

## Adam Clarke:

## Introduction

Honor is not seemly in a fool. The correction and treatment suitable to such. Of the slothful man. Of him who interferes with matters which do not concern him. Contentions to be avoided. Of the dissembler and the lying tongue.

## Verse 1

As snow in summer - None of these is suitable to the time; and at this unsuitable time, both are unwelcome: so a fool to be in honor is unbecoming.

## Verse 2

As the bird - םִיִּפּוֹר (tsippor) is taken often for the sparrow; but means generally any small bird. As the sparrow flies about the house, and the swallow emigrates to strange countries; so an undeserved malediction may flutter about the neighborhood for a season: but in a short time it will disappear as the bird of passage; and never take effect on the innocent person against whom it was pronounced.

## Verse 3

A whip for the horse - Correction is as suitable to a fool, as a whip is for a horse, or a bridle for an ass.

## Verse 4

Answer not a fool - On this and the following verse Bishop Warburton, who has written well on many things, and very indifferently on the doctrine of grace, has written with force and perspicuity: "Had this advice been given simply, and without circumstance, to answer the fool, and not to answer him, one who had reverence for the text would satisfy himself in supposing that the different directions referred to the doing a thing in and out of season;

1. The reasons given why a fool should not be answered according to his folly, is, "lest he (the answerer) should be like unto him."

2. The reason given why the fool should be answered according to his folly, is, "lest he (the fool) should be wise in his own conceit."

1. "The cause assigned for forbidding to answer, therefore, plainly insinuates that the defender of religion should not imitate the insulter of it in his modes of disputation, which may be comprised in sophistry, buffoonery, and scurrility.

2. "The cause assigned for directing to answer, as plainly intimates that the sage should address himself to confute the fool upon his own false principles, by showing that they lead to conclusions very wide from, very opposite to, those impieties he would deduce from them. If any thing can allay the fool's vanity, and prevent his being wise in his own conceit, it must be the dishonor of having his own principles turned against himself, and shown to be destructive of his own conclusions." - Treatise on Grace. Preface.

## Verse 6

Cutteth off the feet - Sending by such a person is utterly useless. My old MS. Bible translates well: Halt in feet and drinking wickedness that sendith wordis bi a foole messenger. Nothing but lameness in himself can vindicate his sending it by such hands; and, after all, the expedient will be worse than the total omission, for he is likely to drink wickedness, i.e., the mischief occasioned by the fool's misconduct. Coverdale nearly hits the sense as usual: "He is lame of his fete, yee dronken is he in vanite, that committeth eny thinge to a foole."

## Verse 8

As he that bindeth a stone in a sling, so is he that giveth honor to a fool - It is entirely thrown away. This, however, is a difficult proverb; and the versions give but little light on the subject. The Hebrew may be translated, "As a piece of precious stone among a heap of stones, so is he that giveth honor to a fool." Or, As he that putteth a precious stone in a heap of stones. See Parkhurst: but on this interpretation the meaning would rather be, "It is as useless to throw a jewel among a heap of stones to increase its bulk, as to give honor to a fool."

As he that sendith a stoon into a hepe of monee; so he that geveth to an unwiisman wirschip - Old MS. Bible.

"He that setteth a foole in hye dignite, that is even as yf a man dyd caste a precious stone upon the

galous. - Coverdale. This translator refers to the custom of throwing a stone to the heap under which a criminal lay buried. The Vulgate gives some countenance to this translation: "He who gives honor to a fool is like one who throws a stone to Mercury's heap." Mercury was considered the deity who presided over the highways; and stones were erected in different places to guide the traveler. Hence those lines of Dr. Young:

"Death stands like Mercuries in every way;  
And kindly points us to our journey's end."

#### Verse 10

The great God that formed all things - Or, A great man grieveth all, and he hireth the fool, he hireth also transgressors, where this verse is very differently translated. I shall add that of Coverdale: "A man of experience discerneth all things well: but whoso hyreth a foole, hyreth soch one as wyl take no hede." The 'x' (rab) may mean either the great God, or a great man: hence the two renderings, in the text and in the margin.

#### Verse 11

As a dog returneth to his vomit - See note on 2 Peter 2:22.

#### Verse 13

The slothful man saith - See the note on Proverbs 22:13 (note).

#### Verse 16

Than seven men that can render a reason - Seven here only means perfection, abundance, or multitude. He is wiser in his own eyes than a multitude of the wisest men. "Than seven men that sytt and teach." - Coverdale; i.e., than seven doctors of the law, or heads of the schools of the prophets, who always sat while they taught.

#### Verse 17

He that passeth by - This proverb stands true ninety-nine times out of a hundred, where people meddle with domestic broils, or differences between men and their wives.

#### Verse 19

Am not I in sport? - How many hearts have been made sad, and how many reputations have been slain, by this kind of sport! "I designed no harm by what I said;" "It was only in jest," etc. Sportive as such persons may think their conduct to be, it is as ruinous as that of the mad man who shoots arrows, throws firebrands, and projects in all directions instruments of death, so that some are wounded, some burnt, and some slain.

#### Verse 20

Where no wood is, there the fire goeth out - The tale-receiver and the tale-bearer are the agents of discord. If none received the slander in the first instance, it could not be propagated. Hence our proverb, "The receiver is as bad as the thief." And our laws treat them equally; for the receiver of stolen goods, knowing them to be stolen, is hanged, as well as he who stole them.

#### Verse 22

The words of a tale-bearer - The same with Proverbs 18:8 (note), where see the note.

#### Verse 23

Burning lips and a wicked heart - Splendid, shining, smooth lips; that is, lips which make great professions of friendship are like a vessel plated over with base metal to make it resemble silver; but it is only a vile pot, and even the outside is not pure.

#### Verse 25

When he speaketh fair - For there are such hypocrites and false friends in the world.

Believe him not - Let all his professions go for nothing.

For there are seven abominations in his heart - That is, he is full of abominations.

#### Verse 27

Whoso diggeth a pit - See note on Psalm 7:15. There is a Latin proverb like this: *Malum consilium consultori*

pessimum, "A bad counsel, but worst to the giver." Harm watch; harm catch.

**Verse 28**

**A lying tongue hateth those that are afflicted by it - He that injures another hates him in proportion to the injury he has done him; and, strange to tell, in proportion to the innocence of the oppressed. The debtor cannot bear the sight of his creditor; nor the knave, of him whom he has injured.**