

# CHAPTER 17

## PROVERBS 17:1

### FALSEHOOD AND OPPRESSION REPROVED

These words recommend family-love and peace, as conducing very much to the comfort of human life.

**1.** Those that live in unity and quietness, not only free from jealousies and animosities, but vying in mutual endearments, and obliging to one another, live very comfortably, though they are low in the world, work hard and fare hard, though they have but each of them *a morsel*, and that *a dry morsel*. There may be peace and quietness where there are not three meals a day, provided there be a joint satisfaction in God's providence and a mutual satisfaction in each other's prudence. Holy love may be found in a cottage.

**2.** Those that live in contention, that are always jarring and brawling, and reflecting upon one another, though they have plenty of dainties, *a house full of sacrifices*, live uncomfortably; they cannot expect the blessing of God upon them and what they have, nor can they have any true relish of their enjoyments, much less any peace in their own consciences. Love will sweeten a *dry morsel*, but strife will sour and embitter *a house full of sacrifices*. A little of the leaven of malice will leaven all the enjoyments.

## PROVERBS 17:2

### FALSEHOOD AND OPPRESSION REPROVED

Note,

**1.** True merit does not go by dignity. All agree that the son in the family is more worthy than the servant (<sup>485</sup>John 8:35), and yet sometimes it so happens that the servant is wise, and a blessing and credit to the family, when the son is a fool, and a burden and shame to the family. Eliezer of

Damascus, though Abram could not bear to think that he should be his heir, was a stay to the family, when he obtained a wife for Isaac; whereas Ishmael, a son, was a shame to it, when he mocked Isaac.

**2.** True dignity will go by merit. If a servant be wise, and manage things well, he shall be further trusted, and not only *have rule* with, but *rule over a son that causes shame*; for God and nature have designed that *the fool shall be servant to the wise in heart*. Nay, a prudent servant may perhaps come to have such an interest in his master as to be taken in for a child's share of the estate and to *have part of the inheritance among the brethren*.

## ~~2173~~ PROVERBS 17:3

### FALSEHOOD AND OPPRESSION REPROVED

Note,

**1.** The hearts of the children of men are subject, not only to God's view, but to his judgment: *As the fining-pot is for silver*, both to prove it and to improve it so *the Lord tries the hearts*; he searches whether they are standard or no, and those that are he refines and makes purer, ~~2470~~ Jeremiah 17:10. God tries the heart by affliction (~~3560~~ Psalm 66:10, 11), and often chooses his people in that furnace (~~2380~~ Isaiah 48:10) and makes them choice.

**2.** It is God only that *tries the hearts*. Men may try their *silver and gold* with *the fining-pot and the furnace*, but they have no such way of trying one another's hearts; God only does that, who is both the searcher and the sovereign of the heart.

## ~~2174~~ PROVERBS 17:4

### FALSEHOOD AND OPPRESSION REPROVED

Note,

**1.** Those that design to do ill support themselves by falsehood and lying: *A wicked doer gives ear*, with a great deal of pleasure, *to false lips*, that will justify him in the ill he does, to those that aim to make public

disturbances, catch greedily at libels, and false stories, that defame the government and the administration.

2. Those that take the liberty to tell lies take a pleasure in hearing them told: *A liar gives heed to a malicious backbiting tongue, that he may have something to graft his lies upon, and with which to give them some colour of truth and so to support them.* Sinners will strengthen one another's hands; and those show that they are bad themselves who court the acquaintance and need the assistance of those that are bad.

## PROVERBS 17:5

### FALSEHOOD AND OPPRESSION REPROVED

See here,

1. What a great sin those are guilty of who trample upon the poor, who ridicule their wants and the meanness of their appearance, upbraid them with their poverty, and take advantage from their weakness to be abusive and injurious to them. They *reproach their Maker*, put a great contempt and affront upon him, who allotted the poor to the condition they are in, owns them, and takes care of them, and can, when he pleases, reduce us to that condition. Let those that thus reproach their Maker know that they shall be called to an account for it, <sup><1750></sup>Matthew 25:40, 41; <sup><2148></sup>Proverbs 14:31.

2. What great danger those are in of falling into trouble themselves who are pleased to see and hear of the troubles of others: *He that is glad at calamities*, that he may be built up upon the ruins of others, and regales himself with the judgments of God when they are abroad, let him know that he *shall not go unpunished*; the cup shall be put into his hand, <sup><6316></sup>Ezekiel 25:6, 7.

## PROVERBS 17:6

### COMMON TRUTHS

They are so, that is, they should be so, and, if they conduct themselves worthily, they are so.

**1.** It is an honour to parents when they are old to leave children, and *children's children*, growing up, that tread in the steps of their virtues, and are likely to maintain and advance the reputation of their families. It is an honour to a man to live so long as to see his children's children (~~1006~~ Psalm 128:6; ~~1023~~ Genesis 50:23), to see his house built up in them, and to see them likely to serve their generation according to the will of God. This crowns and completes their comfort in this world.

**2.** It is an honour to children to have wise and godly parents, and to have them continued to them even after they have themselves grown up and settled in the world. Those are unnatural children who reckon their aged parents a burden to them, and think they live too long; whereas, if the children be wise and good, it is as much their honour as can be that thereby they are comforts to their parents in the unpleasant days of their old age.

## ~~1017~~ PROVERBS 17:7

### COMMON TRUTHS

Two things are here represented as very absurd:

**1.** That men of no repute should be dictators. What can be more unbecoming than for fools, who are known to have little sense and discretion, to pretend to that which is above them and which they were never cut out for? A fool, in Solomon's proverbs, signifies a wicked man, whom *excellent speech* does not become, because his conversation gives the lie to his excellent speech. What have those to do to declare God's statutes who *hate instruction*? ~~1516~~ Psalm 50:16. Christ would not suffer the unclean spirits to say that they knew him to be the Son of God. See ~~1417~~ Acts 16:17, 18.

**2.** That men of great repute should be deceivers. If it is unbecoming a despicable man to presume to speak as a philosopher or politician, and nobody heeds him, being prejudiced against his character, much more unbecoming is it for a prince, for a man of honour, to take advantage from his character and the confidence that is put in him to lie, and dissemble, and make no conscience of breaking his word. Lying ill becomes any man, but worst a prince, so corrupt is the modern policy, which insinuates that

princes ought not to make themselves slaves to their words further than is for their interest, and *Qui nescit dissimulare nescit regnare* — *He who knows not how to dissemble knows not how to reign.*

## PROVERBS 17:8

### COMMON TRUTHS

The design of this observation is to show,

1. That those who have money in their hand think they can do any thing with it. Rich men value a little money as if it were a *precious stone*, and value themselves on it as if it gave them not only ornament, but power, and every one were bound to be at their beck, even justice itself. Whithersoever they turn this sparkling diamond they expect it should dazzle the eyes of all, and make them do just what they would have them do in hopes of it. The deepest bag will carry the cause. Fee high, and you may have what you will.
2. That those who have money in their eye, and set their hearts upon it, will do any thing for it: *A bribe is as a precious stone in the eyes of him that takes it*; it has a great influence upon him, and he will be sure to go the way that it leads him, hither and thither, though contrary to justice and not consistent with himself.

## PROVERBS 17:9

### COMMON TRUTHS

Note,

1. The way to preserve peace among relations and neighbours is to make the best of every thing, not to tell others what has been said or done against them when it is not at all necessary to their safety, nor to take notice of what has been said or done against them when it is not at all necessary to their safety, nor to take notice of what has been said or done against ourselves, but to excuse both, and put the best construction upon them. “It was an oversight; therefore overlook it. It was done through

forgetfulness; therefore forget it. It perhaps made nothing of you; do you make nothing of it.”

2. The ripping up of faults is the ripping out of love, and nothing tends more to the separating of friends, and setting them at variance, than the *repeating of matters* that have been in variance; for they commonly lose nothing in the repetition, but the things themselves are aggravated and the passions about them revived and exasperated. The best method of peace is by an amnesty or act of oblivion.

## <img alt="decorative symbol" data-bbox="325 296 360 320"/> PROVERBS 17:10

### COMMON TRUTHS

Note,

1. A word is enough to the wise. A gentle reproof will enter not only into the head, but into the heart of a wise man, so as to have a strong influence upon him; for, if but a hint be given to conscience, let it alone to carry it on and prosecute it.

2. Stripes are not enough for a fool, to make him sensible of his errors, that he may repent of them, and be more cautious for the future. He that is sottish and wilful is very rarely benefited by severity. David is softened with, *Thou art the man*; but Pharaoh remains hard under all the plagues of Egypt.

## <img alt="decorative symbol" data-bbox="325 685 360 708"/> PROVERBS 17:11

### COMMON TRUTHS

Here is the sin and punishment of an evil man.

1. His sin. He is an evil man indeed that seeks all occasions to rebel against God, and the government God has set over him, and to contradict and quarrel with those about him. *Quaerit jurgia* — *He picks quarrels*; so some. There are some that are actuated by a spirit of opposition, that will contradict for contradiction-sake, that will go on frowardly in their wicked

ways in spite of all restraint and check. *A rebellious man seeks mischief* (so some read it), watches all opportunities to disturb the public peace.

**2.** His punishment. Because he will not be reclaimed by mild and gentle methods, *a cruel messenger shall be sent against him*, some dreadful judgment or other, as a messenger from God. Angels, God's messengers, shall be employed as ministers of his justice against him, ~~1389~~ Psalm 78:49. Satan, the angel of death, shall be let loose upon him, and the *messengers* of Satan. His prince shall send a sergeant to arrest him, an executioner to cut him off. He that *kicks against the pricks* is *waited for of the sword*.

## ~~1712~~ PROVERBS 17:12

### WEIGHTY SAYINGS

Note,

**1.** A passionate man is a brutish man. However at other times he may have some wisdom, take him in his passion uncontrolled, and he is a *fool in his folly*; those are fools in whose bosom anger rests and in whose countenance anger rages. He has put off man, and is become like a bear, a raging bear, *a bear robbed of her whelps*; he is as fond of the gratifications of his lusts and passions as a bear of her whelps (which, though ugly, are her own), as eager in the pursuit of them as she is in quest of her whelps when they are missing, and as full of indignation if crossed in the pursuit.

**2.** He is a dangerous man, falls foul of every one that stands in his way, though innocent, though his friend, as a bear robbed of her whelps sets upon the first man she meets as the robber. *Ira furor brevis est — Anger is temporary madness*. One may more easily stop, escape, or guard against an enraged bear, than an outrageous angry man. Let us therefore watch over our own passions (lest they get head and do mischief) and so consult our own honour; and let us avoid the company of furious men, and get out of their way when they are in their fury, and so consult our own safety. *Currenti cede furori — Give place unto wrath*.

## <1713> PROVERBS 17:13

### WEIGHTY SAYINGS

A malicious mischievous man is here represented,

1. As ungrateful to his friends. He oftentimes is so absurd and insensible of kindnesses done him that he renders *evil for good*. David met with those that were his adversaries for his love, <1704> Psalm 109:4. To render evil for evil is brutish, but to render evil for good is devilish. He is an ill-natured man who, because he is resolved not to return a kindness, will revenge it.
2. As therein unkind to his family, for he entails a curse upon it. This is a crime so heinous that it shall be punished, not only in his person, but in his posterity, for whom he thus treasures up wrath. *The sword shall not depart from David's house* because he rewarded Uriah with evil for his good services. The Jews stoned Christ for his good works; therefore is his blood upon them and upon their children.

## <1714> PROVERBS 17:14

### WEIGHTY SAYINGS

Here is,

1. The danger that there is in *the beginning of strife*. One hot word, one peevish reflection, one angry demand, one spiteful contradiction, begets another, and that a third, and so on, till it proves like the cutting of a dam; when the water has got a little passage it does itself widen the breach, bears down all before it, and there is then no stopping it, no reducing it.
2. A good caution inferred thence, to take heed of the first spark of contention and to put it out as soon as ever it appears. Dread the breaking of the ice, for, if once broken, it will break further; *therefore leave it off*, not only when you see the worst of it, for then it may be too late, but when you see the first of it. *Obsta principiis* — *Resist its earliest display*. Leave it off even *before it be meddled with*; leave it off, if it were possible, before you begin.



## PROVERBS 17:15

### WEIGHTY SAYINGS

This shows what an offence it is to God,

**1.** When those that are entrusted with the administration of public justice, judges, juries, witnesses, prosecutors, counsel, do either acquit the guilty or condemn those that are not guilty, or in the least contribute to either; this defeats the end of government, which is to protect the good and punish the bad, <sup>438</sup>Romans 13:3, 4. It is equally provoking to God to *justify the wicked*, though it be in pity and *in favorem vitae* — *to save life*, as to *condemn the just*.

**2.** When any private persons plead for sin and sinners, palliate and excuse wickedness, or argue against virtue and piety, and so *pervert the right ways of the Lord* and confound the eternal distinctions between good and evil.

## PROVERBS 17:16

### WEIGHTY SAYINGS

Two things are here spoken of with astonishment: —

**1.** God's great goodness to foolish man, in putting *a price into his hand to get wisdom*, to get knowledge and grace to fit him for both worlds. We have rational souls, the means of grace, the strivings of the Spirit, access to God by prayer; we have time and opportunity. He that has a good estate (so some understand it) has advantages thereby of getting wisdom by purchasing instruction. Good parents, relations, ministers, friends, are helps to get wisdom. It is *a price*, therefore of value, a talent. It is *a price in the hand*, in possession; *the word is nigh thee*. It is a price for getting; it is for our own advantage; it is for getting wisdom, the very thing which, being fools, we have most need of. We have reason to wonder that God should so consider our necessity, and should entrust us with such advantages, though he foresaw we should not make a right improvement of them.

2. Man's great wickedness, his neglect of God's favour and his own interest, which is very absurd and unaccountable: *He has no heart to it, not to the wisdom that is to be got, nor to the price in the use of which it may be got. He has no heart, no skill, nor will, nor courage, to improve his advantages. He has set his heart upon other things, so that he has no heart to his duty or the great concerns of his soul. Wherefore should a price be thrown away and lost upon one so undeserving of it?*

## ~~ART~~ PROVERBS 17:17

### TRUE FRIENDSHIP

This intimates the strength of those bonds by which we are bound to each other and which we ought to be sensible of.

1. Friends must be constant to each other *at all times*. That is not true friendship which is not constant; it will be so if it be sincere, and actuated by a good principle. Those that are fanciful or selfish in their friendship will love no longer than their humour is pleased and their interest served, and therefore their affections turn with the wind and change with the weather. Swallow-friends, that fly to you in summer, but are gone in winter; such friends there is no loss of. But if the friendship be prudent, generous, and cordial, if I love my friend because he is wise, and virtuous, and good, as long as he continues so, though he fall into poverty and disgrace, still I shall love him. Christ is a friend that loves at all times (~~ART~~ John 13:1) and we must so love him, (~~ART~~ Romans 8:35).

2. Relations must in a special manner be careful and tender of one another in affliction: *A brother is born* to succour a brother or sister in distress, to whom he is joined so closely by nature that he may the more sensibly feel from their burdens, and be the more strongly inclined and engaged, as it were by instinct, to help them. We must often consider what we were *born for*, not only as men, but as in such a station and relation. *Who knows but we came* into such a family *for such a time as this?* We do not answer the end of our relations if we do not do the duty of them. Some take it thus: *A friend that loves at all times is born* (that is, becomes) *a brother in adversity*, and is so to be valued.

## PROVERBS 17:18

### TRUE FRIENDSHIP

Though Solomon had commended friendship in adversity (v. 17), yet let not any, under pretence of being generous to their friends, be unjust to their families and wrong them; one part of our duty must be made to consist with another. Note,

1. It is a piece of wisdom to keep out of debt as much as may be, especially to dread suretiship. There may be a just occasion for a man to pass his word for his friend in his absence, till he come to engage himself; but to be *surety in the presence of his friend*, when he is upon the spot, supposes that his own word will not be taken, he being deemed insolvent or dishonest, and then who can with safety pass his word for him?
2. Those that are *void of understanding* are commonly taken in this snare, to the prejudice of their families, and therefore ought not to be trusted too far with their own affairs, but to be under direction.

## PROVERBS 17:19

### WEIGHTY SAYINGS

Note,

1. Those that are quarrelsome involve themselves in a great deal of guilt: *He that loves strife*, that in his worldly business loves to go to law, in religion loves controversies, and in common conversation loves to thwart and fall out, that is never well but when he is in the fire, *he loves transgression*; for a great deal of sin attends that sin, and the way of it is down-hill. He pretends to stand up for truth, and for his honour and right, but really he loves sin, which God hates.
2. Those that are ambitious and aspiring expose themselves to a great deal of trouble, such as often ends in their ruin: *He that exalts his gate*, builds a stately house, at least a fine frontispiece, that he may overtop and outshine his neighbours, seeks his own destruction and takes a deal of pains to ruin himself; he makes his gate so large that his house and estate go out at it.

## PROVERBS 17:20

### WEIGHTY SAYINGS

Note,

1. Framing ill designs will be of no advantage to us; there is nothing got by them: *He that has a froward heart*, that sows discord and is full of resentment, cannot promise himself to get by it sufficient to counterbalance the loss of his repose and reputation, nor can he take any rational satisfaction in it; he *finds no good*.
2. Giving ill language will be a great disadvantage to us: *He that has a perverse tongue*, spiteful and abusive, scurrilous or backbiting, *falls into one mischief* or other, loses his friends, provokes his enemies, and pulls trouble upon his own head. Many a one has paid dearly for an unbridled tongue.

## PROVERBS 17:21

### WEIGHTY SAYINGS

This expresses that very emphatically which many wise and good men feel very sensibly, what a grievous vexatious thing it is to have a foolish wicked child. See here,

1. How uncertain all our creature-comforts are, so that we are often not only disappointed in them, but that proves the greatest cross in which we promised ourselves most satisfaction. There was *joy when a man-child was born into the world*, and yet, if he prove vicious, his own father will wish he had never been born. The name of Absalom signifies his *father's peace*, but he was his greatest trouble. It should moderate the desire of having children, and the delights of their parents in them, that they may prove a grief to them; yet it should silence the murmurings of the afflicted father in that case that if his son be a fool he is a fool of his own begetting, and therefore he must make the best of him, and take it up as his cross, the rather because Adam begets a son in his own likeness.

2. How unwise we are in suffering one affliction (and that of an untoward child as likely as any other) to drown the sense of a thousand mercies: *The father of a fool* lays that so much to heart that he *has no joy* of any thing else. For this he may thank himself; there are joys sufficient to counterbalance even that sorrow.

## ~~172~~ PROVERBS 17:22

### WEIGHTY SAYINGS

Note,

1. It is healthful to be cheerful. The Lord is for the body, and has provided for it, not only meat, but medicine, and has here told us that the best medicine is *a merry heart*, not a heart addicted to vain, carnal, sensual mirth; Solomon himself said of that mirth, It is not medicine, but madness; it is not food, but poison; *what doth it?* But he means a heart rejoicing in God, and serving him with gladness, and then taking the comfort of outward enjoyments and particularly that of pleasant conversation. It is a great mercy that God gives us leave to be cheerful and cause to be cheerful, especially if by his grace he gives us hearts to be cheerful. This *does good to a medicine* (so some read it); it will make physic more efficient. Or *it does good as a medicine* to the body, making it easy and fit for business. But, if mirth be a medicine (understand it of diversion and recreation), it must be used sparingly, only when there is occasion, not turned into food, and it must be used medicinally, *sub regimine* — *as a prescribed regimen*, and by rule.

2. The sorrows of the mind often contribute very much to the sickliness of the body: *A broken spirit*, sunk by the burden of afflictions, and especially a conscience wounded with the sense of guilt and fear of wrath, *dries the bones*, wastes the radical moisture, exhausts the very marrow, and makes the body a mere skeleton. We should therefore watch and pray against all melancholy dispositions, for they lead us into trouble as well as into temptation.

## PROVERBS 17:23

### FOLLY AND WICKEDNESS

See here,

1. What an evil thing bribery is: He is *a wicked man* that will *take a gift* to engage him to give a false testimony, verdict, or judgment; when he does it he is ashamed of it, for he takes it, with all the secrecy imaginable, *out of the bosom* where he knows it is laid ready for him; it is industriously concealed, and so slyly that, if he could, he would hide it from his own conscience. *A gift is taken out of the bosom of a wicked man* (so some read it); for he is a bad man that gives bribes, as well as he that takes them.
2. What a powerful thing it is. It is of such force that it *perverts the ways of judgment*. The course of justice is not only obstructed, but turned into injustice; and the greatest wrongs are done under colour of doing right.

## PROVERBS 17:24

### FOLLY AND WICKEDNESS

Note,

1. He is to be reckoned an intelligent man that not only has wisdom, but has it ready when he has occasion for it. He lays his *wisdom before him*, as his card and compass which he steers by, has his eye always upon it, as he that writes has on his copy; and then he has it *before him*; it is not to seek, but still at hand.
2. He that has a giddy head, a roving rambling fancy, will never be fit for any solid business. He is a fool, and good for nothing, whose *eyes are in the ends of the earth*, here, and there and every where, any where but where they should be, who cannot fix his thoughts to one subject nor pursue any one purpose with any thing of steadiness. When his mind should be applied to his study and business it is filled with a thousand things foreign and impertinent.

## ~~3175~~ PROVERBS 17:25

### FOLLY AND WICKEDNESS

Observe,

1. Wicked children are an affliction to both their parents. They are an occasion of *anger* to the father (so the word signifies), because they contemn his authority, but of sorrow and *bitterness* to the mother, because they abuse her tenderness. The parents, being joint-sufferers, should therefore bring mutual comfort to bear them up under it, and strive to make it as easy as they can, the mother to mollify the father's anger, the father to alleviate the mother's grief.
2. That Solomon often repeats this remark, probably because it was his own case; however, it is a common case.

## ~~3176~~ PROVERBS 17:26

### FOLLY AND WICKEDNESS

In differences that happen between magistrates and subjects, and such differences often arise,

1. Let magistrates see to it that they never *punish the just*, that they be in no case a *terror to good works*, for that is to abuse their power and betray that great trust which is reposed in them. It is *not good*, that is, it is a very evil thing, and will end ill, whatever end they may aim at in it. When princes become tyrants and persecutors their thrones will be neither easy nor firm.
2. Let subjects see to it that they do not find fault with the government for doing its duty, for it is a wicked thing *to strike princes for equity*, by defaming their administration or by any secret attempts against them to strike at them, as the ten tribes that revolted reflected upon Solomon for imposing necessary taxes. Some read it, *Nor to strike the ingenuous for equity*. Magistrates must take heed that none suffer under them for well doing; nor must parents *provoke their children to wrath* by unjust rebukes.

## PROVERBS 17:27-28

### WISDOM AND FOLLY

Two ways a man may show himself to be a wise man: —

**1.** By the good temper, the sweetness and the sedateness, of his mind: *A man of understanding is of an excellent spirit, a precious spirit* (so the word is); he is one that looks well to his spirit, that it be as it should be, and so keeps it in an even frame, easy to himself and pleasant to others. A gracious spirit is a precious spirit, and renders a man amiable and *more excellent than his neighbour*. He is of a *cool spirit* (so some read it), not heated with passion, nor put into any tumult or disorder by the *impetus* of any corrupt affection, but even and stayed. A cool head with a warm heart is an admirable composition.

**2.** By the good government of his tongue.

**(1.)** A wise man will be *of few words*, as being afraid of speaking amiss: *He that has knowledge*, and aims to do good with it, is careful, when he does speak to speak to the purpose, and says little in order that he may take time to deliberate. He *s pares his words*, because they are better spared than ill-spent.

**(2.)** This is generally taken for such a sure indication of wisdom that a fool may gain the reputation of being a wise man if he have but wit enough to hold his tongue, to hear, and see, and say little. If a fool hold his peace, men of candour will think him wise, because nothing appears to the contrary, and because it will be thought that he is making observations on what others say, and gaining experience, and is consulting with himself what he shall say, that he may speak pertinently. See how easy it is to gain men's good opinion and to impose upon them. But when a *fool holds his peace* God knows his heart, and the folly that is bound up there; thoughts are words to him, and therefore he cannot be deceived in his judgment of men.