool immersed in folly.

Proverbs 17:12

Better to meet a she-bear robbed of its cubs than to confront a fool immersed in folly. A mother bear is notoriously angry and dangerous when she is robbed of her cubs. This analogy is used elsewhere in Scripture: <<*Hushai continued, 'You know that your father and his men are warriors, and that they are enraged, like a bear robbed of her cubs in the field. Besides, your father is expert in war; he will not spend the night with the troops'*>> (2 Samuel 17:8), <<*Like a roaring lion or a charging bear is a wicked ruler over a poor people*>> (Proverbs 28:15), and: <<*I will fall upon them like a bear robbed of her cubs, and will tear open the covering of their heart; there I will devour them like a lion, as a wild animal would mangle them*>> (Hosea 13:8). No sensible person would want to meet a mother bear under such conditions. A foolish man in the

midst of his foolish actions can be more dangerous than a mother bear who has lost her cubs or fears for their safety. The wise man or woman will stay away from such a fool in his folly just as they would avoid the bear.

Abigail averted a massacre when she rode out to meet David and advised him to ignore her husband Nabal, whose name means 'fool', and to accept the provisions she presented to David: <<My lord, do not take seriously this ill-natured fellow Nabal; for as his name is, so is he; Nabal is his name, and folly is with him; but I, your servant, did not see the young men of my lord, whom you sent>> (1 Samuel 25:25). Nabal died of natural causes shortly afterwards and Abigail became David's wife.

¹³ Evil will not depart from the house
of one who returns evil for good.

Proverbs 17:13

Evil will not depart from the house of one who returns evil for good. God sees when his moral order is offended, and will answer it: <<**They repay me evil for good; my soul is forlorn**>> (Psalm 35:12). The one who gives evil to the good can expect their own home to be troubled by evil. It is plainly wrong to give evil to those who deserve good. It discourages those who do good and encourages those who do not. It upsets God's moral order to have the good punished.

Clarke commented, "As many persons are guilty of the sin of ingratitude, and of paying kindness with unkindness, and good with evil, it is no wonder we find so much wretchedness among men; for God's word cannot fail; evil shall not depart from the houses and families of such persons."

Kidner stated, "This proverb was very near the bone: both parents of Solomon had so repaid the devoted Uriah, and had duly received the sentence of line 2: see 2 Samuel 12:10ff."

Introduction to Proverbs 17:14-19

Verse 14 advises the reader to avoid, resolve, or walk away from conflict before things get out of hand and true calamity ensues. In v.19, to make the threshold high symbolises the pride of the owner and is a picture of the arrogance and pride of the one who 'seeks destruction.' These two verses form a frame for vv.15-18, each of which more or less describes the wisdom and shape of a right relationship.

¹⁴ The beginning of strife is like letting out water;
so stop before the quarrel breaks out.

Proverbs 17:14

The beginning of strife is like letting out water. Once a dam has been breached, there is no holding back the water – an apt image for the rapid and damaging escalation of a quarrel. The nature of liquid water makes it difficult to restrain. Once it is released it will go in unexpected and uncontrolled ways. This is like the beginning of strife. Once an argument or battle has begun, it is difficult to control its course, and like uncontrolled water, it can cause great damage: <<*It is honourable to refrain from strife, but every fool is quick to quarrel*>> (Proverbs 20:3), <<*Have nothing to do with stupid and senseless controversies; you know that they breed quarrels. And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kindly to everyone*>> (2 Timothy 2:23-24a), <<*But if you have bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not be boastful and false to the truth. Such wisdom does not come down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, devilish. For where there is envy and selfish ambition, there will also be disorder and wickedness of every kind. But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without a trace of partiality or hypocrisy. And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace for those who make peace*>> (James 3:14-18). Kidner noted, "Opening such a sluice lets loose more than one can predict, control or retrieve."

So stop before the quarrel breaks out. Because strife and contention are difficult to control and cause great damage, wisdom sees that it is much better to stop contention before it ever starts: <<*If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all*>> (Romans 12:18), <<*But we urge you, beloved, to do so more and more, to aspire to live quietly, to mind your own affairs, and to work with your hands, as we directed you, so that you may behave properly towards outsiders and be dependent on no one*>> (1 Thessalonians 4:10b-12).

¹⁵ One who justifies the wicked and one who condemns the righteous are both alike an abomination to the Lord.

Proverbs 17:15

One who justifies the wicked and one who condemns the righteous are both alike an abomination to the Lord. Although wisdom calls for the careful avoidance of strife, this does not excuse the one who justifies the wicked by calling a guilty person innocent, or who condemns the righteous by calling an innocent person guilty. Both of these actions are an abomination to the Lord: <<*When all the prisoners of the land are crushed under foot, when human rights are perverted in the presence of the Most High, when one's case is subverted – does the Lord not see it?*>> (Lamentations 3:34-36).

- 16 Why should fools have a price in hand
to buy wisdom, when they have no mind to learn?

Proverbs 17:16

Why should fools have a price in hand to buy wisdom, when they have no mind to learn? Wisdom has a price: <<*Buy truth, and do not sell it; buy wisdom, instruction, and understanding*>> (Proverbs 23:23), and Solomon imagined a fool who was ready to pay that price. It might be said that the price of wisdom begins with the fear of the Lord. The price of wisdom also involves humility and willingness to receive correction. It would be strange to find the price of wisdom in the hand of a fool, because then that person would no longer be a fool. The nature of the fool requires that they have no heart to pay the price of wisdom: <<*And he said, 'Go and say to this people: "Keep listening, but do not comprehend; keep looking, but do not understand." Make the mind of this people dull, and stop their ears, and shut their eyes, so that they may not look with their eyes, and listen with their ears, and comprehend with their minds, and turn and be healed'*>> (Isaiah 6:9-10), and: <<*Then both Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly, saying, 'It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken first to you. Since you reject it and judge yourselves to be unworthy of eternal life, we are now turning to the Gentiles'*>> (Acts 13:46).

This proverb either (1) expresses the irony of thinking that wisdom is a commodity that can be bought with money, or (2) suggests that a fool, because he has no sense, would refuse to buy wisdom even if he could.

- 17 A friend loves at all times,
and kinsfolk are born to share adversity.

Proverbs 17:17

A friend loves at all times. A true friend will not only love when it is easy, but at all times: <<*But Ruth said, 'Do not press me to leave you or to turn back from following you! Where you go, I will go; where you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God my God. Where you die, I will die – there will I be buried. May the Lord do thus and so to me, and more as well, if even death parts me from you!'*>> (Ruth 1:16-17), <<*David asked, 'Is there still anyone left of the house of Saul to whom I may show kindness for Jonathan's sake?'*>> (2 Samuel 9:1), <<*No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you*>> (John 15:13-14), and: <<*For the one who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one Father. For this reason Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers and sisters, saying, 'I will proclaim your name to my brothers and sisters, in the midst of the congregation I will praise you'*>> (Hebrews

2:11-12). What used to be called fair weather friends - those who are friends only when the weather is pleasant and fair - are not true friends at all. Charles Spurgeon commented, "Ahithophel has deserted David, and Judas has sold his Lord. The greatest of kings who have been fawned upon by their courtiers while in power, have been treated as if they were but dogs in the time of their extremity." And again, "That eminent servant of God, Jonathan Edwards, when he was at his last, said, 'Where is Jesus of Nazareth, my old and faithful friend? I know he will be with me now that I need his help,' and so he was, for that faithful servant died triumphant."

Kinsfolk are born to share adversity. Kinsfolk or a true brother or sister, here used in a sense beyond the literal blood relationship, will show themselves in a time of adversity: <<*But Ittai answered the king, 'As the Lord lives, and as my lord the king lives, wherever my lord the king may be, whether for death or for life, there also your servant will be'*>> (2 Samuel 15:21), and: <<*Do not forsake your friend or the friend of your parent; do not go to the house of your kindred on the day of your calamity. Better is a neighbour who is nearby than kindred who are far away*>> (Proverbs 27:10).

¹⁸ It is senseless to give a pledge,
to become surety for a neighbour.

Proverbs 17:18

It is senseless to give a pledge. Wisdom guards against foolish partnerships: <<*To guarantee loans for a stranger brings trouble, but there is safety in refusing to do so*>> (Proverbs 11:15), and: <<*Do not be one of those who give pledges, who become surety for debts. If you have nothing with which to pay, why should your bed be taken from under you?*>> (Proverbs 22:26-27).

To become surety for a neighbour. It is responsibility enough for each person to honour their own debts. Wisdom warns against taking responsibility for the debts of others.

There are wise limits to what it means to be a friend (v.17), e.g. when one is asked to put up a pledge or security for a loan for another person's debt; refer to the comments made on Proverbs 6:1-5. Such an action is labelled here as the sheer stupidity of a person who altogether lacks sense.

¹⁹ One who loves transgression loves strife;
one who builds a high threshold invites broken bones.

Proverbs 17:19

One who loves transgression loves strife. There are those who love both transgression and strife. The love it when God's laws are sinfully transgressed and when there is conflict. Transgression and strife go hand-in-hand (v.14). Transgression is in the heart of the person who loves strife, i.e. who is unwilling to **<<stop before the quarrel breaks out>>** (v.14b). Such a person is characterised by pride and arrogance, i.e. one who builds a high threshold; although he seeks the ruin of others, in reality he is seeking his own destruction, which God will bring about in due course: **<<But you, O God, will cast them down into the lowest pit; the bloodthirsty and treacherous shall not live out half their days. But I will trust in you>>** (Psalm 55:23), **<<But by the same word the present heavens and earth have been reserved for fire, being kept until the day of judgement and destruction of the godless>>** (2 Peter 3:7).

One who builds a high threshold invites broken bones. Those who exalt the leadership of those who love transgression and strife are promoting destruction: **<<Woe to him who builds his house by unrighteousness, and his upper rooms by injustice; who makes his neighbours work for nothing, and does not give them their wages; who says, 'I will build myself a spacious house with large upper rooms', and who cuts out windows for it, panelling it with cedar, and painting it with vermilion. Are you a king because you compete in cedar? Did not your father eat and drink and do justice and righteousness? Then it was well with him>>** (Jeremiah 22:13-15). Such people should never sit in the gate, the literal meaning of threshold here, of respect, leadership, and authority. Clarke observed, "Possibly gate is here taken for the mouth; and the exalting of the gate may mean proud boasting and arrogant speaking, such as has a tendency to kindle and maintain strife. And this interpretation seems to agree better with the scope of the context."

Introduction to Proverbs 17:20-26

These two sets of proverbs (vv.20-22 and vv.23-26) for the most part describe things that bring grief. Three things will bring sorrow to the heart: a crooked and dishonest life (v.20), a foolish son (v.21), and too much discouragement (v.22).

Verses 23 and 26 speak of perversions of justice. Verse 24 speaks of the fool who wastes his life chasing unattainable goals, i.e. **<<the ends of the earth>>**, and v.25 speaks of the fool who gives distress to his parents. Folly and injustice have this in common, that they both fill life with grief and vexation.

²⁰ The crooked of mind do not prosper,
and the perverse of tongue fall into calamity.

Proverbs 17:20

The crooked of mind do not prosper. The one filled with deceit will only find corruption and deceit in others.

The perverse of tongue fall into calamity. Wicked and foolish words not only display the evil of someone's heart, they also lead them into greater evil: <<*A fool's lips bring strife, and a fool's mouth invites a flogging. The mouths of fools are their ruin, and their lips a snare to themselves*>> (Proverbs 18:6-7), <<*Words spoken by the wise bring them favour, but the lips of fools consume them*>> (Ecclesiastes 10:12), <<*And the tongue is a fire. The tongue is placed among our members as a world of iniquity; it stains the whole body, sets on fire the cycle of nature, and is itself set on fire by hell. For every species of beast and bird, of reptile and sea creature, can be tamed and has been tamed by the human species, but no one can tame the tongue – a restless evil, full of deadly poison*>> (James 3:6-8).

²¹ The one who begets a fool gets trouble;
the parent of a fool has no joy.

Proverbs 17:21

The one who begets a fool gets trouble. To be the parent of a foolish scoffer, i.e. one who foolishly doubts and rejects the truth, is to have sorrow. Parents should do all they can to not raise scoffers, beginning with believing and living out the truth themselves. Then they can pass that truth on to others: <<*I have no greater joy than this, to hear that my children are walking in the truth*>> (3 John 4).

The parent of a fool has no joy. There is no pleasure in seeing that a child is a fool. There is both the pain of the consequences of the child's folly and the regret of wondering if one parented effectively, often the role of the mother: <<*A wise child makes a glad father, but a foolish child is a mother's grief*>> (Proverbs 10:1b).

²² A cheerful heart is a good medicine,
but a downcast spirit dries up the bones.

Proverbs 17:22

A cheerful heart is a good medicine. It has been said - no doubt based on this proverb - that laughter is the best medicine. Truly, a cheerful and merry heart is good for more than the personality; it is good for the body and soul. This was the feeling David described: <<*Happy are those whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Happy are those to whom the Lord imputes no iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit. While I kept silence, my body wasted*>>

away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer>> (Psalm 32:1-4).

A downcast spirit dries up the bones. Those who are defeated and broken in spirit will see the effect in their health and experience of life. It will feel to them that their life has withered and dried up. David felt this too at times: *<<I am utterly spent and crushed; I groan because of the tumult of my heart>> (Psalm 38:8).*

²³ The wicked accept a concealed bribe
to pervert the ways of justice.

Proverbs 17:23

The wicked accept a concealed bribe to pervert the ways of justice. It is wrong to receive a bribe, and illegal and unjust payment to get around normal laws and procedures and to buy favour from officials. This shows a fundamental corruption and lack of integrity. When favour and a desired outcome depend on bribe money and not fairness and righteousness, justice is perverted. No one can or should have confidence in the system of laws and ways of justice. Jethro, a godly man, called on Moses to select men who would not act corruptly in leadership: *<<You should also look for able men among all the people, men who fear God, are trustworthy, and hate dishonest gain; set such men over them as officers over thousands, hundreds, fifties, and tens>> (Exodus 18:21).* The same values must apply to those who enter leadership roles in the church and, indeed, in government at any level: *<<Let every person be subject to the governing authorities; for there is no authority except from God, and those authorities that exist have been instituted by God>> (Romans 13:1).*

²⁴ The discerning person looks to wisdom,
but the eyes of a fool to the ends of the earth.

Proverbs 17:24

The discerning person looks to wisdom. The sense seems to be that the wise see things in the light of their wisdom. Their wisdom makes everything else clearer and able to be understood: *<<Who is like the wise man? And who knows the interpretation of a thing? Wisdom makes one's face shine, and the hardness of one's countenance is changed>> (Ecclesiastes 8:1).*

The eyes of a fool to the ends of the earth. The fool does not see things with the eyes of wisdom: *<<Do not love the world or the things in the world. The love of the Father is not in those who love the world; for all that is in the world – the desire of the flesh, the desire of the eyes, the pride in riches – comes not*

from the Father but from the world>> (1 John 2:15-16). They have their eyes everywhere, on unattainable things, i.e. to the ends of the earth, rather than where they should be. Job was no fool: <<*I have made a covenant with my eyes; how then could I look upon a virgin?*>> (Job 31:1), and Jesus teaches: <<*You have heard that it was said, “You shall not commit adultery.” But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart*>> (Matthew 5:27-28). Clarke noted, “Wisdom is within the sight and reach at every man: but he whose desires are scattered abroad, who is always aiming at impossible things, or is of an unsteady disposition, is not likely to find it.”

²⁵ Foolish children are a grief to their father
and bitterness to her who bore them.

Proverbs 17:25

Foolish children are a grief to their father and bitterness to her who bore them. The thought in this proverb is similar to that in v.21. Parents may find great grief in the foolish character of their children. Because of the maternal instinct and bond, there is a special pain and bitterness that belongs to the mother of a foolish son or daughter. The picture of a foolish son grieving the mother who bore him expands on the similar statement in v.21, and is also found in Proverbs 15:5, 15:20 and 23:22-25. Such images should encourage both children and parents to seek the benefits of wisdom.

²⁶ To impose a fine on the innocent is not right,
or to flog the noble for their integrity.

Proverbs 17:26

To impose a fine on the innocent is not right. God’s moral order insists that the righteous be rewarded and the wicked be punished. To upset this or reverse it is not good. Governments should not punish innocent people: <<*For the Lord’s sake accept the authority of every human institution, whether of the emperor as supreme, or of governors, as sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to praise those who do right*>> (1 Peter 2:13-14). In Israel, of all places, this should never happen!

To flog the noble for their integrity. If a leader is upright, he should never be punished - especially by striking: <<*Jesus answered, ‘If I have spoken wrongly, testify to the wrong. But if I have spoken rightly, why do you strike me?’>> (John 18:23). Uprightness should be rewarded and honoured, not punished.*

Introduction to Proverbs 17:27-18:4

This section is framed by two proverbs on the careful, restrained use of words (Proverbs 17:27 and 18:4). Between these, Proverbs 17:28 asserts that a fool would do well to keep his mouth shut, while Proverbs 18:2 asserts that this is the one thing a fool cannot do. Also, Proverbs 18:1 asserts that some people are irrational in their determination to be antisocial; this is answered by Proverbs 18:3, which declares that wicked behaviour brings people into contempt. Together, these six proverbs call for people to be careful with their words in the public arena lest they risk exclusion and humiliation.

²⁷ One who spares words is knowledgeable;
one who is cool in spirit has understanding.

Proverbs 17:27

One who spares words is knowledgeable. Both wisdom and folly are often revealed by one's words. Yet, in the case of wisdom, it may be revealed by the knowledge of when to keep quiet: <<*Teach me, and I will be silent; make me understand how I have gone wrong*>> (Job 6:24), <<*Never be rash with your mouth, nor let your heart be quick to utter a word before God, for God is in heaven, and you upon earth; therefore let your words be few*>> (Ecclesiastes 5:2), and: <<*You must understand this, my beloved: let everyone be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger; for your anger does not produce God's righteousness*>> (James 1:19-20). No one should ever think that the wise man or woman reveals their wisdom by talking a lot.

One who is cool in spirit has understanding. The peace and contentment that properly come to the wise is described here as a calm spirit, i.e. cool in spirit: <<*Whoever is slow to anger has great understanding, but one who has a hasty temper exalts folly*>> (Proverbs 14:29). To be constantly agitated and upset is a mark of folly, not wisdom.

²⁸ Even fools who keep silent are considered wise;
when they close their lips, they are deemed intelligent.

Proverbs 17:28

Even fools who keep silent are considered wise. This continues the idea from the previous proverb. There is a wonderful way that even a fool can be considered wise - to not speak. Kidner added, "The dry advice of v.28 is not purely ironical: the fool who takes it is no longer a complete fool."

When they close their lips, they are deemed intelligent. If the fool cared about being considered perceptive, this gives an easy way for it to happen: <<*They sat*

with him on the ground for seven days and seven nights, and no one spoke a word to him, for they saw that his suffering was very great>> (Job 2:13), <<*If you would only keep silent, that would be your wisdom!*>> (Job 13:5), and: <<*When words are many, transgression is not lacking, but the prudent are restrained in speech*>> (Proverbs 10:19). One is reminded of Abraham Lincoln's witty saying: "It is better to keep your mouth shut and let them think you a fool than to open your mouth and remove all doubt."