

Proverbs 30:32

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

If thou hast done foolishly in lifting up thyself, or if thou hast thought evil, lay thine hand upon thy mouth.

Analysis

If thou hast done foolishly in lifting up thyself (אִם-נָבַלְתָּ בְּהַתְנִשָּׁא, im-navalta vehitnasse)—וְאִם (im, 'if') introduces a conditional. **נָבַל** (naval, 'to be foolish, to act as a fool') combined with **הַתְנִשָּׁא** (hitnasse, 'to lift oneself up, exalt oneself') describes self-exaltation—the root of so much folly. Pride precedes destruction (Proverbs 16:18).

Or if thou hast thought evil, lay thine hand upon thy mouth (וְאִם-זָמַם יָד לֶפֶה, ve'im-zammota yad lefeh)—or if **זָמַם** (zamam, 'to plan, devise, scheme') evil, place **יָד** (yad, 'hand') upon **לֶפֶה** (peh, 'mouth'). The remedy for prideful words or evil schemes: silence. Stop talking. Job learned this: 'I will lay mine hand upon my mouth' (Job 40:4). James 1:19: 'Let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath.' Silence prevents compound folly—when you've erred, don't make it worse by justifying yourself.

Historical Context

Ancient Near Eastern wisdom emphasized control of speech. Egyptian wisdom literature warned against hasty words. The gesture of hand over mouth symbolized humility and restraint (Job 21:5, 29:9). Agur's counsel: recognize folly immediately and cease multiplying it through defensive speech. This requires rare humility.

Related Passages

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

Study Questions

1. When you've 'lifted yourself up' foolishly, do you compound the error by justifying yourself—or do you 'lay your hand upon your mouth'?
2. What would it look like to practice immediate silence when you recognize you've erred?
3. How does pride make you defend yourself rather than quickly confessing folly?

Interlinear Text

אִם בְּהַתְנִשְׁתָּא לְבָבְךָ

H518 If thou hast done foolishly H5034 in lifting up H518

לְפָהַת עַל פֶּה

thyself or if thou hast thought evil lay thine hand upon thy mouth

H2161 H3027 H6310

Additional Cross-References

Job 21:5 (Parallel theme): Mark me, and be astonished, and lay your hand upon your mouth.

Job 40:4 (Parallel theme): Behold, I am vile; what shall I answer thee? I will lay mine hand upon my mouth.

Proverbs 26:12 (Parallel theme): Seest thou a man wise in his own conceit? there is more hope of a fool than of him.

Romans 3:19 (Parallel theme): Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God.

From KJV Study • kjvstudy.org