

Proverbs 18:16

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

A man's gift maketh room for him, and bringeth him before great men.

Analysis

The Hebrew word 'gift' (מַתָּן/*matan*) can denote both legitimate presents and bribes—context determines which. Here the verse describes neutral observation: gifts open doors and provide access to influential people. This reflects the ancient practice of bringing gifts when approaching rulers (1 Kings 10:2, 25). However, Proverbs elsewhere condemns bribes that pervert justice (17:8, 23). The tension requires discernment. Appropriate giving—expressing honor, gratitude, or genuine generosity—is biblical. Abraham gave gifts to Sarah's relatives (Genesis 24:53); Jacob sent gifts to appease Esau (Genesis 32:13-21). Paul taught generous giving (2 Corinthians 9:7). Yet giving that manipulates, obligates, or corrupts is sinful. The wise person discerns the difference. Ultimately, this proverb points beyond earthly gifts to the supreme Gift—Christ Himself, who 'maketh room' for believers before God the Father. 'God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us' (Romans 5:8).

Historical Context

Ancient Near Eastern protocol required bringing gifts when approaching royalty or seeking favor. This wasn't bribery but culturally expected honor. The Queen of Sheba brought lavish gifts to Solomon (1 Kings 10:2). Tribute payments between nations functioned similarly—acknowledging authority and seeking peaceful relations. However, the law explicitly forbade bribes in judicial contexts: 'Thou shalt not wrest judgment; thou shalt not respect persons, neither take a gift: for a gift doth blind the eyes of the wise' (Deuteronomy 16:19). The prophets

condemned corrupt officials who took bribes (Isaiah 1:23; Micah 7:3). Early Christian communities emphasized generous giving without expectation of return (Acts 20:35; Luke 6:35), transforming gift-giving from a tool for social climbing to an expression of Christian love.

Related Passages

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Study Questions

1. How can you practice biblical generosity without falling into manipulation or corruption?
2. When have you seen gifts used appropriately to honor others versus inappropriately to obligate or manipulate?
3. How does Christ's gift of Himself on your behalf change your approach to giving and receiving?

Interlinear Text

מַתָּה	אִישׁ	יַרְחֵ יוֹ	לִי	וְלִפְנֵי	גְּדֹלֵי	יִבְרֹכֵנוּ:
gift	A man's	maketh room	H0	him before	great men	for him and bringeth
H4976	H120	H7337		H6440	H1419	H5148

Additional Cross-References

Proverbs 19:6 (Parallel theme): Many will intreat the favour of the prince: and every man is a friend to him that giveth gifts.

Genesis 43:11 (Parallel theme): And their father Israel said unto them, If it must be so now, do this; take of the best fruits in the land in your vessels, and carry down the man a present, a little balm, and a little honey, spices, and myrrh, nuts, and almonds:

1 Samuel 25:27 (Parallel theme): And now this blessing which thine handmaid hath brought unto my lord, let it even be given unto the young men that follow my lord.

Proverbs 17:8 (Parallel theme): A gift is as a precious stone in the eyes of him that hath it: whithersoever it turneth, it prospereth.

Genesis 32:20 (Parallel theme): And say ye moreover, Behold, thy servant Jacob is behind us. For he said, I will appease him with the present that goeth before me, and afterward I will see his face; peradventure he will accept of me.

Genesis 33:10 (Parallel theme): And Jacob said, Nay, I pray thee, if now I have found grace in thy sight, then receive my present at my hand: for therefore I have seen thy face, as though I had seen the face of God, and thou wast pleased with me.

Proverbs 21:14 (Parallel theme): A gift in secret pacifieth anger: and a reward in the bosom strong wrath.