

PROVERBS:
FAMILY, FRIENDS, & FOOLS

Monday, April 13
Reading: Proverbs 17

Proverbs 17:1 Better a dry crust with peace and quiet than a house full of feasting, with strife.

As we come to Proverbs 17-19 we notice that there are more negative observations than positive ones. “These chapters communicate less overall optimism and more of the feel of plowing through the realities of yesterday and tomorrow... We should appreciate progressions of proverbs like these. Often we go through a week that feels just like these chapters, with a lot of hard things and only a few rays of light to remind us to see straight, to walk straight, and to hope.”¹ Proverbs 17:1 gives us a key theme that will run through this chapter – strife. This word has the idea of verbal combat – controversy, contention, and quarrels. Another frequent word found in this chapter is “fool.” A fool causes strife in his home, his friendships, and his community. While fools think no one notices, Solomon reminds us that “the Lord tests the heart” (17:3) and wants to refine and shape us to be more like Him.

STRIFE IN THE HOME – Instead of the peace and quiet and the pride of their parents, fools stir up trouble and bring grief and bitterness to their parents (17:1, 21, 25). While verse 2 expresses the honor a prudent servant receives, it also shows a family dynamic that has gone wrong due to the foolishness of the son. When a family follows God’s wisdom, they will have mutual respect and honor for each other that passes from generation to generation (17:6). Is your home one of peace or contention?

STRIFE IN FRIENDSHIP – Friendships are built on love, honesty, and faithfulness. But fools do not “foster love” but instead spread gossip that destroys relationships (17:9). They often do not think before they speak (17:27-28). While at times it is necessary to lovingly rebuke a straying friend, fools do not receive it. Solomon says even a hundred lashes do not get their attention (17:10). Instead of honesty, fools think they can get whatever they want through bribes and deception (17:8). When we base our friendships on “what I can get out of it” we are violating the integrity of our relationship. Friendship is not so much what we can get as what we can give. A friendship is not based on circumstances. It “loves at all times” and especially in times of trouble (17:17). Instead of faithfulness, fools love to argue. Solomon equates this to water spilling out of a dam. It may start with a small drip but will eventually break out into a flood that destroys if it is not dealt with quickly. The best advice is to stop an argument before it goes too far (17:14, 19). Are you a friend who “loves at all times”?

STRIFE IN THE COMMUNITY – A fool loves to listen to gossip and lies which rips a community apart (17:4). They have no concern for others and gloat in their misfortune (17:5). Instead of encouraging and cheering others, they crush spirits (17:22). Fools pervert justice by punishing the innocent and letting the guilty go free (17:15, 23, 26). The reason for their foolish behavior is rebellion against God and His way (17:11). They have no heart for wisdom and could not understand it even if they had the best instructors (17:16). One commentator translates this verse as: “Why does the fool have money in his hands? To buy wisdom when he has no brains?”² Fools always have their eyes on “greener pastures” instead of living by wisdom in the present (17:24). How is your relationship with the community around you?

¹ Kathleen Nielson. *Proverbs for You*, p 145

² Allen P. Ross. *Expositor’s Bible Commentary Vol. 5 – Proverbs*, p. 1018