

Proverbs 26:19

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

So is the man that deceiveth his neighbour, and saith, Am not I in sport?

Analysis

This verse completes the metaphor begun in verse 18, revealing the deceiver's defense: "Am I not in sport?" The Hebrew 'sahaq' (sport/jest) means to laugh, play, or mock—the ancient equivalent of "just kidding!" This person wounds their neighbor through deception, then deflects accountability by claiming it was merely entertainment. The comparison to a madman hurling firebrands shows God's view: such behavior isn't innocent fun but dangerous insanity. The excuse doesn't negate the harm—it compounds the sin by adding dishonesty to injury. Someone who deceives then claims "I was only joking" is as culpable as the madman who shoots arrows randomly, because both cause real damage while denying responsibility.

Historical Context

Ancient Near Eastern cultures highly valued truthful speech and considered deceptive jesting a serious moral failure. Egyptian wisdom literature warned against mockery that wounds, and Mesopotamian texts emphasized the sacredness of honest communication between neighbors. In Israel's covenant community, bearing false witness was forbidden (Exodus 20:16), and this extended to all deceptive speech—even when disguised as humor. The excuse "Am I not in sport?" would not have absolved the speaker; it would have revealed a callous heart that treats relationships carelessly and refuses to own the consequences of harmful words.

Related Passages

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Psalms 19:1 — Heavens declare God's glory

Study Questions

1. When have you used "I was just joking" to avoid taking responsibility for words that wounded someone?
2. How does God view the difference between genuine humor that builds relationships and deceptive jesting that harms them?
3. What practical steps can you take to ensure your speech reflects genuine love for your neighbor rather than careless entertainment at their expense?

Interlinear Text

כֵּן	אֵשׁ	רָמָה	אֶת	רֵעֵהוּ	אָמַר	הֵלֹא
H3651	So is the man	that deceiveth	H853	his neighbour	and saith	H3808
	H376	H7411		H7453	H559	
אֲנִי		מְשִׁיחַ	קִי			
Am not I in sport		H589				
H7832						

Additional Cross-References

Proverbs 10:23 (Parallel theme): It is as sport to a fool to do mischief: but a man of understanding hath wisdom.

Ephesians 5:4 (Parallel theme): Neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor jesting, which are not convenient: but rather giving of thanks.