

# PROVERBS

## Chapter 17

**Better a dry crust with peace and quiet than a house full of feasting, with strife. <sup>2</sup> A wise servant will rule over a disgraceful son, and will share the inheritance as one of the brothers. <sup>3</sup> The crucible for silver and the furnace for gold, but the LORD tests the heart. <sup>4</sup> A wicked man listens to evil lips; a liar pays attention to a malicious tongue. <sup>5</sup> He who mocks the poor shows contempt for their Maker; whoever gloats over disaster will not go unpunished. <sup>6</sup> Children's children are a crown to the aged, and parents are the pride of their children. <sup>7</sup> Arrogant lips are unsuited to a fool— how much worse lying lips to a ruler! <sup>8</sup> A bribe is a charm to the one who gives it; wherever he turns, he succeeds. <sup>9</sup> He who covers over an offense promotes love, but whoever repeats the matter separates close friends. <sup>10</sup> A rebuke impresses a man of discernment more than a hundred lashes a fool. <sup>11</sup> An evil man is bent only on rebellion; a merciless official will be sent against him. <sup>12</sup> Better to meet a bear robbed of her cubs than a fool in his folly. <sup>13</sup> If a man pays back evil for good, evil will never leave his house. <sup>14</sup> Starting a quarrel is like breaching a dam; so drop the matter before a dispute breaks out. <sup>15</sup> Acquitting the guilty and condemning the innocent— the LORD detests them both. <sup>16</sup> Of what use is money in the hand of a fool, since he has no desire to get wisdom? <sup>17</sup> A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity. <sup>18</sup> A man lacking in judgment strikes hands in pledge and puts up security for his neighbor. <sup>19</sup> He who loves a quarrel loves sin; he who builds a high gate invites destruction. <sup>20</sup> A man of perverse heart does not prosper; he whose tongue is deceitful falls into trouble. <sup>21</sup> To have a fool for a son brings grief; there is no joy for the father of a fool. <sup>22</sup> A cheerful heart is good medicine, but a crushed spirit dries up the bones. <sup>23</sup> A wicked man accepts a bribe in secret to pervert the course of justice. <sup>24</sup> A discerning man keeps wisdom in view, but a fool's eyes wander to the ends of the earth. <sup>25</sup> A foolish son brings grief to his father and bitterness to the one who bore him. <sup>26</sup> It is not good to punish an innocent man, or to flog officials for their integrity. <sup>27</sup> A man of knowledge uses words with restraint, and a man of understanding is even-tempered. <sup>28</sup> Even a fool is thought wise if he keeps silent, and discerning if he holds his tongue.**

**17:1** BETTER A DRY CRUST WITH PEACE AND QUIET – Who would choose riches, if he could have peace instead? Simple choice? Seemingly, it is. Yet many people are so enamored of wealth, that they will seek it even at the cost of having a loveless home. Pray to God for contentment. Then a dry crust will be as inviting as a sumptuous feast. (PBC)

Lit, “sacrifices with strife.” Sacrificial meat that was to be eaten in the home made the meal a festive occasion because meat was in short supply. Only a rich man could afford a house full of feasting. (TLSB)

**17:2** *A wise servant will rule over a disgraceful son.* See 11:29 and note. (CSB)

A wise servant could be given authority and even freed by his or her master. Slaves in the ancient world often had oversight of young heirs (Gal 4:1–2) and might inherit a master’s estate in the absence of a biological son (Gn 15:2). If an existent heir proved unworthy, a faithful slave might either become responsible for managing the estate at the master’s death or share in the inheritance with the master’s children. This proverb cautions the reader not to rely on privilege and position. (TLSB)

WISE – *saw-kal'* A primitive root; to *be* (causeatively *make* or *act*) *circumspect* and hence *intelligent*:—consider, expert, instruct, prosper, (deal) prudent (-ly), (give) skill (-ful), have good success, teach, (have, make to) understand (-ing), wisdom, (be, behave self, consider, make) wise (-ly), guide wittingly. (QV)

The point of this verse is that a good servant can rise to higher honor than a disgraceful son. What matters is not the position we are born into, but what we do with the life we have. (PBC)

*disgraceful son.* See 10:5; 19:26; 28:7; 29:15. (CSB)

**17:3** *The crucible ... the furnace.* Silver and gold were refined to remove their impurities (cf. Isa 1:25; Mal 3:3). (CSB)

Cf Ps 7:9; 17:3; 66:10; Jer 6:27; 9:7; 1Pt 1:7. Both were used for refining and testing gold and silver. (TLSB)

A crucible was a container that could resist great heat. Silver and gold were melted down and refined in crucibles and furnaces. (PBC)

*tests the heart.* See 15:11; 16:2 and notes; Jer 17:10. (CSB)

Hbr *bachan*; could also be translated “tempts.” God tempts no one (Jas 1:13) in the way that Satan tries to achieve our fall. But God tests and tries us. He tested Abraham to teach him (Heb 11:17), and it is through many trials that we enter God’s kingdom (Ac 14:22). Scripture assures us that we will not be tested beyond what we can endure (1Co 10:13). Peter speaks of testing and refining the genuineness of faith (1Pt 1:6–7). (TLSB)

While men have the ability to refine metals in this way, only God can test the heart. God uses life’s trials and suffering as a way to refine His people, making them stronger and purer. St Peter encourages us to accept sufferings, since they are for our good: “These [trials] have come so that your faith – of greater

worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire – may be [roved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed” (1 Peter 1:17). (PBC)

**17:4** WICKED MEN LISTEN TO EVIL LIPS – The saying “Birds of a feather flock together,” fits well. (PBC)

**17:5** *who mocks the poor shows contempt for their Maker.* See 14:31 and note. (CSB)

How much of our humor isn’t at someone else’ expense! To make fun of the down-and-out is to show contempt for God Himself. He owns everything. If He should distribute less to some than others, that is not cause for mockery. Rather, it is an opportunity God gives us to show love by sharing our gifts with those in need. (PBC)

*whoever gloats over disaster will not go unpunished.* The people of Edom in particular were condemned for gloating over the collapse of “brother” Israel (Ob 10; see Eze 35:12, 15; see also Pr 24:17). (CSB)

To mock those on whom God has allowed disaster to fall is also to invite God’s punishment. (PBC)

**17:6** *crown to the aged.* Cf. the “gray hair” of 16:31. To live to see one’s grandchildren was considered a great blessing (see Ge 48:11; Ps 128:5–6). (CSB)

A large family is regarded as a blessing. Old age crowns the righteous life with the blessings of children and grandchildren (16:31). Godly parents and grandparents are likewise God’s precious gifts to children (Eph 6:4). E.g., Timothy had both Eunice and Lois to teach him the faith (2Tm 1:5). We have such cherished “fathers” as Abraham, Isaac, Moses and the prophets, the holy apostles and evangelists, and other faithful teachers. (TLSB)

*parents are the pride of their children.* See Ge 47:7. (CSB)

Not only do parents rejoice to see their children grow up and have families of their own, but children are proud of their parents as well. Without using the words, Solomon has described the love and joy of a God-fearing family. (PBC)

**17:1–6** The Fourth Commandment not only teaches children to honor their parents but also teaches parents to cherish and take seriously God’s gift of raising their children. God did not give us “children for our pleasure or amusement” (LC I 170) but that we would train them up in the way they should go (22:6). Parents, are you taking seriously your responsibility to instruct your children in the Scriptures and the catechism (Dt 6:6–8)? Children, are you respecting your parents, holding them in the highest esteem,

recognizing what good gifts God has provided you through them (Ex 20:12)? Our heavenly Father has given us His highest good in His Son, Jesus, and because Jesus delighted to do His Father's will, God now delights in you and me. In Jesus, we will receive the true crown of righteousness (2Tm 4:8), and by Him we call God our Father. • Dear Father, teach us to cherish the gifts You provide in our families—both as parents and as children—and lead us to dutifully carry out the responsibilities You give us. In Jesus' name. Amen. (TLSB)

**17:7** For the structure of this verse cf. 19:10; 26:1. (CSB)

*Arrogant.* See NIV text note. (Or Eloquent) (CSB)

One should not expect words excelling in wisdom on the lips of a fool. Still more out of place is deception on the lips of a noble character. (TLSB)

Although no one should be haughty, arrogant speech is especially unsuited to a fool. (PBC)

*lying lips to a ruler.* His right to rule depends on honesty and justice (see 12:22; 16:12–13). (CSB)

The higher the ruler or leader, the more serious are the consequences of his deceit. (PBC)

**17:8** *A bribe is a charm.* A sad commentary on human behavior (see 18:16; 21:14; Ecc 10:19). Elsewhere, bribes are condemned (see v. 23; 15:27; 28:16; Dt 16:19; 1Sa 12:3; Ecc 7:7; Isa 1:23; Am 5:12; 1Ti 6:10). (CSB)

Lit, “stone of favor.” A bribe works like magic on the wicked (v 23). (TLSB)

**17:9** *He who covers over an offense promotes love.* See 10:12 and note. (CSB)

We may know of some embarrassment in the life of another. Perhaps a neighbor or friends spend some time in prison. Love says, let it be. This is not to overlook sin, but simply not to bring it up when it need not be brought up. (PBC)

**17:10** *rebuke impresses a man of discernment.* See 9:8–9. (CSB)

Who of us likes to be corrected for something we've done wrong. Yet a man of understanding will appreciate it and learn from it, more than a fool will from a hundred lashes across the back. (PBC)

*a hundred lashes a fool.* Fools deserved and received flogging (cf. 10:13; 19:25, 29; 26:3; Dt 25:3). (CSB)

**17:11** BENT ONLY ON REBELLION – Some people can't be talked out of a wrongful course of action. (PBC)

*merciless official.* Cf. the dispatching of Abishai and Joab to end Sheba's rebellion against David (2Sa 20:1–22; see 1Ki 2:25, 29, 46; Pr 16:14). (CSB)

The necessity of force is a harsh reality in our fallen world. (PBC)

**17:12** *bear robbed of her cubs.* Sure to attack you and rip you open (see 2Sa 17:8; Hos 13:8; cf. the raging of the fool in 29:9). (CSB)

Expression of deadliness. Image is also used of fierce warriors in 2Sm 17:8 and of God's merciless wrath in Hos 13:8. God used the wrath of she-bears to punish boys who mocked His prophet in 2Ki 2:24. Nevertheless, the proverb teaches that even such merciless destruction is more bearable than the mayhem of a fool. *robbed of her cubs.* Lit, "childless." (TLSB)

The fool in his made folly is just as dangerous. (PBC)

**17:13** *pays back evil for good.* Like Nabal, who refused to pay David's men (1Sa 25:21; see Ps 109:5; Ro 12:17–21). (CSB)

*evil will never leave his house.* The fate of David's family after his affair with Bathsheba and the murder of Uriah (2Sa 12:10; cf. Jer 18:20–23). (CSB)

**17:14** STARTING A QUARREL – be sensitive, says Solomon. Don't start the argument; you might start more than you can handle. (PBC)

*letting out water.* Gregory the Great: "To let out water is to let loose the tongue to a flux of speech" (*NPNF* 2 12:38). The breaching of a dam begins with a trickle, after which a raging flood sweeps a wide path of destruction. Backing away before a quarrel breaks out is like plugging the proverbial hole in the dike. (TLSB)

**17:15** *Acquitting the guilty.* Perhaps because of a bribe (see v. 8; 24:24). (CSB)

This does not apply to God's work of justifying sinners but describes the acts of "an unjust judge in justifying or acquitting a guilty man" (Chemnitz, *LTh* 2:479). Only God can truly acquit the guilty, charging our sins against His innocent Son. In His mercy, God chose to look upon Jesus as the only sinner there is, while considering us as innocent as Jesus (2Co 5:21). (TLSB)

So often the innocent little guy seems to lose out, while the criminal who can hire the best lawyers gets away with murder. The famous lawyer Clarence Darrow remarked, "There is no such thing as justice – in or out of court." So it often appears. But God takes note, and does not forget. (PBC)

**17:16** *money in the hand of a fool.* Perhaps to pay the fee for his schooling. (CSB)

The idea behind this verse seems to be that if a fool could buy wisdom (or pay for schooling), it wouldn't do him any good. He lacks the qualities necessary to make good use of wisdom. Those qualities would include such virtues as self-control and patience. First the fool must have a changed heart. Only then is he ready to learn. (PBC)

Wisdom cannot be gained by money alone. Only an inner desire for it is an acceptable price. (TLSB)

**WISDOM** – *hokmah* – The most frequently used word for wisdom and refers to practical wisdom. Practical wisdom is the chief concept in Proverbs. (PBC)

**17:17** *friend loves at all times.* Cf. David's friendship with Jonathan (2Sa 1:26; see 18:24; Ru 1:16; 1Co 13:4–7). (CSB)

Description of true friendship, which does not change based on circumstances. (TLSB)

This little verse has a special brilliance, as it points to one of life's rarest and most excellent gifts. (PBC)

*brother is born for adversity.* A brother will offer support even in the worst of times. (TLSB)

**17:18** *pledge.* Lit, "clasps hands," as when shaking hands to confirm a deal. Hastily made promises entrap the foolish, who commit themselves to vows they have neither the ability nor determination to keep (Ec 5:4). Obviously, the person is not being taught to refuse help or to ignore the command to lend to someone in need, even without interest (Lv 25:35–36; Mt 5:42). (TLSB)

*security.* To guarantee another's debt or obligation. While God's people should be generous, esp in matters of forgiveness and love, we are to exercise wisdom and prudence in temporal affairs (e.g., Ex 22:14). (TLSB)

See note on 6:1 (Refers to responsibility for someone else's debt (cf. 22:26) or for some other obligation. It can end in abject poverty (cf. 22:27) or even slavery if you cannot pay. For example, Judah volunteered to personally guarantee the safe return of Benjamin to Jacob (Ge 43:9), and when this seemed impossible, he had to offer himself to Joseph as a slave (Ge 44:32–33). Such an arrangement was sealed by "striking hands," equivalent to our handshake (see 11:15; 17:18; 20:16; 22:26; cf. Job 17:3). (CSB)

**17:19** *who loves a quarrel loves sin.* A hot-tempered man commits many sins (29:22). (CSB)

*builds a high gate.* Out of pride (cf. 16:18; 29:23). (CSB)

Difficult and disputed phrase. May mean that the one who builds a high and impressive fortress gate invites an attack. It may also condemn those who raise the “door” of their mouth in boasting and pride. (TLSB)

It’s akin to our trying to “keep up with the Joneses.” (PBC)

**17:20** A MAN OF PERVERSE HEART – Here again, as so often in the middle of a grouping of proverbs, Solomon draws our attention to the heart – the inner center of emotions, thought, and spiritual life. (PBC)

*does not prosper.* Contrast 16:20. (CSB)

While people with a perverse or wicked heart might prosper in this life, they do not enjoy God’s spiritual blessings. (PBC)

*whose tongue is deceitful.* See note on 2:12. (CSB)

*falls into trouble.* See note on 6:15. (CSB)

When they vent their twisted ideas in speech, it will lead them into trouble. (PBC)

**17:21** *He who sires a fool.* The risk every parent takes! When parents ignore their duty under the Fourth Commandment, “Because this matter is disregarded, God so fearfully punishes the world that there is no discipline, government, or peace. We all complain about this but do not see that it is our own fault. The way we train children and subjects spoils them and makes them disobedient.” (LC I 177). (TLSB)

*grief ... no joy.* See v. 25; 19:13. (CSB)

After they’ve done all they are able to, parents need to recognize that children can go off in their own direction. For godly parents to see a child go astray is perhaps the closest human beings comes to knowing how our heavenly Father grieves over our rebelliousness. In love, He sent His Son to save us. In love, parents keep praying for the wayward child. (PBC)

**17:22** *cheerful heart.* See 14:30; 15:13, 30; 16:15; Job 29:24. (CSB)

Chemnitz: “Refers to the created emotions or impulses of men” (*LTh* 1:134). (TLSB)

In this verse we see how the inner life affects us physically. Joy invigorates. From Christ the great Physician, we have the medicine of forgiveness and peace with God. And the best part is, its free! (PBC)

*crushed spirit dries up the bones.* See note on 3:8; see also 12:4; 14:30; Ps 32:3; 37:7–8. (CSB)

David expressed how grief drains one of strength, when he wrote, “When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long” (Psalm 32:3). Long before the advent of modern psychology with its insights into the emotions, the Bible spoke of depression. (PBC)

**17:23** *accepts a bribe.* See note on v. 8. (CSB)

Motives are important in gift giving. If the motive is to win favor or to pervert justice, then the gift becomes a bribe. (PBC)

*in secret.* The folds of the garment serving as a pocket (6:27). (TLSB)

**17:24** WISDOM – *hokmah* – The most frequently used word for wisdom and refers to practical wisdom. Practical wisdom is the chief concept in Proverbs. (PBC)

*wander to the ends of the earth.* He chases fantasies and is interested in everything except wisdom (see 12:11; cf. Dt 30:11–14). (CSB)

The thoughts of fools wander. St Paul says that a time is coming when people will not put up with sound doctrine but will go wherever their “itching ears” lead them (2Tm 4:3). This proverb reminds us to remain in the Word and not to be led away by other “gospels” that are no Gospel at all (Gal 1:6–9). (TLSB)

One of the cardinal rules in sports is: “Keep your eye on the ball.” That’s so basic, and yet, in the heat of a game, it’s easily forgotten. In life it is imperative that we keep focused. The fool’s eyes wander in every direction. “He is a double-minded man, unstable in all he does” (James 1:8). We need to keep our eyes, our attention, on our families, our marriages, our work, and above all, on the Lord. Amid the heated trials of life, we easily turn our eyes away from where they need to be focused. When we do, we become the fool. They writer to the Hebrews says, “Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith” (Hebrews 12:2). (PBC)

**17:7–24** God’s people are not to use the Gospel as grounds for partiality in judging (24:23–24), for calling good evil or evil good (Is 5:20), or for failing to protect the innocent. The Father is our goodness and glory, whom we honor by faith. • Dear Father, give us life always by the Gospel, being sure of our forgiveness for Jesus’ sake and looking past the sins of those who repent. As we carry out our individual responsibilities

within this world, guide us to judge rightly between good and evil, upholding what pleases You and condemning what does not. In Jesus' name. Amen. (TLSB)

**17:25–19:12** Section shows how fools bring grief to others. (TLSB)

**17:25** See v. 21. *bitterness*. See 14:10 and note. (CSB)

The word “bitterness” is related to the word used in Exodus 15:23. As the Israelites traveled in the desert, “when they came to Marah, they could not drink its water because it was bitter. (That is why the place is called Marah.)” Bitterness spoils the taste of food or drink, and bitterness is life takes away all joy. With this terse proverb, Solomon captures the heartache of many a parent. After Solomon’s death, his own son Rehoboam was to bring bitterness and ruin to the kingdom of Solomon. Amid life’s bitter experiences, however, we can always find sweet joy in the unfailing love of our Savior. (PBC)

**17:26** *punish an innocent man*. See v. 15 and note. (CSB)

God’s law called for beating, with up to forty lashes, the guilty man in a dispute (Deuteronomy 25:2,3). But the wicked have often overturned justice so that good people are unfairly and cruelly punished. Examples of this are Jeremiah who was beaten and put in stocks and Jesus when Pontius Pilate released the “notorious prisoner” Barabbas and “had Jesus flogged” (Matthew 27:15-26). (PBC)

*flog officials*. Cf. the beating and disgrace endured by Jeremiah (Jer 20:2; see v. 10 and note). (CSB)

**17:27** KNOWLEDGE – *dah'-ath knowledge*:—cunning, know(-ledge), awares (wittingly). (QV)

*uses words with restraint*. See 10:19. (CSB)

Patient, restrained; opposite of being hot-tempered. Self-control ultimately comes from the knowledge that God Himself vindicates us in Christ Jesus. (TLSB)

Over against injustice, Solomon describes the man of restraint and understanding. He is not quick to accuse others. His self-control is poles apart from the unbridled injustice of the previous verse. By placing such sharp distinctions side by side, Solomon skillfully portrays life in our fallen world. Amid all the injustice, we are to stand for what is God-pleasing. In a world of darkness, Christians are the light of the world (Matthew 5:14-16). (PBC)

UNDERSTANDING – DISCERNING – *bene* A primitive root; to *separate* mentally (or *distinguish*), that is, (generally) *understand*:—attend, consider, be cunning, diligently, direct, discern, eloquent, feel, inform, instruct, have intelligence, know, look well to, mark, perceive, be prudent. (QV)

*even-tempered. See 16:32. (CSB)*

**17:28** *a fool is thought wise if he keeps silent. Cf. Job's sarcastic comment in Job 13:5. (CSB)*

WISE – *khaw-kawm'* From H2449; *wise*, (that is, intelligent, skilful or artful):—cunning (man), subtil, ([un-]), *wise* ([hearted], man). – By taking time to listen to others, the fool is taking the first steps toward ceasing to be a fool. Above all, listen to God's Word. (PBC)