



Proverbs - Chapter Eighteen

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

Summary of Chapter Eighteen

A fool delights in his own opinions. The name of Lord is a strong tower. A gift opens the way. The tongue can bring life or death.

Introduction to Proverbs 17:27-18:4 (continued)

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.

- ¹ The one who lives alone is self-indulgent, showing contempt for all who have sound judgement.

Proverbs 18:1

The one who lives alone is self-indulgent. To cut one's self off from family, friends, and community is often to express a selfish desire. It shows an unwillingness to make the small (and sometimes large) sacrifices to get along with others. The one who lives alone, literally 'whoever isolates himself', translates a Hebrew word that refers to someone who is either reclusive or divisive. Either way, antisocial tendencies seem to be implied: *<<Be careful then how you live, not as unwise people but as wise, making the most of the time, because the days are evil. So do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord*

is>> (Ephesians 5:15-17), and: <<*It is these worldly people, devoid of the Spirit, who are causing divisions*>> (Jude 19).

The Mishnah uses this passage to teach the necessity of not separating from the community, because people have responsibilities as social beings (Aboth 2:4).

The writer to the Hebrews expresses a similar view: <<*And let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day approaching*>> (Hebrews 10:24-25).

Showing contempt for all who have sound judgement. God designed humankind after his own triune nature; he designed them to live in community. The instinct many have for isolation must not be over indulged; it is against all wise judgement.

² A fool takes no pleasure in understanding,
but only in expressing personal opinion.

Proverbs 18:2

A fool takes no pleasure in understanding. The wise man or woman has great satisfaction in knowledge, understanding and wisdom: <<*Happy are those who do not follow the advice of the wicked, or take the path that sinners tread, or sit in the seat of scoffers; but their delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law they meditate day and night*>> (Psalm 1:1-2), and: <<*So with yourselves; since you are eager for spiritual gifts, strive to excel in them for building up the church*>> (1 Corinthians 14:12). This is not so with the fool; they find no delight in wisdom.

But only in expressing personal opinion. What does delight the fool is expressing his own heart: <<*One who is clever conceals knowledge, but the mind of a fool broadcasts folly*>> (Proverbs 12:23). If he asks questions it is to show how clever he is rather than to learn. He is focused on self instead of God, and his folly flows from this wrong priority and wrong place to find delight: <<*They have left the straight road and have gone astray, following the road of Balaam son of Bosor, who loved the wages of doing wrong, but was rebuked for his own transgression; a speechless donkey spoke with a human voice and restrained the prophet's madness. These are waterless springs and mists driven by a storm; for them the deepest darkness has been reserved. For they speak bombastic nonsense, and with licentious desires of the flesh they entice people who have just escaped from those who live in error. They promise them freedom, but they themselves are slaves of corruption; for people are slaves to whatever masters them*>> (2 Peter 2:15-19). Adam Clarke commented, "It is a fact that most vain and foolish people are never satisfied in company, but in showing their own nonsense and emptiness."

- ³ When wickedness comes, contempt comes also;
and with dishonour comes disgrace.

Proverbs 18:3

When wickedness comes, contempt comes also. The wicked brings contempt with them, the proud, superior attitude that thinks themselves better than others and looks at those thought to be lesser with scorn. This was seen in those who derided Jesus as he hung dying on the Cross: <<*Those who passed by derided him, shaking their heads and saying, 'You who would destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself! If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross.'* In the same way the chief priests also, along with the scribes and elders, were mocking him, saying, 'He saved others; he cannot save himself. He is the King of Israel; let him come down from the cross now, and we will believe in him. He trusts in God; let God deliver him now, if he wants to; for he said, "I am God's Son.">> (Matthew 27:39-44). Yet it can also be said that contempt follows the wicked, because God will scorn those who scorn others.

With dishonour comes disgrace. The wicked bring insults and reproach upon those they consider dishonourable: <<*When the wicked are in authority, transgression increases, but the righteous will look upon their downfall*>> (Proverbs 29:16).

- ⁴ The words of the mouth are deep waters;
the fountain of wisdom is a gushing stream.

Proverbs 18:4

The words of the mouth are deep waters. The idea is not that everyone's speech is deep and meaningful. Instead the idea is that a person reveals the depths of their heart by the words of their mouth: <<*The purposes in the human mind are like deep water, but the intelligent will draw them out*>> (Proverbs 20:5), and: <<*Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer everyone*>> (Colossians 4:6). Clarke observed, "That is, the wise sayings of a wise man are like deep waters; howsoever much you pump or draw off, you do not appear to lessen them."

The fountain of wisdom is a gushing stream. When the wellspring of a man's being is rooted in wisdom, it will then flow out from their words. Jesus also indicated that the indwelling Holy Spirit in a Christian will allow them to speak wisely: <<*On the last day of the festival, the great day, while Jesus was standing there, he cried out, 'Let anyone who is thirsty come to me, and let the one who believes in me drink. As the scripture has said, "Out of the believer's heart shall flow rivers of living water."' Now he said this about the*>>

Spirit, which believers in him were to receive; for as yet there was no Spirit, because Jesus was not yet glorified>> (John 7:37-39).

Introduction to Proverbs 18:5-8

These verses all concern the misuse of words and the consequences thereof. Verses 6 and 7 obviously parallel each other. Of itself, v.5 is a simple condemnation of injustice in the courts; but in this context, and especially against v.8, the implication is that the legal system will malfunction in a setting dominated by innuendo, gossip, and lying. Verse 8 explains why gossip is so deadly: people love to hear it and to share it.

- ⁵ It is not right to be partial to the guilty,
or to subvert the innocent in judgement.

Proverbs 18:5

It is not right to be partial to the guilty. This is obvious to the person with a moral compass. Yet there are many reasons why someone might be tempted to show partiality to the wicked. They may do it out of misplaced compassion, out of a desire to please others, because of some kind of bribe, or many other reasons: *<<These also are sayings of the wise: Partiality in judging is not good. Whoever says to the wicked, 'You are innocent', will be cursed by peoples, abhorred by nations; but those who rebuke the wicked will have delight, and a good blessing will come upon them>> (Proverbs 24:23-25).* Clarke added, "We must not, in judicial cases, pay any attention to a man's riches, influence, friends, offices, &c., but judge the case according to its own merits. But when the wicked rich man opposes and oppresses the poor righteous, then all those things should be utterly forgotten."

It is not right to subvert the innocent in judgement. When one shows partiality to the wicked, they will overthrow the righteous in judgement whether they intend to or not. Each aspect of injustice is sin, and: *<<the wages of sin is death>> (Romans 6:23a).* The psalmist asked: *<<How long will you judge unjustly and show partiality to the wicked?>> (Psalm 82:2),* and it is further written: *<<One who justifies the wicked and one who condemns the righteous are both alike an abomination to the Lord>> (Proverbs 17:15).*

God's law makes it clear: *<<You shall not render an unjust judgement; you shall not be partial to the poor or defer to the great: with justice you shall judge your neighbour>> (Leviticus 19:15), and: <<You must not distort justice; you must not show partiality; and you must not accept bribes, for a bribe blinds the eyes of the wise and subverts the cause of those who are in the right>> (Deuteronomy 16:19).* **Jesus clearly kept these laws:** *<<So they sent their disciples to him, along with the Herodians, saying, 'Teacher, we know*

that you are sincere, and teach the way of God in accordance with truth, and show deference to no one; for you do not regard people with partiality'>> (Matthew 22:16).

⁶ A fool's lips bring strife,
and a fool's mouth invites a flogging.

Proverbs 18:6

A fool's lips bring strife. It is in the nature of the fool to argue. Their words often bring them into contention.

A fool's mouth invites a flogging. The contentious words of the fool invite punishment, and sometimes this punishment will be physical correction, the blows of the rod of correction: <<*Condemnation is ready for scoffers, and flogging for the backs of fools*>> (Proverbs 19:29).

Thankfully, all forms of corporal punishment have been abolished in the UK, There remain people who believe it should be restored as the solution to lack of respect and even violence that manifests itself in many areas of society. However, it would be better for people to be taught and then act on the wisdom of Christ's teaching rather than being physically beaten.

⁷ The mouths of fools are their ruin,
and their lips a snare to themselves.

Proverbs 18:7

The mouths of fools are their ruin. The words of the fool show his folly, but they also work towards his destruction: <<*Those who surround me lift up their heads; let the mischief of their lips overwhelm them!*>> (Psalm 140:9). Many a fool has been ruined because of their foolish words.

Their lips a snare to themselves. As in most places in Proverbs, snare here speaks of the life of being of the fool. It includes the inner spiritual self, but is not restricted to it. The fool's life is trapped, caught in a snare by his foolish words: <<*Because of their tongue he will bring them to ruin; all who see them will shake with horror*>> (Psalm 64:8), <<*The evil are ensnared by the transgression of their lips*>> (Proverbs 12:13a), and: <<*Words spoken by the wise bring them favour, but the lips of fools consume them*>> (Ecclesiastes 10:12).

One is reminded of the foolishness of those who wanted to kill the apostle Paul in Jerusalem: <<*In the morning the Jews joined in a conspiracy and bound themselves by an oath neither to eat nor drink until they had killed Paul. There were more than forty who joined in this conspiracy. They went to the*

chief priests and elders and said, 'We have strictly bound ourselves by an oath to taste no food until we have killed Paul. Now then, you and the council must notify the tribune to bring him down to you, on the pretext that you want to make a more thorough examination of his case. And we are ready to do away with him before he arrives' >> (Acts 23:12-15).

⁸ The words of a whisperer are like delicious morsels;
they go down into the inner parts of the body.

Proverbs 18:8

The words of a whisperer are like delicious morsels. The gossip and evil reports brought by the talebearer are almost impossible to resist. Those who should know better find it difficult to tell the talebearer to stop talking. The importance of this proverb is expressed in its repetition, being repeated in Proverbs 26:22.

They go down into the inner parts of the body. When people receive the words of a talebearer, they normally have an effect on them. The words are absorbed and often change the way people think and feel about others, even if what the talebearer says is not true or is not confirmed. God gives strong words regarding the confirmation of testimony: <<*A single witness shall not suffice to convict a person of any crime or wrongdoing in connection with any offence that may be committed. Only on the evidence of two or three witnesses shall a charge be sustained*>> (Deuteronomy 19:15), <<*In your law it is written that the testimony of two witnesses is valid*>> (John 8:17), <<*This is the third time I am coming to you. 'Any charge must be sustained by the evidence of two or three witnesses'*>> (2 Corinthians 13:1), and: <<*Never accept any accusation against an elder except on the evidence of two or three witnesses*>> (1 Timothy 5:19).

Introduction to Proverbs 18:9-12

Verses 10 and 11 describe two types of security (the Lord and riches), while v.9 and v.12 describe two things that bring about one's destruction (laziness and pride). Taken together, these proverbs imply that riches can give a false sense of security that leads to laziness, pride, and a downfall, but that humility and the fear of God exalt people.

⁹ One who is slack in work
is close kin to a vandal.

Proverbs 18:9

One who is slack in work. There are times of entertainment or leisure where perhaps laziness can be excused. There is never an excuse to be lazy or slothful in work. As previously commented on at Proverbs 15:19:

- Laziness is theft - one lives off the work of others.
- Laziness is selfishness - one lives for self and comfort.
- Laziness is neglect of duty - one does not do what one should.

Is close kin to a vandal. Laziness is often considered as a fairly innocent sin, but it is not. The lazy man is a close associate to the one who brings great destruction. If a person is given management over a large estate and ruins it through vandalism and outright destruction, it is easy to see them as a great destroyer. Yet if the same person allows it to fall into disrepair and uselessness through neglect and laziness, they also are a great destroyer - they just did it another way. Laziness destroys, as it did to one estate manager that Jesus referred to: <<***Then Jesus said to the disciples, ‘There was a rich man who had a manager, and charges were brought to him that this man was squandering his property. So he summoned him and said to him, “What is this that I hear about you? Give me an account of your management, because you cannot be my manager any longer”***>> (Luke 16:1-2).

¹⁰ The name of the Lord is a strong tower;
the righteous run into it and are safe.

Proverbs 18:10

The name of the Lord is a strong tower. God provides a wonderful and strong defence. This is rooted not in a magical saying of his name as if it were a charm or a spell, but in the name of the Lord as a declaration of his character, his person. In all that he is and all that he stands for, Yahweh is a strong tower: <<***The Lord is my rock, my fortress, and my deliverer, my God, my rock, in whom I take refuge, my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold and my refuge, my saviour; you save me from violence***>> (2 Samuel 22:2b-3), <<***Hear my cry, O God; listen to my prayer. From the end of the earth I call to you, when my heart is faint. Lead me to the rock that is higher than I; for you are my refuge, a strong tower against the enemy. Let me abide in your tent for ever, find refuge under the shelter of your wings***>> (Psalm 61:1-4), and: <<***On that day this song will be sung in the land of Judah: We have a strong city; he sets up victory like walls and bulwarks. Open the gates, so that the righteous nation that keeps faith may enter in. Those of steadfast mind you keep in peace— in peace because they trust in you. Trust in the Lord for ever, for in the Lord God you have an everlasting rock***>> (Isaiah 26:1-4).

Because the name of Yahweh represents his character in all its aspects, the believer can think about the aspects of God’s character and find a strong, safe refuge in them. It can be as simple as this:

- “Lord, you are a God of love - so I find refuge in your love.”
- “Lord, you are a God of mercy - so I find refuge in your mercy.”

- “Lord, you are a God of strength - so I find refuge in your strength.”
- “Lord, you are a God of righteousness - so I find refuge in your righteousness.”

Charles Spurgeon commented, “Numberless are those castles in the air to which men hasten in the hour of peril: ceremonies lift their towers into the clouds; professions pile their walls high as mountains, and works of the flesh paint their delusions till they seem substantial bulwarks; but all, all shall melt like snow, and vanish like a mist.”

The righteous run into it and are safe. God invites all to find refuge in his name; whoever calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved; refer to Joel 2:32, Acts 2:21, and Romans 10:13. Those who humbly run to God and find refuge with him are his righteous ones, so it is the righteous who run into it.

On run into it, Spurgeon observed, “This running appears to me to imply, that they have nothing to carry. A man who has a load, the heavier the load may be, the more will he be impeded in his flight. But the righteous run, like racers in the games, who have thrown off everything, their sins they leave to mercy, and their righteousness to the moles and bats.”

¹¹ The wealth of the rich is their strong city;
in their imagination it is like a high wall.

Proverbs 18:11

The wealth of the rich is their strong city. In contrast to the righteous who find their strong tower in God and his character, the rich man (here used in the sense of the man who trusts in his riches, who is only rich and nothing else) finds refuge in his wealth. This is why Jesus observed: <<*It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God*>> (Mark 10:25).

In their imagination it is like a high wall. The rich man sees his wealth as safe and sure as a high wall around a strong city. Yet this is only in his own esteem; both the Lord and the wise know that wealth is not a truly strong city and not a high wall. It is temporal; at most, it will last a human lifetime but it has no value in eternity and may even prevent many from spending eternity with the Lord: <<*If I have made gold my trust, or called fine gold my confidence; if I have rejoiced because my wealth was great, or because my hand had acquired much; if I have looked at the sun when it shone, or the moon moving in splendour, and my heart has been secretly enticed, and my mouth has kissed my hand; this also would be an iniquity to be punished by the judges, for I should have been false to God above*>> (Job 31:24-28).

- 12 Before destruction one's heart is haughty,
but humility goes before honour.

Proverbs 18:12

Before destruction one's heart is haughty. Since pride leads the way to destruction, as in Proverbs 16:18, it should be expected that the haughty heart is ready to receive its just destruction. Spurgeon observed, "There is no wisdom in self-exaltation. Other vices have some excuse, for men seem to gain by them; avarice, pleasure, lust, have some plea; but the man who is proud sells his soul cheaply. He opens wide the flood-gates of his heart, to let men see how deep is the flood within his soul; then suddenly it flows out, and all is gone – and all is nothing, for one puff of empty wind, one word of sweet applause – the soul is gone, and not a drop is left."

A prime example of this is seen in the prophecy against Tyre which was fulfilled by Alexander the Great over two hundred years later: <<*The word of the Lord came to me: Mortal, say to the prince of Tyre, Thus says the Lord God: Because your heart is proud and you have said, 'I am a god; I sit in the seat of the gods, in the heart of the seas', yet you are but a mortal, and no god, though you compare your mind with the mind of a god. You are indeed wiser than Daniel; no secret is hidden from you; by your wisdom and your understanding you have amassed wealth for yourself, and have gathered gold and silver into your treasuries. By your great wisdom in trade you have increased your wealth, and your heart has become proud in your wealth. Therefore, thus says the Lord God: Because you compare your mind with the mind of a god, therefore, I will bring strangers against you, the most terrible of the nations; they shall draw their swords against the beauty of your wisdom and defile your splendour. They shall thrust you down to the Pit, and you shall die a violent death in the heart of the seas*>> (Ezekiel 28:1-8).

Humility goes before honour. Wise people know that humility leads the way to honour. If a person wants destruction, they should be haughty; if they want honour, they should show humility: <<*When pride comes, then comes disgrace; but wisdom is with the humble*>> (Proverbs 11:2). Spurgeon commented, "It is not humility to underrate yourself. Humility is to think of yourself, if you can, as God thinks of you." And again, "Very likely the most humble man in the world won't bend to anybody. John Knox was a truly humble man, yet if you had seen him march before Queen Mary with the Bible in his hand, to reprove her, you would have rashly said, 'What a proud man!'"

- 13 If one gives answer before hearing,
it is folly and shame.

Proverbs 18:13

This proverb relates to every area of life, not just a courtroom setting.

If one gives answer before hearing. It is common to give a quick, impulsive answer to questions and problems. People often respond without thinking, or without hearing the full story, sometimes more interested in what they hope to say than what the matter before them really is. Derek Kidner commented, “This is a special snare of the self-important.”

The Mosaic Law gives instruction to thoroughly investigate issues before coming to a decision, for example: *<<If you hear it said about one of the towns that the Lord your God is giving you to live in, that scoundrels from among you have gone out and led the inhabitants of the town astray, saying, ‘Let us go and worship other gods’, whom you have not known, then you shall inquire and make a thorough investigation. If the charge is established that such an abhorrent thing has been done among you, you shall put the inhabitants of that town to the sword, utterly destroying it and everything in it – even putting its livestock to the sword>>* (Deuteronomy 13:12-15), and one prominent Pharisee questioned his companions when they made judgements about Jesus without hearing what he had to say: *<<Nicodemus, who had gone to Jesus before, and who was one of them, asked, ‘Our law does not judge people without first giving them a hearing to find out what they are doing, does it?’>>* (John 7:50-51).

It is folly and shame. People often rush to judgement or to a flawed decision: *<<It is a snare for one to say rashly, ‘It is holy’, and begin to reflect only after making a vow>>* (Proverbs 20:25), which will either be detrimental to them or to someone else. To whatever extent one does this, it is foolish and shameful. It is folly because a wrong or misguided answer is likely; it is shame because people do not represent themselves well in doing so. Clarke noted, “There are many also that give judgement before they hear the whole of the cause, and express an opinion before they hear the state of the case. How absurd, stupid, and foolish!”

¹⁴ The human spirit will endure sickness;
but a broken spirit – who can bear?

Proverbs 18:14

The human spirit will endure sickness. Many who have laboured long under sickness have felt themselves sustained - sometimes miraculously so - by the strength of their spirit. Illness in a broken and fallen world is just part of the trials of a Christian life, as it is for all life: *<<My brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of any kind, consider it nothing but joy, because you know that the testing of your faith produces endurance; and let endurance have its full*

effect, so that you may be mature and complete, lacking in nothing>> (James 1:2-4), and: <<Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy he has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who are being protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. 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 1:3-7).

A broken spirit – who can bear? When the spirit is broken, instead of giving life it proves to be something few people can bear: <<*Fear and trembling come upon me, and horror overwhelms me*>> (Psalm 55:5), <<*A glad heart makes a cheerful countenance, but by sorrow of heart the spirit is broken*>> (Proverbs 15:13), and: <<*A cheerful heart is a good medicine, but a downcast spirit dries up the bones*>> (Proverbs 17:22). Spurgeon observed, “There are some who have been greatly wounded, no doubt, through sickness. A wounded spirit may be the result of diseases which seriously shake the nervous system. Let us be very tender with brothers and sisters who got into that condition. I have heard some say, rather unkindly, ‘Sister So-and-so is so nervous, we can hardly speak in her presence.’ Yes, but talking like that will not help her; there are many persons who have had this trying kind of nervousness greatly aggravated by the unkindness or thoughtlessness of friends. It is a real disease, it is not imaginary. Imagination, no doubt, contributes to it, and increases it; but, still, there is a reality about it. There are some forms of physical disorder in which a person lying in bed feels great pain through another person simply walking across the room. ‘Oh!’ you say, ‘that is more imagination ‘Well, you may think so, if you like; but if you are ever in that painful condition, – as I have been many a time, – I will warrant that you will not talk in that fashion again.’”

A person’s **spirit**, if it is hopeful and good, can **endure sickness** and adversity, but if the spirit is despondent, even when there is nothing overtly wrong, then life itself becomes difficult to **bear**.

Introduction to Proverbs 18:15-19

These proverbs could be applied to many settings in life, although here they seem to be particularly focused on a courtroom setting. In hearing a case, one should seek with one’s heart (Hebrew *leb*, ‘reason, emotions, and will’) to acquire knowledge, and likewise with one’s ear to listen carefully to what is being said, for this is the way that the wise person seeks knowledge. One reason for this is the danger of bribery, which was condemned in Proverbs 15:27. Because the gift is intended to provide access to those in authority, it corrupts. Thus the warning of

v.17 not to be easily swayed by the person who states his case first; rather, the wise person examines the evidence in a careful, probing manner (v.13).

Still, in some cases it is impossible to reach a verdict, because the matter is hidden and there is not enough evidence to make a well-informed judgement. In such cases (v.18), it is better to settle quarrels by means of casting a lot before the Lord, thus leaving the outcome in the Lord's hands, rather than allowing powerful contenders to do violence to each other. Even so, whether by means of a lot or judicial determination, the reconciliation of one brother to another, i.e. reconciliation of close friends, is difficult to achieve. A brother offended can be more unyielding than a fortified city – for the resolution of quarrelling meets with resistance like the bars of a castle.

¹⁵ An intelligent mind acquires knowledge,
and the ear of the wise seeks knowledge.

Proverbs 18:15

An intelligent mind acquires knowledge. Wisdom desires more wisdom and knows how to get it. They show their intelligence or wisdom by seeking and getting more knowledge. Mary demonstrated such wisdom by receiving the teaching of Jesus, something Martha failed to grasp in her duty to provide hospitality: *<<Now as they went on their way, he entered a certain village, where a woman named Martha welcomed him into her home. She had a sister named Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to what he was saying. But Martha was distracted by her many tasks; so she came to him and asked, 'Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself? Tell her then to help me.' But the Lord answered her, 'Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things; there is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her'>>* (Luke 10:38-42).

The ear of the wise seeks knowledge. Wise men and women seek after wisdom with all their being - their heart and their ear are given over to the pursuit of more wisdom: *<<The mind of one who has understanding seeks knowledge, but the mouths of fools feed on folly>>* (Proverbs 15:14).

¹⁶ A gift opens doors;
it gives access to the great.

Proverbs 18:16

A gift opens doors. A previous proverb (Proverbs 17:8) spoke of a present in the sense of a bribe, but a different word is used here. This proverb is a simple recognition of fact: generosity and politeness open many doors. Kidner wrote, "It

can also be an innocent courtesy or *eirenicon*, like the present (*minhah*) sent to the captain in 1 Samuel 17:18, or to Esau or Joseph (Genesis 32:20; 43:11).”

It gives access to the great. It is true that a gift can be effective in gaining an audience of even great men. Christians are grateful that no gift is required to come before the greatest Man, the Man Christ Jesus who offers his work as mediator without cost: <<*Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand; and we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God*>> (Romans 5:1-2), and: <<*For there is one God; there is also one mediator between God and humankind, Christ Jesus, himself human, who gave himself a ransom for all – this was attested at the right time*>> (1 Timothy 2:5-6).

On the cost of becoming a Christian: it will cost you nothing and yet it will cost you everything. This is what Paul meant when he wrote: <<*I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God – what is good and acceptable and perfect*>> (Romans 12:1-2).

¹⁷ The one who first states a case seems right,
until the other comes and cross-examines.

Proverbs 18:17

The one who first states a case seems right. This is strong and familiar principle. When a person hears the first side of a dispute or a debate, they often think the first one to plead his cause seems right, and they are quick to take their side against the other.

Until the other comes and cross-examines. The judgement is very different when the other side is heard from his neighbour. The second voice may confront the first one to plead his cause and give both sides of the story. Clarke commented, “Any man may, in the first instance, make out a fair tale, because he has the choice of circumstances and arguments. But when the neighbour comes and searches him, he examines all, dissects all, swears and cross-questions every witness, and brings out truth and fact.”

A prime example of this is seen when Paul came before the governor Felix, the high priest Ananias and the Jewish elders. He was met with accusations from the Jewish prosecutor Tertullus: <<*We have, in fact, found this man a pestilent fellow, an agitator among all the Jews throughout the world, and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes. He even tried to profane the temple, and so we seized him*>> (Acts 24:5-6). To which Paul replied: <<*I cheerfully*

make my defence, knowing that for many years you have been a judge over this nation. As you can find out, it is not more than twelve days since I went up to worship in Jerusalem. They did not find me disputing with anyone in the temple or stirring up a crowd either in the synagogues or throughout the city. Neither can they prove to you the charge that they now bring against me. But this I admit to you, that according to the Way, which they call a sect, I worship the God of our ancestors, believing everything laid down according to the law or written in the prophets. I have a hope in God – a hope that they themselves also accept – that there will be a resurrection of both the righteous and the unrighteous. Therefore I do my best always to have a clear conscience towards God and all people. Now after some years I came to bring alms to my nation and to offer sacrifices. While I was doing this, they found me in the temple, completing the rite of purification, without any crowd or disturbance. But there were some Jews from Asia – they ought to be here before you to make an accusation, if they have anything against me. Or let these men here tell what crime they had found when I stood before the council, unless it was this one sentence that I called out while standing before them, “It is about the resurrection of the dead that I am on trial before you today”’>> (Acts 24:10b-21).

With this principle in mind, it is important that Christians argue for and defend Biblical truth in a way that can stand before the examination of others. Giving arguments that sound convincing but can be easily exposed or answered by an adversary do no good in defending and advancing God’s kingdom.

¹⁸ Casting the lot puts an end to disputes
and decides between powerful contenders.

Proverbs 18:18

Casting the lot puts an end to disputes and decides between powerful contenders. When there is an argument or dispute, appealing to an outside authority to solve the matter can cause contentions to cease. In this case the outside authority is the casting of lots, but the principle can be applied to other agreed-upon authorities. When an outside authority settles the contention, it can keep mighty warriors from fighting and killing each other. In Jewish understanding the lot was guided by the Lord: <<**The lot is cast into the lap, but the decision is the Lord’s alone**>> (Proverbs 16:33). On whether Christians should cast lots, refer to the comments made on Acts 1:26.

¹⁹ An ally offended is stronger than a city;
such quarrelling is like the bars of a castle.

Proverbs 18:19

An ally offended is stronger than a city. There is a price to pay in offending a brother. This was seen in the dispute between Paul and Barnabas over Mark: <<*After some days Paul said to Barnabas, ‘Come, let us return and visit the believers in every city where we proclaimed the word of the Lord and see how they are doing.’ Barnabas wanted to take with them John called Mark. But Paul decided not to take with them one who had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not accompanied them in the work. The disagreement became so sharp that they parted company; Barnabas took Mark with him and sailed away to Cyprus*>> (Acts 15:36-39). To win him back to friendship and cooperation is difficult, more than is often thought. However, Paul’s letters indicate that he was later reconciled with Mark and so it is assumed with Barnabas as well. Yet there was ill feeling at the time. Therefore one should avoid offending a brother or sister in Christ, doing so only if necessary and doing all that can be done to be blameless and whatever offense that is taken is truly because of them. Clarke stated, “If we take the words according to the common version, we see them express what, alas! we know to be too generally true: that when brothers fall out, it is with extreme difficulty that they can be reconciled. And fraternal enmities are generally strong and inveterate.”

Such quarrelling is like the bars of a castle. The conflict and contentions that come from a brother offended can be as difficult to break as the bars of a castle. They also may imprison those caught up in the contentions. Kidner observed, “The proverb so understood is a forceful warning of the strength of the invisible walls of estrangement, so easy to erect, so hard to demolish.”

Introduction to Proverbs 18:20-21

Since the tongue can produce either death or life, the wise person will guard his or her speech.

²⁰ From the fruit of the mouth one’s stomach is satisfied;
the yield of the lips brings satisfaction.

Proverbs 18:20

From the fruit of the mouth one’s stomach is satisfied. For some it is possible for them to make their living by what they say. They satisfy their stomach and perhaps that of their family from the fruit of the mouth. However, there is also the interpretation that inner satisfaction comes from say what is right: <<*From the fruit of their words good people eat good things, but the desire of the treacherous is for wrongdoing*>> (Proverbs 13:2), <<*A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in a setting of silver. Like a gold ring or an ornament of gold is a wise rebuke to a listening ear*>> (Proverbs 25:11-12), and: <<*Pay close*

attention to yourself and to your teaching; continue in these things, for in doing this you will save both yourself and your hearers>> (1 Timothy 4:16).

The yield of the lips brings satisfaction. What a person says shall fill his stomach and fulfil his financial obligations. What is not a good idea is to become self-satisfied with what one says. It has to be the truth and it has to be said with the other person's best interest at heart.

Clearly, the Pharisee was satisfied with what he said and did, considering himself as superior to others in the parable told by Jesus: <<*Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax-collector. The Pharisee, standing by himself, was praying thus, "God, I thank you that I am not like other people: thieves, rogues, adulterers, or even like this tax-collector. I fast twice a week; I give a tenth of all my income." But the tax-collector, standing far off, would not even look up to heaven, but was beating his breast and saying, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner!"*>> (Luke 18:10-13).

²¹ Death and life are in the power of the tongue,
and those who love it will eat its fruits.

Proverbs 18:21

Death and life are in the power of the tongue. The previous proverb said how 'what a person speaks' might provide for their stomach. Here the idea is extended as a reminder that the tongue not only has the power of provision, but also of death and life, as David knew only too well: <<*Help, O Lord, for there is no longer anyone who is godly; the faithful have disappeared from humankind. They utter lies to each other; with flattering lips and a double heart they speak. May the Lord cut off all flattering lips, the tongue that makes great boasts, those who say, 'With our tongues we will prevail; our lips are our own – who is our master?'*>> (Psalm 12:1-4).

Those who love it will eat its fruits. Those who are wise enough to love and appreciate the power of what a person says will be blessed and will eat the pleasant fruit of wise and effective speech. Those who are not, will not: <<*From the fruit of their words good people eat good things, but the desire of the treacherous is for wrongdoing. Those who guard their mouths preserve their lives; those who open wide their lips come to ruin*>> (Proverbs 13:2-3). Jesus taught: <<*for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned*>> (Matthew 12:37).

Introduction to Proverbs 18:22-20:4

A number of proverbs in this section of the book are so similar to each other that they appear to serve as markers, setting boundaries for separate proverb

collections. Proverbs 18:22 and 19:14 both assert that a good wife is from the Lord; while 19:15, 19:24, and 20:4 concern laziness. Proverbs 19:11-12 deals first with patience and then with the king's anger, and 20:2-3 deals first with the king's anger and then with patience. Between these markers, Proverbs 18:23-19:10 concerns misfortune, while 19:16-23 can be described as an inventory of the essential elements of a good life. Over against 19:16-23, the proverbs in 19:25-20:1 present the antithesis of the good life, the life of the mocker.

²² He who finds a wife finds a good thing,
and obtains favour from the Lord.

Proverbs 18:22

He who finds a wife finds a good thing, and obtains favour from the Lord. This verse refers to both the human action finds and the divine governance from the Lord of a marital relationship, while the pronouncement good agrees with the Lord's assessment that it was 'not good' for Adam to be alone in Genesis 2:18.

God brought together the first husband and wife in Genesis 2:21-25. In this God gave marriage between a man and woman as a gift to humanity, both as a whole and a blessing on an individual level. Clarke commented, "Marriage, with all its troubles and embarrassments, is a blessing from God; and there are few cases where a wife of any sort is not better than none. As to good wives and bad wives, they are relatively so, in general; and most of them that have been bad afterwards, have been good at first; and we well know the best things may deteriorate, and the world generally allows that where there are matrimonial contentions, there are faults on both sides."

Obtains favour from the Lord. As noted above, in Genesis 2:18 God said that it was not good that man should be alone. His gift of Eve to Adam was a demonstration of God's favour, and he still gives that gift of favour. In the modern western world the cultural incentives for marriage seem to become weaker year by year, but God's declaration of good and the giving of his favour does not depend on cultural incentives. Kidner observed, "The wording, especially in the Hebrew, strikingly resembles that of Proverbs 8:35, and so suggests that after wisdom itself, the best of God's blessings is a good wife."

Introduction to Proverbs 18:23-19:4

These proverbs observe misfortune from various angles. The poor are reduced to begging and taking abuse (18:23), but a few friends stick by a man even in his worst times (18:24). The great majority of one's companions, however, only stay close by so long as one's fortunes are good; in bad times, they disappear (19:4).

Poverty with integrity is better than immorality (19:1), but hunger, such as is produced by poverty, can lead to thoughtless, hasty acts of folly (refer to 19:2 and the associated comment). People often blame God for their misfortune when they should be blaming themselves (19:3).

²³ The poor use entreaties,
but the rich answer roughly.

Proverbs 18:23

The poor use entreaties. It is sadly true that often, when a person is poor in money or influence, all they can do is beg for favour and justice.

The rich answer roughly. The rich man or woman can speak boldly - even rudely - because they have resources of money and influence. Solomon here described the world as it is, not as it should be. In this proverb a quiet plea to make a better world than what is described in the proverb can be sensed.

In God's eyes people are judged by who they are spiritually and not how wealthy they may be materially. In many ways the poor Christian has an advantage eternally: <<Let the believer who is lowly boast in being raised up, and the rich in being brought low, because the rich will disappear like a flower in the field. For the sun rises with its scorching heat and withers the field; its flower falls, and its beauty perishes. It is the same with the rich; in the midst of a busy life, they will wither away>> (James 1:9-11).

²⁴ Some friends play at friendship
but a true friend sticks closer than one's nearest kin.

Proverbs 18:24

Some friends play at friendship. This is a basic but often ignored principle. If a person wants friends, they should first be friendly to others.

A true friend sticks closer than one's nearest kin. Even when a person has friends, there is something that will disappoint in human friendship. The flesh and blood friends of this world are important and a blessing, but people really need the friend who sticks closer than a brother - Jesus Christ himself, who called his disciples, then and now, no longer servants but friends in John 15:13-15.

Christians often apply this to Jesus their Friend as a spiritual principle; it is likely that Solomon did not have the Messiah in mind. Clarke noted, "In many cases the genuine friend has shown more attachment, and rendered greater benefits, than the natural brother. Some apply this to God; others to Christ; but the text has no such meaning."

Spurgeon concluded, “Now I have a question to ask: that question I ask of every man and every woman in this place, and of every child too – Is Jesus Christ your friend? Have you a friend at court – at heaven’s court? Is the Judge of quick and dead your friend? Can you say that you love him, and has he ever revealed himself in the way of love to you? Dear hearer, do not answer that question for your neighbour; answer it for yourself. Peer or peasant, rich or poor, learned or illiterate, this question is for each of you, therefore, ask it. Is Christ my friend?”