
PROVERBS 18: 1 An unfriendly man pursues selfishness, and defies all sound judgement.

The man who separates himself and seeks wisdom. The fool and the wicked man. Deep wisdom. Contention of fools. The talebearer and the slothful. The name of the Lord. Pride and presumption because of riches. Hastiness of spirit. The wounded spirit. The influence of gifts. The lot. The offended brother. The influence of the tongue. A wife a good from God. The true friend.

Verse 1

Through desire a man, having separated himself - The original is difficult and obscure. The Vulgate, Septuagint, and Arabic, read as follows: "He who wishes to break with his friend, and seeks occasions or pretenses shall at all times be worthy of blame."

My old MS. Bible translates, Occasioun seeketh that wil go awei fro a freend: at al tyme he schal ben variable.

Coverdale thus: "Who so hath pleasure to sowe discorde, piketh a quarrel in every thinge."

Bible by Barker, 1615: "Fro the desire thereof he will separate himself to seeke it, and occupie himself in all wisdom." Which has in the margin the following note: "He that loveth wisdom will separate himself from all impediments, and give himself wholly to seek it."

The Hebrew: לֶתְאֹוָה יִבְקֵשׁ נִפְרָד בְּכָל תּוֹשִׁיָּה יִתְגַּלֵּעַ lethaavah yebakkesh niphrad, bechol tushiyah yithgalla. The nearest translation to the words is perhaps the following: "He who is separated shall seek the desired thing, (i.e., the object of his desire), and shall intermeddle (mingle himself) with all realities or all essential knowledge." He finds that he can make little progress in the investigation of Divine and natural things, if he have much to do with secular or trifling matters: he therefore separates himself as well from unprofitable pursuits as from frivolous company, and then enters into the spirit of his pursuit; is not satisfied with superficial observances, but examines the substance and essence, as far as possible, of those things which have been the objects of his desire. This appears to me the best meaning: the reader may judge for himself.

PROVERBS 18: 2 A fool has no delight in understanding, but only in revealing his own opinion.

Verse 2

But that his heart may discover itself - It is a fact that most vain and foolish people are never satisfied in company, but in showing their own nonsense and emptiness. But this verse may be understood as confirming the view already given of the preceding, and may be translated thus: "But a fool doth not delight in understanding, though it should even manifest itself:" so I understand כִּי אִם בְּהִתְגַּלּוֹת ki im behithgalloth. The separated person seeks understanding in every hidden thing, and feels his toil well repaid when he finds it, even after the most painful and expensive search: the other regards it not, though its secret springs should be laid open to him without toil or expense.

PROVERBS 18: 3 When wickedness comes, contempt also comes, and with shame comes disgrace.

 Verse 3

When the wicked cometh, etc. - would it not be better to read this verse thus? "When the wicked cometh contempt cometh; and with ignominy cometh reproach." A wicked man is despised even by the wicked. He who falls under ignominy falls under reproach.

PROVERBS 18: 4 The words of a man's mouth are like deep waters. The fountain of wisdom is like a flowing brook.

Verse 4

The words of a man's mouth - That is, the wise sayings of a wise man are like deep waters; howsoever much you pump or draw off, you do not appear to lessen them.

The well-spring of wisdom - Where there is a sound understanding, and a deep, well-informed mind, its wisdom and its counsels are an incessant stream, מקור חכמה mekor chochmah, "the vein of wisdom," ever throwing out its healthy streams: but מקור חיים mekor chiyim, "the vein of Lives," is the reading of eight of Kennicott's and De Rossi's MSS., and is countenanced by the Septuagint, πηγή ζωής, "the fountain of life." And so the Arabic. This is the more likely to be the true reading, because the figure of the heart propelling the blood through the great aorta, to send it to all parts of the animal system, is a favourite with Solomon, as it was with his father, David. See the note on Psa 36:9; Pro 10:11, etc.

PROVERBS 18: 5 To be partial to the faces of the wicked is not good, nor to deprive the innocent of justice.

Verse 5

To accept the person of the wicked - We must not, in judicial cases, pay any attention to a man's riches, influence, friends, offices, etc., but judge the case according to its own merits. But when the wicked rich man opposes and oppresses the poor righteous, then all those things should be utterly forgotten.

PROVERBS 18: 6 A fool's lips come into strife, and his mouth invites beatings.

PROVERBS 18: 7 A fool's mouth is his destruction, and his lips are a snare to his soul.

PROVERBS 18: 8 The words of a gossip are like dainty morsels: they go down into a person's innermost parts.

Verse 8

The words of a tale-bearer - דברי נרגן dibrey nirgan, "the words of the whisperer," the busy-body, the busy, meddling croaker. Verba bilinguis, "the words of the double-tongued." - Vulgate. The wordes of the twisel tunge - Old MS. Bible. "The words of a slanderer." - Coverdale.

The words of a deceiver, the fair-spoken, deeply-malicious man, though they appear soft and gracious, are wounds deeply injurious.

The original word is כמתלהמים kemithlahamim; they are as soft or simple, or undesigning. But Schultens gives another meaning. He observes that lahamah in Arabic signifies to "swallow down quickly or greedily." Such words are like dainties, eagerly swallowed, because inviting to the taste; like gingerbread, apparently gilded over, though with Dutch leaf, which is a preparation of copper; or sweetmeats powdered over with red candied seeds, which are thus formed by red lead; both deeply ruinous to the tender bowels of the poor little innocents, but, because of their sweetness and inviting color, greedily swallowed down. This makes a good reading, and agrees with the latter clause of the verse, "they go down into the innermost parts of the belly."

PROVERBS 18: 9 One who is slack in his work is brother to him who is a master of destruction.

Verse 9

He also that is slothful - A slothful man neglects his work, and the materials go to ruin: the master, he destroys the materials. They are both destroyers.

PROVERBS 18: 10 the LORD's name is a strong tower: the righteous run to him, and are safe.

Verse 10

The name of the Lord is a strong tower - The name of the Lord may be taken for the Lord himself; he is a strong tower, a refuge, and place of complete safety, to all that trust in him. What a strong fortress is to the besieged, the like is God to his persecuted, tempted, afflicted followers.

PROVERBS 18: 11 The rich man's wealth is his strong city, like an unscalable wall in his own imagination.

Verse 11

The rich man's wealth - See Pro 10:15.

PROVERBS 18: 12 Before destruction the heart of man is proud, but before honour is humility.

Verse 12

Before destruction - See on Pro 11:2 (note); Pro 16:18 (note).

PROVERBS 18: 13 He who gives answer before he hears, that is folly and shame to him.

Verse 13

He that answereth a matter - This is a common case; before a man can tell out his story, another will begin his. Before a man has made his response, the other wishes to confute piecemeal, though he has had his own speech already. This is foolishness to them. They are ill-bred. 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. How absurd, stupid, and foolish!

PROVERBS 18: 14 A man's spirit will sustain him in sickness, but a crushed spirit, who can bear?

Verse 14

The spirit of a man will sustain - A man sustains the ills of his body, and the trials of life, by the strength and energy of his mind. But if the mind be scoundrel, if this be cast down, if slow-consuming care and grief have shot the dagger into the soul, what can then sustain the man? Nothing but the unseen God. Therefore, let the afflicted pray. A man's own spirit has, in general, sufficient fortitude to bear up under the unavoidable trials of life; but when the conscience is wounded by sin, and the soul is dying by iniquity, who can lift him up? God alone; for salvation is of the Lord.

PROVERBS 18: 15 The heart of the discerning gets knowledge. The ear of the wise seeks knowledge.

PROVERBS 18: 16 A man's gift makes room for him, and brings him before great men.

Verse 16

A man's gift maketh room for him - It is, and ever has been, a base and degrading practice in Asiatic countries, to bring a gift or present to the great man into whose presence you come. Without this there is no audience, no favor, no justice. This arose from the circumstance that men must not approach the altar of God without an offering.

Potentates, wishing to be considered as petty gods, demanded a similar homage: -

Munera, crede mihi, capiunt hominesquedeosque;

Placatur donis Jupiter ipse suis.

Ovid "Believe me, gifts prevail much with both gods and men: even Jupiter himself is pleased with his own offerings."

PROVERBS 18: 17 He who pleads his cause first seems right; until another comes and questions him.

Verse 17

He that is first in his own cause - Any man may, in the first instance, make out a fair tale, because he has the choice of circumstances and arguments. But when the neighbor cometh and searcheth him, he examines all, dissects all, swears and cross-questions every witness, and brings out truth and fact.

PROVERBS 18: 18 The lot settles disputes, and keeps strong ones apart.

Verse 18

The lot causeth contentions to cease - See note on Pro 16:33.

PROVERBS 18: 19 A brother offended is more difficult than a fortified city; and disputes are like the bars of a castle.

Verse 19

A brother offended is harder to be won than a strong city - Almost all the versions agree in the following reading: "A brother assisted by a brother, is like a fortified city; and their decisions are like the bars of a city." Coverdale is both plain and terse: "The unitie of brethren is stronger then a castell, and they that holde together are like the barre of a palace." The fable of the dying father, his sons, and the bundle of faggots, illustrates this proverb. Unity among brethren makes them invincible; small things grow great by concord. If we take the words according to the common version, we see them express what, alas! we know to be too generally true: that when brothers fall out, it is with extreme difficulty that they can be reconciled. And fraternal enmities are generally strong and inveterate.

PROVERBS 18: 20 A man's stomach is filled with the fruit of his mouth. With the harvest of his lips he is satisfied.

Verse 20

With the fruit of his mouth - Our own words frequently shape our good or evil fortune in life.

PROVERBS 18: 21 Death and life are in the power of the tongue; those who love it will eat its fruit.

Verse 21

Death and life are in the power of the tongue - This may apply to all men. Many have lost their lives by their tongue, and some have saved their lives by it: but it applies most forcibly to public pleaders; on many of their tongues hangs life or death.

PROVERBS 18: 22 Whoever finds a wife finds a good thing, and obtains favour of the LORD.

Verse 22

Whoso findeth a wife findeth a good thing - Marriage, with all its troubles and embarrassments, is a blessing from God; and there are few cases where a wife of any sort is not better than none, because celibacy is an evil; for God himself hath said, "It is not good for man to be alone." None of the versions, except the Chaldee, are pleased with the naked simplicity of the Hebrew text, hence they all add good: "He that findeth a Good wife findeth a good thing;" and most people, who have not deeply considered the subject, think the assertion, without this qualification, is absurd. Some copies of the Targum, and apparently one of Kennicott's MSS., have the addition טובה tobah, good; but this would be an authority too slender to justify changing the Hebrew text; yet Houbigant, Kennicott, and other able critics argue for it. The Septuagint is not satisfied without an addition: "But he who puts away a good wife, puts away a good thing: and he that retains an adulteress, is a fool and wicked." In this addition the Vulgate, Syriac, and Arabic, agree with the Septuagint. The Hebrew text as it stands, teaches a general doctrine by a simple but general proposition: "He that findeth a wife findeth a good thing." So St. Paul: "Marriage is honorable in all." Had the world been left, in this respect, to the unbridled propensities of man, in what a horrible state would society have been - if indeed society could have existed, or civilization have taken place - if marriage had not obtained among men! As to good wives and bad wives, they are relatively so, in general; and most of them that have been bad afterwards, have been good at first; and we well know the best things may deteriorate, and the world generally allows that where there are matrimonial contentions, there are faults on both sides.

PROVERBS 18: 23 The poor plead for mercy, but the rich answer harshly.

PROVERBS 18: 24 A man of many companions may be ruined, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.

Verse 24

A man that hath friends must show himself friendly - Love begets love; and love requires love as its recompense. If a man do not maintain a friendly carriage, he cannot expect to retain his friends. Friendship is a good plant; but it requires cultivation to make it grow.

There is a kind of factitious friendship in the world, that, to show one's self friendly in it, is very expensive, and in every way utterly unprofitable: it is maintained by expensive parties, feasts, etc., where the table groans with dainties, and where the conversation is either jejune and insipid, or calumnious; backbiting, talebearing, and scandal, being the general topics of the different squads in company.

There is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother - In many cases the genuine friend has shown more attachment, and rendered greater benefits, than the natural brother. Some apply this to God; others to Christ; but the text has no such meaning.

But critics and commentators are not agreed on the translation of this verse. The original is condensed and obscure. אִישׁ רַעִים לְהִתְרוּעֵעַ ish reim lehithroea, or lehithroeang, as some would read, who translate: A man of friends may ring again; i.e., he may boast and mightily exult: but there is a friend, אֹהֵב oheb, a lover, that sticketh closer, דָּבֵק dabek, is glued or cemented, מֵאָח meach, beyond, or more than, a brother. The former will continue during prosperity, but the latter continues closely united to his friend, even in the most disastrous circumstances.

Hence that maxim of Cicero, so often repeated, and so well known: -

Amicus certus in re incerta cernitur. "In doubtful times the genuine friend is known."

A late commentator has translated the verse thus: -

The man that hath many friends is ready to be ruined:

But there is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother.

Holden. "A frende that delyteth in love, doth a man more frendship, and sticketh faster unto him, than a brother." Coverdale. "A man that hath friends ought to show himself friendly for a friend is nearer than a brother." Barker's Bible, 1615. "A man amyable to felowschip, more a freend schal ben thanne a brother." - Old MS. Bible. The two last verses in this chapter, and the two first of the next, are wanting in the Septuagint and Arabic.

These are the principal varieties; out of them the reader may choose. I have already given my opinion.