

Proverbs

Behind the Mask

Lesson #10 for March 7, 2015

Scriptures: Proverbs 25:2-3; 26:11-12,13-16; 27:5-6; 1 Corinthians 1:20-21.

1. This lesson will focus on the challenges of speaking the truth and discerning the truth from what we hear. In the Garden of Eden, the beautiful flying serpent spoke words that seemed so exciting but were full of poison. Satan is a master at deception. He can appear and does appear as an angel of light. (2 Corinthians 11:14) But, as dangerous as he is, our own self-deception may be even more dangerous because we are so inclined to believe it!
2. So, what are the most common ways in which we, maybe even unwittingly, deceive ourselves and others? How often do we try to deceive by using flattering words, appealing speech, even wonderful sentiments when, in fact, our intentions are not good? Certainly, Jesus spoke the truth when He said: "Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves; be therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves." (Matthew 10:16, KJV)
3. It is interesting to note that this lesson does not mention Proverbs 25:1. It was mentioned in the lesson for the first week. What happened to these Proverbs during the 300 years between Solomon and Hezekiah? Can we be sure that they came from Solomon? What about the thousands of other proverbs and songs that he produced or collected which we apparently do not have? (1 Kings 4:32) What happened to those other songs and proverbs?
4. One of the things we learn from a good education is how much we do not know. The more educated we are, the better we understand how little we know. When facing a universe which is so incredibly complex and which we cannot begin to fully understand, how could we possibly understand God? Having made such a statement, one must remember that the most important thing each of us can do in life is to do everything possible to get to know Him and understand Him better. Do we really believe that?
5. Read Proverbs 25:2-3; Jeremiah 8:8; and Isaiah 45:14-15. Why do you think the Old Testament often describes God as mysterious? Is God trying to hide something? Read **Deuteronomy 17:14-20**. How different do you think the history of the Jewish people would have been if Israel's and Judah's kings had followed the advice recorded in Deuteronomy 17?
6. How many of the things that happen to us every day are completely out of our control? What should we think about such things? Is that a good reason to keep on praying?
7. Many people in our modern day have begun to dismiss the idea of any absolute truth. They want us to believe that every truth is relative. They say that truth depends on who you are, where you are, your cultural background, etc. But, is it not true that certain things are right and certain things are wrong? Are the Ten Commandments negotiable?
8. The Seventh-day Adventist Church had an early publication entitled, "The Present Truth." What is implied by "The Present Truth"? Is truth negotiable?
9. Read Proverbs 26:11-12. Compare Judges 21:25; 1 Corinthians 1:20-21; 2:6-7; and 2 Corinthians 1:12. Surely, these verses are an adequate warning against boasting of our own wisdom. Even when we do what we think is right, we are in trouble. What is the only thing about which we can honestly boast? See Jeremiah 9:23-24. Can Adventists do that?
10. How much of modern "culture" is really foolishness? Have you ever listened to a politician, car salesman, or some such person who was so convincing in the way s/he spoke that you were inclined to believe something that you were sure was not true?

11. So, are there absolute truths that we can understand and on which we can base our core values? We have learned that the field of ethics in our modern world is very complicated. Sometimes, it is necessary to decide which values are more important than others, and in that context, which values affect the larger number of people.
12. Read Proverbs 26:15. Could someone really be so lazy that he does not want to pick up food from the dish and put it in his mouth? Why are some people so lazy? Some students seem to spend more time and energy figuring out ways to cheat on an examination than they spend studying for it. How much time do lazy people spend finding excuses for their laziness? Read Proverbs 26:13-16. Solomon seemed to think that lazy people never get anything done that is worth doing!
13. No doubt, you have heard the English expression: "Nothing ventured, nothing gained." Lazy people tend to be afraid to venture anything. Solomon compared lazy people to a door swinging on its hinges. The door may move, but it never goes anywhere!
14. How many people are lazy because they do not want to put in the time and effort to evaluate new ideas and to try new things? Are we open to new ideas? Do we study new ideas carefully as did the noble Bereans? (Acts 17:11)

In the judgment men will not be condemned because they conscientiously believed a lie, but because they did not believe the truth, because they neglected the opportunity of learning what is truth.—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 55.2.

15. So, what should be our role in giving others the "opportunity" to learn what is truth? Where does our responsibility begin and end? Is it worth the trouble to send missionaries around the world? If God is going to take into account where someone was born and his surroundings, is it worth trying to carry the gospel to them and suggesting new ideas?
16. Read Proverbs 27:5-6. When is it appropriate to rebuke a friend? Is it a sign of love to warn someone of dangers ahead? Is love ever unpleasant? Judgmental? Even critical? Have you ever lost a friend because you were trying to give constructive criticism?
17. Read Proverbs 27:17. What is implied by this proverb? How do we learn truth from each other? Real friends should be able to openly discuss issues and to learn from each other. An honest discussion leading to discovery of new truths is a wonderful blessing. Why is it that some people are not comfortable with engaging in honest discussions? What is the kindest way to tell a friend that danger is coming? What is the best way to tell our unbelieving friends that Jesus is coming soon? Do we first need to understand them well?
18. Read Proverbs 26:17-23. In your experience, do you find it true that troublemakers and gossips keep the arguments alive? We must always remember that the person who feels comfortable slandering your enemy in your presence will probably be just as ready to slander you in the presence of another!
19. When we hear a very nice, even flowery, speech, should red flags go up in our minds? Don't you think that Satan is very effective with his nice speeches? Think of what happened to Eve! How often do we say something which is really meant to deceive because we feel and understand just the opposite? When we are sick, do we say, "I'm fine"?

Everything that Christians do should be as transparent as the sunlight.

Truth is of God; deception, in every one of its myriad forms, is of Satan; and whoever in any way departs from the straight line of truth is betraying himself into the power of the wicked one. Yet it is not a light or an easy thing to speak the exact truth. We cannot speak the truth unless we know the truth; and how often preconceived opinions, mental bias, imperfect knowledge, errors of

judgment, prevent a right understanding of matters with which we have to do! We cannot speak the truth unless our minds are continually guided by Him who is truth.—Ellen G. White, *Mount of Blessing* 68.3; *SD* 64.5; *RC* 71.5. [Bold type is added.]

20. As scary as it may be to do so, we need to be fully aware and admit that God knows and sees everything. Every detail of our lives will come up for review in the final judgment.
21. When discussing the history of Jacob and comparing that with the time of Jacob's trouble in the future, Ellen White penned these words:

The long, black catalogue of our delinquencies is before the eye of the Infinite. **The register is complete; none of our offenses are forgotten.** But He who listened to the cries of His servants of old, will hear the prayer of faith and pardon our transgressions. He has promised, and He will fulfill His word. (*Patriarchs and Prophets* 202.4) [Bold type is added.]

22. So, what is our role in all of this? Are there some things that we have to do? Are there other things for which we must depend upon God? Our brains are the only instruments God has given us for determining what is truth. We must diligently and intelligently use them.

The agency of the Spirit of God does not remove from us the necessity of exercising our faculties and talents, but teaches us how to use every power to the glory of God. The human faculties, when under the special direction of the grace of God, are capable of being used to the best purpose on earth. Ignorance does not increase the humility or spirituality of any professed follower of Christ. **The truths of the divine word can be best appreciated by an intellectual Christian. Christ can be best glorified by those who serve Him intelligently.** The great object of education is to enable us to use the power which God has given us in such a manner as to represent the religion of the Bible and promote the glory of God.

We are indebted to Him who gave us existence, for the talents that have been entrusted to us, and it is a duty we owe our Creator to cultivate and improve these talents.—Ellen G. White, *Counsels to Parents, Teachers, and Students*, pp. 361, 362. [Bold type is added.]

23. In light of all this, is it possible for us to distinguish between that which is transitory and temporary in contrast to that which is eternal, universal, and immutable? Do we believe in eternal truths? Can you name a few? Do we sometimes get mixed up between transitory truths and eternal truths?
24. Would you agree that “smart people keep their friends close and their enemies closer”? What would that mean? Read Matthew 10:16. As we approach the end of this world's history, are we going to be like sheep among wolves?
25. Are we faithful in praying for divine wisdom to guide us through the problems in our lives? Our world is very complex and confusing. People cannot always be trusted. Can God be trusted? Can the Bible be trusted? Can it be misapplied? Hasn't Satan even misquoted the Bible to his advantage?
26. In difficult times, does God seem further from you? Or, closer? How should we respond when God seems distant? Why do you think Paul and Silas were singing while chained in that Philippian prison? (Acts 16:25) When we are confused and feeling lost, Ellen White has suggested that we need to look back to the last place where we saw the light.

When temptations assail you, when care, perplexity, and darkness seem to

surround your soul, look to the place where you last saw the light.—Ellen G. White, *Ministry of Healing* 250.1.

27. Review briefly the stories of some Bible heroes who had tremendous ups and downs in their young lives. Think of Joseph (Genesis 37,39-50), Daniel and his three friends (Daniel 1-6), and Jesus (The Gospels). Would we have the courage to do as they did?
28. Earlier, we asked the question about God being mysterious. Does God actually conceal things that He knows? Isn't God's government transparent? Read Proverbs 25:1-3 again. What is it that God conceals? See **Jeremiah 31:31-34** and Hebrews 10:16-18. Aren't you glad that God does not reveal everything He knows about our past sins? Why did God conceal from the apostles how long it would be until His second coming? Read Proverbs 6:16-19. What are the things that God hates? Notice that lying is mentioned twice in this short list.
29. Let us never forget that the core question in the great controversy is: Who is telling us the truth? Do we really believe God's truths? Or, are we deceived by the Devil's lies? How many Christians are teaching the Devil's lies and claiming that they are the gospel truth?

O the mystery of godliness—God manifest in the flesh! This mystery increases as we try to comprehend it. It is incomprehensible, and yet human beings will allow worldly, earthly things to intercept the faint view it is possible for mortals to have of Jesus and His matchless love. . . . How can we be enthusiastic over earthly, common things and not be stirred with this picture—the cross of Calvary, the love that is revealed in the death of God's dear Son . . . ?

I shall, if saved in the kingdom of God, be constantly discerning new depths in the plan of salvation. All the redeemed saints will see and appreciate as never before the love of the Father and the Son, and songs of praise will burst forth from immortal tongues. He loved us, He gave His life for us. With glorified bodies, with enlarged capacities, with hearts made pure, with lips undefiled, we shall sing the riches of redeeming love.—Ellen G. White, *Maranatha*, p. 318.3-4; *That I May Know Him* 371.2-3.

30. How much can we learn about God from studying the life of Christ? Why has our modern world gone to such lengths to reject the teachings of the Bible?
31. What can we learn from the spiritual ups and downs, the struggles, the sufferings, and the pain of Bible heroes such as Ruth and Naomi (Ruth), Hannah and Elkanah (1 Samuel 1), David and Jonathan (1 Samuel 18-23), Paul and Barnabas (Acts 13-15), etc.?

No calamity can befall the least of His children, no anxiety harass the soul, no joy cheer, no sincere prayer escape the lips, of which our heavenly Father is unobservant, or in which He takes no immediate interest. "He healeth the broken in heart, and bindeth up their wounds." Psalm 147:3. **The relations between God and each soul are as distinct and full as though there were not another soul upon the earth to share His watchcare, not another soul for whom He gave His beloved Son.**—Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, p. 100.1. [Bold type is added.]

32. Is it possible for you to imagine yourself as being the center of God's attention? How does that make you feel?

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Last Modified: February 3, 2015

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