

Wisdom in Humility

Proverbs 18:1-12

Proverbs 18:1-12 - *“A man who isolates himself seeks his own desire; he rages against all wise judgment.*

A fool has no delight in understanding, but in expressing his own heart.

When the wicked comes, contempt comes also; and with dishonor comes reproach.

The words of a man’s mouth are deep waters. The wellspring of wisdom is a flowing brook.

It is not good to show partiality to the wicked, or to overthrow the righteous in judgment.

A fool’s lips enter into contention, and his mouth calls for blows.

A fool’s mouth is his destruction, and his lips are the snare of his soul.

The words of a talebearer are like tasty trifles, and they go down into the inmost body.

He who is slothful in his work is a brother to him who is a great destroyer.

The name of the LORD is a strong tower; the righteous run to it and are safe.

The rich man’s wealth is his strong city, and like a high wall in his own esteem.

Before destruction the heart of a man is haughty, and before honor is humility.”

Background Notes

For background, let’s discuss the strong tower in verse 10: *“The name of the LORD is a strong tower; the righteous run to it and are safe.”*

In Old Testament days, there were several kinds of towers. Agricultural watchtowers were built in the middle of vineyards for guarding the vineyard from thieves and destructive animals, as well as for guarding the harvested grapes. In addition there were three basic types of defensive towers. Some defensive towers were built as part of the city walls, or as an essential part of a city’s gates. By the way, a number of foundations of these defensive towers have been found in archaeological excavations.

Most likely, the tower that’s in view in verse 10 is a third type of tower - a strong solitary tower that was built in the center of a city, for both defensive and refuge purposes. During times of attack, citizens could run to the tower for safety.

When we run to the Lord as our strong tower, we are safe and secure from any attack. The phrase *“The name of the Lord”* in verse 10 refers to the Lord Himself.

Doctrinal Point

The proverbs are wise advice for everyday living.

Verse 1: *“A man who isolates himself seeks his own desire; he rages against all wise judgment.”* It’s not wrong to take some time for yourself for rest and relaxation, for quiet reflection, and for personal time with the Lord. That’s not the idea in this proverb. This proverb is a warning against anti-social behavior. It is selfish not to want the wise input of others in the decisions we make.

Verse 2: *“A fool has no delight in understanding, but in expressing his own heart.”* Sometimes in a class a person raises a hand, and instead of asking an intelligent question, he just starts talking to show how much he knows (or doesn’t know, as the case may be)! It’s obvious that person didn’t come to class to learn and gain more understanding of the subject, but rather to draw attention to himself. “Closed mind/open mouth” is the way of the fool.

Verse 3: *“When the wicked comes, contempt comes also, and with dishonor comes reproach.”* Remember, proverbs are “general truths stated in general terms.” So this proverb is not disproved if you happen to know of a wicked person who is prospering with no dishonor or contempt. And remember, the story is not over yet! The biblical principle is: *“Be sure your sin will find you out” (Numbers 32:23)*. Judgment for sin may take place in this lifetime, or it may not take place until the final judgment - but you can be sure that contempt and dishonor and reproach will follow wickedness. And isn’t it interesting how often God allows wickedness in high places to be uncovered in the most unusual ways? The truth leaks out, and cover-ups are exposed! You can’t cover up your sin forever.

Verse 4: *“The words of a man’s mouth are deep waters; the wellspring of wisdom is a flowing brook.”* The biggest question about this proverb is whether it is Hebrew antithetic parallelism, or synthetic parallelism. In other words, is the second line of the proverb in contrast to the first line, or is it a continuation of the first line? Some translations emphasize the contrast by including the word “but”: *“The words of a man’s mouth are deep waters, [but] the wellspring of wisdom is a flowing brook.”* In other words, without wisdom, words can be hidden like the deep waters of a stagnant cistern.

In contrast, the words of wisdom are like a continuous fountain of refreshing water flowing out in a crystal-clear stream. If the structure of this proverb is continuous, then the deep waters are not the idea of “obscure and stagnant,” but rather a profound and inexhaustible supply of wise words from a fountain. The rest of Scripture supports both lines of thought.

Verse 5: *“It is not good to show partiality to the wicked, or to overthrow the righteous in judgment.”* This proverb alone is enough to condemn “kangaroo courts” that use false witnesses, unjust legal loopholes, unjust deal setting, and unjust plea-bargaining. The Bible has many other passages that condemn partiality and other miscarriages of justice.

“The LORD your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality nor takes a bribe. He administers justice for the fatherless and widow, and loves the stranger, giving him food and clothing” (Deuteronomy 10:17-18).

Verses 6-7: *“A fool’s lips enter into contention, and his mouth calls for blows. A fool’s mouth is his destruction, and his lips are the snare of his soul.”* Two things are said here about the words of a fool. 1) A fool’s words will generally get him into trouble. Think of a fool’s mouth as a self-ensnaring trap. 2) Corporal punishment is not wrong when a fool’s words cause trouble. In application, this truth backs up the teaching that the discipline of children may include spanking.

Verse 8: *“The words of a talebearer are like tasty trifles, and they go down into the inmost body.”* Why is gossip so appealing? Why is it hard not to listen to gossip? It’s because of our fallen sinful natures. We love to hear little tidbits about other people’s doings, especially if we don’t particularly like those people. It gives us a sense of superiority.

Some Christians cover up their innate desire for gossip by calling it “prayer concerns.” We need to be especially concerned about the sin of gossip as we grow older and move into retirement, with more time on our hands. If anything, the problem of gossip can grow as we grow older. Prayer for others – yes! Gossip about others – no!

Verse 9: *“He who is slothful in his work is a brother to him who is a great destroyer.”* The use of the word “brother” here means that the lazy person and the destructive person fall into the same classification. A person who is asleep at the switch can lead to great destruction of life and property. Taking stupid shortcuts to save time or money can lead to ruin rather than repair.

This proverb also has valuable application to the local church and to ministries. Lazy leadership leads first to neglect of responsibility and then to a breakdown of the church or ministry. It’s rightly been said that a church or ministry may be disintegrated or destroyed through laziness as much as by satanic attack.

Verse 11: *“The rich man’s wealth is his strong city, and like a high wall in his own esteem.”* In Proverbs 10:15 we saw that money, when used wisely, can give a measure of earthly security. The danger, of course, is to think, as we see in verse 11, that money is our ultimate protection. It’s not!

Notice the contrast between verses 10 and 11. Verse 10: *“The name of the LORD is a strong tower.”* That’s fact. Verse 11: if you think money is your strong tower and wall of protection - that’s fiction. For example, how much security or protection will money provide in the final days of a terminal illness?

Notice at the end of verse 11 that the false concept of money providing security is only in our imagination. It’s not God’s truth.

Once again we see that the proverbs are wise principles for everyday living.

Practical Application

The higher you fly, the harder you fall.

Verse 12: *“Haughtiness goes before destruction, but humility precedes honor” (NLV).*

“The higher you fly, the harder you fall.” You’ve probably heard that expression before. It’s not a Bible verse, but it’s a Bible truth, as we see in the first part of verse 12.

The same basic truth was presented back in Proverbs 16:18: *“Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall.”* We have many examples of this in Scripture. Think of Goliath, for example. And of course the prime example is Satan, who was lifted up with pride. Pride was at the root of Satan’s fall. *“You were on the holy mount of God; you walked among the fiery stones. Your heart became proud because of your beauty, and you corrupted your wisdom because of your splendor” (Ezekiel 28:14, 17).*

1 Timothy 3:6 warns us about the potential of the sin of pride when selecting church leaders. New converts should not be chosen as church leaders lest they become puffed up with pride, and come under the same judgment as the devil!

The second part of Proverbs 18:12, that honor is preceded by humility, also has many examples in Scripture. Think of Joseph, Moses, David and Daniel, who all were humbled before they were honored. And of course the prime example is our Lord Himself. For our sake, He humbled Himself: He came from heaven’s glory to become a Servant, and die on a Roman cross. But He is now exalted at the right hand of God! Read Philippians 2:5-11.

Philippians 2:1-4 urges us to have the same attitude of humility that Jesus displayed - to consider others as being more important than ourselves! And 1 Peter 5:6 says, *“Humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time.”* What a contrast to the way of pride!

Remember: the higher you fly, the harder you fall. *“Pride goes before destruction and a haughty spirit before a fall.”* But – if you humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, at the right time He will honor you. Humility precedes honor!