

Proverbs Week #154 (14:16-17)

A wise man is cautious and turns away from evil, but a fool is arrogant and careless. A quick-tempered man acts foolishly, and a man of evil devices is hated. (Proverbs 14:16–17 NAS95)

Last week we talked about two themes. First we described what it meant to be a backslider. I used the pictures of a dog and a pig to help us remember the importance of knowing what is true (allowing God's truth to change us) and not turning away from it. The second picture had a child riding a bicycle. I suggested that being naïve and believing everything (Prov 14:15) could be compared to being told that it was safe to ride your bike with your eyes closed. In today's verses we will continue to think about the importance of knowing what we think and how it can affect how we act towards others.

If we break down the two verses above, we find one statement about a wise person and three statements about fools/evil people. The translation "cautious" doesn't give the full meaning of the Hebrew word in this verse. The root is from *yarei* (יָרֵא) and is generally translated to fear or reverence. We might consider this a shortened version of Proverbs 3:4 "Do not be wise in your own eyes; Fear the LORD and turn away from evil." This verse cautions the son not to be arrogant and our verse today shows the result of the son following a father's and Wisdom's advice. The parallel thought gives us the opposite condition and result. Those who are proud are careless. They don't consider the importance of what they are doing and recklessly do not turn away from evil.

Verse 17 speaks of a person who is "short of nose/face." According to Waltke and others, this idiom could refer to those who are quick tempered or easily angered. In contrast to the wise man who is "cautious" because of an abiding relationship to the LORD, this fool is in a hurry to do evil. They don't think before they act and it appears that this may even be a character quality for them (a bad quality at that). Consider the following words from the apostles James and Paul in regard to anger and thinking about what you do and say before you do and say it.

This you know, my beloved brethren. But everyone must be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger; for the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God. (James 1:19–20 NAS95)

Love is patient, love is kind and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant, does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered, does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. (1 Corinthians 13:4–7 NAS95)

It takes wisdom not to simply react when someone actively attempts to provoke us. If your brother or sister is continually poking you or saying mean things to you, how does it make you feel? How much time is there between what you feel and what you say or do? A person who is "short of face" has little time between feeling and acting. This type of person (if we assume anger is also a characteristic of theirs) will usually yell back, push, or do some other mean thing. While this is easy to see in children or others, do we as parents and adults recognize this in ourselves? Wisdom would ask us to pause, think about our Creator, and recognize when something we might say or do is evil. For those who fear the LORD their natural response is to turn away from that evil way and find the good way (the way that hits the target in God's eyes).

Come, you children, listen to me; I will teach you the fear of the LORD. Who is the man who desires life And loves length of days that he may see good? Keep your tongue from evil And your lips from speaking deceit. Depart from evil and do good; Seek peace and pursue it.

The eyes of the LORD are toward the righteous And His ears are open to their cry. The face of the LORD is against evildoers, To cut off the memory of them from the earth. The righteous cry, and the LORD hears And delivers them out of all their troubles. The LORD is near to the brokenhearted And saves those who are crushed in spirit. (Psalms 34:11–18 NAS95)