

### Wisdom in the Heart

#### Proverbs 17:1-13

**Proverbs 17:1-13** - *“Better is a dry morsel with quietness than a house full of feasting with strife.*

*A wise servant will rule over a son who causes shame, and will share an inheritance among the brothers.*

*The refining pot is for silver and the furnace for gold, but the LORD tests the hearts.*

*An evildoer gives heed to false lips. A liar listens eagerly to a spiteful tongue.*

*He who mocks the poor reproaches his Maker; he who is glad at calamity will not go unpunished.*

*Children’s children are the crown of old men, and fathers are the pride of their children.*

*Excellent speech is not becoming to a fool, much less lying lips to a prince.*

*A present is a precious stone in the eyes of its possessor. Wherever he turns, he prospers.*

*He who covers a transgression seeks love, but he who repeats a matter separates friends.*

*Rebuke is more effective for a wise man than a hundred blows on a fool.*

*An evil man seeks only rebellion, therefore a cruel messenger will be sent against him.*

*Let a man meet a bear robbed of her cubs rather than a fool in his folly.*

*Whoever rewards evil for good, evil will not depart from his house.”*

#### Background Notes

In the first half of Proverbs 17 there are thirteen more proverbs for living from the inspired writings of King Solomon. For background notes, let’s talk a little more about the refining pot that’s mentioned in verse 3: *“The refining pot is for silver and the furnace for gold, but the Lord tests the hearts.”*

I’m sure you understand what smelting and refining metals is all about. To separate a metal from its ore or to purify a precious metal, intense heat is needed. If the amount is relatively small, the container for holding the metal is a small refining pot or crucible. A furnace is used for a large amount of metal. Large smelting furnaces were positioned so the prevailing winds would provide a blast furnace effect. In Daniel 3, the intensely hot furnace into which the three faithful Hebrew men were thrown may have been a brick kiln, or it may have been a smelting furnace.

In any case, intense heat is required in the refining process. With that background, Proverbs 17:3 becomes a powerful picture of God’s refining process of the believer.

#### Doctrinal Point

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

Verse 1: *“Better is a dry morsel with quietness than a house full of feasting with strife.”* Quite a contrast here! It’s not just a small hamburger compared to a steak dinner. It’s a dry crust of bread compared to a sumptuous feast. However, along with the feast there’s arguing and quarreling, but with the bread crust there’s peace and tranquility. Now think of Thanksgiving dinner with an extended family. What would you opt for? Day-old bread with a happy and peaceful family time, or turkey and all the trimmings, with family members arguing and feuding around the table? Most of us would probably opt for somewhere in between - but notice what **God** says is better!

Verse 2: *“A wise servant will rule over a son who causes shame, and will share an inheritance among the brothers.”* In the ancient world, the status of a son was significantly higher and more favored than that of a hired servant, who might even be a slave. And yet, loyal and faithful service for the master might well advance the slave over the son who causes shame to the family. The practical application of this proverb should be obvious: be a hardworking, dependable, loyal, and honest employee. As a general truth, you will be advanced, and you will be rewarded.

Verse 4: *“An evildoer gives heed to false lips. A liar listens eagerly to a spiteful tongue.”* At least two logical conclusions can be deduced from this proverb:

- 1 - The kind of talk you listen to and feed on is an indication of your character.
- 2 - You’re just as guilty of gossip if all you do is listen.

Verse 5: *“He who mocks the poor reproaches his Maker. He who is glad at calamity will not go unpunished.”* Some folks seem to enjoy making fun of those who are less fortunate, and even make jokes about calamity. This is wrong, because all people are made in God’s image. In the Book of Obadiah, we are specifically told not to gloat over our brother’s day of misfortune (Obadiah 12). And mocking anyone, especially the poor, is denigrating God.

Verse 6: *“Children’s children are the crown of old men, and fathers are the pride of their children.”* Those of us who are grandparents can certainly identify with the first part of this proverb. And there are no grandchildren who are smarter or more talented or more athletic than our grandchildren! Seriously speaking, Proverbs 17:6 teaches us that God sees the extended family as an important unit in society, and respect and honor in the family is very important. Show me an extended family that does not follow Proverbs 17:6, and I’ll show you a dysfunctional family.

Verse 7: *“Excellent speech is not becoming to a fool, much less lying lips to a prince.”* The point of this proverb seems to be that if arrogant or lofty speech is unbecoming to a fool who doesn’t know what he’s talking about, how much worse is it when a prince, or ruler, lies. The bad fallout is far greater when a leader lies and betrays his people.

Verse 8: *“A present is a precious stone in the eyes of its possessor. Wherever he turns, he prospers.”* Some versions use the word *“bribe”* instead of *“present.”* *“A bribe is seen as a charm by the one who gives it; they think success will come at every turn” (NIV).* The idea in this proverb is that bribes are effective and gain favor for the one who gives it, even though bribery is not condoned in the Bible. Verse 23 makes this very clear: *“A wicked man accepts a bribe behind the back to pervert the way of justice.”*

However, I also like the idea of a “present” or a “gift” here, because it’s not wrong to use a motivating gift or reward to encourage someone to do what is good and right. You might promise your child a gift or reward for memorizing 100 Bible verses, or reading through the Bible! That’s not a bribe - it’s a reward. Bribery, by definition, is an attempt to induce someone to do something wrong or dishonest.

Verse 9: *“He who covers a transgression seeks love, but he who repeats a matter separates friends.”* This proverb is not encouraging us to sweep sin under the rug and failing to address it. The idea is that we don’t dig up dirt about another person if we want peace and love to prevail. Gossip, on the other hand, is not only sinful but will break up good friendships. I’ve seen it happen even in families.

Verse 10: *“Rebuke is more effective for a wise man than a hundred blows on a fool.”* Although the old proverb ‘a word to the wise is sufficient’ isn’t a verse in the Bible, it captures the truth of this proverb. When a teacher tells her class to quiet down, the wise and obedient students quiet down!

Verse 11: *“An evil man seeks only rebellion, therefore a cruel messenger will be sent against him.”* God hates rebellion. We are called to submit to the authority structures that He has put in place (Romans 13). 1 Samuel 15:23 says, *“For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry.”* Proverbs 17:11 not only says that rebellion is evil, but that God will deal with it. God’s moral law of Galatians 6:7 will not be overturned, and you will reap what you sow.

The cruel, or merciless messenger that God sends could be a stronger authority placed over you, or it could be an accident, or some great loss, or even death. The rest of Scripture certainly backs up the principle of stern discipline for rebellion. Parents, we should follow the biblical principle of discipline for rebellion when we discipline our children. Don’t crack the whip for honest mistakes, but do crack the whip for rebellion.

Verse 12: *“Let a man meet a bear robbed of her cubs rather than a fool in his folly.”* Would you rather meet a female bear robbed of her cubs - or an out-of-control fool with a gun? They’re both dangerous! There’s no telling what a fool in his folly might do. Remember, proverbs are wise advice for everyday living.

Verse 13: *“Whoever rewards evil for good, evil will not depart from his house.”* King David is the perfect illustration of this proverb. He repaid Uriah, his loyal army officer, with death - and took his wife. That was evil. After that, evil and sorrow never departed from David’s house. The prophet Nathan said to David, *“Why have you despised the commandment of*

*the LORD, to do evil in His sight? You have killed Uriah the Hittite with the sword. You have taken his wife to be your wife, and have killed him with the sword of the people of Ammon. Therefore, the sword shall never depart from your house, because you have despised Me, and have taken the wife of Uriah to be your wife” (2 Samuel 12:9-10).* You cannot break God’s moral laws and get away with it.

Several years ago, while traveling, I just happened to meet one of my former students. After some small talk, he told me that he had divorced his Christian wife, and had left her and their child because (in his words), “I met someone better suited for me.” This was *“rewarding evil for good.”* He knew the truth that God will not be mocked, and at first he thought God was going to zap him for what he had done, but it didn’t happen, and now he’s happy. Within two years of that conversation, that young man died suddenly.

The proverbs are wise advice for everyday living.

## **Practical Application**

### **Let the Lord’s face be reflected in your life.**

Verse 3: *“The refining pot is for silver and the furnace for gold, but the LORD tests the hearts.”*

The refiner knows that the impurities are burned away and the metal in the crucible is purified when he can see his face reflected in the molten metal. In the same way, as the heat is turned up and our lives are tested and purified, the “dross” is eliminated until the Lord can be seen reflected in our lives. 1 Peter 1:7 says *“trials show that your faith is genuine. Your faith is much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, that it may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ.”* And 2 Corinthians 4:11 says, *“For we who live are always delivered to death for Jesus’ sake that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh.”*

A believer’s life is like a precious metal. Our lives contain “dross” that needs to be removed, and the pure gold purified. Only then can the Lord be seen in our lives. Let the Lord do His refining work so His face be reflected in your life!