

Slander

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What do we do when somebody badmouths us? How do we handle a situation where gossips are tearing us down and making our lives miserable?

This teaching from Proverbs 26 gives us a lot of insight into the mentality of the “fool” who is one of those people known as a “talebearer”. We will study the whole chapter, and we reach the point of this doctrinal study in verse 22.

Proverbs 26:22

The words of a talebearer are as wounds, and they go down into the innermost parts of the belly.

So, this is a discussion of Proverbs 26, with emphasis on mental attitude sins and sins of the tongue, particularly slander.

Of the seven sins mentioned in Proverbs 6:16-19 as being especially hated by God, three are sins of the tongue. A Christian believer must learn as much as possible about this type of sin, and do everything possible to gain victory over this in order to be able to make progress in the Christian Way of Life.

In Proverbs 26:1-12, the believer is warned about having any relationship with a “fool”.

Proverbs 26:1

As snow in summer, and as rain in harvest, so honor is not seemly for a fool.

This verse refers to difficulties in an agricultural economy. “Snow in summer”, of course, is not good; neither is rain at harvest time. So “honor”, or prosperity, is really not useful to a fool.

“If there is snow in high summer, it is contrary to nature; and if there is rain in harvest, it is (according to the alternations of the weather in Palestine)

contrary to what is usually the case, and is a hindrance to the in-gathering of the fruits of the field. Even so a fool and respect, or a place of honor, are incongruous things. Honor (as according to 19:10, luxury); will only injure him he will make unjust use of it, and draw false conclusions from it; it will strengthen him in his folly, and only increase it.”

The details of life fluctuate. Sometimes there is prosperity; sometimes there is loss.

A believer without Bible truth, the “fool”, cannot stand prosperity. Prosperity only increases the folly of the ignorant believer.

The word “honor” here refers to prosperity, but the fool thinks of himself instead of the Lord, so that he is miserable even while he prospers.

We will see that the fool fails to respond to the Lord. He is a “reactor”, always upset about something, regardless of prosperity.

He reacts to people, with mental attitude sins, such as jealousy, pride, vanity, vindictiveness, spite, bitterness, fear.

The mental attitude sin of the fool leads him into sins of the tongue: gossip, backbiting, complaining, slander.

**Proverbs 26:2

As the bird by wandering, as the swallow by flying, so the curse causeless shall not come.

The “bird” here is a sparrow. The sparrow feeds on the ground, eats seeds and insects, etc. As long as he is close to the ground, he is relatively safe. The danger comes when he goes up into the air. That’s where the birds of prey are waiting for him.

When a Christian tries to operate on his own, he is a cluck-sparrow; outside of the sphere of the Word of God, he is out of his element! He is vulnerable and miserable.

The swallow, though, is a great traveler, always trying something new to make him happy. []

The “curse” is divine discipline, therefore it is a “gracious” curse. A believe without doctrine is always subject to chastisement, but the curse is actually to his benefit, because it has the objective of bringing him to repentance.

Proverbs 26:3

A whip for the horse, a bridle for the ass, and a rod for the fool’s back.

As whip and bridle are both serviceable and necessary, so also serviceable and necessary is a rod.

See Grace Notes Topic - Chastisement (Divine Discipline)

A Christian who is always out of fellowship, always living without the Word of God, is always getting spurred and whipped!

Now, it is God the Father’s business to chastise the fool – we must not get involved in this, or try to discipline a fool ourselves.

Matthew 7:1, 2. Judge not, that ye be not judged. For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again.

So we mind our own business while the Lord deals with the fool.

Proverbs 26:4,5

Answer not a fool according to his folly, lest you also be like unto him.

Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own conceit.

How do you handle a fool? There is a “how not to” (vs. 4) and a “how to” (vs. 5).

“Answer” means to reply or respond. In verse 4, folly refers to mental attitude sins. Don’t answer the fool’s sinful attitude with sin of your own. Don’t answer pettiness with pettiness.

Romans 12:19b

Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord.

Don’t retaliate; don’t stoop to his level. If a believer gossips about you, don’t strike back; the Lord will handle it!

In verse 5, “folly” refers to the general human viewpoint by which the man without doctrine lives. The answer to human viewpoint is divine viewpoint. You can answer the fool with Bible doctrine. You can be the agent of correction; it is your duty, in fact. Just be sure you are using Bible truth in your response.

2 Timothy 3:16,17

All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness:

That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.

Proverbs 26:6

He that sends a message by the hand of a fool cuts off the feet, and drinks damage.

In short, he cuts off his own feet! As we say: he breaks his neck, *il se casse le cou*. He thinks to supplement his own two legs by those of the messenger, but in reality he cuts them off; for not only is the commission not carried out, but it is even badly carried out, so that instead of being refreshed (Prov. 13:17; 25:13) by the quick, faithful execution of it, he has to swallow nothing but damage; cf. Job 34:7.

This verse is used as an idiom; this means it has a meaning other than its literal translation.

“Sends a message” is an idiom for the transaction of business. The lesson is, if you have executive responsibilities, don’t hire a fool to do the work! In this case, a believer ignorant of doctrine.

Hire a stable, functioning believer, a believer who lives in the Word of God. Definitely don’t hire a believer who is continually out of fellowship, who is in a back-slidden state, and who is constantly under divine discipline.

You will suffer by association with such a person! Your “legs will be cut off”.

To “drink damage” is an idiom for loss of business, loss of profit.

Proverbs 26:7-9

The legs of the lame are not equal: so is a parable in the mouth of fools.

As he that binds a stone in a sling, so is he that gives honor to a fool.

As a thorn goes up into the hand of a drunkard, so is a parable in the mouths of fools.

One great tragedy that occurs is that some of these fools try to witness for Christ or become preachers. Here is a poor novice believer, out of fellowship, trying to explain a parable (a proverb); a man ignorant of doctrine is trying to explain a Scripture passage and make something out of it.

His legs are “not equal”, one is longer than the other; he has a hard time moving forward. A believer out of fellowship makes no progress. Not only is he confused, but he confuses everyone else, or gives people bad information.

The fool trying to teach the Bible causes his congregation to be off balance.

A foolish, empty-headed preacher should not be given any kind of reward (honor), as it is wasted, just as a stone from a sling is wasted if it does not reach its target.

The “thorn” goes into the hand of a drunkard without being felt. The rambling message of the fool carries no useful information, because the preacher can’t handle the passage.

Proverbs 26:10

The great God that formed all things both rewards the fool, and rewards transgressors.

Keil and Delitzsch consider this verse a very obscure proverb. They translate it as: *Much bringeth forth from itself all; But the reward and the hirer of the fool pass away.* [I must refer you to their full commentary to try to follow their reasoning. wd]

Fools and transgressors can earn something from their efforts, but not what they were expecting; they will be chastised. The legalistic believer wants to earn something from God, well this is it, he get divine discipline!

Proverbs 26:11

As a dog returns to his vomit, so a fool returns to his folly.

“Return” means to repeat something again and again. The fool tries to learn Bible truth, but he doesn’t really care for it; as long as he is a carnal believer, doctrine is just not in his nature. He gets bored and goes back to his foolishness.

Proverbs 26:12

Do you see a man wise in his own conceit? there is more hope for a fool than for him.

The arrogant fool is even worse; he is basking in his own pride. The mental attitude sins which come from pride are the worst of all categories of sin. This man is a great believer in himself, and in his self-righteousness. He may be moral, but he is a goody-goody, sincere, sweet, emotional, but loaded down with mental attitude sins. The worst troublemakers come from this sort.

Proverbs 26:13

The slothful man saith, There is a lion in the way; a lion is in the streets.

In the ancient world, lions often lived on the edges of small towns. They would sometimes come into town out of curiosity, or when they saw small animals they could capture and eat. When this happened, most people went indoors until the “city watch” would drive them away.

The “slothful” man is lazy, in spiritual terms he is lacking in self-discipline. He can’t enjoy life because something is always threatening him.

Principle: don’t procrastinate! Procrastination is based on rationalization; “I can’t act because there are problems that keep me from it.” (for instance, lions in the street).

What excuses are we using? What keeps us from taking action?

Proverbs 26:14

As the door turns upon his hinges, so does the slothful upon his bed.

The door turning on its hinges is an illustration of the lazy person who lacks self-discipline and the ability to concentrate.

The door turns itself on its hinges, on which it hangs, in and out, without passing beyond the narrow space of its motion; so is the fool on his bed, where he turns himself from the one side to the other. []

The action of a door is always connected with the hinge; the action of the slothful man is always associated with his bed. It's the picture of the utter lack of initiative.

Proverbs 26:15

The slothful hides his hand in his bosom; it grieves him to bring it again to his mouth.

The word "bosom" here is "dish" in the Hebrew (tsalachath). In those days people did not use a fork and spoon; they cut with a knife but ate with their hands, that is, they put their hand into a dish.

This foolish believer is hungry enough to put his hand into the dish, but it's almost too much effort to bring the food to his mouth!

He has the strength, but his mental discipline is weak, because of the lack of Bible understanding. He's not sick; he lacks self-discipline. Working to eat (learn doctrine) is too much of a strain.

Proverbs 26:16

The sluggard is wiser in his own conceit than seven men that can render a reason.

In practice, the sluggard acts as if he needs no help from God. ("Sluggard" and "slothful" are the same word in Hebrew.)

This is consummate pride, the arrogance of the man who is out of step with the plan of God, has no divine viewpoint, and is filled with mental attitude sins.

The phrase "seven men who can give an answer" can have two meanings. First, in an academic setting, the idiom refers to seven people at the top of the class. The sluggard considers himself smarter than they are; of course he is not.

Then, there's a political meaning in that the phrase could refer to the top men in a government council, such as seven advisers to a king, to whom, of course, he considers himself superior.

Quite often you find this person trying to straighten out everyone else.

Proverbs 26:17

He that passes by, and meddles with strife belonging not to him, is like one that takes a dog by the ears.

Now this guy is revealed as a busybody. He is in everyone's business. He thinks he's the smartest one in the neighborhood, and he doesn't hesitate to let you know about it.

A busybody is a self-appointed monitor, or one who tries to straighten others out. This word appears as a translation of several Greek originals.

From *κατασκευάζω*, verb. (*κατασκευάζω*) "to do something useless or unnecessary". Literally, "to work around". Also used in Greek to mean "undue anxiety" over something which is not really a proper concern.

2 Thessalonians 3:11

"For we hear that there are some which walk among you disorderly, working not at all, but are busybodies."

Also from *ἐπιβιβάζω*, a combining form from *ἐπιβίβω*, "belonging to another", and *ἐπίσκοπος*, "bishop". Hence, the busybody fancies himself "another man's bishop".

1 Peter 4:15

"But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evildoer, or as a busybody in other men's matters."

Note what company the busybody is keeping, in the previous verse. Murderers, thieves, evildoers, and busybodies get the same billing here.

So, the sluggard is passing, but he can't resist inserting himself into your affairs, taking your dog by the ears.

Proverbs 26:18,19

As a mad man who casts firebrands, arrows, and death,

So is the man that deceives his neighbor, and says, Am not I in sport?

The “mad man” is the sluggard, filled with mental attitude sin, and one day he cracks. He goes down the street shooting arrows and throwing Molotov cocktails at people.

He deceived his neighbor, then he says “I’m only joking!” Ha, ha ha!

Now we’re getting to the whole point of this article. The slothful man is guilty of a multitude of mental attitude sins, and now these sinful inner thought patterns lead him to commit sins of the tongue.

Topic: **Sins of the Tongue**

Proverbs 26:20

Where no wood is, there the fire goes out: so where there is no talebearer, the strife ceases.

As long as this backslidden Christian engages only in mental attitude sins, he is usually his own worst enemy. But as soon as he opens his mouth with verbal sins, it becomes clear that he is everyone’s enemy!

“Wood” refers to the sins of the tongue. If there were none, the “fire goes out”, the “strife ceases”.

The Hebrew for “talebearer” is (nirgan), meaning “to roll to pieces; one who bears a tale; a whisperer; a slanderer”.

“Strife” is (madown) – to act as an umpire, in this case, a self-appointed referee; to quarrel or to cause discord.

Now, a mature believer will take sins of the tongue made against him and put them into the Lord’s hands.

1 Peter 5:7

“Casting all your care upon him; for he cares for you.”

Romans 12:19

Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord.”

“The strife ceases”: if the talebearer keeps his mouth shut, the fire goes out.

Proverbs 26:21

As coals are to burning coals, and wood to fire; so is a contentious man to kindle strife.

Well, it looks like our sluggard didn’t take the opportunity to let the fire go out. Now he is a source of discord, causing trouble among the believers, sometimes even disrupting entire local churches.

Titus 1:10,11

“For there are many unruly and vain talkers and deceivers, specially they of the circumcision:

Whose mouths must be stopped, who subvert whole houses, teaching things which they ought not, for filthy lucre’s sake.

James 3:5,6

“Even so the tongue is a little member, and boasts great things. Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindles!

And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity: so is the tongue among our members, that it defiles the whole body, and sets on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell.”

Proverbs 26:22

The words of a talebearer are as wounds, and they go down into the innermost parts of the belly.

Sins of the tongue are extremely destructive! The word “wounds” actually refers to “dainty morsels”, very tasty, delicious pies, for example, which are easy to swallow. A slanderer will often have eager listeners for his gossip.

Proverbs 26:23

Burning lips and a wicked heart are like a potsherd covered with silver dross.

Here there are two illustrations of the previous verse.

As a glaze of silver spreads over a clay pot, refers to a person who pulls the wool over people's eyes. He has a façade of silver, but underneath he is only clay. Sweet people can be vicious underneath.

Then, the lover has lips on fire with love, and the non-discerning victim can fall for his great line.

Proverbs 26:24,25

He that hates dissembles with his lips, and lays up deceit within him;

When he speaks fair, believe him not: for there are seven abominations in his heart.

The talebearer is full of hate and deceit. He makes his own voice sweet, but "don't believe him"! There are many mental attitude sins (abominations) behind what he is saying.

Proverbs 26:26

Whose hatred is covered by deceit, his wickedness shall be shown before the whole congregation.

A little bit of simple Bible doctrine is usually enough to show up a slanderer for what he is. His wickedness, his mental attitude sins, are going to be uncovered. The slanderer exposes himself. He could have kept his mouth shut and his treacherous attitude would not have been discovered.

Proverbs 26:27

Whoso digs a pit shall fall therein: and he that rolls a stone, it will return upon him.

The slanderer digs his own grave. The believer who seeks vengeance never hurts others as much as he hurts himself.

Proverbs 26:28

A lying tongue hates those that are afflicted by it; and a flattering mouth works ruin.

A lying tongue hates an innocent victim. Patronizing tongues destroy through lies and flattery.