## Lesson 2-13

# Consider Fools

##### Proverbs 17:9-26

###### Memorize This Week

A friend loves at all times,

and a brother is born for a time of adversity.

Proverbs 17:17

## Fools & Forgiveness *(17:9-13)*

The ability to practice forgiveness and discretion is essential for the survival of an atmosphere of friendship…. A person who cannot do this will not only be friendless but will bring all manner of troubles on his or her head.[[1]](#footnote-1)

1. How does a fool handle “offenses” and why *(17:9, 13)?*

An ‘*offense’* is a breach of relationships, civil or religious, between two parties.[[2]](#footnote-2) It was the word that Jacob used to confront Laban for hunting him down like a common criminal *(Genesis 31:36).* The offense can be a serious crime such as the kidnapping and selling of a brother into slavery *(Genesis 50:17)* or it can be a social breach of etiquette *(1 Samuel 25:28).*

How people respond to the faults of others reveals whether or not they have love. The contrast is between one who “covers” (forgives) the fault of a friend and one who repeats news about it. The forgiver promotes love because he cares about the person; the other uses his tongue to divide friends.

W. McKane observes that this refers to the person who breaks up friendships by scandalous gossip, even if it is done with a kind of zeal for the welfare of the community, it will destroy love and trust (*Proverbs* [OTL], 508–9).[[3]](#footnote-3)

1. How does a fool react to rebuke *(17:10, 12)?*

These verses focus on the stubbornness of a fool who is willfully wrong-headed, no matter how much it hurts (v.10). This obstinate spirit makes the fool dangerous to be near (v.12). A person who can accept criticism has an approachable personality and can function well in social interaction. Those who cannot cause chaos. It would be better to try to deal with an angry bear in search of her cubs![[4]](#footnote-4)

17:11 is set up in a cause and effect relationship. The cause is that evil people seek rebellion. The term *méri* means “rebellion” as in “a rebellious man seeks only evil” (so NASB).

The parallelism seems to be formal, with the idea simply continuing to the second line; … However, the proverb could be interpreted as antithetical just as easily.

Those bent on rebellion will meet with retribution. The messenger could very well be a merciless messenger from the king; but the expression could also figuratively describe something God sends—storms, pestilence, or any other misfortune.

17:12 *Hebrew* “Let a man meet” (so NASB); NLT “It is safer to meet.” It could be worded as a “better” saying, but that formula is not found here. The human, who is supposed to be rational and intelligent, in such folly becomes more dangerous than the beast that in this case acts with good reason.

Pray About This

Are you a peacemaker or one who stirs up trouble?

## Fightin’ Fool *(17:14-19)*

1. What is the fool’s approach to quarrels *(17:14, 19)?*

A small breach in a dam soon grows until the dam is destroyed and the area is flooded. Even so, a conflict can take on a life of its own and devastate a long friendship and lead to litigation.[[5]](#footnote-5)

17:14 involves a small leak in a container or cistern that starts to spurt out water. The problem will get worse if it is not stopped. Strife is like that. It is best stopped before it starts and become catastrophic.

The of 17:19 parallelism suggests the proverb is about a quarrelsome and arrogant person who loves sin and invites destruction. Some have taken the second line literally and interpreted it to mean he has built a pretentious house. Probably it is meant to be figurative: The gate is the mouth and so to make it high is to say lofty things—he brags too much (e.g., 1 Samuel 2:3; Proverbs 18:12; 29:23).[[6]](#footnote-6)

1. How does their use of money identify fools *(17:16, 18)?*

Verse 16 would seem to be out of place in this context, but its function here is clarified by v.18. A common source of conflict among friends is tension over money, as is brought about when one friend loans money to or co-signs for another (v.18). A fool does not understand the use of money, including how to avoid complicating a relationship with financial entanglements.[[7]](#footnote-7)

The sense of 17:16 seems to be “What good is money” since what the fool needs, wisdom, cannot be bought? The verse is a rhetorical question stating that money would be wasted on a fool. They have no heart for wisdom. W. McKane envisions a situation where the fool comes to a sage with a fee in hand, supposing that he can acquire a career as a sage, and this gives rise to the biting comment here: Why does the fool have money in his hands? To buy wisdom when he has no brains? (*Proverbs* [OTL], 505).[[8]](#footnote-8)

17:18 The proof that the fool has not absorbed wisdom in his core is that he foolishly pledges security for someone’s loans (e.g., Proverbs 6:1–5).[[9]](#footnote-9)

1. How does our sense of justice stand up God’s measure *(17:15)?*

17:15 To acquit the guilty and punish the innocent is the judicial equivalent of individuals retaliating against those who seek to do them good. Such a society undermines its own structure and invites divine wrath as well. The context (vv. 14, 19) implies that the injustice here may involve showing favor to those who are quick to bring lawsuits.[[10]](#footnote-10)

To declare someone righteous who is a guilty criminal, or to condemn someone who is innocent, are both abominations before the Righteous Judge of the whole earth.[[11]](#footnote-11)

Far from being quarrelsome, the true friend is supportive (17:17). Also, while the wise man knows that lending money can ruin friendships, he does not close his heart to his friend in time of crisis. Prudence is balanced by a generous and caring spirit.[[12]](#footnote-12)

*Heb* “is born for adversity” does not refer to sibling rivalry but to the loyalty a brother shows during times of calamity. This is not to say that a brother only shows loyalty when there is trouble, nor that he always does in these times (e.g., 18:19, 24; 19:7; 27:10). The true friend is the same as a brother—in times of greatest need loyal love is displayed.

Pray About This

Would you want you as a friend in troubled times?

## Inside Out *(17:20-22)*

1. How does our heart, who we really are inside, affect our life *(17:20, 22)?*

17:20 parallels two descriptions of the wicked person: “corrupt of heart” (genitive of specification, one with twisted intentions), and “whose tongue is perverse” (deceitful). By contrast, “a heart of rejoicing” (17:22), a happy and healthy outlook on life brings healing.

The “crushed spirit” refers to one who is depressed. “Crushed” is figurative (an implied comparison) for the idea that one’s psyche or will to go on is beaten down by circumstances.

The “bones” represent the whole body encased in a framework. “Fat bones” means a healthy body (3:8; 15:30; 16:24), but “dried up” bones signify unhealthiness and lifelessness (cf. Ezekiel 37:1–4).[[13]](#footnote-13)

1. What effect does a fool have upon his parents *(17:21, compare 17:25)?*

In 17:21 the *Hebrew* terms *késil (fool)* and *naval (godless fool)* are paired. *Fool* occurs about 50 times in the book, refers to a dullard, whether it be in spiritual, intellectual, or moral matters. The second word, *naval (nabal),* rare in the book, primarily focuses on religious folly—it refers to the practical atheist, the one who lives as if there is no God.

Parents of fools, who had hoped for children who would be a credit to the family, find only bitter disappointment.

These verses, 17:20-22, read as a series, assert that the twisted, scheming man will have a life of trouble (v.20). He is an affliction for his parents (v.21). This indicates that the greatest source of a crushed spirit is trouble in the family. Finally, a happy heart is the key to a full, healthy life (v.22).[[14]](#footnote-14)

Pray About This

When you meet discouraged people, do you usually leave them more upbeat?

## Justice *(17:23-26)*

1. What is a fool’s approach to justice *(17:23,26 w/ 17:11,15)?*

The fact that the “gift” of 17:23 is given secretly (*Heb* “from the bosom”) indicates that it was not proper.

Imposing a fine on the innocent is “not good” (17:26). This is *tapeinosis*—an understatement implying the worst-case scenario: *“it is terrible.”* The two lines could be synonymous parallelism; but it seems that the second is being used to show how wrong the first act would be—punishing the righteous makes about as much sense as beating an official of the court for doing what is just.

17:11 is wholly concerned with relations with the community at large. Those who cannot submit themselves to governmental authority will soon come to regret it. More than being socially outcast, they receive judicial punishment from the community.[[15]](#footnote-15)

17:15 To acquit the guilty and punish the innocent is the judicial equivalent of individuals retaliating against those who seek to do them good. Such a society undermines its own structure and invites divine wrath as well. The context (vv. 14, 19) implies that the injustice here may involve showing favor to those who are quick to bring lawsuits.[[16]](#footnote-16)

1. What is different about the discerning and the fool in this verse *(17:24)?*

The interpretation of v. 24 is difficult. In what sense do the fool’s eyes “wander to the ends of the earth”? A clue may be provided by the previous verse: the wise man heads straight on in the path of wisdom while the fool is attracted by temptations of every kind and wanders off the right path. The wandering eyes of the fool therefore represent his greed, as epitomized by Lot’s yearning gaze after the prosperity of the cities of the plain (Gen 13:10).

Pray About This

When it comes to justice, do your eyes wander?

1. Garrett, D. A., *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of songs* (The New American Commentary; Nashville 1993) XIV, 161. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Livingston, “1846 פָּשַׁע”, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Biblical Studies Press, *The NET Bible First Edition Notes* (2006) Pr 17:9. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Garrett, *Proverbs,* XIV, 161. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Garrett, *Proverbs,* XIV, 161. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. *NET Bible Notes* 17:19. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Garrett, *Proverbs,* XIV, 162. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. *NET Bible Notes* 17:16. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. *NET Bible Notes* 17:18. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Garrett, D. A., *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of songs* (The New American Commentary; Nashville 1993) XIV, 161-162. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. *NET Bible Notes* (2006) Pr 17:15. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Garrett, D. A., *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of songs* (The New American Commentary; Nashville 1993) XIV, 162. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. *NET Bible Notes* (2006) Pr 17:20-22. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Garrett, D. A., *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of songs* (The New American Commentary; Nashville 1993) XIV, 162. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Garrett, *Proverbs,* XIV, 161. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Garrett, *Proverbs,* 161-162. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)