

# Answering Before Hearing

*Proverbs 18:13*

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As is often the case in Proverbs, Solomon is taking a look at some of the things that affect our everyday lives, things that each of us struggle with on a regular basis. We have all, to one degree or another or at one time or another, done just what Solomon has laid before us here. We all, at times, have fallen into the act of “bad-behavior” he speaks of here. We speak before we ought to instead of holding our peace until our contribution to the conversation is warranted.

There has actually been an ongoing set of things that have illustrated the matter of how pride inserts itself into the lives of those who are taken by it. Verse 12 spoke a bit about the haughtiness of the prideful man. There were actually quite a number of illustrations of those who might be considered “prideful” (or haughty) men throughout the Bible. For instance, we could talk about Lucifer (Ezekiel 28:11-17); or Jezebel (2 Kings 9:30-33). We could talk about Goliath (1 Sam. 17:8-47); Nebuchadnezzar (Dan. 4) or even Belshazzar (Dan. 5).

There were (are) also examples of those who put humility before human honor: Joseph surely did this (Gen. 37-44). So also did Gideon (Judges 6). David demonstrated this idea also (1 Samuel 17-18). We can notice that Solomon, the wisest man in history, also put humility before honor (1 Kings 3). Of course, our Lord Jesus Christ is perhaps the best example of putting humility before human honor!

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The point that Solomon is seeking to make in this particular verse is that a person ought to be willing to hold his opinion to himself until he has the fullness of a matter with which to form his opinion.

Just to see the concrete form of what Solomon has in mind, let’s look at a couple examples:

1. **David**, though, as we noted, handled himself rightly, did, on occasion, “answered before hearing” (2 Samuel 16:4; 19:24-30)
  - David was one of the great and godly examples of those who were greatly interested in hearing and doing the will of God.
2. **Ahasuerus** did as well (Esther 3:10)
  - It is interesting that, had Ahasuerus NOT been willing to listen and hear what information he needed to have, there would have a

greatly different turnout for Esther and the others, the Jews might never had gotten back to the land!

3. **Darius** did this as well (Dan. 6:9)

- Had he not, Daniel is another who likely would not have gotten back to Jerusalem.

4. **The Magistrates** (Acts 16:37-39)

- When Paul refused to depart from Philippi secretly as the Magistrates wanted him to, they listened and then let him out!

It is ALWAYS a good thing for one to refrain from just “saying” what they think or giving their opinion and putting their thoughts about what ought to be out for others to hear. What is godly is for us to listen and take in what we hear, remembering that God desires for us use all that we hear as the fodder for our decisions, not just our own thoughts.

To summarize a bit by way of interpretation. - The meaning of this proverb is quite clear. It condemns prejudging a matter before hearing what is to be said on both sides. It may be applied to private as well as public judgments. Prejudice is folly, and folly both is and leads to shame. This needs to be (or become) a habit for us! We are NOT the end-all and be-all of wisdom!

As we virtually always find to be the case, there are a number of illustrations (some we’ve already mentioned) for us to think of –

- Solomon did himself what he recommended to kings, and in the matter of the two harlots searched out the truth (25:2).
- But David, in the matter of Ziba and Mephibosheth, pronounced a hasty, perhaps an unjust judgment.
- The magistrates at Philippi were made ashamed of their hasty proceedings against Paul and Silas.
- What was the real cause of the hatred and persecution of our Lord but prejudice leading to a foregone conclusion against Him, as He Himself testified (Luke 22:67, 68)?

Thinking by way of application - Not only to the office of the judge and magistrate does this advice pertain. In their case, indeed, armed as they are with power, too much pains cannot be taken to sift evidence, so as to get at the truth before pronouncing a decision. An official who, through partiality, or impatience, or laziness, or conceit of his own understanding, concludes a case without having fairly heard it, is an “unjust judge,” and shame will be his award. But for private life, as well as public, the rule is a salutary one. It is bad manners (to say the least) to “interrupt men in the midst of their talk” (Ecclesiasticus. 11:8). But more, it leads to very grave misunderstandings. I may thus be hurried into doing a friend injustice, misinterpreting an argument, plunging into a wrong conclusion. Half the scandal circulated has its origin in imperfectly heard or comprehended statements of fact. Of the mistakes made in life a large proportion arise from hastily formed judgments. What is error and heresy but mostly partial truth? What is party spirit but the offspring of one-sided prejudice? Under the influence of this I may, as a master, award praise and

blame where equally undeserved, to the injury of all concerned. As a teacher, I may deprive others of much truth by not presenting it in its due proportions. As an individual member of the Church, I may practically not rise above the sectarian. But for what purpose is education, if not to enlarge the mind, to strengthen the reasoning powers, in a word, to correct prejudice? And what gift of the Spirit is more to be sought than the promised one of “a right judgment in all things”? Having this, I shall be preserved from the grievous fault of forming precipitate and ill-considered opinions to my own damage and that of others, to the perpetration of folly, to the reaping of shame.