

Proverbs 17:18

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

A man void of understanding striketh hands, and becometh surety in the presence of his friend.

Analysis

A man void of understanding striketh hands, and becometh surety in the presence of his friend. Adam chasar-lev toqe'a khaf (אָדָם חָסַר-לֵב תּוֹקַע כָּף, a man lacking heart strikes palms). Striking hands symbolized legally binding agreements. Orev aravah lifney re'ehu (עֹרֵב אֲרָבָה לִפְנֵי רֵעֵהוּ, becoming surety before his friend). Becoming guarantor for another's debt was financially dangerous. Proverbs repeatedly warns against this practice (6:1-5, 11:15, 17:18, 20:16, 22:26-27, 27:13). While generosity is good, financially entangling yourself with others' debts is unwise. Give generously but don't obligate yourself legally for others' responsibilities.

Historical Context

Ancient financial systems included debt slavery—those unable to pay debts became slaves. Sureties who guaranteed others' debts faced this if the primary debtor defaulted. Many lost everything becoming surety for friends or relatives. Proverbs' repeated warnings suggest this was common and destructive. While Israelites were to lend freely to needy brothers (Deuteronomy 15:7-8), becoming legal guarantor was different—and dangerous.

Related Passages

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

Study Questions

1. Have you struck hands to become surety for others' debts, ignoring biblical wisdom?
2. How can you practice generous lending without the legal entanglements of co-signing or guaranteeing?
3. What is the difference between biblically wise generosity and foolish financial entanglement?

Interlinear Text

אִישׁ	חֲסֵר	לֵב	תִּזְקַע	כַּף	עַל	בְּ	עֲרֵב
A man	void	of understanding	strike	hands	and	becometh	surety
H120	H2638	H3820	H8628	H3709	H6148		H6161
לְפָנַי	רֵעֵהוּ:						
in the presence	of his friend						
H6440	H7453						

Additional Cross-References

Proverbs 11:15 (Parallel theme): He that is surety for a stranger shall smart for it: and he that hateth suretiship is sure.

Proverbs 20:16 (Parallel theme): Take his garment that is surety for a stranger: and take a pledge of him for a strange woman.