

Proverbs 18:17

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

He that is first in his own cause seemeth just; but his neighbour cometh and searcheth him.

Analysis

This proverb exposes the danger of one-sided narratives. 'He that is first in his own cause seemeth just' (הָרֵאשׁוֹן בְּרִיבוֹ/ tsaddiq harishon berivo)—the first speaker appears righteous because no contrary testimony challenges his account. But when 'his neighbour cometh and searcheth him' (וּבֹא־רֵעֵהוּ וְחִקְרוֹ/ uva-re'ehu vachaqaro, examines/cross-examines him), the truth emerges. This principle undergirds biblical justice: 'At the mouth of two witnesses, or three witnesses, shall he that is worthy of death be put to death; but at the mouth of one witness he shall not be put to death' (Deuteronomy 17:6). Multiple testimonies prevent deception. Modern application extends beyond courtrooms: we must resist forming judgments based on partial information. Social media amplifies this danger—we hear one side and rush to judgment. James commands: 'let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath' (James 1:19). Christians must pursue truth through careful investigation, not react to emotional appeals.

Historical Context

Israel's judicial system required careful examination of witnesses. Judges were commanded to 'enquire diligently' (Deuteronomy 13:14). The law prescribed severe punishment for false witnesses—they would receive the penalty they sought to inflict on the accused (Deuteronomy 19:18-19). This deterred false testimony and protected the innocent. Famous biblical examples illustrate this principle: Potiphar's wife accused Joseph (Genesis 39:14-18), yet he was innocent. Jezebel arranged false witnesses against Naboth (1 Kings 21:13), perverting justice. Jesus

faced false accusers whose testimonies contradicted (Mark 14:56-59). Early Christians were often condemned on false charges—Paul repeatedly defended himself before governors and kings (Acts 24-26), demonstrating that truth emerged through careful examination.

Related Passages

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

1 John 4:8 — God is love

Study Questions

1. How quickly do you form judgments based on one person's account of a situation?
2. What practical steps can you take to ensure you hear both sides before reaching conclusions?
3. How does this proverb warn against the dangers of social media echo chambers and one-sided narratives?

Interlinear Text

צַדִּיק	הָרִאשׁוֹן	בְּרִיבוֹ	יָבֵא	יָ עַהֲבֵהוּ
seemeth just	He that is first	in his own cause	cometh	but his neighbour
H6662	H7223	H7379	H935	H7453
וַיִּשְׁקָרְוֵהוּ:				
and searcheth				
H2713				

Additional Cross-References

Proverbs 18:13 (Parallel theme): He that answereth a matter before he heareth it, it is folly and shame unto him.

