

## PROVERBS 17

## THE TRUE FRIEND AND BROTHER

**Seeking love! (verse 9)**

*“He that covereth a transgression seeketh love: but he that repeateth a matter separateth very friends.”*

“Seeketh love!” What a beautiful expression that ought to be kept in mind! It shows a delight in the atmosphere of love, which is man’s highest elevation in communion with his God. It does not simply imply the mere exercise of love, where it is presented; but also the searching and making opportunity for it! A forbearing spirit is a fine manifestation of this. In a world full of selfishness, our motives are often misconstrued or misunderstood, we meet with cold reserve instead of glowing confidence, prejudice builds a wall against Christian fellowship, wounded pride wishes to return unkindnesses with contempt, resentment stirs up recrimination, and disappointment kindles morbid suspicion. But here is the noble field for Christian victory! Instead of being resentful, we ought to cover the transgression with a robe of love – with that same act of amnesty by which we ourselves have been saved, and by which the most aggravated transgressions and the most unprovoked injuries have been covered in everlasting forgetfulness. The repeating of a matter that ought to be disremembered has often separated friends, by uncovering a forgotten quarrel. Mischief may not be intended; but to amuse ourselves with the follies or weaknesses of our brethren is sinful trifling, and it is very injurious to relationships. “Tattlers and busybodies” are justly described as “speaking things which they ought not” (1 Tim. 5:13). A disciplined tongue – where it is found – is indeed a restraining mercy to the Church!

**The true Friend and Brother (verse 17)**

*“A friend loveth at all times, and a brother is born for adversity.”*

This beautiful picture of friendship has been drawn by moralists, sentimentalists, and poets. But the reality is only truly found in instances where Divine grace has melted away natural self-interest into unselfish love! If virtue is the best ground of friendship, then this most heavenly virtue of true love is the firmest ground of all. What passes under the name of “love” these days is too often – as one man has described it – only “brittle stuff.” Fickle excitement cools by distance, or by the coldness of the one whom we call our friend. Worldly degradation of circumstances converts this cheap “love” into indifference or even hatred. The friend or relative who has strayed off the right path is forsaken, instead of being followed and watched over, with every opportunity being made for prayer and an attempt to reclaim him. But the true friend “loveth at all times” – through both the good and the bad. He is not ashamed of poverty or of a prison. In hard times or circumstances, the adversity will cement these friends together with real and authentic love. And the loving friend now becomes a brother





“born for adversity.” Such was the love of Joseph for his brothers – unshaken by changes in circumstances, and unabated by others’ ingratitude. Such also was the firm clinging of Ruth to her desolate mother-in-law. Such was the identity of heart between David and Jonathan, and such was the affectionate sympathy of the beloved disciple for the mother of his Lord.

But truly, we must not look for perfection in our friendships and relationships, for even the best of men are only men at their best. For example, surely we cannot doubt the sincerity of Christ’s disciples, but we are humbled and instructed and warned by their frailty – for certainly it was frailty, and not willfulness nor hypocrisy. “Ye are they that have continued with me in my temptations” – that was their Master’s kind acknowledgment at the very moment of their infirmity, when “they all forsook him and fled!” But oh! It is to *Him* that we must look as the perfect Example! When we see the Son of God in our human nature, so that He might be our Friend and Brother; and when we hear that He is “not ashamed to call us brethren” (as He does in Ps. 22:22) – this is a mystery of friendship that is truly unsearchable! This Friend – and He alone – is worthy of our unlimited confidence! Such is the sympathy of His love: He is “born for adversity.” And such is the constancy of His love: it is “at all times,” even unto death; it is unaltered by the most cold returns; and we find it turning and bestowing a look of tenderness and power upon the disciple who uttered a triple denial, whom we surely would have excommunicated. Jesus is so united to us, that He is the Friend and the Brother Whom we truly need; for He is never nearer to us than when we are in our lowest depths of trouble. And although our glorified Brother is now in heaven, yet He is still “touched with the feeling of our infirmities,” and He is still “afflicted in all our afflictions.” Here is sympathy! Here, indeed, is a Brother born for adversity! Let all trembling believers trust Him at all times and in all places! They will then possess the happy art of living beyond the reach of all disappointment.

*Lord Jesus, we praise You as our true Friend and Brother, Who was indeed born for our adversity; for You took our human nature upon Yourself, so that You could satisfy the debt of sin that we owed to Almighty Justice. We thank You for not being ashamed to call us Your brethren! Amen.*