

Proverbs 17 – Becoming Pursuers of Peace

Proverbs 17:1 makes it clear that the effects of peace and conflict in a person's life are a very big deal. So big, in fact, that it would be better to eat the leftover stale crust of an old, already eaten sandwich for dinner than to have an all-you-can-eat buffet if it means the difference between peace and conflict.

That doesn't mean that we should all just "live and let live," as the saying goes. The wisdom we read in God's Word is never void of truth. Notice how the wise pursuit of peace and reconciliation is described throughout chapter 17.

It isn't about accepting all behaviors; it's about accepting behaviors that love God and people-at all times. Pursuers of peace don't give attention to malicious and destructive words that insult people and celebrate their adversity (w. 4-5). They don't go around talking about what someone did wrong; they choose to forgive so they can move past it (v. 9). They don't look to start conflicts; they look to end them (v. 14). They don't love to take digs at someone else's expense; they love to step up to support someone in trouble (w. 17,19). They don't quickly comment on everything they hear; they take time to listen and process before speaking (w. 27-28).

Based on these principles, we must consider whether or not we are pursuing peace and reconciliation in our relationships. The effects of that answer are powerful and far-reaching. In any relationship where conflict currently thrives, now is the perfect time to begin pursuing peace and reconciliation, instead.

A. Falsehood and Oppression

¹ Better a dry crust with peace and quiet than a house full of feasting, with strife. ² A prudent servant will rule over a disgraceful son and will share the inheritance as one of the family.

Better is a dry morsel with quietness: These words recommend family-love and peace, as critical to the comfort of human life. Those who live in unity and quietness, live free from jealousies and animosities.

There is nothing appealing about a dry morsel. Yet the blessing of quietness and peace is so great, that it can make a dry morsel seem better than the alternative. Peace and contentment, and especially domestic peace, are beyond all other blessings. Think about every thought and action that may disturb contentment. If you have fewer comforts than you used to have, or fewer comforts than other people have, or fewer comforts than you desire, you still have more than you deserve.

Than a house full of feasting with strife: A home full of feasting would be wonderful; but not with constant strife. Peace and quietness in the home are so valuable that they make up for many other comforts you might not have. Those that live in contention, always jarring and brawling, live uncomfortably. They cannot expect the blessing of God upon them and what they have, nor can they have any true enjoyment.

A wise servant will rule over a son who causes shame: It is natural that a son should rule; the trust one has in family is often greater than the trust in non-family. Yet should a son cause shame, God knows how to replace that son with a wise servant. The son has his natural place, but God does not see that natural place as giving absolute right to lead when the son bring shame to the family.

And will share an inheritance among the brothers: Should the son prove to cause shame and if it is in God's will, God is able to even lift up a wise servant to a place of leadership and inheritance among the brothers.

³ The crucible for silver and the furnace for gold, but the Lord tests the heart. ⁴ A wicked person listens to deceitful lips; a liar pays attention to a destructive tongue.

The refining pot is for silver and the furnace for gold: There are appropriate places where things are tested and purified. Silver and gold each have their place of refining and purification. The hearts of the children of men are subject, not only to God's view, but to his judgment: The fining pot is for silver, both to prove it and to improve it, so the Lord can try hearts he searches. He refines them and makes them purer. (Jeremiah 17:10) God tries the heart by affliction. Psalm 66:10-11 He often chooses his people in the furnace (Isaiah 49:10) and makes them His choice. The LORD tests the hearts: The most appropriate place for the human heart to be tested and purified is with the LORD Himself. His word and His truth give a wise, loving standard that will both examine and refine the inner man or woman.

An evildoer gives heed to false lips: When it comes to lies spoken by false lips, evil people not only spread them, but they also receive them. They seem to love to embrace a lie. It is a sign of a vicious nature to believe scandalous reports of godly men. If men did not love lies, they would not listen to them. A liar listens eagerly to a spiteful tongue: An evil heart is ever ready to receive evil; and liars delight in lies. Those who lie love to listen to lies as well as speak them. It should concern us if we love to hear lies and gossip about others.

⁵ Whoever mocks the poor shows contempt for their Maker; whoever gloats over disaster will not go unpunished.

He who mocks the poor reproaches his Maker: Some people find it easy to mock the poor. They love to think of themselves as better than those who have less than they do. Such people should understand that when they mock the poor, they despise the One who made both the poor and themselves. The fact that both the poor and the well-off have the same Maker should give the richer person greater sympathy and greater

sense. The first part of this proverb does not teach, as is so often stated, that poverty is from God. Rather, it recognizes the inherent rights of every man in God, notwithstanding his poverty. He who is glad at calamity will not go unpunished: To be glad at anyone's misfortune shows an unloving, unsympathetic heart. Anyone who despises their fellow man should expect God to answer and defend the weaker one.

B. Common Truths

⁶ Children's children are a crown to the aged, and parents are the pride of their children.

Children's children are the crown of old men: Grandchildren are like a crown of glory for a grandparent. They give an indescribable sense of pleasure and satisfaction. They are so, if they conduct themselves worthily. It is an honor to parents when they are old to leave children, and children's children growing up, that they follow in their footsteps and are likely to maintain and advance the reputation of their families. It is an honor to a man to live so long as to see his children's children. (Psalm 128:6; Genesis 50:23) The glory of children is their father: This is true both as a fact and as an aspiration. It is natural for children to glory in their father, and fathers should live and parent in such a way that would cause their children to glory in them.

⁷ Eloquent lips are unsuited to a godless fool— how much worse lying lips to a ruler! ⁸ A bribe is seen as a charm by the one who gives it; they think success will come at every turn.

Excellent speech is not becoming to a fool: It isn't that excellent speech is not desired from the fool, but that it is an unexpected surprise. Since people usually express their wisdom or folly by what they say, it seems strange and almost inappropriate for a fool should say something wise and eloquent. God does not receive fair words from a foul mouth. Christ silenced the devil when he confessed him to be the Son of the most high God. Much less lying lips to a prince: Any leader (a prince) should be known for truthfulness such that it would be a strange surprise for them to lie. This is a high standard among leaders, especially political leaders. A dishonest leader is worse than an arrogant fool.

A present is a precious stone in the eyes of its possessor: It is human nature to regard a present as something precious. In this context the present may be a bribe. This proverb simply states that a bribe usually works. The proverb is expressing this reality from the viewpoint of the one giving the bribe. Wherever he turns, he prospers: The benefit one receives from a gift (or bribe) so thrills them that it accomplishes the purpose of the gift.

⁹ Whoever would foster love covers over an offense, but whoever repeats the matter separates close friends. ¹⁰ A rebuke impresses a discerning person more than a hundred lashes a fool. ¹¹ Evildoers foster rebellion against God; the messenger of death will be sent against them.

He who covers a transgression seeks love: There is a time and a place for the exposure of sin (Ephesians 5:11), but often the sins of others should be tactfully and lovingly covered. The exposure of all belongs to God, not man (Luke 12:3). He who repeats a matter separates friends: To uncover someone's sin by repeating it to others will ruin relationships and divide friendships. Repeats may indicate either tale-telling or harping on a matter.

Rebuke is more effective for a wise man: Because a wise man or woman will respond to rebuke and learn from it, it can be truly effective for him or her. Than a hundred blows on a fool: Correction may be given repeatedly to the fool, yet they will not receive it. The problem is not in the correction itself (though the fool will likely blame it); the problem is in the fool. The better the disposition, the less is needed to correct it.

An evil man seeks only rebellion: The instinctive response of rebellion belongs to the evil, not to the wise. Those who seek only rebellion can offer nothing wise and good to replace that which they rebel against. A cruel messenger will be sent against him: Repeated rebellion invites cruel retaliation. The evil man should not be surprised when it comes. Cruel messenger could refer to storms, disease, or any misfortune that is God's messenger of retribution.

C. Impactful Sayings

¹² Better to meet a bear robbed of her cubs than a fool bent on folly. ¹³ Evil will never leave the house of one who pays back evil for good.

Let a man meet a bear robbed of her cubs: A mother bear is notoriously angry and dangerous when she is robbed of her cubs. No sensible person would want to meet a mother bear under such conditions. Rather than a fool in his folly: A foolish man in the midst of his foolish actions can be more dangerous than a mother bear who lost her cubs. The wise man or woman will stay away from such a fool in his folly. The human, who is supposed to be intelligent and rational, in such foolishness becomes more dangerous than the beast that acts with good reason.

Whoever rewards evil for good: It is plainly wrong to give evil to those who deserve good. It discourages those who do good and encourages those who do not. It upsets God's moral order to have good punished. To render good for evil is divine, good for good is human, evil for evil is harsh, evil for good is devilish. Evil will not depart from his house: God sees when His moral order is offended and will answer it. The one who gives evil to the good can expect their own home to be troubled by evil. As many persons are guilty of the sin of ingratitude, and of paying kindness with unkindness, and good with evil, it is no wonder we find so much misery among men; for God's word cannot fail; evil shall not depart from the houses and families of such persons. Both parents of Solomon paid for the evil done to Uriah and received a similar sentence. See 2 Samuel 12: 15; 18

14 Starting a quarrel is like breaching a dam; so drop the matter before a dispute breaks out. 15 Acquitting the guilty and condemning the innocent—the Lord detests them both.

The beginning of strife is like releasing water: The nature of liquid water makes it difficult to restrain. Once it is released it will go in unexpected and uncontrolled ways. This is like the beginning of strife. Once an argument or battle has begun, it is difficult to control its course, and like uncontrolled water, it can cause great damage.

The beginning of a bitter conflict involving the pent-up arrogance and anger of a fool is similar to a person who digs a hole in a dam. The seepage starts from a small gap, but under built up pressure it quickly bursts open and the small leak turns into a raging, uncontrolled cataclysm that gets out of hand and does irreparable damage. Opening such a stream lets loose more than one can predict, control or retrieve. Therefore stop contention before a quarrel starts: Because strife and contention are difficult to control and cause great damage, wisdom says that it is much better to stop contention before it ever starts.

He who justifies the wicked, and he who condemns the just: This is the same kind of upset of God's moral order as mentioned previously in Proverbs 17:13. Justice requires the opposite outcome – that the wicked are condemned and that the just are justified. Both of them are an abomination to the LORD: God sees the violation of justice on both sides. God never thinks that all should be equally condemned or justified; but that the appropriate answer be given to both the wicked and the just. The proverb corrects the popular misconception that it is better to set free ten guilty persons than to condemn one innocent person. Both are an abomination to the Lord.

16 Why should fools have money in hand to buy wisdom, when they are not able to understand it?

Why is there in the hand of a fool the purchase price of wisdom: Wisdom has a price, and Solomon imagined a fool who was ready to pay that price. We might say that the price of wisdom begins with the fear of the LORD. The price of wisdom also involves humility and willingness to receive correction. The fool has no interest in obtaining wisdom in the way that it must be obtained. Since he has no heart for it: It would be strange to find the price of wisdom in the hand of a fool, because then that person would no longer be a fool. The nature of the fool is that they have no heart to pay the price of wisdom.

C. True Friendship

17 A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for a time of adversity. 18 One who has no sense shakes hands in pledge and puts up security for a neighbor.

A friend loves at all times: A true friend will not only love when it is easy, but at all times. What used to be called fair-weather friends – those who are friends only when the weather is pleasant and fair – are not true friends at all. Example: Ahithophel has deserted David, and Judas has sold out the Lord. A brother is born for adversity: A true brother (beyond blood relation) will show himself in a time of adversity. We must

look to our Lord for the best example in this matter. We see the Son of God taking on our nature so that he might be our friend and brother (Hebrews 2:14). The mystery of this friendship is beyond our imagination.

A man devoid of understanding shakes hands in a pledge: Wisdom guards us against foolish partnerships. And becomes surety for his friend: It is responsibility enough to honor our own debts. Wisdom warns us against taking responsibility for the debts of others.

19 Whoever loves a quarrel loves sin; whoever builds a high gate invites destruction.

He who loves transgression loves strife: There are those who love both transgression and strife. They love it when God's laws are sinfully transgressed and when there is conflict. He who exalts his gate seeks destruction: Those who exalt the leadership of those who love transgression and strife are promoting destruction. Such people should never sit in the gate of respect, leadership, and authority. The man who builds a high gate exalts himself above his neighbor and assumes a lifestyle beyond his rank. Possibly gate is here taken for the mouth; and the exalting of the gate may mean proud boasting and arrogant speaking, such tends to kindle and maintain strife.

20 One whose heart is corrupt does not prosper; one whose tongue is perverse falls into trouble. 21 To have a fool for a child brings grief; there is no joy for the parent of a godless fool.

He who has a deceitful heart finds no good: The one filled with deceit will only find corruption and deceit in others. He who has a perverse tongue falls into evil: Wicked and foolish words not only display the evil of someone's heart, they also lead them into greater evil. He who begets a scoffer does so to his sorrow: To be the parent of a foolish scoffer (one who doubts and rejects the truth) is to have sorrow. Parents should do all they can to not raise scoffers, beginning with believing and living out the truth themselves. The father of a fool has no joy: There is no pleasure in seeing that your child is a fool. There is both the pain of the consequences of the child's folly and the regret of wondering if one parented effectively. No more than William the Conqueror had in his ungracious children, or Henry II, who, finding that his sons had conspired against him with the king of France, fell into a terrible passion, cursing both his sons, and the day they were born.

22 A cheerful heart is good medicine, but a crushed spirit dries up the bones. 23 The wicked accept bribes in secret to pervert the course of justice.

A merry heart does good, like medicine: It has been said that laughter is the best medicine. Truly, a cheerful and merry heart is good for more than the personality; it is good for the body. A broken spirit dries the bones: Those who are defeated and broken in spirit will see the effect in their health and experiences of life. It will feel to them that their life has withered and dried up. This was the feeling David described in Psalm 32:1-4.

Bones' figuratively represents the body (encased in the bony frame): fat bones means a healthy body (Proverbs 3:8; 15:30; 16:24), but dry bones signify unhealthiness and lifelessness (Ezekiel 37:1-14). A broken spirit in an evangelical sense is God's precious gift. It is stamped with his special honor. But here a crushed spirit describes a brooding spirit of despondency that always looks on the dark side of things. If this is linked to religion, it flows from a narrow and perverted view and a fake humility centered one one's self. It has the effect of drying up the bones.

A wicked man accepts a bribe behind the back: It is wrong to receive a bribe, an illegal and unjust payment to get around normal laws and procedures and to buy favor from officials. This shows a fundamental corruption and lack of integrity. The corrupt official defies God who has placed him over the community to protect the poor. He shows he is conscious of his guilt by accepting the bribe, which is concealed from public scrutiny and shame, but it is not concealed from God. To pervert the ways of justice: When favor and a desired outcome depends on bribe and not fairness and righteousness, justice is perverted. Then, no one can or should have confidence in the system of laws and ways of justice.

24 A discerning person keeps wisdom in view, but a fool's eyes wander to the ends of the earth.

Wisdom is in the sight of him who has understanding: The sense seems to be that the wise see things in the light of their wisdom. Their wisdom makes everything else clearer and able to be understood.

The eyes of a fool are on the ends of the earth: The fool doesn't see things with the eyes of wisdom. They have their eyes everywhere (the ends of the earth) except where they should be. Wisdom is within the sight and reach at every man: but he whose desires are scattered, who is always aiming at impossible things, or is of an unsteady disposition, is not likely to find it.

This diversion is a great friend to the enemy. Our enemy's goal is to turn the mind away from what is immediate to what is indefinite, from what is plain and important to what is unsearchable, from what is personal to what is irrelevant.

25 A foolish son brings grief to his father and bitterness to the mother who bore him.

A foolish son is a grief to his father: The thought in this proverb is similar to that in Proverbs 17:21. Parents may find great grief in the foolish character of their children. And bitterness to her who bore him: Because of the maternal instinct and bond, there is a special pain and bitterness that belongs to the mother of a foolish son or daughter.

26 If imposing a fine on the innocent is not good, surely to flog honest officials is not right.

To punish the righteous is not good: God's moral order insists that the righteous be rewarded and the wicked be punished. To upset this or reverse it is not good. Nor to

strike princes for their uprightness: If a leader is honorable and righteous, he should never be punished. Uprightness should be rewarded and honored, not punished.

²⁷ The one who has knowledge uses words with restraint, and whoever has understanding is even-tempered. ²⁸ Even fools are thought wise if they keep silent, and discerning if they hold their tongues.

He who has knowledge spares his words: Both wisdom and folly are often revealed by one's words. Yet, in the case of wisdom, it may be revealed by the knowledge of when to keep quiet. We should never think that the wise man or woman reveals their wisdom by talking a lot. A man of understanding is of a calm spirit: The peace and contentment that come to the wise is described here as a calm spirit. To be constantly agitated and upset is an indication of folly, not wisdom.

Even a fool is counted wise when he holds his peace: There is a wonderful way that even a fool can be considered wise – to not speak. The advice of verse 28 is not ironic: the fool who takes it is no longer a complete fool. When he shuts his lips, he is considered perceptive: If the fool cared about being considered perceptive, this gives an easy way for it to happen. One is reminded of Abraham Lincoln's saying: "It is better to keep your mouth shut and let them think you a fool than to open your mouth and remove all doubt."