

Proverbs 12:23

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

A prudent man concealeth knowledge: but the heart of fools
proclaimeth foolishness.

Analysis

This proverb contrasts discretion with foolish display. "A prudent man concealeth knowledge" shows wisdom's restraint. Adam arum (אָדָם אַרֻם, a prudent/shrewd man) kosseh da'at (כֹּסֶה דָּאָת, conceals knowledge). Arum denotes shrewdness, craftiness, prudence—someone who thinks before acting. This person doesn't display all they know; they exercise discretion about when, how, and to whom they reveal understanding.

"But the heart of fools proclaimeth foolishness" presents unrestrained folly. Lev kesilim yiqra ivvelet (לֵב כְּסִילִים יִקְרָא אִוְלֵת, the heart of fools cries out foolishness). Fools cannot contain their ignorance—it erupts publicly. Their foolishness isn't hidden but proclaimed, broadcasted, advertised to all.

The proverb teaches strategic communication. Wisdom knows when to speak and when to remain silent. Ecclesiastes 3:7 teaches there's "a time to keep silence, and a time to speak." Amos 5:13 warns: "The prudent shall keep silence in that time; for it is an evil time." Jesus demonstrated this—sometimes explaining mysteries to disciples privately (Matthew 13:10-11), other times remaining silent before accusers (Matthew 26:63). Paul became all things to all people, adapting communication strategically (1 Corinthians 9:19-23). Fools, lacking self-control, expose their ignorance constantly. Wise believers speak truth in love, with grace and discretion (Colossians 4:6).

Historical Context

Ancient Near Eastern wisdom valued discretion, especially in royal courts where revealing information prematurely could have fatal consequences. Joseph's wisdom included knowing when to interpret dreams publicly versus privately. Daniel understood when to speak boldly to kings and when to remain silent. The prudent in Israel's society earned trust by not revealing secrets or displaying knowledge inappropriately. Conversely, fools who spoke without filter damaged relationships and opportunities.

Related Passages

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Study Questions

1. In what contexts should you exercise discretion about displaying your knowledge or opinions?
2. How can you balance the call to speak truth with the wisdom to remain silent at appropriate times?
3. What does it reveal about your heart when you feel compelled to constantly demonstrate your knowledge or correct others?

Interlinear Text

אִם	עַרְוִם	כִּסְה	דַּעַת	וְלִב	בְּסִילִיִּם
man	A prudent	concealeth	knowledge	but the heart	of fools
H120	H6175	H3680	H1847	H3820	H3684
יְקַבֵּל אֶת־	אֲחִילָהּ:				
proclaimeth	foolishness				
H7121	H200				

Additional Cross-References

Proverbs 13:16 (Parallel theme): Every prudent man dealeth with knowledge: but a fool layeth open his folly.

Proverbs 10:19 (Parallel theme): In the multitude of words there wanteth not sin: but he that refraineth his lips is wise.

Proverbs 11:13 (Parallel theme): A talebearer revealeth secrets: but he that is of a faithful spirit concealeth the matter.

Proverbs 10:14 (Parallel theme): Wise men lay up knowledge: but the mouth of the foolish is near destruction.

Proverbs 15:2 (Parallel theme): The tongue of the wise useth knowledge aright: but the mouth of fools poureth out foolishness.

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