

### Wisdom in Reproof

#### Proverbs 29:1-13

**Proverbs 29:1-13** - *“He who is often rebuked, and hardens his neck, will suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy.*

*When the righteous are in authority, the people rejoice; but when a wicked man rules, the people groan.*

*Whoever loves wisdom makes his father rejoice, but a companion of harlots wastes his wealth.*

*The king establishes the land by justice, but he who receives bribes overthrows it.*

*A man who flatters his neighbor spreads a net for his feet.*

*By transgression an evil man is snared, but the righteous sings and rejoices.*

*The righteous considers the cause of the poor, but the wicked does not understand such knowledge.*

*Scoffers set a city aflame, but wise men turn away wrath.*

*If a wise man contends with a foolish man, whether the fool rages or laughs, there is no peace.*

*The bloodthirsty hate the blameless, but the upright seek his well-being.*

*A fool vents all his feelings, but a wise man holds them back.*

*If a ruler pays attention to lies, all his servants become wicked.*

*The poor man and the oppressor have this in common: the LORD gives light to the eyes of both.”*

#### Background Notes

For our background notes, let's look at verse 10. There are two different interpretations, depending on the translation:

*“The bloodthirsty hate the blameless, but the upright seek his well-being” (NKJV).*

The New International Version: *“Bloodthirsty men hate a man of integrity, and seek to kill the upright.”*

The Revised Standard Version: *“Bloodthirsty men hate one who is blameless, and the wicked seek his life.”*

The King James Version: *“The bloodthirsty hate the upright, but the just seek his soul.”*

The New King James Version: *“The bloodthirsty hate the blameless, but the upright seek his wellbeing.”*

The New American Standard Version: *“Men of bloodshed hate the blameless, but the upright are concerned for his life.”*

The two sets of translations are significantly different, and thus the interpretations are significantly different. That's not because the Hebrew manuscripts differ. It's simply that the Hebrew text can be translated and interpreted either way.

In one case, bloodthirsty men not only hate blameless people, and people of integrity, but they seek to put them to death as well. Cain killing Abel and King Saul seeking to kill David are good examples of this translation and interpretation. The outstanding interpretation of this translation would be the Jewish leaders at the time of the crucifixion of Christ. They hated the Lord, and were not satisfied until they had Him put to death.

The interpretation of this proverb from the King James, the New King James and the New American Standard Version consider it as antithetic parallelism. The *“upright”* in the second line are not the victims of the *“bloodthirsty.”* Rather, the upright people are actively seeking the welfare and reform of the bloodthirsty people.

A third possibility is that the upright are concerned about protecting the life of the blameless from the threat of the bloodthirsty. Clearly we can't be dogmatic on the translation and interpretation of this verse. Context allows for any of these interpretations.

All these interpretations are biblically true, but don't jump to the conclusion that the Holy Spirit purposely designed this text to be vague so that any of these interpretations would do! No. Solomon, the inspired writer, had one interpretation in mind when he wrote this text – but we can't be sure which one.

## Doctrinal Point

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

**Verse 1:** *“He who is often rebuked, and hardens his neck, will suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy.”*

There are many biblical examples of the truth of this proverb. Think of the unbelievers of Noah's day. For many years they heard reproof and rebuke from Noah's preaching - and then they were suddenly cut off at the time of the Flood (2 Peter 2). Think of Pharaoh at the time of Moses, and the many chances he had to submit to the one true God of Israel, but he continued to *“harden his neck”* to resist divine authority. Think of the sudden deaths of Hophni and Phinehas, Eli's wicked sons (1 Samuel 4). They refused to listen to many rebukes from their father, and then they were suddenly cut off. Think of many people who die in their sins because time after time they have rejected Jesus. I trust that you are not in that category, because you could be cut off suddenly, *“and that without remedy.”* Don't continue to resist, because we don't know what a day may bring forth.

**Verse 2:** *“When the righteous are in authority, the people rejoice; but when a wicked man rules, the people groan.”*

Compare the long reign of Queen Victoria of Great Britain with the rule of Hitler in Germany, or the rule of Stalin in Russia. What a contrast! Under one, there was blessing and rejoicing. Under the others, there was great oppression, cruelty and death.

**Verse 3:** *“Whoever loves wisdom makes his father rejoice, but a companion of harlots wastes his wealth.”* The runaway son in Luke 15 is an example of the truth in this proverb. As the proverb indicates, the prodigal's wanton living wasted the father's wealth. This story has a happy ending, because of the father's grace.

What a blessing it is when an upright son or daughter does the right thing from the start. They not only make their father glad, but they please the Lord as well.

**Verse 4:** *“The king establishes the land by justice, but he who receives bribes overthrows it.”* The ruler in this proverb is involved in some kind of graft or corruption. The Hebrew word used here for “bribes” is broad enough to include even the idea of unfairly raising taxes. King Rehoboam overthrew justice when, regarding unjust taxation, he said, *“my little finger will be thicker than my father’s waist” (1 Kings 12:10)*. What a contrast to the political leader who maintains justice in the land, starting with himself, and including the way he raises campaign funds and proposes fair and just taxes - regardless of political party and party politics.

**Verse 5:** *“A man who flatters his neighbor spreads a net for his feet.”* Flattery is not the same as rightly earned and deserved praise. Flattery involves guile. It is a deceitful compliment that’s designed to win favor or affection. The word translated “flatters” here literally means “to deal smoothly.” Most likely the second part, *“spreads a net for his feet,”* refers to the flatterer’s own feet. It’s a general truth that one who uses flattery to obtain his wrong designs will eventually reap what he has sown.

**Verse 6:** *“By transgression an evil man is snared, but the righteous sings and rejoices.”* There is great contrast in the antithetic parallelism of this proverb. On the one hand is the unrighteous person who gets caught when his own evil plans boomerang. In great contrast is the righteous person, who does the right thing, and as a result he is free to rejoice and sing because he doesn’t have a guilty conscience. What a great feeling!

**Verse 7:** *“The righteous considers the cause of the poor, but the wicked does not understand such knowledge.”* Here’s a good proverb to help you determine whether you’re a truly righteous person or not. If you are righteous, you’ll not only be concerned about the **needs** of the poor, but the **rights** of the poor as well - to the point of doing something about it. If you’re not concerned about justice for the poor, and don’t even bother to try to understand or do something to correct unjust situations, it may show, from God’s perspective, how low your righteous standards really are.

**Verse 8:** *“Scoffers set a city aflame, but wise men turn away wrath.”* Scoffers mock God’s moral standards and the truth of God’s Word, and they cause city chaos with their rebellion. Wise people, who by definition honor God and His Word and uphold God’s moral standards, are peacemakers, and stabilize civil government.

**Verse 9:** *“If a wise man contends with a foolish man, whether the fool rages or laughs, there is no peace.”* Don’t try to argue with a fool - you won’t get very far! He’ll either get angry, or he’ll try to laugh it off. The fool can’t follow logic and has a distorted sense of justice.

**Verse 11:** *“A fool vents all his feelings, but a wise man holds them back.”* Are there times in your life when you wish you had counted to ten before you spoke? Perhaps even sometime in the past week? I think we all have played the “fool” - maybe many times. Fools run off at the mouth. They wear their feelings on their sleeves. Wise people can restrain themselves. They hold back from saying things they’ll regret later.

The verb translated as “*hold back*” is used in Psalms 65 and 89 in connection with the Lord calming the waves of the sea. “*You still the noise of the seas, the noise of their waves, and the tumult of the peoples*” (Psalm 65:7). And Psalm 89:9: “*You rule the raging of the sea. When its waves rise, You still them.*” What a great word picture!

**Verse 12:** “*If a ruler pays attention to lies, all his servants become wicked.*” It isn’t long before the servants or officials of the king, or president, or ruler see the standard operating procedure of their leader, and they begin to follow his example. How important it is, especially for leaders, to always do what is right, regardless of pressure or persuasion, or politics.

The proverbs are wise advice for everyday living.

## Practical Application

### You can always find some common ground!

**Verse 13:** “*The poor man and the oppressor have this in common: the LORD gives light to the eyes of both.*”

Think of the contrast between the poor and downtrodden in society and the oppressive ruling class. And yet they have common ground - they both have the light of life! The expression “*light to the eyes*” involves more than mere physical eyesight. It includes God’s blessing of light. “*That he may be enlightened with the light of life*” (Job 33:30).

There’s always some common ground between us and any other human being. We should look for this common ground, so we can share God’s good news with them. The Lord related to a Samaritan woman using the common ground of water (John 4). Even though the Jews had no dealings with the Samaritans, the Lord used the common need of every human being: thirst and the need for water.

When relating to people who need to hear about God’s truth and love, we too should look for common ground. I once used the common ground of a beautiful clear night sky, full of stars, to relate to an unbeliever about the beauty of creation - and he could not deny it! And that led to a conversation about God and the Bible.

So remember this practical application from Proverbs 29: 13: You can always find some common ground!