

As is common in Proverbs, this chapter contains a series of short proverbs structured in point/counterpoint form. Each proverb tends to make a statement about the actions of a good/wise person and then contrasts it with the actions of a wicked/foolish person. The contrasting statements emphasize the virtues of wisdom and righteousness.

1 Every wise woman buildeth her house: but the foolish plucketh it down with her hands.

Like the virtuous woman described in Proverbs 31:10-31, the wise woman works to keep her household operating well. The foolish woman is lazy and exerts little or no effort toward the upkeep of her house, allowing its condition to deteriorate over time.

2 He that walketh in his uprightness feareth the LORD: but *he that is* perverse in his ways despiseth him.

The man who lives an upright life demonstrates his fear and reverence for the LORD, but the man who lives a perverse life reveals that he “despises” (disrespects; does not value) the LORD.

3 In the mouth of the foolish *is* a rod of pride: but the lips of the wise shall preserve them.

How we speak reveals a lot about us. The pride of the foolish is revealed in what they say, which can be like a rod with which they strike others and themselves. On the other hand, the wise are humble and choose their words carefully so that no harm comes to themselves or others.

4 Where no oxen *are*, the crib *is* clean: but much increase *is* by the strength of the ox.

Farmers that are not willing to work their fields will not bother to own any oxen, and therefore the crib will not have any food. However, if a farmer has an ox, he will use its strength to work the fields and therefore have food for both the ox and himself.

5 A faithful witness will not lie: but a false witness will utter lies.

Lies do not make you a false witness. You will lie because you are a false witness and what comes out of your mouth will prove it.

6 A scorner seeketh wisdom, and *findeth it* not: but knowledge *is* easy unto him that understandeth.

The apostle Paul speaks of scorners who scoff at the existence of God while thinking themselves to be wise (**Rom. 1:22** “*Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools*”). However, those who believe in God will have the understanding to learn and gain knowledge because they are basing their worldview on the truth.

7 Go from the presence of a foolish man, when thou perceivest not *in him* the lips of knowledge.

Once you realize that a man is foolish and without knowledge then it will be wise to depart before you are influenced by his foolishness.

8 The wisdom of the prudent *is* to understand his way: but the folly of fools *is* deceit.

The wisdom of a prudent man is manifested in the fact that he seeks to understand what he is doing. The fool demonstrates his foolishness by deceiving himself into thinking that he knows what he is doing or trying to deceive others by pretending to know what he is doing.

9 Fools make a mock at sin: but among the righteous *there is* favour.

It is foolish to not take sin seriously. The righteous gain God’s favor by avoiding sin because they understand how destructive it is.

10 The heart knoweth his own bitterness; and a stranger doth not intermeddle with his joy.

“Intermeddle” means “to share; to take part in.” Other people cannot truly know the bitterness or joy that is in our heart.

11 The house of the wicked shall be overthrown: but the tabernacle of the upright shall flourish.

The wicked is portrayed as seeming to be more wealthy and established than the upright, with the wicked having a house and the upright a tabernacle (tent). However, God will ensure that the tent of the upright will outlast the house of the wicked.

12 There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof *are* the ways of death.

Like Prov. 3:5, this proverb cautions us to limit our confidence in our own sinful intellect. Seeking God’s counsel on any matter is always superior to following our own ideas because our corrupt nature causes us to follow the ways that lead to death.

13 Even in laughter the heart is sorrowful; and the end of that mirth *is* heaviness.

Laughter may give a temporary respite from the sorrow of one’s heart, but once the laughter and mirth of the moment has faded, then the heart begins sinking back into the heaviness of the heartbreak it was previously experiencing.

14 The backslider in heart shall be filled with his own ways: and a good man *shall be satisfied* from himself.

A backslider is someone who has turned from the LORD’s ways and is following his own path. In contrast, the good man is one who has remained faithful to the LORD and is living with a clear conscience, satisfied that he has obeyed the LORD.

15 The simple believeth every word: but the prudent *man* looketh well to his going.

The simple (unwise) person takes everything at face value but a wise and prudent man verifies that what he is being told is the truth.

16 A wise *man* feareth, and departeth from evil: but the fool rageth, and is confident.

A wise man is cautious and is thus able to avoid problems (“evil”). His fear of God will also motivate him to avoid sin. The Hebrew word “rageth” means “to pass over” and, in context, seems to imply that a fool is impatient and charges ahead without investigating the situation or considering God’s will in the matter.

17 *He that is soon angry dealeth foolishly: and a man of wicked devices is hated.*

People with short tempers tend to make foolish decisions and hurt others because of their impatience. The Hebrew word translated “wicked devices” refer to the evil plans and purposes of a the wicked. People with evil plans (perhaps a result of their anger) are hated for the harm they do to others.

18 The simple inherit folly: but the prudent are crowned with knowledge.

“Folly” refers to foolishness, which the simple have in abundance. However, knowledge adorns the head of the prudent (wise) like a crown. The simple are shamed by their foolishness while the prudent are honored by their knowledge.

19 The evil bow before the good; and the wicked at the gates of the righteous.

The custom of the day was for the inferior to bow before the superior or to wait humbly by the superior’s gate seeking favor. While it may not always be true now, God will ensure that evil people will indeed bow before the righteous and seek their favor one day.

20 The poor is hated even of his own neighbour: but the rich *hath* many friends.

It is a fact of human nature that people desire friendship with rich people because of the benefits that come with it. In contrast, no one seeks friendship with a poor person since there is little material benefit to gain from them.

21 He that despiseth his neighbour sinneth: but he that hath mercy on the poor, happy *is* he.

Related to the previous verse where even a poor man’s neighbor does not want to be friends with him, this proverb points out the sin of “despising” (to show contempt; to consider insignificant) your neighbor just because he is poor. Those who do show mercy to the poor are “happy” (blessed).

29 *He that is slow to wrath is of great understanding: but he that is hasty of spirit exalteth folly.*

Similar to v. 17, this verse tells us that a man is wise to be patient and not short-tempered because he will investigate a situation before becoming angry. However, a man who becomes angry and acts before knowing the facts of the situation will make foolish decisions.

30 A sound heart *is* the life of the flesh: but envy the rottenness of the bones.

The Hebrew word for “sound” means “healthy.” A “sound heart” figuratively refers to having a heart free of hatred, covetousness, jealousy, etc. and implies the health benefits of living without these harmful emotions, in contrast to the envious who must deal with the physical consequences and stresses of their negative emotions.

31 He that oppresseth the poor reproacheth his Maker: but he that honoureth him hath mercy on the poor.

God created both the oppressor and the poor, but when someone oppresses the poor man, he is showing reproach (“to defy; to taunt”) to the God that created both of them. In contrast, a man desiring to honor God will show mercy to the poor.

32 The wicked is driven away in his wickedness: but the righteous hath hope in his death.

The Hebrew word translated “driven away” means “to thrust or cast down.” The wicked will be “cast down” because of their wickedness. The worst thing a righteous person will experience in this life is death, but he, unlike the wicked, has the hope of eternal life afterward.

33 Wisdom resteth in the heart of him that hath understanding: but *that which is* in the midst of fools is made known.

The man with understanding has wisdom resting in his heart, hidden but ready to be utilized when needed. A fool, through his foolish actions, makes it obvious to all that he does not have wisdom in his heart.

34 Righteousness exalteth a nation: but sin *is* a reproach to any people.

A nation that is righteous will prosper in the blessings of God and be honored/admired among the nations, but people that are guilty of or tolerate sin will bring a “reproach” (shame) upon themselves.

35 The king's favour *is* toward a wise servant: but his wrath is *against* him that causeth shame.

The “wise” servant (one that is skilled and knows what he is doing) will earn the favor of the king. However, the king will become angry with the unwise servant that embarrasses him with his incompetence.
