

The Proverbs

Lesson 20

Proverbs 17

Chapter 17 continues to follow the comparison/completion format of the proverbs found in chapters 16 – 22.

QUIETNESS/STRIFE

Proverbs 17:1 Better is a dry morsel and quietness with it than a house full of feasting with strife.

A more accurate translation of the original is “Better is dry meal with peace and quiet than a house full of sacrifices where there is strife.” “Dry morsel” or “dry meal” literally refers to eating dry corn meal or dry flour. It is hard to imagine how someone can enjoy eating a spoonful of dry flour, yet, even the flour may bring some comfort to someone living in the midst of never-ending discontent, discord, fighting, friction and trouble. When Solomon addresses the “house full of sacrifices”, he is referring to the meat from the animals offered to the LORD and slain on the altar by the priest. These meats are holy to the LORD and should be consumed in a godly manner and place. The mere presence of the holy offerings cannot guarantee the holiness of the attitudes of the people consuming them. Many highly religious people bear no relationship with the LORD. They claim to be religious “but they do not bridle their tongues” as mentioned in James chapter 1. The tongue is the instigator of most strife, discontent, discord, fighting, friction and trouble because through them the heart of a person is revealed. The savory meat of the sacrifice may soothe the hunger of the body but the environment in which it is eaten can rob all the enjoyment from the meal.

SERVANT/SON

Proverbs 17:2 A servant who acts wisely will rule over a son who acts shamefully, and will share in the inheritance among brothers.

A shameful son is a disgraceful son. Such sons often bring untold heartache to their parents. After years of strife and contention, the sons fall out of favor. It seems that it is common for good and faithful servants to find great favor with their employers and find they are as heirs to the estate in the end. It is not uncommon for sons to be disinherited because of their shamefulness and the servant to be granted the entire estate of the employer because the servant brought great peace where the son brought great strife.

REFINING POT/LORD'S TEST

Proverbs 17:3 The refining pot is for silver and the furnace for gold, but the LORD tests hearts.

A great difference existed in Solomon's day between a refining pot and a furnace. Silver could be melted in a crucible or refining pot made of clay which could withstand the volume of heat needed to melt the silver and skim off all the impurities before pouring the pure silver into a mold. The heat was concentrated in a smaller area to obtain the silver's melting point of 1763 degrees Fahrenheit. A furnace was used to melt metals and fire pottery at high temperatures. The melting point of gold is 1947 degrees Fahrenheit. Different types of pottery are fired in a furnace at temperatures between 1809 – 2615 degrees Fahrenheit. Therefore, even the lowest grade pottery can withstand the heat of melting silver but it takes a higher-grade pottery to melt gold. But even silver and gold cannot withstand the test of the LORD by which He purifies the heart of man. The LORD sends trials and tribulations to those who belong to Him in order to purify them for His use and ultimate holiness in His presence. His testing brings strife to man but ultimately brings him peace in His purification process.

EVIL/LIAR

Proverbs 17:4 An evildoer listens to wicked lips, a liar pays attention to a destructive tongue.

What is the difference between an evildoer and a liar? An evildoer is a person who performs acts which are harmful or non-productive. A liar is a person who uses his words to cheat, perjure, deceive, fabricate, mislead or malign. Wicked lips are lying lips because the two go hand-in-hand. An evildoer uses lying lips to bolster his position. An evildoer robs people of peace; however, lying lips bring destruction. The word "destruction" actually means engulfing ruin of one person by another. Liars love to see the ruin of others.

MOCK/PUNISH

Proverbs 17:5 He who mocks the poor reproaches his Maker; he who rejoices at calamity will not go unpunished.

Those who make sport of poverty are likewise making sport of the LORD; however, the LORD will not allow such attitudes against those in poverty to go unpunished.

GRANDCHILDREN/SONS

Proverbs 17:6 Grandchildren are the crown of old men, and the glory of sons is their fathers.

Think of "the crown" as dignity and joy. Such are the grandchildren of older people. Even after the grandchildren have reached adulthood, they should remember the parents and grandparents who raised them in wisdom and truth.

EXCELLENT SPEECH/LYING LIPS

Proverbs 17:7 Excellent speech is not fitting for a fool; much less are lying lips to a prince.

Remember, a fool in Solomon's proverbs is a wicked person. Excellent speech and "lying lips" are polar opposites. It is the prince who should have excellent speech and it is the fool who should have lying lips. Such is the point of this proverb; fools rarely have excellent speech and princes should not have lying lips.

BRIBE/REFLECTS

Proverbs 17:8 A bribe is a charm in the sight of its owner; wherever he turns, he prospers.

The words "he prospers" at the end of this proverb should be "he glistens" or reflects the bribe's light. Some people will do anything for money and wherever that person turns his attitude and appetite for money will shine. Think of it as sin; many sinful persons love to flaunt their sins before the world.

COVER SIN/SEPARATE FRIENDS

Proverbs 17:9 He who covers a transgression seeks love, but he who repeats a matter separates intimate friends.

Sinners seek loving approval in spite of their continued sinful action. These same sinners will attempt to find love from a multitude of people and thus cause dissension within that group as to what is a proper and appropriate response to the request of the sinners. Therefore, the sinner continues to sin and the group is filled with strife.

UNDERSTANDING/FOOL

Proverbs 17:10 A rebuke goes deeper into one who has understanding than a hundred blows into a fool.

The word "rebuke" means to correct. Wise people with great understanding tend to listen to everything that is said, weigh what is said in light of what they know and make adjustments as needed. The wise and understanding person considers even the simplest word of correction seriously. The wicked person will rarely consider any correction seriously, regardless of how many times they hear the same thing.

REBELLIOUS/CRUEL

Proverbs 17:11 A rebellious man seeks only evil, so a cruel messenger will be sent against him.

The word "rebellious" means defying or resisting some form of established authority. The magistrates of countries determine what constitutes proper conduct. A rebellious man will continue to break the law of proper conduct; however, the magistrates will ultimately send merciless officials to arrest and punish him.

FOLLY/FOOLS

Proverbs 17:12 Let a man meet a bear robbed of her cubs, rather than a fool in his folly.

Nothing is as dangerous as coming in contact with a mother bear who cannot find her cubs. She is angry and destructive toward every living thing that comes in her way. In this proverb, Solomon indicates that the folly of the fool is more dangerous than that of the mother bear.

EVIL/EVIL

Proverbs 17:13 He who returns evil for good, evil will not depart from his house.

When a person pays back a good person with evil deeds, evil will come upon his own house to an unusual extent. Truly, evil begets evil and the evil will not go unpunished.

STRIFE/QUARREL

Proverbs 17:14 The beginning of strife is *like* letting out water, so abandon the quarrel before it breaks out.

Think about how running water erodes soil and carves out new creeks, rivers, canyons and crevices. The damage of the running water can rarely be stopped even by human intervention until it has run its course. Then, when the land is dry again, humans can attempt to build a structure in order to offset any further occurrences. So it is with strife; rarely can it be stopped until it runs its course; therefore, when strife begins, run from it before the spirit of contention comes into conflict.

EVIL/ABOMINATION

Proverbs 17:15 He who justifies the wicked, and he who condemns the righteous, both of them alike are an abomination to the LORD.

The person who holds out wickedness as good and righteousness as evil is a stench in the nostrils of the LORD.

FOOL/NO SENSE

Proverbs 17:16 Why is there a price in the hand of a fool to buy wisdom, when he has no sense?

Many fools will try to buy wisdom but they fail to recognize that they lack the genuine desire to obtain it. Wisdom is gathered over a lifetime and cannot be bought or obtained in an instant.

FRIEND/BROTHER

Proverbs 17:17 A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity.

True friends are forever friends regardless of the times and circumstances. Rarely are there brothers who do not experience hardships in their relationships; nevertheless, they do not

determine or deter their love for each another. However, for many people, the love of friends can be greater than the love of relatives because of the adversity experienced by the family.

PLEDGES/SURETY

Proverbs 17:18 A man lacking in sense pledges, and becomes surety in the presence of his neighbor.

Simply put, never co-sign a note for a neighbor.

STRIFE/DESTRUCTION

Proverbs 17:19 He who loves transgression loves strife; He who raises his door seeks destruction.

Sin and strife go hand-in-hand although they are different. Sin loves strife and strife accompanies sin. Sin always brings strife to a bystander as well as the sinner.

The second clause of this proverb completes the first but its meaning is difficult to apply to today's life in America. In Solomon's day, the gates or doors of the city were rarely in their full uplifted position; rather, they were raised about three feet above the ground. People entering the city on foot would have to stoop to enter the doors or gates. Those on horseback would not be able to enter the city without dismounting. Attacking enemies would rarely dismount to enter a city; therefore, the low doors and gates acted as a partial protection for the people of the city. The heavy gates and doors of the city operated with a pulley system; opening and closing the gates was a slow process. With that knowledge, we can understand that the second clause is warning all people that a gate that is wide open may act as an invitation for sinful people to destroy the city.

CROOKED/PERVERTED

Proverbs 17:20 He who has a crooked mind finds no good, and he who is perverted in his language falls into evil.

Evil begets evil; the crooked mind devises crooked ways; neither the evil nor crooked person attempts to do that which is good. When a person develops a perverted language, it is an indication that evil has taken over the heart. It may take some time for the evil to become evident but it is definitely present. Soon, the perverted person will fail to find good and therefore begin to develop evil plans.

FOOL/FOOL

Proverbs 17:21 He who begets a fool *does so* to his sorrow, and the father of a fool has no joy.

The LORD does not promise that the children of good and godly parents will follow their example. Wicked children can bring great sorrow to righteous parents.

JOYFUL HEART/BROKEN SPIRIT

Proverbs 17:22 A joyful heart is good medicine, but a broken spirit dries up the bones.

The original actually reads, “A joyful heart does good to the body.” With this understanding the proverb makes sense. The “joyful heart” helps the body and the “broken spirit” figuratively drains the marrow from the bones.

BRIBE/PERVERT

Proverbs 17: 23 A wicked man receives a bribe from the bosom to pervert the ways of justice.

In Solomon’s world, the money purse was carried just above the girdle and right below the breast. It was tied tight to prevent theft. Therefore, when a bribe was paid to someone, the money was retrieved from the pouch below the breast. But that is not the point of this proverb. Solomon relates the truth that an evil man will pay a bribe to a person of notoriety in order to offset the rightful system of justice that otherwise should arrest the man paying the bribe.

WISDOM/FOOL

Proverbs 17:24 Wisdom is in the presence of the one who has understanding, but the eyes of a fool are on the ends of the earth.

The wicked fool has his eyes set on the pie in the sky and impossible to obtain. The wise person keeps his eyes on the things which are within sight and reachable.

FOOLISH/BITTERNESS

Proverbs 17:25 A foolish son is a grief to his father, and bitterness to her who bore him.

This proverb is similar in theme to Proverbs 17:21, “He who begets a fool *does so* to his sorrow, and the father of a fool has no joy.” Wicked children bring grief and bitterness to their father and mother.

FINE/STRIKE

Proverbs 17:26 It is also not good to fine the righteous, *Nor* to strike the noble for *their* uprightness.

Simply put, it is wrong to fault those who are doing what is right.

RESTRAIN/COOL SPIRIT

Proverbs 17:27 He who restrains his words has knowledge, and he who has a cool spirit is a man of understanding.

It is one thing to ponder the good and evil concerning a subject. It is another thing to speak those thoughts. The same can be said in how we respond emotionally and physically to a situation. In all things, restraint and a cool spirit are characteristics of a knowledgeable and understanding person.

SILENT FOOL/SILENT WISE

Proverbs 17:28 Even a fool, when he keeps silent, is considered wise; when he closes his lips, he is *counted* prudent.

Is Proverbs 17:27 true even for fools? Verse 28 alludes to the perception about fools who have learned to hold their tongues and restrain their behavior. For that moment, others will consider them wise; nevertheless, that does not guarantee their wisdom. The extent of their foolishness will quickly become known when they finally begin to speak. Even a fool can fool most of the people some of the time.