

# Rewarding Fools and Transgressors

Proverbs 26:10

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*The great God that formed all things both rewardeth the fool, and rewardeth transgressors.” – Proverbs 26:10.*

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The Scripture is very, very clear about the truth that God watches over all men and will hold all men accountable for their actions when the disobey and/or follow after their own minds and hearts in disobedience to what they know is His desires. This chapter, in particular, speaks of the various “kinds” of those who pursue after disobedience to God’s desires and ord. Singled out are

- the fool, 1–12;
- the sluggard, 13–16;
- the meddler, the tale-bearer, 17–20, 22–23;
- the contentious, 21;
- the hater, 24–26; and
- the liar, 28.

Just a verse before Solomon had made an instructive analogy for us to consider: “A proverb in the mouth of fools is like a thorn in the hand of the drunkard” because when a fool uses a proverb, he is insensitive to the fact that it applies principally to himself. The idea present in this verse is much the same but Solomon wants us to be sure that we understand that it is God Himself that meets out the results of the actions of those who do not handle issues that come to them wisely.

Something we should note is that the Heb. language is obscure here, so as to produce many interpretations of what this is saying. Since it is impossible to know exactly what it said in the original, it is impossible to know exactly what it means. The translation might be: “*Much brings forth from itself all; but the reward and the wages of the fool pass away.*” This could mean, reasonably, that although he who possesses much and has great ability may be able to accomplish all he wants, that is not the case when he makes use of the work of fools, who not only do not accomplish anything, but destroy everything. Likewise it might mean “As an archer wounds everyone, so is he who hires a fool or hires those who pass by.”

Essentially, in context with what has just gone on in the prior verses, Solomon is saying that Hiring a fool or a stranger is a dangerous thing to do. The one who hires such has been compared to “an archer who wounds at random” (*raḥ m<sup>e</sup>hōlēl-kōl*). The line is difficult because it can be translated in different ways: *raḥ* can mean “archer,” “master,” or “much”; and *mehōlēl* could mean “wound” or “bring forth.” The possibilities include the following: “A master performs all”; “A master injures all”; “An archer wounds all”; or simply “Much produces (wounds) all” (see Toy, p. 476, for the variety of interpretations). The line must express something that is negative—an archer/master who injures/wounds everything. Anyone who hires a fool or a

stranger gives them ample opportunity to do great damage. The undisciplined hireling will have the same effect as an archer's shooting at random. Actually, this verse seems to be a summary of what has been built over the prior verses.

Summarizing the interpretation in context it seems clear that no proverb of Solomon's has caused so much division of opinion as this one. To enumerate the various versions of it would only perplex the reader. Suffice it, that as it stands in our text it is quite irreconcilable with the original. Nor is the marginal rendering much to be preferred. The best critics are divided between the two following, either of which renders good "*counsel.*" "*As the archer that woundeth every one, so is he who hireth the fool, and he who hireth every passer-by (or vagrant).*" Or this, "*A skilful man, or master workman, may produce or form anything, but he that hireth a fool hireth vagabonds.*" The warning seems to be in either case against the danger and folly of employing at random any sort of agents for a work which, under proper supervision, may be well executed.

As is usual, there are some helpful illustrations for us to think through:

- Out of Gideon's whole body of recruits there was found an immense majority, who, though hired for war, would have proved unfit and therefore injurious in the day of battle (Judg. 7).
- Solomon exemplified the second of these two precepts in his own person by sending to Tyre to fetch Hiram to be his master workman, for making the holy vessels of the Temple (1 Kings 7:13, 40).
- In the NT, we can see that those ill-affected Jews at Thessalonica, who seem to have hired "loose fellows, (Acts 17:5), did they not resemble the archer shooting at random, who wounds everybody while aiming at some one?

Thinking in the direction of application - Too much care cannot be taken in the selection of agencies of whatever kind. It should be made a matter of conscience on the part of any one in authority of whatever degree. For what untold mischief may be the result should matter of grave moment be entrusted to men who are incompetent or of bad repute! As envoys, they may embroil nations in war; as overseers of property, strikes and imbroglios may result from their administration; as ministers of religion or teachers, their influence may be most destructive. Let me lay this to heart, and in any appointment, I may have a hand in making beware of accepting any one who may offer, and make the choice of fit men a subject of prayer and inquiry. And if the matter be one that concerns myself only, it will be my interest to choose "a skillful man" to do the work at a higher rate of payment, rather than one of those vagrant workmen who are dear at any price. Or it may not be amiss to remember that a wise man will rather do his work himself than put it into the hands of fools who may mar it all. In good work done for God there breathes an inspiration from above (Exod. 36:1).