

Proverbs 16:21

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

The wise in heart shall be called prudent: and the sweetness of the lips increaseth learning.

Analysis

The wise in heart shall be called prudent: and the sweetness of the lips increaseth learning. Lachakham-lev yiqqare navon (לַחֲכָמִים-לֵב יִקְרָא נָבוֹן, to the wise in heart will be called discerning). Wisdom earns a reputation for discernment. Umetoq sefatayim yosif leqach (וּמֵתוֹק שְׁפָתַיִם יוֹסִיף לִקְחָךְ, and sweetness of lips adds learning). Metoq (מֵתוֹק, sweetness) in speech increases (yasaf, יָסַף, add, increase) leqach (לִקְחָךְ, learning, instruction, persuasiveness). Wise hearts and pleasant speech combine to maximize influence and teaching effectiveness. Believers should speak truth in love (Ephesians 4:15), combining sound doctrine with gracious delivery (Colossians 4:6).

Historical Context

Ancient teachers' effectiveness depended on both content (wisdom) and delivery (pleasant speech). Harsh truth without grace alienated hearers. Empty pleasantries without wisdom wasted time. Effective instruction required both. Solomon demonstrated this combination in his wisdom writings. Jesus perfectly modeled it—full of grace and truth (John 1:14), speaking with authority yet attracting common people who heard Him gladly (Mark 12:37).

Related Passages

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Psalms 19:1 — Heavens declare God's glory

Study Questions

1. Do you have wisdom without pleasant delivery, or pleasant words without wisdom—or both?
2. How can you cultivate both wise content and gracious communication in your teaching and conversations?
3. What does 'sweetness of lips' that increases learning look like in gospel contexts (evangelism, discipleship, counseling)?

Interlinear Text

לְחָכְמָה	לֵב	יִקְרָא	נָבִיגִים	וּמִתְקָן	שֶׁפֶת יִמְ
The wise	in heart	shall be called	prudent	and the sweetness	of the lips
H2450	H3820	H7121	H995	H4986	H8193
יִסְיֶה	לִמְדָה:				
increaseth	learning				
H3254	H3948				

Additional Cross-References

Isaiah 50:4 (Parallel theme): The Lord GOD hath given me the tongue of the learned, that I should know how to speak a word in season to him that is weary: he wakeneth morning by morning, he wakeneth mine ear to hear as the learned.

Proverbs 15:7 (Parallel theme): The lips of the wise disperse knowledge: but the heart of the foolish doeth not so.

Proverbs 27:9 (Parallel theme): Ointment and perfume rejoice the heart: so doth the sweetness of a man's friend by hearty counsel.

James 3:17 (Parallel theme): But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy.

John 7:46 (Parallel theme): The officers answered, Never man spake like this man.

Luke 4:22 (Parallel theme): And all bare him witness, and wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth. And they said, Is not this Joseph's son?

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