

The proverbs in this chapter cover the importance of how we use our tongue, cautions against putting trust in our wealth, the dangers of being proud, the benefits of wisdom, the problems associated with fools, the value of friendship, and other similar topics.

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1 Through desire a man, having separated himself, seeketh *and* intermeddleth with all wisdom.

**“Through desire** [*longings; wishes*] **a man, having separated himself**” – The subject is a man who isolates himself in order to seek after his own desires. He apparently does not want to be subject to the expectations of others or the restraints they may place upon him.

**“seeketh and intermeddleth** [*to quarrel; to be contentious*] **with all wisdom**” – This man seeks to argue against any wisdom given to him that contradicts his desires.

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2 A fool hath no delight in understanding, but that his heart may discover itself.

A fool is not interested in gaining knowledge because he thinks he already knows all that he needs to know. He is more interested in trying to demonstrate how “smart” that he is (“that his heart may discover [*reveal*] itself”). Such people will not ask questions in order to gain information but so that they will have the opportunity to “educate” others.

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3 When the wicked cometh, *then* cometh also contempt, and with ignominy reproach.

**“When the wicked cometh, then cometh also contempt** [*to despise; to consider insignificant*]” – Wickedness shows contempt for others because it doesn’t care what others think or about their well-being.

**“and with ignominy** [*shame; disgrace; dishonor*] **reproach** [*scorn*]” – By the same token, where there is disgrace, then scorn will also be present, either because it produces scorn for others or else it invites scorn from others.

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4 The words of a man's mouth *are* as deep waters, *and* the wellspring of wisdom as a flowing brook.

The context of this verse seems to refer to the words of a wise man’s mouth. His words are a deep wealth of unending information that we would do well to listen to and absorb.

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5 *It is* not good to accept the person of the wicked, to overthrow the righteous in judgment.

It is an error and a sin to take the side of a wicked person just because of who they are. Judges should base their judgment impartially on what is just, not on their personal opinion of the people involved.

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6 A fool's lips enter into contention, and his mouth calleth for strokes. 7 A fool's mouth *is* his destruction, and his lips *are* the snare of his soul.

These verses point out the destructive effects of a fool’s words, provoking “contention” (quarrels; disputes) and violence. His words will eventually result in his own demise.

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8 The words of a talebearer *are* as wounds, and they go down into the innermost parts of the belly.

The words of a “talebearer” (slanderer; backbiter) cut deeper than any superficial wound. The injuries they inflict can affect us to the core of our being, particularly if they come from someone we have trusted.

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9 He also that is slothful in his work is brother to him that is a great waster.

A “great waster” refers to someone who destroys and lays waste to the land. The man who is too lazy to work his land is related to someone who destroys land because the lazy man is not keeping it productive. The same is true of any kind of work.

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10 The name of the LORD *is* a strong tower: the righteous runneth into it, and is safe. 11 The rich man's wealth *is* his strong city, and as an high wall in his own conceit.

**“The name of the LORD is a strong tower: the righteous runneth into it, and is safe**” – The righteous know that it is the LORD Who ultimately provides safety and so they place their trust in Him.

**“The rich man's wealth is his strong city, and as an high wall in his own conceit**” – In contrast, a rich man trusts in his own wealth to protect him, as if it were a strong city with a high wall. His own conceit prevents him from trusting the LORD.

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12 Before destruction the heart of man is haughty, and before honour *is* humility.

A “haughty” (proud; arrogant) man is destined for destruction because he thinks he does not need the help of God or man. In contrast, those who are humble look to God for help and He will respond by blessing them with honor before men. Pride precedes destruction and humility precedes honor.

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13 He that answereth a matter before he heareth *it*, *it is* folly and shame unto him.

It can be embarrassing to jump to conclusions about a matter before we have heard all the facts. Whether it is an incident we see in the news or one involving someone we know, we tend to be opinionated and prematurely pass judgment, only to be embarrassed when the truth comes out.

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14 The spirit of a man will sustain his infirmity; but a wounded spirit who can bear?

The Hebrew word for “infirmity” refers to a physical weakness or illness. Someone can endure a physical injury or sickness and still be in good spirits, which will help in their recovery. However, if their injury is emotional, then it is easy to fall into depression and discouragement.

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15 The heart of the prudent getteth knowledge; and the ear of the wise seeketh knowledge.

A “prudent” (discerning; understanding) man is always seeking to gain more knowledge. His wisdom has taught him always to be receptive to acquiring more knowledge in order to be wiser.

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16 A man's gift maketh room for him, and bringeth him before great men.

This proverb is not referring to bribery but to the courtesy of bringing a gift to show your respect for someone. A gift often can open a door that would otherwise be closed as well as providing the opportunity to speak with powerful and influential people.

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17 *He that is first in his own cause seemeth just*; but his neighbour cometh and searcheth him.

**“He that is first in his own cause seemeth just [lawful; righteous]”** – The first person to argue his case may seem to be righteous in his cause since he will only focus on the facts that support his cause. See v. 13.

**“but his neighbour cometh and searcheth [examine; explore] him”** – When the man’s neighbor (likely his opponent) gets his turn to state his case, he will examine the first man’s arguments, exposing the flaws as he brings more facts to light. The first man’s cause may be shown to not be righteous after all.

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18 The lot causeth contentions to cease, and parteth between the mighty.

Casting lots was a method of making a fair decision in ancient days, similar to when we toss a coin today. The idea was that the result of the lot was controlled by the LORD and thus represented His will (**Prov. 16:33** “*The lot is cast into the lap; but the whole disposing thereof is of the LORD*”). Thus, the lot settled arguments because no one could say they were being cheated by man. Mighty men, such as kings, could part ways in peace as a result of the lot.

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19 A brother offended *is harder to be won* than a strong city: and *their contentions are* like the bars of a castle.

A “brother offended” is someone (a family member or a close friend) who feels that they have been betrayed by someone they have trusted. The pain of such betrayal makes it extremely difficult to regain their trust and to get past the resulting “contentions” (strife).

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20 A man's belly shall be satisfied with the fruit of his mouth; *and* with the increase of his lips shall he be filled. 21 Death and life *are* in the power of the tongue: and they that love it shall eat the fruit thereof.

**“A man's belly shall be satisfied with the fruit of his mouth; and with the increase of his lips shall he be filled”** – This proverb emphasizes the importance of speaking to others with grace and kindness. The benefits of being on good terms with others include being able to feed oneself and one’s family. People will buy and sell from those that they like and will be more willing to give gifts to them.

**“Death and life are in the power of the tongue: and they that love it shall eat the fruit thereof”** – How we speak to others can mean the difference between life and death since our tongue and influence whether people will want to help or harm us. Those who recognize this power of the tongue will use it to their benefit.

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22 *Whoso findeth a wife findeth a good thing*, and obtaineth favour of the LORD.

God created men and women to benefit one another and instituted marriage for their benefit. When He created Adam, God stated that it was not good for the man to be alone (Gen. 2:18). Thus it demonstrates the blessings and favor of God when a man finds and marries a wife.

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23 The poor useth intreaties; but the rich answereth roughly.

The poor understand that they are not in a position to make demands, so they politely use “intreaties” (humble requests) to ask for what they need. The rich, however, tend to have their confidence in their wealth and power and so they make impatient demands, not caring how they treat others.

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24 A man *that hath* friends must shew himself friendly: and there is a friend *that sticketh* closer than a brother.

**“A man that hath friends must shew himself friendly”** – No one should be surprised that they have no friends if they are unwilling to be friendly toward others. If someone wants to have friends, then he/she should be a friendly person that treats others with kindness.

**“and there is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother”** – There are different levels of friendship, ranging from mere acquaintances to friends and close friends. A close friend is someone with whom you share the most intimate details of your life. Such friends are a treasure and often know you better than family members. These friends can be even more loyal than family.