

CHAPTER 17

Ver. 1. *Better [is] a dry morsel, and quietness therewith,* etc.] A small quantity of bread; a broken piece of bread, as the word ^{f479} signifies; which has been long broken off, and become “dry”^{f480}; a dry crust of bread; old bread, as the Arabic version; an old, mouldy, dry piece of bread: and the word used has the signification of destruction in it: bread that has lost its taste and virtue; or, however, a mere piece of bread is meant, without anything to eat with it, as Gersom, butter, cheese, or flesh: this, with quietness and peace among those that partake of it, peace in the family, in a man’s own mind, especially if he has the peace of God, which passeth all understanding; this is better

than a house full of sacrifices [with] strife; than a house ever so well furnished with good cheer, or a table ever so richly spread; or where there is plenty of slain beasts for food, or for sacrifice, which were usually the best, and part of which the people had to eat, and at which times feasts used to be made; but the meanest food, with tranquillity and contentment, is preferable to the richest entertainment where there is nothing but strife and contention among the guests; for, where that is, there is confusion and every evil work: peace and joy in the Holy Ghost are better than meats and drinks. Mr. Dod used to say,

“brown bread and the Gospel are good fare;”

(see ³¹⁵⁷Proverbs 15:17).

Ver. 2. *A wise servant shall have rule over a son that causeth shame,* etc.] That does wicked and shameful actions: that is slothful, and will not attend to instruction or business; that is prodigal, wasteful, and luxurious, and causes shame to his parents, who blush at his conduct. Now a servant that behaves well and wisely in a family is observed and respected by his master, and he puts his wicked and extravagant son under him, makes him a tutor to him, and sets him to watch over him, and obliges his son to obey his orders. Jarchi illustrates this in Nebuchadnezzar ruling over the children of Israel;

and shall have part of the inheritance among the brethren; be appointed by his master’s will to a share in his estate among his children, for his

faithful service to him in life, and to encourage him to take care of his family, his children, and his affairs, after his death; or through gifts in his lifetime shall have what is equal to what his sons have; or growing rich shall purchase a part of theirs, as Gussetius^{f481}; or “shall part the inheritance among the brethren”^{f482}; being a wise man, his master shall leave him executor of his will, to divide his substance among his children, and see that everyone have their proper portion and equal share; but it rather is to be understood of his being a co-heir with them. So the Gentiles, through the will of the Lord, become fellow heirs of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ with the Jews, and share in the same inheritance with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and their children; nay, when the children of the kingdom shall be shut out; (see <486> Ephesians 3:6 <481> Matthew 8:11,12). Jarchi gives an ancient exposition of it thus,

“a proselyte of righteousness is better than a wicked native; and in time to come he shall divide the spoil and the inheritance in the midst of the children of Israel, at it is said in (<473> Ezekiel 47:23);”

Ver. 3. *The fining pot [is] for silver, and the furnace for gold,* etc.]

Refiners of silver have their fining pots, in which they purify the silver from the dross; and goldsmiths have their crucibles to melt and purify their gold, by which assays of the worth and value of it may be made;

but the Lord trieth the hearts; there is no vessel, as Gersom observes, in which they can be put and tried by creatures; a man does not know, nor can he thoroughly search and try his own heart, and much less the hearts of others; God only knows and tries them, (<470> Jeremiah 17:9,10); The Septuagint, Vulgate Latin, and Arabic versions, render it by way of similitude, “as the fining pot is for silver”, etc. as silver is refined in the pot, and gold in the furnace, so are the hearts of God’s people, and their graces tried and purified by him in the furnace of affliction; the variety of troubles they are exercised with are made useful for the purging away of the dross of sin and corruption, and for the brightening of their graces, (<407> 1 Peter 1:7).

Ver. 4. *A wicked doer giveth heed to false lips,* etc.] A man of an ill spirit, of a mischievous disposition, that delights in doing wickedness; he carefully attends to such as speak falsehood; he listens to lies and calumnies, loves to hear ill reports of persons, and takes pleasure in spreading them to the hurt of their characters; and men of bad hearts and lives give heed to

seducing spirits, to false teachers, to inch as speak lies in hypocrisy, who sooth and harden them in their wickedness;

[and] a liar giveth ear to a naughty tongue: or, “to a tongue of destruction”^{f483}; a cumninating, backbiting tongue, which destroys the good name and reputation of men; and he that is given to lying is made up of lying, or is a lie itself, as the word signifies; who roves and makes a lie, as antichrist and his followers; such an one hearkens diligently to everything that may detract from the character of those especially he bears an ill will to: or it may be better rendered, “he that hearkens to a lie [gives heed] to a naughty tongue”^{f484}; for a lying tongue is a naughty one, evil in itself, pernicious in its effects and consequences.

Ver. 5. *Whoso mocketh the poor reproacheth his Maker,* etc.] He that mocks the poor for his poverty, Upbraids him with his mean appearance, scoffs at the clothes he wears or food he eats, such an one reproaches his Creator; or, as the Targum,

“provokes his Creator to anger;”

him who is his own Creator as well as the poor man’s; him who made the poor man, both as a man and as a poor man; and who could have made him rich if he would, as well as the man that mocks at him; whose riches are not of himself, but of God; and who can take them away, and give them to the poor man if he pleases; and therefore rich men should be careful how they mock the poor; for, as Gersom observes, he that derides a work derides the workman;

[and] he that is glad at calamities shall not be unpunished; or “at calamity”^{f485}; at the calamity of another, as the Vulgate Latin; and so Gersom; for no man rejoices at his own calamity; at the calamity of the poor, as Aben Ezra; or of his neighbour or companion, as the Targum; or at the calamity of any of his fellow creatures, as the Edomites rejoiced at the calamity of the Jews, but were in their turn destroyed; and as the Jews rejoiced when the Christians were persecuted by Nero, and at length were destroyed themselves by the Romans; and as the Papists will rejoice when the witnesses are slain, and quickly after seven thousand men of name will be slain of them, and the rest frightened, (^{f486} Revelation 11:10,13).

Ver. 6. *Children’s children [are] the crown of old men,* etc.] Ancient parents. Grandfathers with the Jews are called old men, as Buxtorf^{f486} observes. A numerous progeny was reckoned a great blessing to a man; to

have his table surrounded with children, as olive plants; to be encircled with a large family was a crown of glory^{f487}; and to live to see children's children, a large number of grandchildren, was still a greater glory; and especially, as Jarchi observes, when these children, or children's children, were walking in a good way, in the good ways of religion and godliness, they trained them up in. Christ is the Ancient of days, the everlasting Father; and it is his glory, as Mediator, to see his seed, to have a numerous off spring; and which will endure for ever, as the days of heaven: ministers of the Gospel are spiritual fathers; and those who have been converted under their ministry will be their joy and "crown of rejoicing" at the last day, (²³¹⁹1 Thessalonians 2:19);

and the glory of children [are] their fathers; who are wise, as Aben Ezra observes; and righteous, as Jarchi: if they are wise and good men, it is an honour to their children that they descend from them; nor are they ashamed to own their relation to them, but glory in it, as the Jews did in Abraham, saying, "We have Abraham for our father", (⁴¹⁸Matthew 3:9) (⁴¹⁸Luke 3:8): but, on the contrary, if their fathers are foolish or wicked, their children are ashamed of them, and do not care to acknowledge their descent from them; and such parents, who are an honour to their children, their children should be careful to tread in their steps, that they reflect no dishonour on them; particularly as it is our great honour and glory to have God for our father, to be his adopted sons and daughters, we should be followers of him as dear children, and be obedient ones.

Ver. 7. *Excellent speech becometh not a fool*, etc.] A wicked man. Eloquence, or a sublime grand way of speaking, a copiousness and fluency of expression, become not such; because hereby he may be capable of doing more mischief; or such a style is unsuitable to the subject of his discourse, which is nothing but folly and wickedness. The Gospel is excellent speech, sound speech, that cannot be condemned; it treats of excellent things; concerning the person, office, and grace of Christ, and salvation by him; and very unfit is a wicked man to take it into his mouth, talk of it, and declare it;

much less do lying lips a prince; they rather become a fool, as excellent speech does a prince; who neither should speak lies himself, nor encourage, but abhor them in others. The Septuagint, Syriac, and Arabic versions, render it, "a just man": but the word more properly signifies a liberal man, as it is rendered in (²³¹⁸Isaiah 32:8); where it stands opposed to a churl or

covetous man: and some Jewish^{f488} writers think by the “fool” is meant such an one to whom a “lip of abundance”^{f489}, as it may be rendered, is very unsuitable; or to talk of his abundance, when he makes no good use of what he has for himself or others; and so, on the other hand, it is very disagreeable to the character of an ingenuous and liberal man to promise and not perform, and never intended it. It is true of such who are made a “willing” people in the day of Christ’s power, (~~HB~~ Psalm 110:3); where the same word is used as here; of his volunteers; that to speak lies one to another very ill becomes them; or to receive, or to speak, or profess false doctrines; for no lie is of the truth.

Ver. 8. *A gift [is as] a precious stone in the eyes of him that hath it*, etc.] Or “is a stone of grace”^{f490}, the note of similitude being wanting. It is an ornament of grace, adorns the person that wears it, makes him look lovely and amiable; is very grateful and desirable in itself, attracts and dazzles the eyes, and fills the mind with pleasure; so is a gift in the eyes of him that has it, that is the owner of it; either that has it in his possession to give, is the giver of it, as Aben Ezra; which, as it is valuable in his own eyes, he judges it to be so with others, and thinks he can do what he pleases with it, and engage persons by it to do as he would have them: or that is the receiver of it, as the Targum; who, having it given him, is master of it, and is so acceptable to him, and has such an influence upon him, as to do anything for it the giver of it directs him to, as follows:

whithersoever it turneth it prospereth: to whatsoever cause, or to whatsoever persons, judge or jury, it is given and received; it succeeds far better than the most eloquent orations, or learned pleadings in law, or appeals to statutes, and the production of them. Money answers all things; a gift blinds the eyes; it is like a diamond, so sparkling and dazzling, so charming and attracting, that the person to whom it is offered cannot resist it; and it draws him to do whatever is desired of him; it carries the cause, it succeeds according to the wish of the giver: or, as the Arabic version renders it,

“he shall find his business plain;”

done as he would have it. Jarchi applies the proverb thus;

“when a man comes before the Lord, and bribes him with words, and returns unto him, it is a precious stone in his eyes; and in all that he asks of him he prospers.”

Ver. 9. *He that covereth a transgression seeketh love*, etc.] He that hides the transgression of another, or of his friend, committed against himself or against another, which he is privy to; but the matter being made up, and the offence forgiven, he forgets it, and no more speaks of it to his friend, or upbraids him with it, nor spreads it among others: such a man shows that he loves his friend, and is desirous that love and friendship should be continued; and this is the way to continue it; and a man that thus seeks it finds it. Or it may be rendered, “he covereth a transgression who seeketh love”^{f491}; for “love covereth all things”, (^{<2002>}Proverbs 10:12);

but he that repeateth a matter; the matter of the transgression, the thing that has given the offence; that rakes it up again, when it has been covered; upbraids his friend with it, when it has been passed over and forgiven; will frequently hit him on the teeth with it, and talk of it wherever he comes, and spread the knowledge of it in all places: he

separateth [very] friends; he sets the best of friends at variance one with another by such a practice; for this pursued, friendship cannot subsist long among men: he separates his best friend from himself, and himself from him. The word signifies a prince, leader, or governor; (see Gill on ^{<2068>}Proverbs 16:28”); and Jarchi interprets it thus;

“he separates from himself the Governor of the world, the holy blessed God.”

Ver. 10. *A reproof entereth more into a wise man*, etc.] A single verbal reproof, gently, kindly, and prudently given, not only enters the ear, but the heart of a wise and understanding man; it descends into him, as the word^{f492} signifies; it sinks deep into his mind; it penetrates into his heart, and pierces his conscience; brings him easily to humiliation, confession, and reformation. Or, “reproof is more terror to a wise man”; as Jarchi interprets it, and the Tigurine version; it awes and terrifies him more; a single word has more effect upon him, entering more easily into him,

than an hundred stripes into a fool; or, “than smiting a fool a hundred times”^{f493}: a word to a wise man is more than a hundred blows to a fool, will sooner correct and amend him; a word will enter where a blow will not; stripes only reach the back, but not the heart of a fool; he is never the better for all the corrections given him; his heart is not affected, is not humbled, nor brought to a sense of sin, and acknowledgment of it; nor is he in the least reformed: or a single reproof to a wise man is of more

service than a hundred reproofs to a fool; which are sometimes expressed by smiting, “let the righteous smite me”, etc. (~~HEB~~ Psalm 141:5).

Ver. 11. *An evil [man] seeketh only rebellion*, etc.] For he seeks nothing but what is evil; and all sin is rebellion against God, a contempt of his laws, and a transgression of them; a trampling upon his legislative power and authority; an act of hostility against him, and a casting off allegiance to him. Or rather the words may be rendered, “rebellion”, that is, “the rebellious man”, so the Targum, the abstract for the concrete, “verily” or “only seeketh evil”^{f494}; a man that is rebellious against his prince, that is of a rebellious disposition, is continually seeking to do mischief in the commonwealth; he is continually plotting and contriving destructive schemes, and stirring up sedition, and causing trouble; and so a rebel against God is always seeking that which is sinful, which is evil in its own nature, and contrary to the law and will of God; and in the issue brings the evil of punishment on himself;

therefore a cruel messenger shall be sent against him: if a rebel against his lawful sovereign, a messenger shall be sent by him to take him into custody, who will show him no mercy; or an executioner to dispatch him, who will not spare to perform his orders: and if a rebel against God, some judgment of God shall fall upon him in a very severe manner; or his own conscience shall accuse him, and shall be filled with dreadful apprehensions of divine vengeance; or Satan, the angel of death, shall be let loose upon him, to terrify or destroy him; or death itself, which spares none. The Septuagint and Arabic versions ascribe this to God as his act, rendering it, “the Lord shall send”, etc. and so Aben Ezra; who also refers the former clause to him, and gives it as the sense of it; that he shall seek to do the rebellious man evil, inflict on him the evil of punishment for the evil of sin.

Ver. 12. *Let a bear robbed of her whelps meet a man*, etc.] A bear is a very fierce and furious creature, especially a she bear; and she is still more so when robbed of her whelps, which she has just whelped, and been at great pains to lick into shape and form, by which her fondness to them is increased; and therefore, being stripped of them, is full of rage; and ranging about in quest of them, falls furiously upon the first she meets with. Jerom^{f495} observes, that those who have written of the nature of beasts say, that, among all wild beasts, there is none more fierce than a she bear, when she has lost her whelps, or wants food. And yet, as terrible and as

dangerous as it is, it is safer and more eligible of the two, to meet an enraged bear in those circumstances,

rather than a fool in his folly; in the height of his folly, in a paroxysm or fit of that; in the heat of his lusts, and the pursuit of them, in which there is no stopping him, or turning him from them; especially in the heat of passion and anger, which exceeds that of a bear, and is not so easily avoided. Jarchi applies it to such fools as seduce persons to idolatry, whom to meet is very dangerous: such are the followers of the man of sin, who have no mercy on the souls of men they deceive, and whose damnation they are the cause of; and who are implacably cruel to those who will not join with them in their idolatrous worship; the beast of Rome, his feet are as the feet of a bear, (^{<613D>}Revelation 13:2); and one had better meet a bear than him and his followers.

Ver. 13. *Whoso rewardeth evil for good*, etc.] As the enemies of David and Christ rewarded them, (^{<495I2>}Psalm 35:12 109:5); this is base ingratitude, contrary to the law and light of nature; worse than beastly, is really devilish;

evil shall not depart from his house; from him and his family; they shall be continually visited with one disease and calamity or another; so hateful and offensive is the sin of ingratitude to God, and therefore ought to be carefully avoided. This might be illustrated by the judgments of God on the nation of the Jews, for their ingratitude to Christ.

Ver. 14. *The beginning of strife [is as] when one letteth out water*, etc.] As when a man makes a little hole in the bank of a river, or cuts a small passage in it, to let the water into an adjoining field; by the force of the water, the passage is widened, and it flows in, in great abundance, to the overflow and prejudice of the field; nor is it easily stopped: so a single word, spoken in anger, with some warmth, or in a way of contradiction, has been the beginning and occasion of great strife and contention. The words in the Hebrew text lie thus; “he that letteth out water [is] the beginning of strife”^{f496}; which some understand of letting out water into another man’s field, which occasions contentions, quarrels, and lawsuits; but the former sense is best: the Targum is,

“he that sheddeth blood as water stirreth up strifes;”

therefore leave off contention, before it be meddled with; cease from it as soon as begun; leave it off before it is well entered: or “before one mixes

himself^{f497} with it, or is implicated with it; got so far into it, that it will be difficult to get out of it: or “before thou strivest with any openly”; which sense the word has in the Arabic language, as Schultens^{f498} observes; that is, before you come to open words and blows, put an end to the contention; do not suffer it to proceed so far; since it cannot be known what will be the consequence of it: or rather, leave it off, as the same learned writer in his later thoughts, in his commentary on the place, by the help of Arabism, also renders it, “before the teeth are made bare”: or shown, in quarrelling, brawling, reproaching, in wrath and anger.

Ver. 15. *He that justifieth the wicked, and he that condemneth the just,* etc.] That absolves and clears the guilty, and pronounces him righteous in open court, where he stands arraigned, accused, and the fact proved; and that adjudges an innocent man to condemnation; or passes the sentence of it upon him, when it is a clear case he is not guilty;

even they both [are] abomination to the Lord: being contrary to law and justice, to the declared will of God, and the orders and instructions given by him to judges, (~~(1821)~~ Deuteronomy 25:1); such an abominable action were the Jews guilty of in desiring Barabbas, a wicked man, to be released, and Christ, the just One, to be condemned; and Pilate in complying with them. From this passage we learn, that the word “justify” is used in a forensic sense, for pronouncing persons just in a court of judicature; and in which sense it is used in the article of a sinner’s justification before God: by which act, though it is an ungodly person that is justified, yet it is through the perfect righteousness of Christ imputed to him, and is quite agreeable to law and the justice of God; and not at all inconsistent with this passage, which represents the justification of a wicked man as an abomination: it is so where there is no righteousness, but not where there is; agreeably to which is the saying of an Heathen^{f499} poet,

“it is not righteous, neither rashly to condemn bad men good, nor good men bad.”

Ver. 16. *Wherefore [is there] a price in the hand of a fool to get wisdom,* etc.] Natural wisdom and knowledge. By this “price” may be meant money, riches, worldly substance, of which a foolish man is possessed; by means of which he might purchase useful books for the improvement of his mind, and procure himself instructors that might be very useful to him; but instead of seeking after that which he most wants, and making use of his substance to furnish him with it, he spends it on his back and belly, in fine

clothes and luxurious living; in rioting and drunkenness, in chambering and wantonness, at balls and plays, in taverns and brothel houses: or spiritual wisdom and knowledge; the means of which are reading the word, hearing the Gospel, frequent opportunities of attendance on a Gospel ministry, in season and out of season, and conversation with Gospel ministers and other Christians; but, instead of making use of these, he neglects, slights, and despises them. And it is asked, with some degree of indignation and admiration, why or to what purpose a fool is favoured with such means;

seeing [he hath] no heart [to it]? to wisdom; he does not desire it, nor to make use of the price or means, in order to obtain it; all is lost upon him; and it is hard to account for it why he should have this price, when he makes such an ill use of it.

Ver. 17. *A friend loveth at all times*, etc.] A true, hearty, faithful friend, loves in times of adversity as well as in times of prosperity: there are many that are friends to persons, while they are in affluent circumstances; but when there is a change in their condition, and they are stripped of all riches and substance; than their friends forsake them, and stand at a distance from them; as was the case of Job, (~~8914~~ Job 19:14); it is a very rare thing to find a friend that is a constant lover, such an one as here described;

and a brother is born for adversity; for a time of adversity, as Jarchi: he is born into the world for this purpose; to sympathize with his brother in distress, to relieve him, comfort and support him; and if he does not do this, when it is in his power to do it, he does not answer the end of his being born into the world. The Jewish writers understand this as showing the difference between a friend and a brother: a cordial friend loves at all times, prosperous and adverse; but a “brother [loves when] adversity [is] born”^{f500}, or is, so Aben Ezra; he loves when he is forced to it; when the distress of his brother, who is his flesh and bone, as Gersom observes, obliges him to it: but this may be understood of the same person who is the friend; he is a brother, and acts the part of one in a time of adversity, for which he is born and brought into the world; it being so ordered by divine Providence, that a man should have a friend born against the time he stands in need of him^{f501}. To no one person can all this be applied with so much truth and exactness as to our Lord Jesus Christ; he is a “friend”, not of angels only, but of men; more especially of his church and people; of sinful men, of publicans and sinners; as appears by his calling them to repentance, by his receiving them, and by his coming into the world to save them: he

“loves” them, and loves them constantly; he loved them before time; so early were they on his heart and in his book of life; so early was he the surety of them, and the covenant of grace made with him; and their persons and grace put into his hands, which he took the care of: he loved them in time, and before time began with them; thus they were preserved in him, when they fell in Adam; were redeemed by his precious blood, when as yet they were not in being, at least many of them: he loves them as soon as time begins with them, as soon as born; though impure by their first birth, transgressors from the womb, enemies and enmity itself unto him; he waits to be gracious to them, and sends his Gospel and his Spirit to find them out and call them: and he continues to love them after conversion; in times of backsliding; in times of desertion; in times of temptation, and in times of affliction: he loves them indeed to the end of time, and to all eternity; nor is there a moment of time to be fixed upon, in which he does not love them. And he is a “brother” to his people; through his incarnation, he is a partaker of the same flesh and blood with them; and through their adoption, they having one and the same Father; nor is he ashamed to own the relation; and he has all the freedom, affection, compassion, and condescension, of a brother in him: and now he is a brother “born”; (see ²³⁰⁶Isaiah 9:6); born of a woman, a virgin, at Bethlehem, in the fulness of time, for and on the behalf of his people; even “for adversity”; to bear and endure adversity himself, which he did, by coming into a state of meanness and poverty; through the reproaches and persecutions of men, the temptations of Satan, the ill usage of his own disciples, the desertion of his father, the strokes of justice, and the sufferings of death; also for the adversity of his people, to sympathize with them, bear them up under it, and deliver them out of it. The ancient Jews had a notion that this Scripture has some respect to the Messiah; for, to show that the Messiah, being God, would by his incarnation become a brother to men, they cite this passage of Scripture as a testimony of it ^{f502}.

Ver. 18. *A man void of understanding striketh hands*, etc.] With his friend’s creditor, and becomes surety for him; and thereby acts a very unwise part, and shows himself to want understanding, by taking such a step, which may prove the ruin of himself and family: for though a man may and should love his friend at all times; yet he is not obliged, under a notion of friendship, to injure himself and his family, or to run the risk of it; if he does, it is a plain case he wants wisdom and discretion, (see ²⁰⁰¹Proverbs 6:1);

[and] becometh surety in the presence of his friend; not the creditor, but the debtor; and to pass his word for him, when he is present, shows that his own word will not be taken; and that he is either thought to be in bad circumstances, and incapable of payment at the proper time; or else that he is a bad man, of dishonest principles, and will not; and in either case it is not advisable to become surety for such a man: and besides, doing it in his presence may make him more careless and unconcerned about making good his payment or contract at the appointed time, when he knows his friend is engaged him.

Ver. 19. *He loveth transgression that loveth strife*, etc.] For strife is transgression, when it flows from a malignant spirit, is with bad views, about things to no profit, and for contention's sake; otherwise to contend earnestly for the truth; to strive together for the faith of the Gospel, for matters of moment and importance, and not mere words; to strive lawfully in a cause that is just, and for truth and justice, is commendable and praiseworthy;

[and] he that exalteth his gate seeketh destruction; that opens the door of his lips, and speaks proudly, as Jarchi and Aben Ezra interpret it; who compare it with (^{<307B>}Micah 7:5); who set their mouths against heaven, and God in it; and whose tongue walks through the earth, and spares none there, (^{<307A>}Psalms 73:8,9); as antichrist, who opens his mouth in blasphemy against God and his tabernacle, and exalts himself above all that is called God; and such, sooner or later, bring destruction on themselves, and find it as surely as if they sought for it. Or this may be understood of proud ambitious persons, that build houses more magnificent than their substance will allow of, the gate being put for the whole; by which means they bring themselves to ruin. The Septuagint, Vulgate Latin, and Arabic versions, have it in (^{<307C>}Proverbs 17:16), “he that buildeth his house high”; or who behaves proudly.

Ver. 20. *He that hath a froward heart findeth no good*, etc.] Who is of a perverse spirit, meditates and devises evil things; is not ingenuous and sincere, but false and deceitful to God and men: such an one gets no good from either; he obtains not the favour of God, nor a good name, credit, and reputation among men;

and he that hath a perverse tongue falleth into mischief; or “that turns himself”, or “is turned in his tongue”¹⁵⁰³; whose tongue is changeable, as the Septuagint and Arabic versions; who sometimes says one thing, and

sometimes another, and is not consistent with himself; as well as is contrary to all men: sooner or later he falls into mischief, into a pit, which he himself has dug for others; see (^{<900b>}James 3:6,8).

Ver. 21. *He that begetteth a fool [doth it] to his sorrow*, etc.] As it proves in the issue; though it was joy to him when a man child was born, and took delight in him while in infancy and childhood, and promised himself much happiness in him when at years of discretion; but, instead of that, he departs from his education principles, despises all parental counsels and advice, and goes into all the extravagance of sin and folly; which is an heartbreaking to his godly and religious parents; for this is to be understood; not of an idiot, but of a wicked son, taking bad courses;

and the father of a fool hath no joy; in his son, but sorrow, and has scarce any joy or pleasure in anything else in all his enjoyments; the trouble he is filled with on his account embitters all he has, that he can take no satisfaction, or have any comfort of life; the concern for his son is uppermost in his thoughts, and hinders him from taking that pleasure which otherwise he might enjoy.

Ver. 22. *A merry heart doth good [like] a medicine*, etc.] Does the body good, makes it healthful and vigorous. Cheerfulness of spirit has a great influence upon the body, and much contributes to the health and welfare of it; (see ^{<200b>}Ecclesiastes 9:7-9); and especially a heart full of spiritual joy, peace of conscience, flowing from the blood of Christ, joy in the Holy Ghost, a rejoicing in Christ Jesus and his righteousness, and in hope of the glory of God, much affect even the outward man. Or, “a merry heart makes a good medicine”^{f504}; it is a good medicine of itself; raises the spirits, invigorates the body, and fits it for service and business: or, “does a medicine good”^{f505}; makes that operate kindly, and to a good purpose: or, as Jarchi, makes the countenance shine well, makes a serene countenance; which Schultens approves, and, from the use of the word in the Arabic language, confirms;

but a broken spirit drieth the bones; a spirit broken with sorrow, whether on spiritual or temporal accounts; as it weakens the nerves, it dries up the marrow in the bones, and emaciates the body, and reduces it to a skeleton: the joy or grief of the mind, those passions of the soul, have a very great influence upon the body, either for its good or hurt.

Ver. 23. *A wicked [man] taketh a gift out of the bosom*, etc.] Of another, of a rich man, who takes it out from thence, and offers it to him as a bribe. This he takes in the most secret manner, that it might not be seen by others; though the Arabic version renders it, “he that receives a gift in his own bosom commits iniquity”; it is true of both the giver and the receiver; the one gives out of his bosom, and the other takes if from thence, and puts it into his own, and both are wicked. And the words are by some rendered, though it seems contrary to the accents, “a gift out of the bosom of the wicked he will take”^{f506}; the unjust judge, who is bribed with it:

to pervert the ways of judgment; to turn the course of justice, and hinder it from taking place; favouring a bad cause, and pronouncing a wrong sentence, which is wresting judgment.

Ver. 24. *Wisdom [is] before him that hath understanding*, etc.] Is near him, to direct and assist him; it is before him as a rule to walk by, and it is the mark he aims at. A man of spiritual understanding has the book of wisdom before him, the Scriptures of truth, which are able to make a man wise to salvation; and he steers his course according to them; he sets Christ, the Wisdom of God, always before him; and keeps his eye on the mark for the prize, all the while he is running his Christian race: or, “in the face of an understanding man is wisdom”^{f507}; it is to be seen in his countenance, which is grave and composed;

but the eyes of a fool [are] in the ends of the earth; where wisdom is not to be found, it is far off from him; his mind is wandering after every object, is unsettled and unfixed to anything; and which may be discerned in his eyes, which are rolling about and turning, first one way and then another; and which shows the levity and inconstancy of his mind.

Ver. 25. *A foolish son [is] a grief to his father*, etc.] Because of his folly and wickedness, and the ruin he is bringing himself to;

and bitterness to her that bare him; a cause of bitterness of soul to his mother, more distressing than the bitter pains with which she brought him forth into the world. Jarchi, by the father, understands the blessed God; and by her that bare him, the congregation of Israel; to whom Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, was bitterness, who caused Israel to sin; (see ~~2001~~ Proverbs 10:1).

Ver. 26. *Also to punish the just [is] not good*, etc.] It is evil, and an abomination to the Lord, (~~2005~~ Proverbs 17:15). Evildoers indeed should be

punished; but to punish the righteous also, as well as them, is far from being commendable;

[nor] to strike princes for equity: to strike princes, judges, civil magistrates, for doing the duty of their place and office, for doing that which is just and equitable among men, is very criminal, who ought to be encouraged and supported therein. Or it may be rendered, nor “that princes should strike for [that which is] right”^{f508} or cause men to be stricken, scourged, and whipped for doing well. The Targum is,

“nor to smite the righteous, who say right things;”

and so the Syriac version renders it, “righteous ones”; and the word signifies ingenuous liberal persons, good men, such as princes are or ought to be; and who should neither be stricken in the due discharge of their office, nor strike others that do well.

Ver. 27. *He that hath knowledge spareth his words*, etc.] Or, “he that knows knowledge”^{f509}; one that is very knowing, has a fund of knowledge in him, “spareth his words”; is generally a man of few words, he thinks much and says little; and though he may be communicative of his knowledge to proper persons, and at proper times, yet never speaks of it in a boasting and ostentatious way: or, he “restrains his words”^{f510}; he puts a bridle on them; and suffers not himself to speak hastily and angrily, and in a reproachful manner, when he is provoked to it;

[and] a man of understanding is of an excellent spirit; here is a various reading; the “Cetib” is **רְצוּם**, “of a cool spirit”^{f511}; in opposition to a warm fiery spirit; such as was that of the apostles, who were for calling for fire from heaven on those that slighted their master, and, as he told them, knew not what spirits they were of; but a cool spirit is one that is not soon angry, calm, sedate, and not easily provoked to wrath: the “Keri”, or marginal reading, is **רְצוּם**, “of an excellent” or “precious spirit”^{f512}; and such an one is a right spirit; a spirit of faith and love, and of a sound mind; and of such a spirit is a man of understanding in things divine and spiritual; to have a spirit of prayer, and to be tenderhearted, and of a sympathizing and forgiving spirit, is to be of an excellent spirit. The Targum is,

“humble in spirit;”

and a meek and quiet spirit is in the sight of God of great price; the Lord has a great regard to such who are of an humble and contrite spirit: with

these he dwells, to these he gives more grace; these are like to Christ, and have the fruits of his Spirit, and are very useful and ornamental. The Septuagint, Syriac, and Arabic versions render it, “patient” or “longsuffering”; and to be of a patient spirit is to be of an excellent spirit: such bear afflictions and reproaches quietly; wait God’s own time for hearing and helping them, and live in the comfortable expectation of heaven and happiness; and such show themselves to be wise and understanding men.

Ver. 28. *Even a fool, when he holdeth his peace, is counted wise,* etc.] Not only one that is sparing of his words, and is really a man of knowledge and understanding; but even a fool, if he is but silent, and does not betray his folly by his words, will be reckoned a wise man by those that do not know him; and, whatever fool he may be in other respects, yet in this he acts the wise part, that he holds his peace and says nothing;

[and] he that shutteth his lips [is esteemed] a man of understanding; and keeps them shut, lest he should say anything rashly and hastily; a man that has so much command of himself as not to speak unadvisedly, through the heat of his own passions, and through the provocations of others, will pass for a man that understands himself, and knows how to behave well before others.