

### Wisdom in Contentment

#### Proverbs 15:1-17

**Proverbs 15:1-17** - *“A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.*

*The tongue of the wise uses knowledge rightly, but the mouth of fools pours forth foolishness.*

*The eyes of the LORD are in every place, keeping watch on the evil and the good.*

*A wholesome tongue is a tree of life, but perverseness in it breaks the spirit.*

*A fool despises his father’s instruction, but he who receives correction is prudent.*

*In the house of the righteous there is much treasure, but in the revenue of the wicked is trouble.*

*The lips of the wise disperse knowledge, but the heart of the fool does not do so.*

*The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the LORD, but the prayer of the upright is His delight.*

*The way of the wicked is an abomination to the LORD, but He loves him who follows righteousness.*

*Harsh discipline is for him who forsakes the way, and he who hates correction will die.*

*Hell and Destruction are before the LORD, so how much more the hearts of the sons of men.*

*A scoffer does not love one who corrects him, nor will he go to the wise.*

*A merry heart makes a cheerful countenance, but by sorrow of the heart the spirit is broken.*

*The heart of him who has understanding seeks knowledge, but the mouth of fools feeds on foolishness.*

*All the days of the afflicted are evil, but he who is of a merry heart has a continual feast.*

*Better is a little with the fear of the LORD, than great treasure with trouble.*

*Better is a dinner of herbs where love is, than a fatted calf with hatred.”*

#### Background Notes

For background, look at verses 11 and 24, where we find a word that, in this version (NKJV), is translated “hell.”

Verse 11: *“Hell and Destruction are before the Lord; so how much more the hearts of the sons of men.”*

Verse 24: *“The way of life winds upward for the wise, that he may turn away from hell below.”*

The Hebrew word that’s used here is *Sheol*. In a number of translations, the word *Sheol* is used, rather than “hell.”

*Sheol* occurs sixty-six times in the Old Testament. Sometimes it refers to the state of death, and is sometimes translated “*the grave*.” At other times it can refer to the state of conscious existence after death, and in that case it corresponds to the word *Hades* in the New Testament.

In the account of the rich man and Lazarus in Luke 16, the Lord Jesus indicated that both the rich man and Lazarus were conscious in Hades, or the “realm of the dead.” However, there was a great division between the rich man, who was in a conscious state of torment, and Lazarus, who was in a conscious state of bliss.

In Proverbs 15, the two references to *Sheol* in both verses 11 and 24 seem to be used in the general sense of death and the grave.

## Doctrinal Point

### The proverbs are wise advice for everyday living.

Verse 1: *“A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.”* We’ve all experienced this proverb in one way or another. I remember cutting in front of a truck too closely on the highway. The driver not only gave me the loud horn, but he continued to follow me – even when I had to turn into a gas station because I was running out of gas. When he stepped down from his cab, I saw that he was big and strong and angry - and coming in my direction. What did I do? I remembered Proverbs 15:1, *“A soft answer turns away wrath.”* I profusely apologized for my bad driving, and said that I should learn to have more patience on the road. Well, it was like a bomb was defused! He essentially said that he was sorry for getting so upset. But suppose I had said something like “They should keep these big overweight trucks like yours off the road!” I probably wouldn’t be here to talk about it.

Verse 2: *“The tongue of the wise uses knowledge rightly, but the mouth of fools pours forth foolishness.”* The point of this proverb is that if we are wise, we’ll think before we speak, and not just gush out words like fools do. Don’t only look before you leap, but think before you talk!

Verse 3: *“The eyes of the LORD are in every place, keeping watch on the evil and the good.”* This proverb is more than just the general truth because the rest of scripture backs it up. God is omniscient. He knows everything. This verse should give you comfort - unless you have something to hide.

Verse 4: *“A wholesome tongue is a tree of life, but perverseness in it breaks the spirit.”* What you say to a person can either build them up or crush them. Sadly, it doesn’t take too many words to crush them.

Verse 5: *“A fool despises his father’s instruction, but he who receives correction is prudent.”* This proverb is easy to appreciate as an adult - but what category were you in as a teenager?

Verse 6: *“In the house of the righteous there is much treasure, but in the revenue of the wicked is trouble.”* This proverb could be applied to material or spiritual things. Treasure or trouble is the question. We determine the answer based on our mindset and priorities.

Verse 7: *“The lips of the wise disperse knowledge, but the heart of the fool does not do so.”* This chapter in Proverbs has a lot to tell us about the effects of human speech. Foolish people can’t provide helpful knowledge because there’s nothing worthwhile in their heads.

Verses 8-9: *“The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the LORD, but the prayer of the upright is His delight. The way of the wicked is an abomination to the LORD, but He loves him who follows righteousness.”* The ways of the wicked and their attempts to seem religious are an abomination to the Lord, because they are hypocritical - and even evil. But the Lord sees the godly heart behind the prayers and lifestyle of the righteous.

Verse 10: *“Harsh discipline is for him who forsakes the way, and he who hates correction will die.”* A person who will not respond to God’s discipline may suffer the discipline of death - even a believer! Remember Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5? And to the Corinthian believers, Paul said that because they were selfish and greedy, and abusing the Lord’s Supper, *“for this cause many are sick among you and in some, sleep”* (1 Corinthians 11:29-30). 1 John 5:16, that is written to believers, says that there is a sin that leads to death.

Verse 11: *“Hell and Destruction are before the LORD, so how much more the hearts of the sons of men?”* We commented on the word “Hell” in Background Notes. The point is, if God knows everything about the unseen world beyond the grave, how much more does He know the thoughts and secret agendas of those who are living?

Verse 12: *“A scoffer does not love one who corrects him, nor will he go to the wise.”* Did you ever try to avoid people because you know they want to help you - but you want to do your own thing, and you don’t want to be helped? Read this proverb.

Verse 13: *“A merry heart makes a cheerful countenance, but by sorrow of the heart the spirit is broken.”* Generally speaking, you can tell how a person is doing by looking at his or her face. A joyful heart is reflected in a happy face, but a sad face reflects a crushed spirit or a broken heart.

Verse 14: *“The heart of him who has understanding seeks knowledge, but the mouth of fools feeds on foolishness.”* Do you find that the more you know, the more you want to learn? I hope that’s true in reference to your knowledge of the Bible! But the people in the second part of this proverb are not knowledgeable - and they don’t care! They don’t want to learn. Fools feed on their folly.

Verse 15: *“All the days of the afflicted are evil, but he who is of a merry heart has a continual feast.”* Some folks are consistently happy and optimistic, and some folks are consistently sad and pessimistic. That’s true, even of believers. What’s the difference? It’s a matter of the heart. The pessimist will look on their external problems and are depressed. Optimists have the joy of the Lord in their hearts, and can therefore they’re able to continually rise above their external circumstances. The image of a “continual feast” here emphasizes the permanent joy that the committed believer can experience.

The proverbs are wise advice for everyday living.

## Practical Application

**Appreciate the better things!**

Verses 16-17: “**Better** is a little with the fear of the LORD, than great treasure with trouble. **Better** is a dinner of herbs where love is, than a fatted calf with hatred” (emphasis added).

Do you agree with these two proverbs? Many believers would say, “Yes, I agree that it’s better to have love than a lot of money” - but they don’t live that way! Rather than concentrating on family and building a God-honoring home, they spend their time and energy trying get rich, so they can have all the things that go along with lots of money. And often there’s friction and trouble and not a lot of love in that family as a result.

This aligns exactly with what we read in 1 Timothy 6:9-10: “*But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.*”

Recently I spoke at a family conference where I met a large family of parents and eight children. They didn’t have a lot of this world’s material things, but it was easy to see that they have things that are much better. They have a happy, Christ-centered home that is filled with love for the Lord and love for one another. What a wonderful blessing!

Appreciate the better things!