

It has been a beautiful, warm early fall ... but today, a bit of rain! There is a hint of color touching the leaves of the trees. I guess we need to expect fall to be here sooner than we want ... but time moves forward. And with the passing of another week, here is our Devotional for today. We continue in the Book of Proverbs. Trust it will be a blessing and encouragement to you. God bless.

SCOFFERS AND SCHEMERS: DON'T BE ONE!

A Devotional prepared by Dr. Robert L. Morris

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“A proud and haughty man – Scoffer is his name; He acts with arrogant pride.” (Proverbs 21:24; NKJV)
“He who plots to do evil will be called a schemer. The devising of foolishness is sin, and the scoffer is an abomination to men.” Proverbs 24:8-9; NKJV)

In this Devotional I want to focus on two key concepts and/or words that emerge from some of the Proverbs: Scoffers and Schemers. In a very real way, this tends to automatically moves this study of Scripture into a negative vein. That is not one of my favorite avenues of approach in teaching or preaching. Yet it is very necessary, it must be done, and one must be careful in how it is done!

I want to define what is meant by these English words, and then go to the Book of Proverbs and learn how the Lord uses them through King Solomon and other writers of the Proverbs. What then, is a Scoffer? A Scoffer is someone who jeers, mocks, laughs at, treats with contempt, or speaks denigratingly about another person or an idea in a way that shows that they think that person or idea is stupid or silly. It is an expression of personal arrogance and pride.

One of the key proverbs that identifies someone as a Scoffer is listed above, and repeated here as follows: “A proud and haughty man – Scoffer is his name; He acts with arrogant pride.” (Proverbs 21:24; NKJV) In this Proverb we notice the clear reference to two very important words: arrogant and pride.

A person with these character traits is very self-focused. He or she has no regard for another person's opinion, much less any instruction from someone else. Very recently this was driven home to my life as I talked with a person who exudes both arrogance and pride. My sole purpose in speaking with the person was to ask a simple question. After asking the question and clarifying what I meant by the question the person to whom I was speaking turned aside, then faced me again and said: I don't need this lecture! Who do you think you are lecturing me? It was very difficult to convince the person that my sole purpose was to make an inquiry. Over the course of four or five days there was a half-hearted beating-around-the-bush attempt to clear the air and regain some semblance of communication.

Now we need to look at some of the Proverbs that address this issue of the Scoffer. For these I am using the New King James Version of the Bible.

1. “Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall.” (Proverbs 16:18)
2. “A scoffer seeks wisdom and does not find it, but knowledge is easy to him who understands.” (Proverbs 14:6)
3. “A scoffer does not love one who corrects him, nor will he go to the wise.” (Proverbs 15:12)
4. “The devising of foolishness is sin, and the scoffer is an abomination to men.” (Proverbs 24:9)
5. “Strike a scoffer, and the simple will become weary; rebuke one who has understanding and he will discern knowledge.” (Proverbs 19:25)
6. “Judgments are prepared for scoffers, and beatings for the backs of fools.” (Proverbs 19:29)
7. “Cast out the scoffer, and contention will leave; yes, strife and reproach will cease.” (Proverbs 22:10)
8. “A haughty look, a proud heart, and the plowing of the wicked are sin.” (Proverbs 21:4)
9. “Scoffers set a city aflame, but wise men turn away wrath.” (Proverbs 29:8)
10. “Everyone proud in heart is an abomination to the LORD; though they join forces, none will go unpunished.” (Proverbs 16:5)
11. “By pride comes nothing but strife, but with the well-advised is wisdom.” (Proverbs 13:10)
12. “When the scoffer is punished, the simple is made wise; but when the wise is instructed, he receives knowledge.” (Proverbs 21:11)

Perhaps one of the most powerful verses in the Book of Proverbs that demonstrates a more complete understanding of pride, arrogance, haughtiness, or self-focused rashness is as follows: "The fear of the LORD is to hate evil; pride and arrogance and the evil way, and the perverse mouth I hate." (Proverbs 8:13, NKJV) An expanded translation of this verse could with integrity read: "The fear of the LORD is to strongly express one's utter hatred for evil, which defined more fully includes an arrogant, haughty spirit, an all-inclusive self-focused pride, a life-style that is contrary to holiness, and a full range of unrighteous conduct characteristic of a depraved world." And that kind of a spirit is what Christians should not only resist, but implore God's gracious help in never letting it lodge within the heart and life.

Now, we move to a second character word for this Devotional. It is the word "Schemer." The Book of Proverbs describes a person who spends time conniving and scheming to avoid the demands of God and society on his life, and to get the most for the least. It is the key verse, Proverbs 24:8 that gives to us the name of such a person: a schemer. We read as noted above: "Whoever plots evil will be known as a schemer. The schemes of folly are sin, and people detest a mocker." (Proverbs 24:8-9; TNIV) Some translations such as the Revised Standard Version (RSV) and the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) use the term mischief-maker. The Authorized, or King James Version uses the term a mischievous person. The New King James Version, together with the Holman Christian Standard Bible, and Today's New International Version use the word "schemer." The nuances of these various terms are not as important as some might think. What is clear here, is that Schemers and Scoffers are obviously closely related in their character.

What then, is meant by the denominating term Schemer? The term itself can be positively applied to a person who draws up plans for action in a given situation. The word Schemer as used in the Proverbs and generally in life today, refers to a person who is involved in making secret or underhanded plans. A Schemer is often thought of as person who makes or devises secret plans designed to get some benefit for himself or herself. In the context of this Devotional thus far, Schemers and Scoffers are obviously closely related in their character.

What does King Solomon and his colleagues in writing Proverbs say about a Schemer?

"A violent man entices his neighbor, and leads him in a way that is not good. He winks his eye to devise perverse things; he purses his lips and brings about evil." (Proverbs 16:29-30; NKJV)

The Bible makes it clear that a schemer is sometimes identified by body language. Different cultures have different physical gestures or even clothing expressions that identify or create confidence or concern. Body language will often disclose a person's true intent. In both ancient Israel as well as in modern America a certain kind of wink suggests that something unsavory is going on. Ancient Israel also used pursed lips (lips compressed together and pushed forward) to communicate scorn for another person. However, the point of Proverbs 16:29-30 is not to teach about the gestures of ancient Israel. It is for us in this time of world history. Shunning someone, refusing to shake the hand that is extended, pointedly ignoring someone with whom we may have a disagreement, unpleasant facial expressions – and many other body language expressions. The point is to warn us not to be taken in by the appeal to our ego with gestures that communicate our real agenda being anything less than the will of God for our lives. Another characteristic of the schemer is damage done by his or her words. Here we turn to another of the Proverbs.

"The heart of the righteous studies how to answer, but the mouth of the wicked pours forth evil." (Proverbs 15:28)

In this Proverb the Bible compares the mouth of the wicked person to a contaminated spring that gushes forth harm and danger. The righteous and wise person will think about the effects of the words to be spoken before speaking. A righteous person will refuse to speak words that bring harm, but the schemer has no such consideration. He or she is simply self-focused, and intends evil, either intentionally or intentionally to the other person if indeed that will bring personal satisfaction to himself or herself. In other words, personal opinion will be made known regardless of the cost to others or to himself or herself.

The entire matter of how the Lord deals with the schemer may be found in the following:

"The tongue of the righteous is choice silver; the heart of the wicked is worth little." (Proverbs 10:20)

The terms choice silver and worth little are obvious opposites. The words righteous and wicked are also obvious opposites. But are the terms tongue and heart opposites? Not exactly. While Hebrew parallelism should produce either a parallel or an opposite, here the Proverb stretches it a little to make a point. The words of the wicked are the products of the wicked mind. They are the products of evil intentions. Words are the products of the heart. Therefore, the management of one's mouth is one of the great challenges of the Christian life. James 3:2-12 makes this abundantly clear.

Scoffers and Schemers! A teaching Devotional that probably doesn't bring a warm, spiritually fuzzy feeling in our hearts but it is a part of the teaching of the Word of God designed to correct, motivate, and direct in our lives. The requirement? The enabling teaching and guiding of the Holy Spirit! Only He can make our words be "choice silver" and our associations with others Christ-honoring at all times. Let us pray daily for that special guidance of the Holy Spirit, keeping our words sweet, because as a friend of mine of many years ago said, "tomorrow we may have to eat them!"

In 1973 Stephen R. Adams wrote the lyrics and composed the music for this familiar song that needs to be sung in our churches.

WHERE THE SPIRIT OF THE LORD IS

Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is peace;

Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is love.

There is comfort in life's darkest hour.

There is light and life; there is help and power

In the Spirit, in the Spirit of the Lord.