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## Resolving Conflicts

### 25: 15-27

**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.**



**Introduction (25:15): Patience can persuade a ruler, and tender speech can break bones (25:15 NLT).** This **proverb** tells the reader that tough things are won over not by force or a show of force, but by patience and tenderness. This is the exact opposite of what might be expected. A military commander is presumably a tough individual, one who is accustomed to dealing with confrontation. The unexpected, **“patience”** wins him over. In the second colon, one might expect the best results from a harsh word, but here it is the **tender speech**. Following this introduction, there are **four proverb pairs** and **one triad**.

**The first proverb pair (25:16-17): Do you like honey? Don’t eat too much, or it will make you sick; so don’t visit your neighbors too often, or you will wear out your welcome (25:16-17 NLT).** These two **proverbs** are joined by their second cola, each warning against overdoing good things and the bad consequences that follow such behavior. The first warning has to do with **eating** too much of a good thing. **Honey** tastes deliciously sweet, to be sure, but those who **eat** too much of it will find that their stomachs can’t keep it down. It will make them sick. This principle is not tied just to **honey**, but also applies to any food.

**Overeating** or overdrinking will sicken, not energize. The second colon has to do with the relationship with one's neighbors. Again, it is not that the sage recommends having nothing to do with one's neighbors. It is a matter of overdoing it and, as our own expression states it: **you will wear out your** welcome. A person who does so will become a nuisance rather than a friend or a help. While both of these **proverbs** have their applications in a particular aspect of life (**eating** and social relationships), they still raise the question of application even more generally. Too much of almost any good thing will have negative consequences.<sup>479</sup>

**The proverb triad (25:18-20): Giving false testimony is as harmful as hitting them with a club, wounding them with a sword, or shooting them with a sharp arrow. Putting confidence in an unreliable person in times of crisis is like chewing with a broken tooth or walking with a lame foot (25:18-19 Hebrew).** These two **proverbs** are united by **their** form more than **their** content. **They** both begin with a list of items that will be implicitly compared, thus forming a metaphor, with something in **their** second colon. It's the item in the second colon that is the object of the teaching.

**Verse 18** lists three weapons: **club, sword, and arrow.** **These** may be used to hurt, or even kill, another person. They are compared to someone who **gives false testimony** against **their neighbor.** The language in **Proverbs 25:18b** is similar to that in the ninth commandment (see the commentary on **Exodus, to see link click [Ds - You Shall Not Give False Testimony Against Your Neighbor](#)**). The teaching against **bearing false witness** is pervasive throughout **Proverbs (14:5 and 25, etc).** It is likely that the primary setting of the teaching is in the courtroom. **False testimony** could result in penalties against the neighbors that would really hurt **them.** In an extreme case, where capital punishment might be called for, it is conceivable that it could even result in someone's death. The story of the trumped-up case against **Naboth** is a good example of the latter (see the commentary on **Elijah and Elisha Az - King Ahab and Naboth's Vineyard**), not to speak of **the false witnesses** brought to testify falsely against **Yeshua.**

**Verse 19** presents a list of two items, body parts, that are disabling and producing pain. The **proverb** points out that an unreliable or unfaithful person is just like that when trouble arises. Just as **a broken tooth** will let you down and hurt when you are trying to eat, or **a lame foot** lets you down and hurts when you are trying to walk, so will such a person who **gives false testimony.** The comparison invites us to think about the character of the people we associate with and assess whether they will help or hurt when trouble arises.

**Singing cheerful songs to a person with a heavy heart is like removing someone's coat in cold weather or pouring vinegar in an open wound (25:20 NLT).** The proverb sets up a comparison that functions as a metaphor. The intention is to explain the effects of trying to be **cheerful** in the midst of trouble. It makes things worse to sing a **cheerful** song when someone is down and depressed. **Removing someone's coat** certainly doesn't help to warm a cold person. **Vinegar** also reacts violently when mixed with soda. **Cheerfulness** just aggravates a troubled heart. The sage instructs us how to approach a depressed person.

Our natural inclination is to want to hurt those who hurt us. We want revenge against our enemies. Ancient tribal society tended to be extreme in its methods of revenge. Indeed, institutions like **the cities of refuge** (see the commentary **Numbers Gk - Cities of Refuge**), and even the principle of **an eye for an eye** (see the commentary on **Exodus Ea - A Life for a Life, an Eye for an Eye**), were attempts to curb excessive vengeance. But this **proverb** presents a remarkable statement of compassion toward enemies that works against this natural inclination. Instead of harming opponents when their weakness presents an opportunity we are to help them! Other **proverbs** suggest kindness toward enemies (**14:29, 19:11, 20:22, 24:17** and **29**), but this one takes the idea the furthest. This **proverb** is quoted by **Paul** in **Romans 12:20** to discourage taking revenge against enemies (see **Romans Dd - Walking in Love**). **Yeshua** cites the **eye for an eye** teaching of the Torah and presents an even more radical idea about retaliation: **Love your enemies (Matthew 5:38-38)**.<sup>480</sup>

Forgiveness is not forgetting. People who try to forget, find that they cannot. **ADONAI** says He will **remember no more of our sins (Hebrews 10:17)**, but **YHVH**, being omniscient, cannot forget. **Remember no more** means that **God** will never use our past against us (**Psalms 103:12**). Forgetting may be a result of forgiveness, but it is never the means of forgiveness. When we bring up the past against others, we haven't forgiven them (see the commentary on **First Corinthians Dd - Love Keeps No Record of Wrongs**). Forgiveness is a choice, a crisis of the will. Since **God** requires us to forgive, it is something we can do. **God** would never require us to do something we cannot do. Forgiveness is agreeing to live with the consequences of another person's sin. Forgiveness is costly; we pay the price for evil we forgive. Yet you're willing to live with those consequences whether you want to or not; your only choice is whether you will do so in the bitterness of unforgiveness or the freedom of forgiveness.

**The second proverb pair (25:21-22):** Grace is simply kindness extended to another person regardless of merit . . . or lack of it. Grace is showing kindness without first considering whether or not that person deserves it. **Hezekiah's men** who copied **Solomon's proverbs** urge us: **If your enemy is hungry, give him food to eat, and if he is thirsty, give him water to drink (25:21 NIV)**. In the ancient Near-East, it was customary to extend hospitality to travelers, to friends and strangers alike. **ADONAI**, however, called **His** people to extend the same courtesy to **enemies**, to those who have harmed you without repenting and/or would take every opportunity to harm you again. **Ha'Shem** is not asking us to be fools. We need to protect ourselves from any further harm. But we can still be kind. We can still give grace. In the words of **the Master: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you (Luke 6:27-28)**.

The following **proverb** suggests a potential result of extending unmerited kindness to our **enemy**, which is expressed in a curious figure of speech: **In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head, and ADONAI will reward you (25:22 NIV)**. **The rabbis interpreted this to say, "ADONAI will cause him to make peace with you."** No one knows for certain the origin of this odd and ancient metaphor. Some suggest it points to an ancient Egyptian practice of carrying a pan of coals on one's head as a sign of contrition. But I believe the phrase is merely an idiom describing humility, not unlike our expression, "He came to me with his hat in his hand." In ancient times, allowing a fire to go out was seen as the epitome of irresponsibility. The humiliating experience of walking home from a neighbor's house with a pan of coals probably gave rise to this word picture for humility. Following **Solomon's** advice can literally melt the hardest of hearts and turn enemies into friends. It is important to note that **proverbs** are not promises; they are generally true principles, all other things being equal. However, nothing can rival unmerited kindness for its ability to disarm our enemies. Hopefully, our godly conduct and our humility will bring about humility and repentance in return.<sup>481</sup> Our **Lord** exemplified and established this principle. Through **His** life and death for **His** enemies, **He** reconciled them to **God** (see the commentary on **Second Corinthians Be - The Ministry of Reconciliation**).

**The third proverb pair (25:23-24): As surely as a north wind brings rain, and so a gossiping tongue causes anger (25:23 NLT)**. This **proverb** teaches us about the effects of **gossip**, which **Proverbs** has much to say (**11:13, 16:28, 18:8, 20:19, 26:20** and **26:22**). Once **gossip** is discovered, it produces **anger** in

those toward whom it is directed. The implicit warning of **the proverb**, then, is to inform people that **gossip** may well result in **the gossiper** being the object of some rather intense **anger**.<sup>482</sup> **It is better to live alone in the corner of an attic than in a house shared with a nagging wife (25:24 HCSB)**. This **proverb** about **the nagging wife** is identical to **21:9** (see **Cw - Justice is a Joy to the Righteous: Janus: the nagging wife**). **Nagging** from **one's wife** is as unwelcome as **rain** from **a north wind** or words of **gossip**. **The nagging wife** presents a striking contrast to the sexually satisfying **wife** (see **Bc - Be Faithful to Your Spouse**).<sup>483</sup>

**The fourth proverb pair (25:25-26):** These **proverbs** compare the perseverance of a weary person, to the wavering righteous person's lack of perseverance. **Good news from far away is like cold water to the thirsty (25:25 NLT)**. If one is **far away from** family and friends, one will normally have a great desire. **Receiving good news** is really comforting. The metaphor that begins **the proverb** shows that the intense desire for **good news** and the comfort upon hearing **the good news** are the object of **the proverb**. What a relief! It's like a drink of **cold water** on a hot, and dry, day. Not only that, this **proverb** could be used as a motivation to *send good news* to a loved one **far away**. **But if the righteous give in to the wicked, it's like polluting a fountain or muddying a clear spring (25:26 Hebrew)**. According to **10:30: The righteous will never be moved, but the wicked will not remain in the Land**. And **12:3** says: **Wickedness never brings stability, but the godly have deep roots**. But this verse envisions **the righteous giving in to the wicked**. This is not the way things are supposed to work! However, it is important to note that **proverbs** are not guaranteed. This **proverb** acknowledges that sometimes **the righteous** will be treated poorly in favor of **the godless**. Yet, that doesn't make it right. It's like a poisoned **water source**.<sup>484</sup>

**Conclusion (25:27):** **Just as it's not good to eat too much honey (or it will make you sick), it's also not good to seek out honors for yourself (25:27 NLT)**. Here learn that excess, **seeking out honors for yourself**, as well as **eating too much honey**, both lead to problems. This verse brings the whole unit to a close (see **Df - Proverbs of Solomon Copied by Hezekiah's Men**).