

Proverbs 18 – The Selfishness of Isolation

With all the warnings the book of Proverbs gives us about our words, we might think the best tact is to simply remove ourselves from relationships. If we don't engage with people, we won't get mad at them, right? We won't take digs at people, speak too quickly, gossip, or start even one conflict. As we read through chapter 18, the growing list continues. Engaging in relationships with people can tempt us to show off our opinions (v. 2), show partiality (v. 5), wrongly state our case (v. 17), carelessly answer a needy person (v. 23), and even provoke a beating (v. 6)! There is no doubt about it; relationships can cause trouble!

However, Proverbs 18:1 assures us that isolation isn't the answer. In fact, removing oneself entirely from community can be as destructive as surrounding oneself with people who make poor decisions. If left to us, we will pursue selfish desires in every single context of life. We will, in effect, war against wisdom all by ourselves.

It's true that what we say matters, and we are often tempted to say wrong things. It's also true that how we live matters, and we are often tempted to live in ways that do not honor the Lord or show grace to other people the Lord has created. And it is precisely because of those truths that we need other people. God made us for relationship. We need the accountability of faithful friends to help us pursue godly wisdom.

¹ An unfriendly person pursues selfish ends and against all sound judgment starts quarrels.² Fools find no pleasure in understanding but delight in airing their own opinions.

A man who isolates himself seeks his own desire: To cut yourself off from family, friends, and community is selfish. It shows an unwillingness to make the small (and sometimes large) sacrifices to get along with others. While getting along with others can be difficult, particularly in the times we live in, this Christian life is best lived together.

He rages against all wise judgment: God designed us after His own triune nature; He designed us to live in community. The instinct for isolation must not be over-indulged; it is against all wise judgment. The protest of this proverb is against the self-satisfaction of a man who separates himself from the thoughts and opinions of others.

He passes judgment upon all man's trials and tribulations. He is sad and condescending; opinionated and conceited, and therefore appears ridiculous, and aggravating to others.

A fool has no delight in understanding: The wise man or woman has great satisfaction in knowledge, understanding, and wisdom. This is not true of the fool; they find no joy in wisdom. He is willful, lets all understanding pass by him, but he stays where he was.

But in expressing his own heart: What does delight the fool is expressing his own heart. If he asks questions, it is to show how clever he is rather than to learn. He is focused on

self instead of God, and his recklessness flows from this wrong priority and wrong place to find delight. It is a fact that most vain and foolish people are never satisfied in company, but in showing their own nonsense and emptiness.

³ When wickedness comes, so does contempt, and with shame comes reproach.

⁴ The words of the mouth are deep waters, but the fountain of wisdom is a rushing stream.⁵ It is not good to be partial to the wicked and so deprive the innocent of justice.

When the wicked comes, contempt comes also: The wicked brings contempt with them; the proud, superior attitude that thinks itself better than others and looks at those thought to be lesser with scorn. Yet it can also be said that contempt follows the wicked because God will scorn those who scorn others. With dishonor comes reproach: The wicked bring insults (reproach) upon those they consider dishonorable.

The words of a man's mouth are deep waters: The idea isn't that everyone's speech is deep and meaningful. Instead, the idea is that we reveal the depths of our heart by the words of our mouth. The sayings of a wise man are like deep waters; no matter how much you pump or draw off, you cannot decrease them. The wellspring of wisdom is a flowing brook: When the wellspring of a man's being is rooted in wisdom, it will then flow out from their words. Deep waters...flowing brook: The words of the wise should wash the minds of the hearers of all filth and foulness. [Ephesians 4:29-20](#)

It is not good to show partiality to the wicked: This is obvious to the person with morals and values. However, one might do so out of misplaced compassion, out of a desire to please others, because of some kind of bribe, or many other reasons. We must not, in judicial cases, pay any attention to a man's riches, influence, friends, positions, etc., but judge the case according to the merits. But when the wicked rich man opposes and oppresses the poor righteous, then all those things should be utterly forgotten. Or to overthrow the righteous in judgment: When one shows partiality to the wicked, they will overthrow the righteous in judgment whether they intend to or not. Each aspect of injustice is sin. For justice to happen, the cause must be heard, not the person. Let the person be punished for his wickedness, not the wickedness be covered for the person's sake. When one is partial to the wicked, the rights of God are despised, and the claims of his justice are thrown away.

⁶ The lips of fools bring them strife, and their mouths invite a beating. ⁷ The mouths of fools are their undoing, and their lips are a snare to their very lives. ⁸ The words of a gossip are like choice morsels; they go down to the inmost parts.

A fool's lips enter into contention: It is in the nature of the fool to argue. Their words often bring them into conflict. His mouth calls for blows: The words of the fool invite punishment, and sometimes this punishment will be physical.

A fool's mouth is his destruction: The words of the fool show his foolishness, but they also work towards his destruction. Many a fool has been ruined because of his foolish

words. His lips are the snare of his soul: As in most places in Proverbs, snare here speaks of the life of being the fool. It includes the inner spiritual self. The fool's life is trapped – caught in a snare— by his foolish words. It is most remarkable that the apostle Paul, when analyzing man's depravity, focuses on the little member and all that is linked to it—the throat, the tongue, the lips, and the mouth. ([Romans 3:13-14](#))

The words of a talebearer are like tasty trifles: The gossip and evil reports brought by the talebearer are almost impossible to resist. Those who should know better find it difficult to tell the talebearer to stop talking. This proverb is expressed in its repetition in [Proverbs 26:22](#). The damage the tattle tale brings is great. He takes away a man's good name, and ruins his reputation and his future. Cain by killing Abel made Abel alive in the mouths of men forever and eternalized his name.

They go down into the inmost body: When we receive the words of a gossip, they normally have an effect on us. The words often change the way we think and feel about people, even if what the gossip says isn't true or isn't confirmed. God gave a strong word regarding the confirmation of testimony ([Deuteronomy 19:15](#); [2 Corinthians 13:1](#); [1 Timothy 5:19](#))

Once we start listening, it is hard to stop. When such tasty bits are taken into the innermost being, they stimulate the desire for more. Instead of eating the tasty trifles of the talebearer, Jeremiah sets a better model: he ate God's word and delighted in it ([Jeremiah 15:16](#). [Colossians 3:12-20](#)).

⁹ One who is slack in his work is brother to one who destroys. ¹⁰ The name of the Lord is a fortified tower; the righteous run to it and are safe. ¹¹ The wealth of the rich is their fortified city; they imagine it a wall too high to scale.

He who is slothful in his work: There are times of leisure or rest where laziness is understandable. However, there is never an excuse to be lazy in work. As previously noted at [Proverbs 15:19](#):

- Laziness is theft – you live off the work of others.
- Laziness is selfishness – you live for yourself and comfort.
- Laziness is neglect of duty – you don't do what you should. Is a brother to him who is a great destroyer: We often think of laziness as a fairly innocent sin, but it is not. The lazy man is a close associate to the one who brings great destruction.

It means that in life there can be no neutrality. Every man lives in the midst of a conflict between good and evil. If he is not helping Jehovah against the mighty, he is helping the mighty against Jehovah. James recognized it when he wrote: *'To him that knoweth to do good and doeth it not, to him it is sin.* James 4:17

The name of the LORD is a strong tower: God provides a wonderful and strong defense. This is rooted not in a magical saying of His name as if it were a charm or a spell, but in the name of the LORD as a declaration of His character, His person. In all that He is

and all that He stands for, Yahweh (the LORD) is a strong tower. Because the name of Yahweh represents His character in all its aspects, the believer can think about the aspects of God's character and find a strong, safe refuge in them.

The righteous run to it and are safe: God invites all to find refuge in His name; whoever calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved ([Joel 2:32](#), [Acts 2:21](#), and [Romans 10:13](#)). Those who humbly run to God and find refuge with Him are His righteous ones, so it is the righteous who run to it.

The rich man's wealth is his strong city: In contrast to the righteous who find their strong tower in God and His character, the rich man (here used in the sense of the man who trusts in his riches) finds refuge in his wealth. Such a man who trusts in his own riches has *no* refuge when they fail. Like a high wall in his own esteem: The rich man sees his wealth as safe and sure as a high wall around a strong city. Yet this is only in his own esteem; both the LORD and the wise know that wealth is not a truly strong city and not a high wall. Wealth does afford a measure of protection, but the danger of wealth is precisely that it gives its possessor the illusion of greater security than it can provide.

12 Before a downfall the heart is haughty, but humility comes before honor. 13 To answer before listening—that is folly and shame. 14 The human spirit can endure in sickness, but a crushed spirit who can bear? 15 The heart of the discerning acquires knowledge, for the ears of the wise seek it out.

Before destruction the heart of man is haughty: Since pride leads the way to destruction ([Proverbs 16:18](#)), we should expect that the haughty heart is ready to receive its just destruction. There is no wisdom in self-exaltation. And before honor is humility: Wise people know that humility leads the way to honor. If you want destruction, be haughty; if you want honor, show humility. It is not humility to underrate yourself. Humility is to think of yourself, if you can, as God thinks of you. The humility and exaltation of Jesus provides the classic example of this truth (see [Isaiah 52:13-53:12](#); [Philippians 2:1-10](#)).

He who answers a matter before he hears it: It is common to give a quick, impulsive answer to questions and problems. We respond without thinking, or without hearing the full story, sometimes more interested in what we hope to say than what the matter before us really is. It is folly and shame to him: To whatever extent we do this, it is foolish and shameful. It is folly because a wrong or misguided answer is likely; it is shame because we do not represent ourselves well in doing so. There are many also that give judgment before they hear the whole of the cause, and express an opinion before they hear the state of the case.

The spirit of a man will sustain him in sickness: Many who have suffered with sickness have been sustained – sometimes miraculously so – by the strength of their spirit. Christian principle strengthens natural strength. Outward troubles are bearable, yes, more than bearable, if there is peace within. Who can bear a broken spirit? When the spirit is broken, instead of giving life it proves to be something few people can bear.

In physical sickness one can fall back on the will to live; but in depression the will to live may be gone, and there is no more physical strength.

The heart of the prudent acquires knowledge: The wise desire more wisdom and know how to get it. [James 1:15](#) They show their prudence (wisdom) by seeking and getting more knowledge. The ear of the wise seeks knowledge: Wise men and women seek after wisdom with all their being – their heart and their ear are given over to the pursuit of more wisdom.

¹⁶ A gift opens the way and ushers the giver into the presence of the great. ¹⁷ In a lawsuit the first to speak seems right, until someone comes forward and cross-examines.

¹⁸ Casting the lot settles disputes and keeps strong opponents apart.

A man's gift makes room for him: A previous proverb ([Proverbs 17:8](#)) spoke of a present in the sense of a bribe, but a different word is used here. This proverb is a simple recognition of fact: generosity and politeness open many doors. A gift can expedite matters but says nothing about bribing judges.

This Jacob [\[Genesis 43:11\]](#) knew well, and therefore told his sons to take a present for the governor of the land. So did Saul, [\[1 Samuel 9:7\]](#) when going to the man of God to inquire about the donkeys. It can also be an innocent courtesy or peace offering, like the present sent to the captain in [1 Samuel 17:18](#), or to Esau or Joseph ([Genesis 32:20; 43:11](#)).

And brings him before great men: It is true that a gift can be effective in gaining an audience of even great men. We are grateful that no gift is required to come before the greatest Man, the Man Christ Jesus who offers His work as mediator without cost ([1 Timothy 2:5, Romans 5:1-2](#)). Our welcome is free. The door of access is forever open. Our treasure of grace in his unchanging favor is unfathomable.

The first one to plead his cause seems right: When we hear the first side of a dispute or a debate, we often think the first one to plead his case is right, and we are quick to take their side against the other. Until his neighbor comes and examines him: The judgment is very different when the other side is heard from his neighbor. The second voice may confront the first one to plead his cause and give both sides of the story.

Casting lots causes contentions to cease: When there is an argument or dispute, appealing to an outside authority to solve the matter can help resolve conflict. In this case, the outside authority is the casting of lots, but the principle can be applied to other agreed-upon authorities. In ancient Israel, the casting of lots was used to settle disputed matters. The intent is to give the controversy over to God.

Today God's word and spiritual leaders figure prominently in divine arbitration ([1 Corinthians 6:1-8](#)) And keeps the mighty apart: When an outside authority settles the contention, it can keep mighty warriors from fighting and killing each other.

¹⁹ A brother wronged is more unyielding than a fortified city; disputes are like the barred gates of a citadel. ²⁰ From the fruit of their mouth a person's stomach is filled; with the harvest of their lips they are satisfied. ²¹ The tongue has the power of life and death, and those who love it will eat its fruit.

A brother offended is harder to win than a strong city: There is a price to pay in offending a brother. To win him back and to reclaim friendship and cooperation is more difficult than we think. When brothers fall out, it is with extreme difficulty that they can be reconciled. It is as if the closer the relationship, the wider the breach. The thread once snapped is not easily repaired. Contentions are like the bars of a castle: The conflict and disputes that come from a brother offended can be as difficult to break as the bars of a castle. The proverb is a forceful warning of the strength of the invisible walls that we so easily erect, so hard to demolish.

A man's stomach shall be satisfied from the fruit of his mouth: For some, it is possible for them to make their living by what they say. They satisfy their stomach and perhaps that of their family from the fruit of the mouth. From the produce of his lips he shall be filled: What he says shall fill his stomach and fulfill his financial obligations. At the same time, this proverb forces the thought that whatever a person dishes out, whether beneficial or harmful, he himself will feed on it to full measure through what his audience in return dishes out to him.

Death and life are in the power of the tongue: The previous proverb said how what a man speaks could provide for his stomach. Here the idea is extended to remind us that the tongue not only has the power of provision but also of death and life. Those who love it will eat its fruit: Those who are wise enough to love and appreciate the power of what a man says will be blessed and will eat the pleasant fruit of wise and effective speech.

²² He who finds a wife finds what is good and receives favor from the Lord. ²³ The poor plead for mercy, but the rich answer harshly. ²⁴ One who has unreliable friends soon comes to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.

He who finds a wife finds a good thing: God brought together the first husband and wife in [Genesis 2:21-25](#). God gave marriage between a man and woman as a gift to humanity, both as a whole and a blessing on an individual level. Some commentators believe that this proverb implies finds a good wife; others insist it does not. Although it does not say it, the verse clearly means a 'good' wife. For a wife, though she be not the best of her kind, is to be esteemed a blessing.

And obtains favor from the LORD: In [Genesis 2:18](#) God said that it was not good for man to be alone. His gift of Eve to Adam was a demonstration of God's favor, and He still gives that gift of favor. In the modern western world, the cultural incentives for marriage

seem to become weaker year by year, but God's declaration of good and the giving of His favor doesn't depend on cultural incentives.

The poor man uses entreaties: It is sadly true that often, when a person is poor in money or influence, all they can do is beg for favor and justice. Makes requests in a submissive manner; uses the language of a broken man. How much more should we do so to God...creeping into his presence with utmost humility and reverence.

The rich answers roughly: The rich man or woman can speak boldly – even rudely – because they have resources of money and influence. Solomon here described the world as it is, not as it should be. We sense in this proverb a quiet plea to make a better world than what is described in the proverb.

A man who has friends must himself be friendly: This is a basic but often ignored principle. If you want friends, you should be friendly to others. There is a friend who sticks closer than a brother: Even when a man has friends, there is something that will disappoint in human friendship. The flesh and blood friends of this world are important and a blessing, but we need the friend who sticks closer than a brother – Jesus Christ Himself, who called us no longer servants but friends ([John 15:14-15](#)). The bond of real friendship is often closer than the natural tie. The friendship between David and Jonathan is such an example.

Now I have a question to ask: Is Jesus Christ your friend? Do you have a friend at court – at heaven's court? Is the Judge of the quick and dead your friend? Can you say that you love him, and has he ever revealed himself in the way of love to you? This question is for each of you, therefore, ask it. Is Christ my friend?