

Dealing With Fights



SABBATH—FEBRUARY 7

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Proverbs 17; 1 Corinthians 13:5–7; John 8:1–11; Proverbs 18; Proverbs 19; Deuteronomy 24:10–22.

MEMORY VERSE: “It is better to eat a dry crust of bread in peace and quiet than to eat a big dinner in a house that is full of fighting” (Proverbs 17:1, NIV).

PROVERBS AGAIN WARNS AGAINST TRUSTING IN APPEARANCES OR THE WAY SOMETHING LOOKS AS A WAY OF JUDGING HOW GOOD OR BAD IT IS. We may seem to have everything the world offers—riches, power, pleasure, fame. But behind the appearance of these things are much tension, worry, and suffering. It is even possible that the cause of these problems is the riches and pleasure that people work so hard for. As an Egyptian proverb says: “Better is bread with a happy heart than wealth [riches] with vexation [problems].”—Miriam Lichtheim, “Instructions,” in *Ancient Egyptian Literature: A Book of Readings*, volume 2, page 156. According to the book of Proverbs, the first step to solve this problem is to recognize what is most important to us. For example, peaceful relationships are more important than wealth (Proverbs 17:1). What is really important is not how much we have. Instead, who we are within ourselves is very important. The advice that follows will help us better to understand this principle (important rule) and lead us toward an inner peace (*shalom* in the Hebrew) that will add to our happiness.

SIN AND FRIENDS (Proverbs 17:9)

Read Proverbs 17:9 and Proverbs 19:11. What important point is being made in these verses? How should we deal with others who fall?

When someone messes up, it is so tempting to spread the story, to tell others. *Have you heard about what that person did?* We might act as if we are shocked by the action. But we still like telling others about what happened. This means that we are gossiping. But that is what we are being warned not to do. This kind of behavior can cause a lot of bitterness between close friends. After all, if a friend of yours messes up, what kind of friend are you if you go around telling others about it?

Instead, Proverbs advises us to “cover” the mistake. This does not suggest that we have to hide the sin or to act as if it never happened. The sin that is covered is still there, even though it is hidden. The Hebrew word for “cover” has the special meaning of “forgiving” (Psalm 85:2; Nehemiah 4:5). Love, not gossip, should be our answer to someone else’s mistake.

Read Proverbs 17:17 and 1 Corinthians 13:5–7. How does love help with a friend’s mistake?

One does not love a friend or spouse because he or she is perfect. We love even if he or she makes mistakes. Through love we learn not to judge others. This is because with our own faults and shortcomings we could be just as guilty. Instead, we can mourn with them over what they have done. Then we try to help them work through it. After all, what are friends for if not for this?

Think about a time you messed up badly and you were forgiven, helped, and comforted. What does that tell you about how you should do the same for others?



The Hebrew word for “cover” means “to forgive.”



Through love we learn not to judge others. But we mourn with them over what they have done.

BE JUST (FAIR)! (Proverbs 17:10)

True love is not blind. We may “cover” someone’s mistake through love. But this does not mean that we do not see the sin and do not recognize it as sin. Love and justice go together. The Hebrew word for “justice,” *zedeq*, also means “love,” “charity” (love and mercy). We cannot have real compassion (mercy) if we are not just (fair). And we cannot be just if we do not have compassion and love. The two ideas must be together.

For example, charity toward the poor should not be done at the expense of justice. So, the rule is not to favor (support) the poor in court just because they are poor (Exodus 23:3). If love requires us to help the poor, it would be unjust (not right; not fair) to favor them when they are wrong just because they are poor. So, justice and truth should go along with love and compassion. It is this wise balance that the torah, the law of God, teaches. And it also is taught in the book of Proverbs.

Read Proverbs 17:10 and Proverbs 19:25. What do these verses say about the need for correction?

The fact that Proverbs 17:10 follows the call to cover the mistake through love (verse 9) is not an accident. “Reproof” (correction) in connection with “love” puts love in the right place. When given in love, correction is much more powerful.

Read John 8:1–11. How do we see Jesus dealing with open sin?

“When Jesus pardoned this woman and encouraged her to live a better life, His love shone forth in the beauty of perfect righteousness. Jesus does not encourage sin. But He tries to save. The world criticized and frowned at this woman. But Jesus spoke words of comfort and hope. Jesus showed mercy to the weak sinner and gave her a helping hand. The two-faced Pharisees [the Jewish teachers and rulers] judged her guilty. But Jesus bids her, ‘Go, and sin no more.’ ”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, page 462.



True love is never blind. We may forgive someone’s mistake, but that does not mean we do not see the sin.

WORDS, AGAIN (Proverbs 18)

Read Proverbs 18. Different themes are presented here. But we need to pay special attention to what it has to say about our words. What important ideas are given about what we do or do not say?

We are again faced with the power of words. We see how fools use their mouths to say foolish things. Verse 13 gives us some light. How easy is it to speak out *before* carefully thinking about what has been said to us? How many times might we have saved ourselves, and others, unnecessary pain if we had only learned to carefully think through our words before making an answer? Sometimes silence can be the best answer.

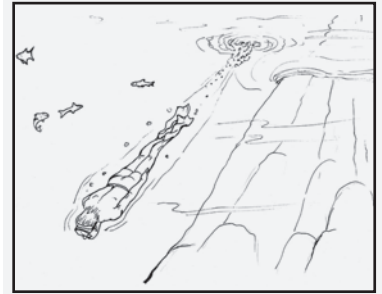
Read Proverbs 18:4. Why are the words of the wise the same as deep waters?

The symbol (word-picture) of “deep waters” is used positively in the book of Proverbs to show wisdom (Proverbs 20:5). It offers the idea of quiet, but also of deep and rich thoughts. The wise are not shallow in their thinking or speech. They take their words from their rich personal experiences. Who has not admired the deep thoughts of those who clearly have wisdom and knowledge?

Read Proverbs 18:21. What does it mean?

Proverbs again tells us what we should already know: our words are powerful. And they can be used for something good or evil, even life and death. How careful we need to be with how we use this powerful tool!

Think about a time someone’s words hurt you in a terrible way. What should this have taught you about how powerful words are? What should it teach you about how careful you need to be with what you say?



The word-picture of deep waters suggests the ideas of quiet and of deep and rich thoughts.

TWO SIDES TO A STORY (Proverbs 18:2)

Read Proverbs 18:2. Why do fools not need time to make their opinions?

Fools are so sure of themselves and so eager to give their own opinions that they are not interested in learning from others. Their closed minds go along with their open mouths. This is deadly. How careful we need to be that we do not find ourselves doing the same thing, especially when we are convinced we are right about something.

After all, have we not all felt very strongly about a subject only to find that we were wrong later? This does not mean that we should be weak in our views. But it means only that we need to be humble, remembering that none of us has all the right answers. When our answers are right, truth is often deeper than we think or can understand.

Read Proverbs 18:17. What important point is given us here?

God alone does not need a second opinion. This is because by His nature He already knows. His eyes are everywhere (Proverbs 15:3). God has the ability to see all sides of any matter. But we have a very limited view of everything. This view even gets narrower when we are stubborn about a position we think is important.

But there are always two or even more sides to any story. And the more information we have, the better we can understand a subject.

Think of a time you fully believed you were right about something. Maybe this opinion was one you held your whole life. But you later found out that you had been wrong your whole life. What should this tell you about your need to be open to the possibility that you could be wrong about things you feel strongly about now?

BE TRUTHFUL (Proverbs 19)

A king needed to choose a new minister for the highest office of his kingdom. For this purpose, he organized a special contest on lying: who could tell the biggest lie. All his ministers applied. And each one came and spoke their biggest lie. But the king was not satisfied. Their lies seemed weak. The king then asked his closest and most trusted advisor: “Why did you not apply?”

The advisor answered, “I am sorry to disappoint you, my king, but I cannot apply.”

“Why not?” asked the king.

“Because I never lie,” the advisor answered.

The king decided to choose him for the position.

As sinners, we find that lying comes to us more easily than we think. For this reason, again, how careful we need to be with our words.

Read Proverbs 19. Many themes are given there. But what does it say about lying?

The book of Proverbs upholds very strict rules. It is better to remain poor, or even to lose a promotion than it is to lie. It is better to lose than to sacrifice our honesty (Proverbs 19:1). It is better to lose than it is to cheat (Proverbs 19:22).

Read Proverbs 19:9. What is the responsibility of a witness?

Telling a lie is bad enough. But doing it in court and under oath is even worse. In many countries, perjury (lying) is a very serious crime. The witness must give a truthful testimony (report). It comes as no surprise that this verse follows the verse that says, “Every man is a friend to one who gives gifts” (Proverbs 19:6, NKJV). And the next verse says that a poor man is hated by his friends and his brothers (Proverbs 19:7, NKJV). The point is that witnesses must not be influenced by bribes or by the important position of those they are testifying about. They need to tell the truth, whether the person they are testifying about is rich or poor.

Read Deuteronomy 24:10–22. What important principle is seen here? How should we use this rule for ourselves or when we work with those who are needy?

DEFINITIONS

1. *Testimonies*—the writings of Ellen G. White.

ADDITIONAL STUDY: “The spirit of gossip and lying is one of Satan’s special tools to cause disagreements, to separate friends, and to destroy the faith of many Christians. Brethren and sisters are too ready to talk of the faults and errors that they think others have.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Testimonies*¹ for the Church, volume 4, page 195.

“The children of these complainers listen with open ears and receive poisonous words about other people. Parents are blindly closing the ways to the hearts of the children. How many families fill their daily meals with doubt and questionings. They analyze [lay open] the characters [faults; mistakes] of their friends, and serve them up as a good ‘dessert.’ Bits of lies are passed around the table by both adults and children. In this God is dishonored. Jesus said, ‘Anything you did for one of the least important of these brothers of mine, you did for me’ (Matthew 25:40, NIV). So, Christ is abused by those who tell lies about His servants.”—Adapted from *Testimonies for the Church*, volume 4, page 195.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ① It is always hard when those you love or care about make mistakes. And it is so easy to try to cover up for them. How do we keep the right balance in situations like these? Certainly, we need to show grace (forgiveness and mercy), as God has shown us grace for our mistakes. But does grace always mean that a person can sin without any conscience and not face the results? What is the right action to take in situations like these?
- ② As the lesson said this week, most things in life are not easy to understand. So, how can we learn to be open-minded while at the same time not being foolish in our decisions and our thinking?
- ③ What are some ways we can lie without ever using words?