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Bad Company Corrupts Good Character

1: 10-19

A proverb is a short and memorable saying designed to be our blueprint for living in the world that ADONAI has created. It is important to note that proverbs are not promises; they are generally true principles, all other things being equal.

For the first time we are introduced to the metaphor of **the path**. As we shall see, this image will be developed in a way that involves the idea of two possible **paths**, one **godly** and one **evil**. Here, **the son** is being warned to stay off **the path** of those who are trying to make **him** involved in their **evil** dealings. **The parents** have heard and obeyed the instruction of **Moses** (see the commentary on **Deuteronomy**, [to see link click Bw - Sh'ma Isra'el](#)). The concept of **obeying your parents** starts in **the Torah** (see **Deuteronomy Bp - Honor Your Parents**), and continues in the B'rit Chadashah (see **Ephesians By - The Responsibilities of Children and Parents: The submission of children**). But what will **the children** do with this teaching?²⁸

The son's allegiance to the family's inherited world view must be clearly set apart from that of **the gang** because **bad company ruins good character (First Corinthians 15:33)**. This timeless principle can also be applied to all of us no matter what age or generation. Peer pressure, or going along with **the crowd**, can lead an otherwise **good** person into **bad** behavior. In warning against **the wicked sinners, the father** gives **wisdom** to **the son**, exposing **their** schemes. Unlike **the father**, who represents **wisdom's** traditional world view, **the sinners** represent a counterfeit **gang** that has no **fear of ADONAI** (see **AI - The Fear of ADONAI is the Beginning of Wisdom**). The supposed gains of **the wicked** are merely counterfeits of the blessings of **the wise**. **The father's** warning is based upon **the fear of ADONAI**, and the certainty that **Ha'Shem** will uphold justice (**16:5**), not the counterfeit "wisdom" of **the world** (see the commentary on **First Corinthians An - The Foolishness of Worldly Wisdom**).²⁹



Introduction (1:10): My son, if sinners entice you, do not give in to them (1:10 Hebrew). That this crime is treated first is an indication of its prevalence. The prophet Hosea, in particular, denounced the existence of organized gangs and bandits (Hosea 4:2, 6:9, and 7:1). The verb **entice** (Hebrew: *pathah*) is related to the noun **simpleminded** (Hebrew: *pethi*) seen in the prologue (1:4). It is also used by **the Philistines** when trying to enlist **Samson's** new bride in **their** plot to discover the meaning of the riddle (**Judges 14:15**). **Jeremiah** also uses the verb to accuse **ADONAI** of **enticing him** into **his** role as **the prophet** of judgment (**Jeremiah 20:7**). All these instances also carry the connotation of deception. **The parents** are warning **the son** against the attraction that **the violent gang** of **sinners** represents, because under the surface of the attraction is deception. **They** look like **they** will plunder others, but in reality, **they** will only plunder **themselves** and anyone associated with **them**.³⁰

Let's understand two things here. First, who are **the sinners**? Every one of us is a **sinner**. Even **the wise father-figure** speaking here is a **sinner**. So who are **the "sinners"** he is warning against? The structure of the Hebrew noun suggests habitual, chronic **sinners**. Bullying is how some people make their way through life. In the extreme, this kind of person is a professional criminal. The key to his human profile is anyone who gets ahead by his own devices, anyone who is out for number one. They are **the "sinners"** whom we must be aware of. You will encounter them. Secondly, note how this scenario actually plays out in our lives. This **father** is not wasting **his** breath. **He** is telling **his son**, "When **people-like-this** come to you, not *if they* do but *when they* do, here's what to do . . ." **The father-figure** in our passage knows what **his son** will experience, and **he** warns **him**. What do all of us inevitably run into? If not an urban **gang**, some self-centered, narcissistic back-

stabber?³¹

Sinners' temptation (1:11-14): The temptation consists of two couplets: the proposition to join **them** in **their bloody** butchery (**verses 11-12**), and **their** enticements for doing so (**verses 13-14**). **Verse 11** exposes **their** thorough preparation for **their** blatant crime in **verse 12**. **Verse 13** exposes **their** corruption, and **verse 14** **their** sinister brotherhood.³²

The parents even take on the voice of **the sinners** who try to **entice their son**. **If they** say: **Come along with us; let's lie in wait for someone's blood, let's ambush some harmless soul (1:11 NIV)**. **Their** cowardice is suggested by the fact that **they ambush their** innocent. **They** don't even give **their** victims a fighting chance. **Their** only object is to get rich at the expense of others. **The parents** continue to associate **the sinners** with the dark side.³³ **The criminals** assure **the novice** of swift success: **Let's swallow them alive, like the grave (see Af - Sh'ol); let's swallow the whole, like those who go down to the pit of death (1:12 NLT)**. **They swallow** up **their** victims as swiftly as **the grave swallows** up the dead. It is as if some innocent traveler falls unexpectedly into some deep **pit** somewhere and is utterly lost, never to be seen again. Just as **the grave** is never satisfied, so the evil of **the wicked** and **their** cruelty knows no end.

The motivation driving these addicted **sinners** is revealed as **they** confess: **We will get all sorts of valuable things and fill our houses with plunder (1:13 NIV)**. As **their** final pitch, **they** promise: **Throw in your lot with us, and we will share a common purse (1:14 ESV)**. **The sinners** claim to operate by a kind of "criminal code of conduct" when **they** say **they** will share **the plunder**. But the only "code" they live by is to get rich at the expense of others. **The parents** imply that while **the gang** wants **the son** to participate in the violence, and therefore benefit from the shared **bag of loot**, in reality, **they** will entangle **their** accomplice in guilt and ultimate retribution.

Fathers' warning (1:15-18): Exactly halfway through **his** teaching, **the father** shifts **his** focus from **the sinners** and **their** alluring lies to **his** own rebuttal. **He** matches **their** persuasive rhetoric with **his** own vivid images. **His** warning also consists of two couplets. The first issues the command to reject joining **the den of thieves** because justice will prevail (**verses 15-16**). The second argues **they** trap **themselves** in ensnaring others (**verses 17-18**).³⁴

We now turn to the words of **the parents** after the quotation of **the gang** leader.

They are blunt: **My son, do not go along with them, do not set foot on their paths (1:15 NIV)**. For the first of many times, we encounter the metaphor of **the path** of life. According to **Chapters 1-9**, there are two **paths**: a **wise** and good **path**, and a **foolish** and evil **path**. **The parents** here urge **their son** to stay on the **wise path**, while **the gang** tries to get **him** to follow **them** on **the evil path**. **The parents** do not leave **their** advice unsupported. In the rest of the **proverb** they tell **their son** why it's a bad idea to follow **the path** of **sinners**. **For their feet rush into evil, they are in a hurry to shed blood (1:16 NIV)**.

The next verse initiates an analogy that is based on the well-used image of **the bird** hunter who casts a **net** to catch **his prey** (for example **Psalms 91:3** and **124:7; Proverbs 6:5; Jeremiah 5:26; Hosea 9:8**). For **the net** to work, **it** has to be camouflaged. No **bird** is going to walk into a trap that can be clearly seen. Thus, as the verse states: **How useless to spread a net in full view of all the birds!**³⁵ **These men lie in wait for their own blood; they ambush only themselves (1:17-18 NIV)**! That is, in hunting and **robbing others**, **they** are only hurting **themselves** in the long run. Punishment usually catches up with the crime. Even if punishment doesn't catch the criminal, vengeance and rampant violence probably will. Violence produces violence. Therefore, in effect, **they** ambush **themselves** by ambushing others.³⁶

Conclusion (1:19): **The father** broadens the relevance of **his** teaching to **everyone** who fits this description: **Such is the end of everyone who goes after unjust gain; it takes away the lives of those who get it**. Such are the ways of everyone who is greedy for **unjust gain**. That includes money, of course, but much more. At its core, unjust gain succeeds by stepping over, or on, someone else. This can take many forms: bullies at school, computer hackers, Islamic terrorists, racists, political candidates stealing elections, intellectuals who rationalize violence in pursuit of their social utopia, and last, but not least, a faction splitting a **congregation** of **God**. And it only takes one person to get it going.³⁷ **There are six things that ADONAI hates, yes, seven that are detestable to Him (6:16 Hebrew)**, and one of them is a **false witness who pours out lies, and a person who stirs up descension in the congregation (6:19 Hebrew)**. **However, the sages are not against the pursuit of profits through honest, hard work**. Many of **the Proverbs** that follow actually encourage hard work with the intention of gaining profits (**3:9-10, 22:22 to 23:11, 28:1-11, and 28:12-28**).

Throughout the book of **Proverbs**, **the parents**, and in particular **the father**, are

sources of authority addressing **the son**. There are good reasons for us to understand, for demands of this **book** to extend beyond boys and girls, young men and women and include more mature adults. We all need to listen to the voice of **the parents** of **Proverbs** as **they** instruct **their son**. However, it is important to understand that the text is not telling all children to listen without question to their **parents**. **The parents** in the book of **Proverbs** are not real people but an ideal couple. **They** are **wise parents**, and not everyone's **parents** today are **wise** in the sense that **Proverbs** describes **wisdom**. In short, **Proverbs** asks us without reservation to listen to these **parents**, and to our own **parents** as **they** also reflect divine wisdom, and we will do so as we proceed. After all, the rewards are great. Here and elsewhere, wonderful rewards are presented as the motivation for following **the godly path**. How are we to understand the rewards in their original setting and today? As will become increasingly obvious, the blessings that flow from **wise** behavior are neither magical nor absolutely guaranteed. These are not promises, as such, but **God's** blueprint for living.³⁸

*Dear heavenly **Father**, praise **You** for how wonderfully gracious, loving and kind **You** are! Life is so much better to have a relationship with **You**, than to have **foolish** friends. They are nice for a short while, but **foolish** friends are only looking out for themselves. But **You**, almighty **Heavenly Father**, never fail and are always there to help and to guide me. **For God Himself has said: I will never leave you or forsake you (Hebrews 13:5c)**. **You** promised to place **Your Presence** within those who have placed their **trust** in **You**. **Yeshua answered and said to him: If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word. My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our dwelling with him (Jn 14:23)**.*

*Everyone enjoys having friends and being liked-but when the choice is: have friends who are in the world – or be alone with only **ADONAI** as one's **Friend**; it is so much **wiser** to be alone with **You** as the only friend- our wonderful **wise** and faithful **Heavenly Father**, who is always with me! Even if **You** were my only friend, **Your** friendship is beyond measure and worth more than all the money in the world!*

Trusting You, God, is like having an army of friends, for **You** are Almighty and All-Powerful. Walking with **You** means that there is always a friend right with me who can be reached to talk to right away – no waiting for a return call, no waiting for a text. People often get busy and cannot be reached to talk to; but **You** are always available 24/7 to guide and to talk to (**Hebrews 13:5c**). **But know that ADONAI has set apart the godly for His own. ADONAI will hear when I call to Him (Psalms 4:3)**.



Thank **You** so much for the peace that **You** give that fills me when I **trust** and obey **Your Word**. **You keep in perfect peace one whose mind stays on You, because he trusts in You. Trust in ADONAI forever, for the LORD Adonai is a Rock of ages (Isaiah 26:3-4).**

Even when your child is all alone, your steadfast love is always there with him to guide, and to comfort. **Thus says Adonai the Maker . . . ADONAI is His Name. “Call to Me, and I will answer you - I will tell you great and hidden things, which you do not know” (Jeremiah 33:2a-3).** Thank **You** so very much for **Your** continual company with those who believe in **You (Hebrews 13:5c)**. It is such a joy and pleasure to walk with **You** in obedience. In **Messiah Yeshua’s** holy **Name** and power of **His** Resurrection. Amen