

# PROVERBS

## Chapter 26

**Like snow in summer or rain in harvest, so honor is not fitting for a fool. 2 Like a sparrow in its flitting, like a swallow in its flying, a curse that is causeless does not alight. 3 A whip for the horse, a bridle for the donkey, and a rod for the back of fools. 4 Answer not a fool according to his folly, lest you be like him yourself. 5 Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own eyes. 6 Whoever sends a message by the hand of a fool cuts off his own feet and drinks violence. 7 Like a lame man's legs, which hang useless, is a proverb in the mouth of fools. 8 Like one who binds the stone in the sling is one who gives honor to a fool. 9 Like a thorn that goes up into the hand of a drunkard is a proverb in the mouth of fools. 10 Like an archer who wounds everyone is one who hires a passing fool or drunkard. 11 Like a dog that returns to his vomit is a fool who repeats his folly. 12 Do you see a man who is wise in his own eyes? There is more hope for a fool than for him. 13 The sluggard says, "There is a lion in the road! There is a lion in the streets!" 14 As a door turns on its hinges, so does a sluggard on his bed. 15 The sluggard buries his hand in the dish; it wears him out to bring it back to his mouth. 16 The sluggard is wiser in his own eyes than seven men who can answer sensibly. 17 Whoever meddles in a quarrel not his own is like one who takes a passing dog by the ears. 18 Like a madman who throws firebrands, arrows, and death 19 is the man who deceives his neighbor and says, "I am only joking!" 20 For lack of wood the fire goes out, and where there is no whisperer, quarreling ceases. 21 As charcoal to hot embers and wood to fire, so is a quarrelsome man for kindling strife. 22 The words of a whisperer are like delicious morsels; they go down into the inner parts of the body. 23 Like the glaze covering an earthen vessel are fervent lips with an evil heart. 24 Whoever hates disguises himself with his lips and harbors deceit in his heart; 25 when he speaks graciously, believe him not, for there are seven abominations in his heart; 26 though his hatred be covered with deception, his wickedness will be exposed in the assembly. 27 Whoever digs a pit will fall into it, and a stone will come back on him who starts it rolling. 28 A lying tongue hates its victims, and a flattering mouth works ruin.**

**26:1** *rain in harvest.* It rarely rains in Palestine from June through September, but see 1Sa 12:17–18. (CSB)

When it snows or rains out of season, we consider it inappropriate. It can also be destructive rather than beneficial. (PBC)

*honor is not fitting for a fool.* See v. 8; 30:22. (CSB)

A position of honor is inappropriate for a fool, and from that position he can do more harm than good. In our day, superficial people often rise to positions of honor because of their looks, athletic ability, or popular music appeal. Their opinions on politics and religion, along with endorsements of everything from underwear to beer, reach the hearing of millions. This is not fitting. (PBC)

**26:2** *sparrow...swallow* – Earlier, we've seen Solomon use the ant as an object lesson (Proverbs 6:6). Beginning in this verse, he uses several more animals as illustrations in this chapter: the sparrow, swallow, horse, donkey, dog and lion. In keeping about with his wide ranging studies, Solomon "taught about animals and birds, reptiles and fish" (1 Kings 4:33). (PBC)

*curse that is causeless.* When David was cursed by Shimei, he realized that the curse would not take effect because he was innocent of the charge of murdering members of Saul's family (2Sa 16:8, 12). (CSB)

A curse pronounced without provocation (i.e., not expressed in response to transgressions of God's Law) has no chance of being fulfilled. (TLSB)

As sparrows and swallows restlessly wander from their nests and back again, so a curse restlessly stays in the air once it has been uttered. The word "curse" has the root meaning of "be slight, of little account." To curse someone is to put that person down, although we often tend to think of cursing only in terms of the biggest put down, wishing someone damned. When we have been slighted – whether verbally or otherwise – it bothers us. Like a restless bird, it keeps fluttering overhead and won't go away. That's the nature of curses, in particular undeserved ones. Let's be careful, therefore, how we treat others, and build them up instead of cursing them. (PBC)

**26:3** *whip for the horse, a bridle for the donkey* – A horse needs a whip to keep moving in the right direction. A donkey, being more stubborn, needs a bridle. (PBC)

*rod for the backs of fools.* Like an animal, a fool needs a rod across his back, or as some might say, a good swift kick! The point is that some people – namely, fools – don't respond to words and reason. They need strong object lessons. (PBC)

**26:4** *answer not a fool according to his folly.* Do not stoop to his level (see Mt 7:6). (CSB)

Whether a fool should be answered or not varies with circumstances. Do not let a fool take your silence as approval or inability to answer. (TLSB)

Timing is central, "There is a time for everything," says the wise king (Ecclesiastes 3:1). While this is still hope of reaching the fool, do not answer according to his folly. (PBC)

**26:5** *Answer a fool according to his folly.* Sometimes folly must be plainly exposed and denounced. (CSB)

*wise – khaw-kawm'* (that is, intelligent, skilful or artful):—cunning (man), subtil, ([un-]), wise ([hearted], man).(QV)

You can give the fool a serious answer. It may sink in. If he refuses to listen, then answer him according to his folly. Give him a silly answer in keeping with his foolish state of mind. (PBC)

**26:6** *drinks violence.* See Job 34:7. (CSB)

Revels in violent behavior and speech; asks for trouble. (TLSB)

It has to do with wicked people's thirst for evil. Like cutting off one's feet, it depicts the kind of behavior that produces nothing but evil and pain. (PBC)

*sends a message by the hand of a fool.* He will likely misrepresent the one who sends him, or in some other manner frustrate the sender's purpose (see 13:17). (CSB)

The lame man's legs are not able to carry him; a fool's mouth cannot properly convey a proverb. He can say the words, but because he lacks real understanding he misuses the words. He is unable to apply them to his life. (PBC)

**26:8** *Like one who binds the stone in the sling.* A fool with authority wields a formidable weapon, but it is useless in his hands—as useless as a stone that is tied, not placed, in the sling. (CSB)

Loads a slingshot. (TLSB)

Honoring a fool is about as useless. (PBC)

**26:9** A fool reciting a proverb will do as much damage to himself and others as a drunkard wielding a thornbush.

Those who take Scripture out of context and twist it to fit their own idea are harming themselves and others. They are fools. (PBC)

**26:10** *who hires a passing fool.* Abimelech hired “reckless adventurers” to help him murder his half brothers and set up a brief and ill-fated rule (Jdg 9:4–6). (CSB)

Hiring someone just to fill the position inevitably leads to more harm than good. (TLSB)

Care in the choice of workers is the theme of this verse. An archer who shoots wildly is a dangerous person. It's a dangerous practice to hire anyone who comes along. This is not to say we shouldn't give people the opportunity to work and earn a living. But care is necessary. (PBC)

**26:11** *As a dog returns to his vomit.* Quoted in 2Pe 2:22 with reference to false teachers. (CSB)

Quoted in 2Pt 2:22. Dogs were considered one of the filthiest animals in ancient Israel. These unclean animals (according to Levitical law) naturally returned to their uncleanness. (TLSB)

Peter quotes this first line and adds another proverb not in the Book of Proverbs: A sow that is washed goes back to her walling in the mud.” He applies these proverbs to people who knew the “way of righteousness,” only “to turn their backs on the sacred command that was passed on to them” (2 Peter 2:21, 22). (PBC)

*fool who repeats his folly.* The drunkard returns to his drink (23:35). (CSB)

Forsaking God's wisdom and retuning to sinful habits and unbelief is spiritually sickening, foolish and destructive. (PBC)

**26:12** *wise in his own eyes.* This conceit is applied to the sluggard in v. 16 and the rich in 28:11; cf. 26:5. (CSB)

Such people are not teachable. (TLSB)

Believe or not, there is someone worse off than the fool! That's the person who proudly thinks he is wise. Pride is the most frightening of conditions, because it cuts one off from the Savior. Those who wise in their own eyes are blind to their sin and their need for God's grace. (PBC)

**26:13** Absurd ploy to avoid leaving the house and engaging in labor. (TLSB)

The lazy person is merely grasping for any excuse to avoid going out to work. (PBC)

**26:14** The sluggard loves to sleep and seems to be attached to his bed as a door to its hinges. (CSB)

Humorously describes the ease with which a sluggard rolls over in bed (when he or she is supposed to be awake). (TLSB)

Not only does he roll over like a door turning on its hinge, but he is about as attached to his bed as a door is to the hinge. (PBC)

**26:15** *buries his hand in the dish*. Solomon is poking fun at people who are too lazy to finish what they started, esp necessary tasks. (TLSB)

*brings it back to his mouth* – This verse is almost identical with Proverbs 19:24. Having listened to the sluggard offer excuses and having seen him lying in bed, we now watch him lazily sit down at the dinner table. Again, the picture is exasperating. (PBC)

**26:16** *wiser in his own eyes*. *khaw-kawm'* (that is, intelligent, skilful or artful):—cunning (man), subtil, ([un-]), wise ([hearted], man).(QV)

What's most exasperating of all, is that the sluggard doesn't even realize his own pitiful condition. The person who thinks he or she can't be taught is in the worst shape of all. (PBC)

*seven men* – The number seven is a number signifying completeness. We might say, "several men," instead. (PBC)

**26:17** *takes a passing dog by the ears*. To do so is to immediately create a disturbance. (CSB)

Dogs in ancient Israel typically roamed the streets in packs (Ex 22:31; 1Ki 14:11; 16:4; 21:19–24; 22:38; 2Ki 9:10, 36; Ps 22:20; 59:6, 14–15; Jer 15:3). If you grabbed one by the ears, you would be unable to let go lest you be bitten and, at the same time, unable to hang on, since the other dogs in the pack would attack you. (TLSB)

For people in ancient Israel, the dog usually wasn't a cute household pet. Rather, it was a dirty scavenger that ran wild in the streets. To grab a passing dog was to invite getting bit.

**26:18–19** Good humor between mutual friends is not condemned, but rather the covering up of malicious deceit with a joke. (TLSB)

**26:18** *Like a madman who throws firebrands, arrows, and death*. Solomon compares this with jumping into a quarrel between other parties. Granted, there is a time for being the peacemaker. Christian common sense will dictate when that is. (PBC)

*firebrands*. Could easily ignite sheaves of grain (cf. Zec 12:6). (CSB)

**26:19** *I am only joking!* Explaining it as a prank is a poor excuse. (CSB)

Solomon speaks against the kind of humor that leads to misunderstandings and hurt feelings. Godly humor maintains a gentleness and concern for others. It is the humor of love. (PBC)

**26:20–22** Gossip and unsubstantiated rumors cause disputes and often sustain them. *kindling*. Lit, “to make hotter.” Gossipy whispers linger in a person’s imagination. (TLSB)

**26:20** *no whisperer* –The Book of Proverbs calls for self-control, over against the uninhabited venting of one’s passions. Most people are able to control themselves physically, so that they don’t strike and hit others. Controlling the tongue is another matter. Most people have a great deal of trouble in this area. (PBC)

Gossip is a fuel on which quarrels feed. The way to extinguish the fire is to remove the gossip. Instead, speak word of for forgiveness and love. (PBC)

**26:21** *kindling strife*. This verse likens quarrelsome people to the materials that keep fires burning. We use similar images to depict such persons: They have “fiery tempers,” “easily get hot under the collar,” and become involved in “heated arguments.” In his inspired letter, James expressed it more strongly: “Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark. The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole person, set the whole course of his life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell.” (James 3:5-7) (PBC)

If we have such inclinations (and who can say he or she doesn’t), then we need to cool it,” step back, and pour some water on the fire. Jesus says that when a person has God’s Word and the Holy Spirit, “streams of living water will flow from within him’ (John 7:38). The Word is the extinguisher for the tongue’s deadly fires. (PBC)

**26:22** This verse is exactly the same as Proverbs 18:8. In this present context, we might build on the fire imagery some more. If fires of gossip never get started, those “choice morsels” will never get cooked. (PBC)

**26:23–26** Warning against those who disguise their malicious intent with the appearances of goodwill. (TLSB)

**26:23** *glaze covering an earthen vessel*. Cf. the clean outside of the cup and dish (Lk 11:39; cf. Mt 23:27). (CSB)

The clean, smooth outer surface of a ceramic cup conceals the common clay the pot is made of. Jesus used the same picture in denouncing the hypocrites of His day! “You clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. Blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and dish, and then the outside also will be clean.” (Matthew 23:25-26). Cleaning the inside of the cup means praying with the psalmist: “Hide your face from my sins and blot out all my iniquity. Create in me a clean heart, O God” (Psalm 51:9-10) (PBC)

*fervent lips with an evil heart*. The speech of the adulteress is seductive (2:16; 5:3). (CSB)

**26:25** *speaks graciously*. See Jer 9:8. (CSB)

Verse 24-26 emphasize the fact that smooth speech is frequently a coverup for a deceitful heart. (PBC)

*seven*. Many (see note on Job 5:19). For seven things the Lord detests see 6:16–19. (CSB)

Again the number seven represents completeness. (PBC)

**26:26** *will be exposed in the assembly.* See 5:14; Lk 8:17. (CSB)

Hbr *qahal*. General public or religious gathering; in the public eye. (TLSB)

Sooner or later the truth will come out. Jesus says, “For there is nothing hidden that will not be disclosed, and nothing concealed that will not be known or brought out into the open” (Luke 8:17). Often that exposure comes in this lifetime. (PBC)

**26:27** *digs a pit, will fall into it.* “The trouble he causes recoils on himself” (Ps 7:16). See Est 7:10; Ps 7:15; Ecc 10:8–9. (CSB)

Those who plan evil for others often have that very evil come back on them. In the book of Esther, the fate of wicked Haman furnishes a vivid example of this truth. Haman had a large gallows built for the hanging of his enemy the Jew Mordecai, but ended up being hanged on that very gallows! (Esther 7:9-10). Often people are destroyed in less direct ways by their schemes. One’s anger toward another, for instance, can come back and consume. The illustration of one falling into his own pit occurs elsewhere in the OT, as in Ecclesiastes 10:8 where Solomon uses it. (PBC)

**26:28** *flattering mouth works ruin.* The lying tongue and flattering mouth are given the characteristics of a person behind them: the tongue hates and the mouth ruins. A “flattering mouth” is literally a “smooth mouth.” Smooth speech conceals the liar’s real purpose, which is to harm the one he or she is flattering. (PBC)

Once again in this cluster of proverbs, we are struck by how Solomon intertwines speech with motives and actions. The heart, the mouth, and the hand are to work together. We can’t have one set of values in our hearts and then try to fake another with our outward behavior. It all goes together. It’s all one package. (PBC)