

Proverbs 29:9

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

If a wise man contendeth with a foolish man, whether he rage or laugh, there is no rest.

Analysis

If a wise man contendeth with a foolish man, whether he rage or laugh, there is no rest—the Hebrew structure emphasizes futility: whether the fool responds with anger (רָגַז, ragaz) or mocking laughter (סָחָק, sachaq), there is **no rest** (נֹחַת, ein nachat—no quietness, settlement, or resolution). Engaging a fool (ish evil, morally deficient person) in argument produces only frustration.

This wisdom parallels Jesus's instruction not to 'cast pearls before swine' (Matthew 7:6). Paul warns against 'foolish and unlearned questions' that generate strife (2 Timothy 2:23). The issue isn't intellectual debate but the fool's moral unwillingness to receive correction—making dialogue pointless and exhausting.

Historical Context

Solomon experienced the frustration of trying to govern subjects who rejected wisdom (1 Kings 11). Proverbs is replete with warnings about the futility of correcting fools (Proverbs 23:9, 26:4-5). The wisdom tradition recognized that moral formation requires humility—something fools categorically lack.

Related Passages

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Study Questions

1. How do you discern when to engage in debate and when withdrawal is the wiser course?
2. What 'rest' have you sacrificed by continuing arguments with those unwilling to reason?
3. How does this proverb challenge or affirm your approach to apologetics and persuasion?

Interlinear Text

וְאֵלֹהִים	אָתָה	בְּשִׁפְטוּ	מִנְחָה	אִישׁ	אָתָה	וְאֵלֹהִים
man	If a wise	contendeth	H854	man	with a foolish	whether he rage
H376	H2450	H8199		H376	H191	H7264
וְאֵלֹהִים	אָתָה	בְּשִׁפְטוּ	מִנְחָה	אִישׁ	אָתָה	וְאֵלֹהִים
or laugh	H369	there is no rest	H5183			
H7832						

Additional Cross-References

Proverbs 26:4 (Parallel theme): Answer not a fool according to his folly, lest thou also be like unto him.

Ecclesiastes 10:13 (Parallel theme): The beginning of the words of his mouth is foolishness: and the end of his talk is mischievous madness.