

CHAPTER 18

PROVERBS 18:1

WISDOM AND FOLLY

The original here is difficult, and differently understood.

1. Some take it as a rebuke to an affected singularity. When men take a pride in *separating themselves* from the sentiments and society of others, in contradicting all that has been said before them and advancing new notions of their own, which, though ever so absurd, they are wedded to, it is to gratify a desire or lust of vain-glory, and they are seekers and meddlers with that which does not belong to them. He *seeks according to his desire, and intermeddles with every business*, pretends to pass a judgment upon every man's matter. He is morose and supercilious. Those generally are so that are opinionative and conceited, and they thus make themselves ridiculous, and are vexatious to others.

2. Our translation seems to take it as an excitement to diligence in the pursuit of wisdom. If we would get knowledge or grace, we must desire it, as that which we need and which will be of great advantage to us, ~~423~~ 1 Corinthians 12:31. We must *separate ourselves* from all those things which would divert us from or retard us in the pursuit, retire out of the noise of this world's vanities, and then *seek and intermeddle with all* the means and instructions of *wisdom*, be willing to take pains and try all the methods of improving ourselves, be acquainted with a variety of opinions, that we may prove all things and hold fast that which is good.

PROVERBS 18:2

WISDOM AND FOLLY

A fool may pretend to understanding, and to seek and intermeddle with the means of it, but,

1. He has no true delight in it; it is only to please his friends or save his credit; he does not love his book, nor his business, nor his Bible, nor his prayers; he would rather be playing the fool with his sports. Those who take no pleasure in learning or religion will make nothing to purpose of either. No progress is made in them if they are a task and a drudgery.

2. He has no good design in it, only *that his heart may discover itself*, that he may have something to make a show with, something wherewith to varnish his folly, that that may pass off the better, because he loves to hear himself talk.

~~283~~ PROVERBS 18:3

WISDOM AND FOLLY

This may include a double sense: —

1. That wicked people are scornful people, and put *contempt* upon others. *When the wicked comes* into any company, comes into the schools of wisdom or into the assemblies for religious worship, *then comes contempt* of God, of his people and ministers, and of every thing that is said and done. You can expect no other from those that are profane than that they will be scoffers; they will be an *ignominy* and *reproach*; they will flout and jeer every thing that is serious and grave. But let not wise and good men regard it, for the proverb of the ancients says, such *wickedness proceeds from the wicked*.

2. That wicked people are shameful people, and bring *contempt* upon themselves, for God has said that those *who despise him shall be lightly esteemed*. As soon as ever sin entered shame followed it, and sinners make themselves despicable. Nor do they only draw contempt upon themselves, but they bring *ignominy* and *reproach* upon their families, their friends, their ministers, and all that are in any way related to them. Those therefore who would secure their honour must retain their virtue.

PROVERBS 18:4

THE LANGUAGE OF FOLLY

The similitudes here seem to be elegantly transposed.

1. The *well-spring of wisdom is as deep waters*. An intelligent knowing man has in him a good treasure of useful things, which furnishes him with something to say upon all occasions that is pertinent and profitable. This is as *deep waters*, which make no noise, but never run dry.
2. The words of such *a man's mouth are as a flowing brook*. What he sees cause to speak flows naturally from him and with a great deal of ease, and freedom, and natural fluency; it is clean and fresh, it is cleansing and refreshing; from his *deep waters* there flows what there is occasion for, to water those about him, as the brooks do the low grounds.

PROVERBS 18:5

THE LANGUAGE OF FOLLY

This justly condemns those who, being employed in the administration of justice, pervert judgment,

1. By conniving at men's crimes, and protecting and countenancing them in oppression and violence, because of their dignity, or wealth, or some personal kindness they have for them. Whatever excuses men may make for it, certainly *it is not good* thus to *accept the person of the wicked*; it is an offence to God, an affront to justice, a wrong to mankind, and a real service done to the kingdom of sin and Satan. The merits of the cause must be regarded, not the person.
2. By giving a cause against justice and equity, because the person is poor and low in the world, or not of the same party or persuasion, or a stranger of another country. This is *overthrowing the righteous in judgment*, who ought to be supported, and whom God will make to stand.

THE LANGUAGE OF FOLLY

Solomon has often shown what mischief bad men do to others with their ungoverned tongues; here he shows what mischief they do to themselves.

1. They embroil themselves in quarrels: *A fool's lips*, without any cause or call, *enter into contention*, by advancing foolish notions which others find themselves obliged to oppose, and so a quarrel is begun, or by giving provoking language, which will be resented, and satisfaction demanded, or by setting men at defiance, and bidding them *do if they dare*. Proud, and passionate men, and drunkards, are fools, whose lips *enter into contention*. A wise man may, against his will, be drawn into a quarrel, but he is a fool that of choice enters into it when he might avoid it, and he will repent it when it is too late.

2. They expose themselves to correction: The *fool's mouth* does, in effect, *call for strokes*; he has said that which deserves to be punished with strokes, and is still saying that which needs to be checked, and restrained with strokes, as Ananias unjustly commanded that Paul should be *smitten on the mouth*.

3. They involve themselves in ruin: A *fool's mouth*, which has been, or would have been, the destruction of others, proves at length *his own destruction*, perhaps from men. Shimei's mouth was his own destruction, and Adonijah's, who spoke against his own head. And when a fool, by his foolish speaking, has run himself into a premunire, and thinks to bring himself off by justifying or excusing what he has said, his defence proves his offence, and his lips are still the snare of his soul, entangling him yet more and more. However, when men by their evil words shall be condemned at God's bar their mouths will be their destruction, and it will be such an aggravation of their ruin as will not admit one drop of water, one drop of comfort, to *cool their tongue*, which is their snare and will be their tormentor.

PROVERBS 18:8

THE LANGUAGE OF FOLLY

Tale-bearers are those who secretly carry stories from house to house, which perhaps have some truth in them, but are secrets not fit to be told, or are basely misrepresented, and false colours put upon them, and are all told with design to blast men's reputation, to break their friendship, to make mischief between relations and neighbours, and set them at variance. Now the words of such are here said to be,

1. *Like as when men are wounded* (so the margin reads it); they pretend to be very much affected with the miscarriages of such and such, and to be in pain for them, and pretend that it is with the greatest grief and reluctance imaginable that they speak of them. They look as if they themselves were wounded by it, whereas really they *rejoice in iniquity*, are fond of the story, and tell it with pride and pleasure. Thus their words seem; but they *go down as poison into the innermost parts of the belly*, the pill being thus gilded, thus sugared.

2. *As wounds* (so the text reads it), as deep wounds, deadly wounds, *wounds in the innermost parts of the belly*; the *venter medius vel infimus* — *the middle or lower belly*, the *thorax* or the *abdomen*, in either of which wounds are mortal. The words of the tale-bearer wound him of whom they are spoken, his credit and interest, and him to whom they are spoken, his love and charity. They occasion sin to him, which is a wound to the conscience. Perhaps he seems to slight them, but they would insensibly, by alienating his affections from one he ought to love.

PROVERBS 18:9

FOLLY AND PRIDE EXPOSED

Note,

1. Prodigality is very bad husbandry. Those are not only justly branded as fools among men, but will give an uncomfortable account to God of the talents they are entrusted with, who are wasters of their estates, who live

above what they have, spend and give more than they can afford, and so, in effect, throw away what they have, and suffer it to run to waste.

2. Idleness is no better. He that is remiss in his work, whose *hands hang down* (so the word signifies), that stands, as we may, with his thumbs in his mouth, that neglects his business, does it not at all, or as if he did it not, he is own brother to him that is a prodigal, that is, he is as much a fool and in as sure and ready a way to poverty; one scatters what he has, the other lets it run through his fingers. The observation is too true in the affairs of religion; he that is trifling and careless in praying and hearing is brother to him that does not pray or hear at all; and omissions of duty and in duty are as fatal to the soul as commissions of sin.

180 PROVERBS 18:10

FOLLY AND PRIDE EXPOSED

Here is,

1. God's sufficiency for the saints: His *name is a strong tower* for them, in which they may take rest when they are weary and take sanctuary when they are pursued, where they may be lifted up above their enemies and fortified against them. There is enough in God, and in the discoveries which he has made of himself to us, to make us easy at all times. The wealth laid up in this tower is enough to enrich them, to be a continual feast and a continuing treasure to them. The strength of this tower is enough to protect them; *the name of the Lord* is all that whereby he has made himself known as God, and our God, not only his titles and attributes, but his covenant and all the promises of it; these make up a tower, a strong tower, impenetrable, impregnable, for all God's people.

2. The saints' security in God. It is a strong tower to those who know how to make use of it as such. *The righteous*, by faith and prayer, devotion towards God and dependence on him, *run into it*, as their city of refuge. Having made sure their interest in God's name, they take the comfort and benefit of it; they go out of themselves, retire from the world, live above, dwell in God and God in them, and so they are safe, they think themselves so, and they shall find themselves so.

PROVERBS 18:11

FOLLY AND PRIDE EXPOSED

Having described the firm and faithful defence of the righteous man (v. 10), Solomon here shows what is the false and deceitful defence of the rich man, that has his portion and treasure in the things of this world, and sets his heart upon them. His wealth is as much his confidence, and he expects as much from it, as a godly man from his God. See,

1. How he supports himself. He makes his *wealth his city*, where he dwells, where he rules, with a great deal of self-complacency, as if he had a whole city under his command. It is *his strong city*, in which he intrenches himself, and then sets danger at defiance, as if nothing could hurt him. *His scales are his pride*; his wealth is his wall in which he encloses himself, and he thinks it a *high wall*, which cannot be scaled or got over, ¹⁸¹²Job 31:24; ⁶⁸¹⁷Revelation 18:7.

2. How herein he cheats himself. It is a *strong city*, and a *high wall*, but it is so only *in his own conceit*; it will not prove to be really so, but like the house built on the sand, which will fail the builder when he most needs it.

PROVERBS 18:12

FOLLY AND PRIDE EXPOSED

Note,

1. Pride is the presage of ruin, and ruin will at last be the punishment of pride; for *before destruction* men are commonly so infatuated by the just judgment of God that they are more haughty than ever, that their ruin may be the sorer and the more surprising. Of, if that do not always hold, yet after the heart has been lifted up with pride, a fall comes, ¹¹⁶⁸Proverbs 16:18.

2. Humility is the presage of honour and prepares men for it, and honour shall at length be the reward of humility, as he had said before, ¹⁰⁵³Proverbs 15:33. That has need to be often said which men are so loth to believe.

~~183~~ PROVERBS 18:13

FOLLY AND PRIDE EXPOSED

See here how men often expose themselves by that very thing by which they hope to gain applause.

1. Some take a pride in being quick. They *answer a matter before they hear it*, hear it out, nay, as soon as they but hear of it. They think it is their honour to take up a cause suddenly; and, when they have heard one side, they think the matter so plain that they need not trouble themselves to hear the other; they are already apprized of it, and masters of all the merits of the cause. Whereas, though a ready wit is an agreeable thing to play with, it is solid judgment and sound wisdom that do business.
2. Those that take a pride in being quick commonly fall under the just reproach of being impertinent. It is folly for a man to go about to speak to a thing which he does not understand, or to pass sentence upon a matter which he is not truly and fully informed of, and has not patience to make a strict enquiry into; and, if it be folly, it is and will be shame.

~~184~~ PROVERBS 18:14

MISCELLANEOUS MAXIMS

Note,

1. Outward grievances are tolerable as long as the mind enjoys itself and is at ease. Many infirmities, many calamities, we are liable to in this world, in body, name, and estate, which a man may bear, and bear up under, if he have but good conduct and courage, and be able to act with reason and resolution, especially if he have a good conscience, and the testimony of that be for him; and, if the *spirit of a man will sustain the infirmity*, much more will the spirit of a Christian, or rather the Spirit of God witnessing and working with our spirits in a day of trouble.
2. The grievances of the spirit are of all others most heavy, and hardly to be borne; these make sore the shoulders which should sustain the other infirmities. If the spirit be wounded by the disturbance of the reason,

dejection under the trouble, whatever it is, and despair of relief, if the spirit be wounded by the amazing apprehensions of God's wrath for sin, and the fearful expectations of judgment and fiery indignation, *who can bear this?* Wounded spirits cannot help themselves, nor do others know how to help them. It is therefore wisdom to keep conscience void of offence.

PROVERBS 18:15

MISCELLANEOUS MAXIMS

Note,

1. Those that are prudent will seek knowledge, and apply their ear and heart to the pursuit of it, their ear to attend to the means of knowledge and their heart to mix faith with what they hear and make a good improvement of it. Those that are prudent do not think they have prudence enough, but still see they have need of more; and the more prudent a man is the more inquisitive will he be after knowledge, the knowledge of God and his duty, and the way to heaven, for that is the best knowledge.
2. Those that prudently seek knowledge shall certainly get knowledge, for God never said to such, *Seek in vain*, but, *Seek and you shall find*. If the ear seeks it, the heart gets it, and keeps it, and is enriched by it. We must get knowledge, not only into our heads, but into our hearts, get the savour and relish of it, apply what we know to ourselves and experience the power and influence of it.

PROVERBS 18:16

MISCELLANEOUS MAXIMS

Of what great force gifts (that is, bribes) are he had intimated before, ~~1178~~ Proverbs 17:8, 23. Here he shows the power of gifts, that is, presents made even by inferiors to those that are above them and have much more than they have. A good present will go far,

1. Towards a man's liberty: *A man's gift*, if he be in prison, may procure his enlargement; there are courtiers, who, if they use their interest even for

oppressed innocency, expect to receive a gratuity for it. Or, if a mean man know not how to get access to a great man, he may do it by a fee to his servants or a present to himself; those will make room for him.

2. Towards his preferment. It will bring him to sit among *great men*, in honour and power. See how corrupt the world is when men's gifts will not do, though ever so great; nay, will gain that for them which they are unworthy of and unfit for; and no wonder that those take bribes in their offices who gave bribes for them. *Vendere jura potest, emerat ille prius* — *He that bought law can sell it.*

~~<187>~~ PROVERBS 18:17

MISCELLANEOUS MAXIMS

This shows that one tale is good till another is told.

1. He that speaks first will be sure to tell a straight story, and relate that only which makes for him, and put the best colour he can upon it, so that his cause shall appear good, whether it really be so or no.

2. The plaintiff having done his evidence, it is fit that the defendant should be heard, should have leave to confront the witnesses and cross-examine them, and show the falsehood and fallacy of what has been alleged, which perhaps may make the matter appear quite otherwise than it did. We must therefore remember that we have two ears, to hear both sides before we give judgment.

~~<188>~~ PROVERBS 18:18

MISCELLANEOUS MAXIMS

Note,

1. Contentions commonly happen among the mighty, that are jealous for their honour and right and stand upon the punctilios of both, that are confident of their being able to make their part good and therefore will hardly condescend to the necessary terms of an accommodation; whereas those that are poor are forced to be peaceable, and sit down losers.

2. Even the contentions of the mighty may be ended by lot if they cannot otherwise be compromised, and sometimes better so than by arguments which are endless, or concessions which they are loth to stoop to, whereas it is no disparagement to a man to acquiesce in the determination of the lot when once it is referred to that. To prevent quarrels Canaan was divided by lot; and, if lusory lots had not profaned this way of appeal to Providence, perhaps it might be very well used now for the deciding of many controversies, both to the honour of God and the satisfaction of the parties, provided it were done with prayer and due solemnity, this and some other scriptures seeming to direct to it, especially ~~418~~ Acts 1:26. If the law be a lottery (as some have called it), it were as well that a lottery were the law.

~~418~~ PROVERBS 18:19

MISCELLANEOUS MAXIMS

Note,

1. Great care must be taken to prevent quarrels among relations, and those that are under special obligation to each other, not only because they are most unnatural and unbecoming, but because between such things are commonly taken most unkindly, and resentments are apt to be carried too far. Wisdom and grace would indeed make it most easy to us to forgive our relations and friends if they offend us, but corruption makes it most difficult to forgive them; let us therefore take heed of disobliging a brother, or one that has been as a brother; ingratitude is very provoking.
2. Great pains must be taken to compromise matters in variance between relations, with all speed, because it is a work of so much difficulty, and consequently the more honourable if it be done. Esau was a *brother offended*, and seemed *harder to be won than a strong city*, yet by a work of God upon his heart, in answer to Jacob's prayer, he was won.

~~182~~ PROVERBS 18:20

MISCELLANEOUS MAXIMS

Note,

1. Our comfort depends very much upon the testimony of our own consciences, for us or against us. The *belly* is here put for the conscience, as ~~182~~ Proverbs 20:27. Now it is of great consequence to us whether that be satisfied, and what that is filled with, for, accordingly, will our satisfaction be and our inward peace.
2. The testimony of our consciences will be for us, or against us, according as we have or have not governed our tongues well. According as *the fruit of the mouth* is good or bad, unto iniquity or unto righteousness, so the character of the man is, and consequently the testimony of his conscience concerning him. “We ought to take as great care about the words we speak as we do about the fruit of our trees or the increase of the earth, which we are to eat; for, according as they are wholesome or unwholesome, so will the pleasure or the pain be wherewith we shall be filled.” So bishop Patrick.

~~182~~ PROVERBS 18:21

MISCELLANEOUS MAXIMS

Note,

1. A man may do a great deal of good, or a great deal of hurt, both to others and to himself, according to the use he makes of his tongue. Many a one has been his own death by a foul tongue, or the death of others by a false tongue; and, on the contrary, many a one has saved his own life, or procured the comfort of it, by a prudent gentle tongue, and saved the lives of others by a seasonable testimony or intercession for them. And, if by our words we must be justified or condemned, *death and life are*, no doubt, *in the power of the tongue*. Tongues were Aesop's best meat, and his worst.

2. Men's words will be judged of by the affections with which they speak; he that not only speaks aright (which a bad man may do to save his credit or please his company), but loves to speak so, speaks well of choice, and with delight, to him it will be life; and he that not only speaks amiss (which a good man may do through inadvertency), but loves to speak so (~~1514~~ Psalm 52:4), to him it will be death. As men *love it* they shall *eat the fruit of it*.

~~182~~ PROVERBS 18:22

MISCELLANEOUS MAXIMS

Note,

1. A good wife is a great blessing to a man. He that *finds a wife* (that is, a wife indeed; a bad wife does not deserve to be called by a name of so much honour), that finds a help meet for him (that is a wife in the original acceptation of the word), that sought such a one with care and prayer and has found what he sought, he has found a *good thing*, a jewel of great value, a rare jewel; he has found that which will not only contribute more than any thing to his comfort in this life, but will forward him in the way to heaven.

2. God is to be acknowledged in it with thankfulness; it is a token of his favour, and a happy pledge of further favours; it is a sign that God delights in a man to do him good and has mercy in store for him; for this, therefore, God must be sought unto.

~~183~~ PROVERBS 18:23

MISCELLANEOUS MAXIMS

Note,

1. Poverty, though many inconveniences to the body attend it, has often a good effect upon the spirit, for it makes men humble and submissive, and mortifies their pride. It teaches them to *use entreaties*. When necessity forces men to beg it tells them they must not prescribe or demand, but take

what is given them and be thankful. At the throne of God's grace we are all poor, and must use entreaties, not answer, but make application, must sue *sub forma pauperis* — as a pauper.

2. A prosperous condition, though it has many advantages, has often this mischief attending it, that it makes men proud, haughty, and imperious: *The rich answers the entreaties of the poor roughly*, as Nabal answered David's messengers with railing. It is a very foolish humour of some rich men, especially those who have risen from little, that they think their riches will warrant them to give hard words, and, even where they not design any rough dealing, that it becomes them to answer roughly, whereas gentlemen ought to be gentle, ^{<1824>}James 3:17.

^{<1824>}PROVERBS 18:24

MISCELLANEOUS MAXIMS

Solomon here recommends friendship to us, and shows,

1. What we must do that we may contract and cultivate friendship; we must *show ourselves friendly*. Would we have friends and keep them, we must not only not affront them, or quarrel with them, but we must love them, and make it appear that we do so by all expressions that are endearing, by being free with them, pleasing to them, visiting them and bidding them welcome, and especially by doing all the good offices we can and serving them in every thing that lies in our power; that is *showing ourselves friendly*.

Si vis amari, ama —
If you wish to gain affection, bestow it. — Sen.

Ut ameris, amabilis esto —
The way to be beloved is to be lovely. — Ovid.

2. That it is worth while to do so, for we may promise ourselves a great deal of comfort in a true friend. A *brother* indeed *is born for adversity*, as he had said, ^{<1824>}Proverbs 17:17. In our troubles we expect comfort and relief from our relations, but sometimes *there is a friend*, that is nothing akin to us, the bonds of whose esteem and love prove stronger than those of nature, and, when it comes to the trial, will do more for us than a

brother will. Christ is a friend to all believers that *sticks closer than a brother*; to him therefore let them show themselves friendly.