

## Wisdom in Listening

### Proverbs 18:13-24

**Proverbs 18:13-24** - *“He who answers a matter before he hears it is folly and shame to him.*

*The spirit of a man will sustain him in sickness, but who can bear a broken spirit?*

*The heart of the prudent acquires knowledge, and the ear of the wise seeks knowledge.*

*A man’s gift makes room for him, and brings him before great men.*

*The first one to plead his cause seems right, until his neighbor comes and examines him.*

*Casting lots causes contentions to cease, and keeps the mighty apart.*

*A brother offended is harder to win than a strong city, and contentions are like the bars of a castle.*

*A man’s stomach shall be satisfied from the fruit of his mouth; from the produce of his lips he shall be filled.*

*Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruit.*

*He who finds a wife finds a good thing, and obtains favor from the LORD.*

*The poor man uses entreaties, but the rich answers roughly.*

*A man who has friends must himself be friendly, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.”*

### Background Notes

For our background notes, let’s consider the subject of “lots” once again. Again? Yes. Back in Proverbs 16:33 we discussed the proverb, *“The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from Lord.”* Now here in Proverbs 18:18, we read, *“Casting lots causes contentions to cease and keeps the mighty apart.”* Making a decision by drawing or casting lots can provide a peaceful solution in a contentious situation.

In our talk on Proverbs 16 we said that, in Old Testament times, believers and unbelievers alike used the drawing of lots for making decisions. The difference was that God’s people believed and knew that God, in His sovereignty, would control the results. The Lord controlled the decision - not fate, not chance, and not foreign gods.

Should believers use lots to make decisions today? Is verse 18 saying that it’s a good idea to flip a coin when we have to make an important decision? No, I don’t think so. It’s OK to flip a coin to see which team is going to receive the kick-off in the Super Bowl, or which child is going to get the extra piece of candy. But the context of Proverbs 18:18 is not games or extra desserts! The context is about bringing harmony in the area of major disputes between two strong opposing parties. The point of this proverb is that it’s better to draw lots than come to blows, when both sides believe that they are in the right.

Drawing lots was a form of arbitration in biblical days, and I suppose it could even be used in arbitration today if all parties agreed. But what about believers making a major life decision by drawing lots or flipping quarters today? In the light of the New Testament, flipping a coin or drawing lots is not the way to go.

In our talk on Proverbs 16 we mentioned that after the selection of Matthias as a replacement for Judas in Acts 1, the New Testament never again mentions the use of lots for making decisions. Why not? What significant event took place in Acts 2? At Pentecost, the Holy Spirit came to indwell all believers! So today, the biblical way for a believer to make decisions in life is not to draw lots, but to be sensitive to the guidance of the Holy Spirit through prayer and obedience to God's Word, along with the godly counsel of other believers who are indwelled and led by the Holy Spirit.

## Doctrinal Point

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

Verse 13: *"He who answers a matter before he hears it is folly and shame to him."* Get all the facts before you make an authoritative statement! This could save you from embarrassment and loss of reputation. How often have we said something that turns out to be stupid because we didn't wait for all the facts - we just ran off the mouth in the emotion of the moment? This is important advice for judgment calls, for making decisions, and for our ordinary verbal reaction to the events of the day. We've all blown it and made mistakes in this area. In light of this proverb, let's be more careful.

Verse 14: *"The spirit of a man will sustain him in sickness, but who can bear a broken spirit?"* A true story from World War II is of a man who endured cruelty and torture in a German concentration camp, but died soon after his release when he learned that it was his own son who had betrayed him to the Nazis. A person can bear up under all kinds of physical problems when they are strong in spirit, but it's hard to rise above the emotional pain and despair associated when the spirit is crushed and broken. During times of physical and emotional crisis, what a blessing it is to know nearness and the comfort of the Lord!

Verse 15: *"The heart of the prudent acquires knowledge, and the ear of the wise seeks knowledge."* Don't ever get to the point in life where you say you don't want to learn any more, because that's an indication you're not a wise person! There's always more to learn. Truth is exhaustless. In fact, I think as believers we will learn forever! Only God is infinite. We can never reach infinite knowledge, so even in our glorified bodies in Heaven we will still be finite. And as finite beings, we will still learn. Learning God's truth forever is certainly a lot more appealing to me than sitting on a cloud playing a harp! (The "cloud & harp" idea of Heaven, by the way, is not found in Scripture!)

Verse 16: *"A man's gift makes room for him, and brings him before great men."* The Hebrew word that's used here for "gift" is not the same Hebrew word that was used back in chapter 17. There it was rendered "bribe" in some translations. The word used here refers to a gift as an innocent courtesy. It can also refer to non-monetary gifts.

However, even innocent gifts, if not guarded, can be used in the wrong way to manipulate people to do what is not right.

The fact that this Hebrew word can refer to non-monetary gifts does give a basis for extending and applying this proverb to spiritual gifts and talents used in service for the Lord. Use your gifts and talents wisely and humbly for the Lord, and doors will open to larger spheres of ministry. Have any of you ever heard that application used for this proverb? It's a very encouraging proverb! Use your gift for the Lord!

Verse 17: *"The first one to plead his cause seems right, until his neighbor comes and examines him."* This proverb is related to the proverb in verse 13 about listening before answering, but here the context specifically refers to legal disputes, as the word "cause" (or "case") makes clear. However, this proverb can certainly be applied to disputes in the church and the family, and for children as well as adults. Always hear both sides of the story. In any dispute, there is more than one side.

A number of years ago, we welcomed a Vietnamese refugee family into our home, and helped them get settled here in America. From time to time, disputes would come up between the young husband and the wife and between her family and his family, whom we also helped bring to this country. If we listened only to her side of the story, we were convinced she was right, and if we listened only to his side of the story, we were convinced he was right! We had to hear both sides to figure out the true story. (And by the way, sometimes we had to settle their disputes through a translator!)

Verse 19: *"A brother offended is harder to win than a strong city, and contentions are like the bars of a castle."* Family feuds and disagreements are some of the hardest troubles to heal. It is like trying to break down the defenses of a strong city or a castle.

Verses 20-21: *"A man's stomach shall be satisfied from the fruit of his mouth; from the produce of his lips he shall be filled. Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruit."* An expression we sometimes use is, "He had to eat his own words." That's not a Bible verse, but it certainly captures the biblical truth in these proverbs. We reap the consequences of what we say, for good or bad. When what we say is good, it's as satisfying as a feast, for us and for others. But when what we say is bad, it can cause embarrassment and trouble for us and for others. It can even lead to death, depending on what is said, and when and where it is said. There is great power in the tongue, for good or evil. Read James 3.

Verse 22: *"He who finds a wife finds a good thing, and obtains favor from the LORD."* Wives are not being called "things" here! A better sense of this proverb might come from another version: *"The man who finds a wife finds a treasure"* (NLV). In Genesis 2:18 God said, *"It is not good that man should be alone."* So it's the finding of a good wife or good marriage that is the "good thing" or the blessing. God originated and ordained marriage, and the blessings that come from a good marriage.

Verse 23: *“The poor man uses entreaties, but the rich answers roughly.”* This proverb does not condone rough or condescending speech from rich people. It’s just stating the general situation that people who are poor tend to make their requests more humbly. Unfortunately we can expect a rough or angry attitude from those who have more money and more clout. If you are rich, be careful how you treat anyone who is less fortunate.

The proverbs are wise advice for everyday living.

## Practical Application

### Select your close friends carefully.

Verse 24: *“A man who has friends must himself be friendly, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.”* But here’s another translation of this verse: *“A man who has friends may come to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.”*

As you can see from the different translations, there are two different interpretations for the first part of this proverb. One interpretation says that if you want to have friends, you yourself must be friendly. The other interpretation says that too many friends can lead to trouble, because some of them may be unreliable. Or some may be only so-called “friends” – friends for the wrong reasons.

In either case, regardless of the translation, it’s better to have one close, loyal, dependable friend that you know will stick with you through good times and bad, rather than many friends who say “Have a nice day” - but where are they when the going gets rough? So select your close friends carefully!

It goes without saying that the Lord Jesus is our Friend *“who sticks closer than a brother.”* And He **wants** to become our Friend! Jesus said, *“Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one’s life for his friends. You are My friends if you do whatever I command you. No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends” (John 15:13-15).*

If you select your closest friends carefully, the Lord Jesus will be at the top of your list! And He Himself will then help you to select your close friends carefully.