

I'D LIKE TO TEACH THE WORLD TO SING IN PERFECT HARMONY PROVERBS 17:1-28

Pastor John Carlini, D. Mn.

M.I. LIKE IT OR NOT, OUR THOUGHTS, ACTIONS, AND BEHAVIORS AFFECT ONE ANOTHER. LIVING IN HARMONY WITH ONE ANOTHER CAN ONLY BE ACHIEVED BY BEING IN HARMONY WITH GOD.

I. THE WISDOM OF HARMONY (Vs. 1-6)

IN A HARMONIOUS HOUSEHOLD, FAMILY MEMBERS ARE A SOURCE OF JOY TO ONE ANOTHER.

- A. DESCRIPTION OF A HARMONIOUS HOUSEHOLD (1 & 6)
- B. A CONFLICTED HOUSEHOLD (Vs. 2, 4, & 5)
- C. THE WAY TO HARMONY (V. 3)

II. THE FOOLISHNESS OF CONFLICT (Vs. 7-16)

IN A CONFLICTED HOUSEHOLD, FAMILY MEMBERS ARE A SOURCE OF SORROW TO ONE ANOTHER.

- A. PERVERTED SPEECH (Vs. 7-9)
- B. PERVERTED BEHAVIOR (Vs. 10-12)
- C. PERVERTED JUSTICE (Vs. 13-16)

III. WISDOM OR FOOLISHNESS: HARMONY OR CONFLICT (Vs.S 17-28)

HARMONY COMES FROM BEING IN A RIGHT RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD.

- A. BRINGING HUMILITY INTO THE HOUSE (Vs. 17-21)
- B. BRINGING FAIRNESS INTO THE HOUSE (Vs. 22-25)
- C. BRINGING WISDOM INTO THE HOUSE (Vs. 26-28)

I'D LIKE TO TEACH THE WORLD TO SING IN PERFECT HARMONY PROVERBS 17:1-28

Pastor John Carlini, D. Mn.

For me, this is one of those classic fun chapters in Proverbs. It contains several of those clever sayings that you love to quote. The interesting thing about these proverbs is that they focus on the fool while he is in the midst of pursuing his folly. There are seven of these sayings scattered throughout the chapter. I'll be sure to point them out as we study through the text.

The other theme that seems to run throughout this text is the concept of harmony. For the most part, the context is harmony in the home, but the poet also wants us to think about harmony in society as well. He will move easily from foolish children to foolish and evil government officials.

I think often times it is easier to live in harmony at work than it is at home. We tend to find it easier to live in harmony with our friends than we do with our spouses, children, or parents. I don't know why that is. You would think the place we run to find peace and harmony would be our homes. But perhaps we need to cultivate an atmosphere of harmony at home.

I have a friend whose wife really seems to have a knack for harmony. I know you won't believe this, but when I was young, I could have maybe been a little wild. When my pastor friends and I get together, we may just have perhaps drank a little too much once in a while. One night, after one of these sessions, my friend had had too much to drink. We were all kind of giggling and laughing and being stupid. When we got into my friend's house, he calls out to his wife, "Yoo-hoo! It's me," and then passed out on the floor in the foyer. His wife, half awake, looked at him lying on the floor, took a blanket and threw it over him. My friend said, "Thanks sweetheart, you're the best," to which she responded, "Don't mention it."

I was looking on with disbelief. She was unfazed. I said, “That’s all? He’s not in trouble? No yelling or screaming? You’re just going to let him lie there and sleep it off?” She looked at me and said, “Here’s a good life lesson for you John. Never take your problems to bed with you.”

Now before anybody gets crazy here, I’m not condoning drinking and I am certainly not advocating that anyone put up with a spouse who drinks. I’m pretty sure we would all get an earful if we came home like that.

Unlike my story, the real key to enjoying harmony in a house or our church requires the cooperation of everybody. I know that I have had several conversations with our adult children, trying to explain this concept to them. They continually tell Luing and me not to worry about them at all. However, that’s just not possible. The decisions they make will affect me, and the decisions I make will affect them. For example, if Luing and I foolishly spent all our money, and then in our old age needed the kids to take care of us, that would disrupt their lives and the lives of their own families. If they were foolish and didn’t buy health insurance and got sick, we wouldn’t let them suffer and die. We would pick up the hospital bill, no matter how expensive it was. Look, here is what the main idea of this morning’s passage is. **LIKE IT OR NOT, OUR THOUGHTS, ACTIONS, AND BEHAVIORS AFFECT ONE ANOTHER. LIVING IN HARMONY WITH ONE ANOTHER CAN ONLY BE ACHIEVED BY BEING IN HARMONY WITH GOD.**

I. THE WISDOM OF HARMONY (Vs. 1-6)
IN A HARMONIOUS HOUSEHOLD, FAMILY MEMBERS ARE A SOURCE OF JOY TO ONE ANOTHER.

In other words, what we do, how we behave, and the attitudes we adopt, really do affect those closest to us. The book of Proverbs is meant to be practical. They give some very concrete examples of what to do and what not to do. In verses 1-6 the poet spells out the wisdom of harmony. In other words, a family in harmony is much more pleasant to be part of than a family in conflict. **IN A HARMONIOUS HOUSEHOLD, FAMILY MEMBERS ARE A SOURCE OF JOY TO ONE ANOTHER.** You will notice from looking at your outlines that I am not going to take these verses in order. I am going to follow the poet's thought process.

A. DESCRIPTION OF A HARMONIOUS HOUSEHOLD (1 & 6)

Verse 1 and verse 6 frame this section by giving us a description of a harmonious household. I don't think many of us give much thought to this unless something has already gone very wrong. We tend to think of material and career success. When people my age get together and talk about our adult children, the conversation usually focuses on how our children are doing career-wise and if they are married and have children. But rarely do we talk about our relationship with them.

Consider verse 6 first. This verse seems to be written from an adult person's perspective. In other words, three generations are described here, and the observation seems to be made from the middle generation's perspective. She looks at her own children, and sees that her children have become a delight to her parents. In other words, grandchildren seem to bring joy to their grandparents. I think we all knew that. But look at the second line of verse 6, "And parents are the pride of their children." How many of us as parents of adult children have ever heard our children express the thought that they are proud of us? I don't want to overstate this to the point that it pushes us into a state of codependency. One of the things that bring joy to children is

when they sense the pride their parents take in their successes. It is something that often motivates young people to continue to succeed in life.

We as parents should probably ask ourselves whether or not what we do and how we live our lives make our children proud of us? And that brings us to verse 1. Think about a household that has defined success in terms of love and harmony; a house where the children love their parents and grandparents; a home where the children are loved by their parents and grandparents; a home where children and grandchildren are proud of their parents and grandparents and vice versa. It wouldn't matter one bit how rich or poor this family was materially, they would be rich in relationship and no amount of money could ever buy that.

On the other hand, people who have defined success in terms of money, status, power and success, often find their families all divided. Even though they have plenty of money, even though they have won many awards, and even though they have many titles and degrees, they are facing old age with a divided family. Many families don't even speak to one another. What good is all that money? What good are all those accomplishments? What good are all those titles and degrees? They are useless.

B. A CONFLICTED HOUSEHOLD (Vs. 2, 4, & 5)

Look at how poor these households are. Verses 2, 4, and 5 describe a conflicted household. Now all of these are stated in the negative, but if we are students of poetry, we can take the opposite and apply it to a happy household. For example if a lack of concern for justice is a character of a conflicted household, then a concern and dedication to justice is a characteristic of a harmonious household.

Verse 2 indicates that a disgraceful son brings conflict to a home. In other words, this verse is not so much about the wise servant, who will gain a family status in the family, as it is

about disgraceful children separating themselves from the family through bad choices. How do they end up making bad choices?

Verse 4 seems to say that not only are they stupid, they don't even know that they're stupid. In fact, they think they are wise. I'm not usually drawn to these types of television shows, but as I was channel surfing, I became fascinated by this one show. I don't remember the name of it, but the premise was this. They gave the impressions that this was a talent contest. The winner would be able to get some kind of recording contract. The catch is that they chose all people who thought they had talent but in reality had no talent. In fact, they were horrible. The judges and the audience were all in on the joke. So these no-talent people would come and sing and act their hearts out, the audience would clap and cheer, and the judges would pretend they were fantastic. When they interviewed the contestants between rounds, they thought they were doing fantastic. For me it was like a train wreck. I felt so sorry that these contestants were so deluded into thinking they were good and people nationwide were being entertained by making fun of their stupidity. On the other hand, I couldn't turn the channel. I was captivated by it.

A wicked and disgraceful person listens to lying lips and pays attention to malicious tongues. Since I was a youth pastor for over 10 years, it never ceased to amaze me how young people got information. Whatever their friends and classmates told them, they accepted as gospel truth. Think about this. If you're hanging around with fools, then all the input you get will be foolish. If you start to accept this as truth, you will be a fool. The saddest thing for me to watch as a pastor is people who think they are smart, righteous, and holy, but in reality are foolish and don't even know it.

Verse 5 really continues this thought because these people tend to be so proud, that it is pride that blinds them. They have contempt for people who don't think the way their group of friends think. They laugh at people who are experiencing set backs. If you ever read the sports page or listen to sports radio, you would think that the writers and hosts were professional athletes --by the way they write and talk. However, if you had ever played truly competitive sports, you would realize they are morons. They really don't know anything about the game. When a player they don't like has a bad game, they write as if the player is no good. They gloat over his failure. But in reality, they themselves are the ones who are stupid.

But here is the sad thing about our society. The fans, who have also never played the game competitively, are empowered by these writers and hosts to think that they too are experts. And so fools and their folly give birth to talk-radio.

In the political scene, no matter if conservative or liberal, democrat or republican, there is plenty of contempt to go around for the poor. Some think the poor deserve their lot in life because they are lazy and never take advantage of the educational system and free market place in the United States. Others feel that the poor are so stupid and so helpless that government needs to come in and tell them what they need.

But Christians ought to think like this. And I'm sure the poet here is thinking the same thing. When we mock the poor, we are actually mocking God for two reasons. First, all human beings are created in God's image. We should never take delight in disaster. But secondly, God is our maker. If we are not poor, if we are not down and out, if we have plenty of money and success, it is not because of our hard work, our diligence, and our good planning. Success is never of our own making. Like chapter 16 pointed out, all is a gift from God.

So people who are fools and don't even know they are fools are the worst kind. They surround themselves with like-minded people and are filled with pride. This kind of stupidity brings conflict into a godly household.

C. THE WAY TO HARMONY (V. 3)

Verse 3 shows us the way to harmony. I have said this many times, but I think especially worth repeating here. Harmony does not mean that everybody thinks the same way and does the same thing. That is unison. Harmony depends on variety. What really matters is the conductor. God is the One Who has to direct the symphony in order for there to be harmony. He is the One Who tests our attitudes, our thoughts, and our behaviors. If everyone in the house has dedicated their lives to serving, loving, and pleasing God, then there should be harmony in the house. If everyone is humbly listening to God's Holy Spirit, there should be harmony in the house. It is a willingness to submit to God's ways by reading and studying the Bible for answers. It comes by genuinely being open and willing to listen to one another. It is the knowledge that we are here to serve God, not our own personal agendas, that brings harmony to a household and to the church. As for me, I want to live in a house where my adult children and I still love one another and talk to one another. I want to live in a house where grandparents, children, and grandchildren live in harmony. I want to pastor a church where people love and care for one another; where we delight in one another's successes. Humility, love, submission to God and to one another brings harmony to a home and to a church. **IN A HARMONIOUS HOUSEHOLD, FAMILY MEMBERS ARE A SOURCE OF JOY TO ONE ANOTHER.**

II. THE FOOLISHNESS OF CONFLICT (Vs. 7-16)
IN A CONFLICTED HOUSEHOLD, FAMILY MEMBERS ARE A SOURCE OF SORROW TO ONE ANOTHER.

In direct contrast to a harmonious household, we can see the foolishness of conflict in verses 7-16. There is really no joy in a conflicted household. **IN A CONFLICTED HOUSEHOLD, FAMILY MEMBERS ARE A SOURCE OF SORROW TO ONE ANOTHER.** This section is characterized by really great put-downs on fools. I don't think there is a technical word for these sayings, but we could call them "fool slams." This section will give us some of the components that characterize a conflicted household.

A. PERVERTED SPEECH (Vs. 7-9)

Perverted speech is described in verses 7-9. In other words, speaking the truth in love brings harmonious and healthy relationships. Perverting the truth promotes conflict. In these verses, the poet informs us that lying doesn't only bring conflict to a home, it brings conflict and chaos to society in general. The first sentence is really meant to be a slam at the fool. It almost summarizes what we talked about in the first section. To be proud and to speak arrogantly is pretty absurd for a fool. He really doesn't know anything, but he's out there trying to be a big shot. If you were smart and had enjoyed a great deal of success, you may have something to brag about, but a fool should simply shut up.

The second half of verse 7 catapults us into the public arena. Politicians should never lie to their people. And that seems to be one reason our society is starting to break down. Even though politicians have lied for thousands of years, I think we can point to a particular time in our history when people no longer trusted their politicians. This era started when many in the Nixon White House resigned and went to jail. In fact, Nixon himself resigned and the appointed new president, President Ford, pardoned him. From that point on in our history we have become cynical and almost always assume that politicians are lying.

And verse 8 continues this theme of corrupt officials. But the warning is really to the fool. Verse 8 is saying this. Corrupt people tend to view bribes as magic charms. We have seen it in government contracts and in our judicial system. We accept it as a normal way to do business with local, state, and federal government agencies. Oh, excuse me, in Washington, we call it “lobbying.”

Here is what the poet wants us to know. We all know that many people, including government officials, are corrupt. But we should not think that what these people are gaining equates to success. In terms of worldly assessments, acquiring power, money, and status define success. But for children of God, success is measured in holiness. Honesty, love, and faithfulness define success for us. The people who have used bribes and influence to get through life will be surprised at the judgment day when Jesus sends them to hell for an eternity and they are unable to talk their way out of that by dropping names or offering a bribe. The magic charm will not work there.

And verse 9 informs us that we are not to gossip or repay hurtful events. Listen, we have all made mistakes. I have made mistakes, and you have made mistakes. If we love each other, we will let these things go. If I have hurt you, all you need to do is tell me and I’ll apologize. I’ll do the same for you. And again, pointing back to the first section, we’ll do this for each other because God did it for us. Speaking the truth in love is necessary to avoid a conflicted household.

B. PERVERTED BEHAVIOR (Vs. 10-12)

Perverted behavior can also fracture a household as described in verses 10-12. Verse 11 seems to illustrate the concept of “What goes around comes around.” In other words, evil individuals will always be in rebellion against God and His ways. And God will use evil

government officials to punish the evil man. However, this is cyclical. The evil man will be a thorn in the evil politician's side, and the evil politician will be thorn in the evil man's side. But neither will learn.

Look at verse 10. Here is one of those "fool slams" I talked about earlier. The fool is so proud, so blind, and so stupid that no matter how many times God tries to reach him, he will not get it. If someone is in tune with God's will and desires to really please God, God need only whisper, and she will correct her behavior. A gentle nudge from God moves her.

On the other hand, you could give the fool a hundred lashes and he still won't get it. Here is a good measuring device to see if we are fools or not. How many times have bad things happened to you that you know came as a direct message from God to you? Have you seriously changed your thoughts and behaviors permanently? Or have you changed for a little while but now back to the same old thoughts and behaviors? If there has been no permanent change, then we could classify ourselves as fools. This fool slam is for us.

Verse 12 contains another great fool slam. Fools are dangerous to be around. They tend not only to destroy their own lives, but they destroy and sadden the lives of their friends and family. How dangerous is it to be around fools? They are more dangerous than a bear who thinks you are out to do harm to her cubs. I know this personally from my military days. I didn't hang around with fools, nor did I ever drink when I was out with them. It's a good thing because they always seemed to be destroying their lives and they always were taking down the friends around them. Hanging around with fools is dangerous. Stay away from them.

C. PERVERTED JUSTICE (Vs. 13-16)

Fools are characterized by stupidity, lying, trying to shortcut their way through life, and doing stupid stuff that is really dangerous. They are perverted in what they say and what they do.

But they will also not hesitate to pervert justice as described in verses 13-16. The key verse in this section is verse 15 because God's Name is mentioned once again. Jehovah, Yahweh, The LORD detests those who attempt to pervert justice in any way. Trying to avoid the consequences of our actions, allowing an innocent person to take the blame, or helping the guilty to go free is a perversion of justice. Let me just point this out about our legal system. Now I'm not saying that there is any better judicial system in the world. But our court system is not interested in justice because justice is based on truth.

Our system of justice is set up like a sport. The lawyer who plays the game the best according to the rules wins. There is no real concern about truth, about right or wrong, or about God. The judicial system and the rules are what is important. So if you are wealthy, you can afford to buy the best lawyer and she or he will be able to play the game far superior to a regular lawyer. You are almost guaranteed success. On the other hand, if you are poor, you will not likely be able to find justice because you will only be able to afford a mediocre player. So our very concept of justice is perverted.

The problem with our concept of justice is that it will never bring peace. In fact someday, it will lead to the downfall of our society. If we don't deal with evil, it will never leave our neighborhoods, our cities, our states, and our countries. If we don't deal with evil at home, it will never leave our homes as well. We need to be concerned about justice for others. People who are so self-centered that they will use other people or ignore others' sufferings, will foster an environment that will come back to haunt them.

Look at verse 16. Here's another "Fool slam." Those pastors who continue to preach this health and wealth type of gospel should look carefully at the Proverbs. The proverbs continually paint righteousness, justice, love and honesty as wealth. Being in a right relationship

with God and one another is described as wealth in the Proverbs. The poet says in effect, “What good is it to put money in the hands of a fool when he doesn’t know what to do with it?” Most of us who were raised in the United States watched a television series called, “The Beverly Hillbillies.” The whole premise of the show was a poor mountain family finding oil on their property. Overnight, they became multimillionaires. So they moved to Beverly Hills, California with all the rich people. The problem was, they didn’t know what to buy with their money. They didn’t understand how to spend their money. For example, they had a billiard table but they thought it was a large dining room table. The show was funny because the banker would buy them things that they didn’t know how to use or even what they were for.

Well fools can buy all sorts of worldly things, but they will never find what’s valuable in life. Many of us are like “the spiritual hillbillies.” We go through life being worldly, valuing the things of this world. Even though God has given us many riches and blessings, we don’t even know what they are let alone being able to use them. Spiritually we are like Jed Clampet with millions of dollars in our pockets without a clue as how to spend it. When we start to focus on the wrong things in life we pervert justice. God’s prescription is that we are to use things and love people. However, we have perverted God’s idea of justice and we have grown to love things and use people. This type of self-centeredness will always promote conflict. **IN A CONFLICTED HOUSEHOLD, FAMILY MEMBERS ARE A SOURCE OF SORROW TO ONE ANOTHER.**

III. WISDOM OR FOOLISHNESS: HARMONY OR CONFLICT (Vs. 17-28) HARMONY COMES FROM BEING IN A RIGHT RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD.

The Proverbs are not only nice morsels of wisdom and clever sayings, the poet always forces us into a decision. In verses 17-28 he invites us to choose Wisdom or Foolishness, Harmony or conflict. In other words, if we choose the wisdom of obeying God, we will find

harmony in our individual lives, in our home life, and in our church life. On the other hand, if we continue to be fools, we will experience conflict in our personal lives, in our home lives, and in our church. For the poet, **HARMONY COMES FROM BEING IN A RIGHT RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD.**

Really the concept is simple. As we dedicate ourselves to loving and serving God, we will be bringing harmony not only into our own personal lives, but we will be a blessing to all those around us.

A. BRINGING HUMILITY INTO THE HOUSE (Vs. 17-21)

Verses 17-21 talk about bringing humility into the house. Godly people are genuinely concerned about others' well being are humble enough to listen and care for others. They are not interested in having their own way. They desire for others to succeed and they will stand by them in difficult situations. It takes humility to work towards unity because, remember, unity is not unison. We must be able to blend our differences. Proud, stubborn, self-centered people only bring heartache because they worship themselves as God. They bring nothing but grief and heartache to their parents and their brothers and sisters. Having a proud fool in the house is like having cancer. That's how this section ends in verse 21.

B. BRINGING FAIRNESS INTO THE HOUSE (Vs. 22-25)

Verses 22-25 instruct us that in addition to being humble, bringing fairness into the house also brings harmony. The God of the Bible and the God we worship is a just and fair God. He demands that we be fair to one another. When people feel they have been treated fairly, they can usually accept the consequences willingly. On the other hand, when people feel they have been treated unfairly, they are usually unhappy. This unhappiness turns into chronic anger and depression. If you are a boss, a parent, a leader of any kind, it is important that you have a real

clear sense of fairness. People who do not show fairness foster an atmosphere of conflict. Again, look how this section ends in verse 25. It ends the same as verse 21. People who are unfair and have no concern for justice or for what is right or wrong, are a disgrace to their parents. Being concerned for the well being and happiness for others brings harmony into the home.

C. BRINGING WISDOM INTO THE HOUSE (Vs. 26-28)

Bringing wisdom into the home is described in verses 26-28. Again, these three verses summarize what we have been saying all along. First of all, knowing God underlies it all. God says that humility, fairness, love, patience and godly behavior promote harmony. The politician has the choice to act fairly. We have a choice to act fairly. We have a choice to be humble, gentle and patient. We have a choice to think before we act and speak. We have a choice to love; to love God and to love one another. It all starts with our commitment and relationship to God. **HARMONY COMES FROM BEING IN A RIGHT RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD.**

Here is the point of this morning's message. No one lives in isolation from others. If we are godly and loving parents, we care about what happens to our children. If we are godly and loving children, we care about what happens to our parents. The key is godly and loving. We need to be godly in order to determine what is right and wrong. We need to be loving in order to be humble enough to allow for differences in thinking. But the bottom line is this. Family members do effect each others' happiness. **LIKE IT OR NOT, OUR THOUGHTS, ACTIONS, AND BEHAVIORS AFFECT ONE ANOTHER. LIVING IN HARMONY WITH ONE ANOTHER CAN ONLY BE ACHIEVED BY BEING IN HARMONY WITH GOD.** But first, we must want harmony. We must come to desire harmony because God commands it. So desiring this harmony takes humility in the first place.

There is a story that is often told concerning Ramsey MacDonald, the one-time Prime Minister of England.

MacDonald was discussing the prospect of world peace with another government official who was an expert on foreign affairs. MacDonald was excited about the prospect of lasting peace. However, his colleague was unimpressed by such idealism. He remarked cynically, “The desire for peace does not necessarily ensure it.” MacDonald readily admitted, “Quite true. ... But neither does the desire for food satisfy your hunger, but at least it gets you started toward a restaurant.” Wanting harmony in your home, in our church, or in society will not guarantee success. However, if we surrender our lives to God in all love and humility, if we remain in a right relationship with Him, we have a good chance of living in a harmonious church and home.

Hopefully, this desire and vision for harmony will motivate us to pursue our relationships with God and one another.