

Proverbs

The Blessings of the Righteous

Lesson #5 for January 31, 2015

Scriptures: Proverbs 10:1-14; 11-13; Matthew 19:19; John 3:16.

1. As we have already discovered, the book of Proverbs is good at showing contrasts. Proverbs 10 to 13 which we are studying this week focus on the contrasts between those who do what is right and those who do wickedly. The Hebrew word *zedeq* and its various derivatives mean righteous or righteousness and in some versions is translated *justice*. Does *justice* mean something different from *righteousness* to you? Some schools teach the course *Criminal Justice*. Is there such a thing as *criminal righteousness*? The meaning of *justice* and *righteousness* have changed.
2. These chapters suggest that *righteousness* means to walk according to God's will—to do what is right because it is right. However appealing any opposite choice may be, the final results will be disastrous. Don't we believe that God never asks us to do anything that is not for our best good?
3. *Righteousness* means being, doing, and speaking what is right. But, how do we determine what is right? For most people it is something we are supposed to learn from our families and culture. What is right is that which in the end produces the best results for everyone involved in the larger context of the great controversy over God's character and government.
4. Read Proverbs 10:1-7. In these verses Solomon clearly contrasted the attitudes of the lazy and the wicked with those of the righteous. And he promised that God will always help the wise—those who follow God's will. Who determines what is right? Is there an innate sense of right?
5. Satan was the originator of sin; his basic sin was selfishness. His followers in our day are still saying that what they do is their business and no one else's business. By contrast, those who are righteous recognize that everything we do impacts others in one way or another. In Proverbs 10:3-7, Solomon did his best to suggest that good behavior impacts us even physically. Perhaps, he was thinking of Leviticus 19:18, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."
6. We need to remember that careful studies have been done to show that only 7% of true communication and meaning are carried by the words themselves; 93% is carried by the demeanor, the facial expressions, and tone of the voice, etc. So, on a day-by-day basis, are we giving the very best representation to our Christianity? In the Bible we only have the 7%.
7. It should be obvious by now that a major component of this series of lessons is the mouth including the lips and the tongue. From reading the book of Proverbs, one might conclude that these are the most important organs in the body.
8. "In the New King James Version of the book, the word *mouth* is used 50 times, *lips* occurs 41 times, and *tongue* 19. The use of this organ in speech is a particularly important theme in Proverbs 10-29." (*Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* for Monday, January 26) Clearly, our words are very powerful either for good or for evil.
9. Read Proverbs 10:11; Ezekiel 47:1-2; and Psalm 36:6,9. Would it be correct to suggest that these verses picture a mouth as it should be, a "well of life"? (Compare James 3:2-12.)
10. While we will never have the power that God has, remember that Psalms 33:6,9 and Hebrews 1:3 tell us that God created the universe by speaking it into existence.
11. But, we must not fool ourselves into thinking that things will always be rosy for those who honestly tell the truth and live righteous lives. Is righteousness always rewarded? Remember 2 Timothy 3:12 (*GNB*) which says, "Everyone who wants to live a godly life in union with Christ Jesus will be persecuted." Think of the hundreds and thousands of Christian martyrs in times past who paid the ultimate price for standing faithfully for the truth. Is it clear in your mind how honesty, wisdom, and righteousness contrast with dishonesty, pride, and wickedness?
12. Read Proverbs 11. What are some of the great advantages of being honest, truthful, and righteous in all that we do? The obvious long-term benefit is a heavenly home where we will dwell in peace and love forever with the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. But, even now, telling the truth means you do not have to "cover your tracks."

13. Should we always do what is right because it is right? Is the hope of the future life in heaven the most important reason for behaving with humility, honesty, and compassion? While this is only a hypothetical situation, imagine for a moment that there is no future life. Would you then become a blatant, open sinner? Fools, like Satan, think only of their temporary apparent benefits and never look to the long-term benefits even to themselves and certainly not to others.
14. How many other day-by-day decisions that you make take into consideration the largest possible context in light of the great controversy between God and Satan and between righteousness and selfishness?
15. Read Proverbs 12. What contrast do you see in this chapter between lying and honesty?

Philosopher Sissela Bok has convincingly demonstrated how lying can be harmful for society. She writes: "A society, then, whose members were unable to distinguish truthful messages from deceptive ones, would collapse."—*Lying: Moral Choice in Public and Private Life* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978), p. 19. Likewise, Augustine, as quoted in the introduction of Bok's book, noted that "when regard for truth has been broken down or even slightly weakened, all things will remain doubtful."—Page xv. (*Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* for Wednesday, January 28)

Deception has become the king of entertainment.

16. Ellen White wrote these words.

Lying lips are an abomination to Him. He declares that into the holy city "there shall in no wise enter . . . any thing that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie." Let truth telling be held with no loose hand or uncertain grasp. Let it become a part of the life. Playing fast and loose with truth, and dissembling to suit one's own selfish plans, means shipwreck of faith. . . . He who utters untruths sells his soul in a cheap market. His falsehoods may seem to serve in emergencies; he may thus seem to make business advancement that he could not gain by fair dealing; but he finally reaches the place where he can trust no one. Himself a falsifier, he has no confidence in the word of others.—*My Life Today*, p. 331.5; compare AA 75.3; HP 179.2-4; RH, February 2, 1911 par. 18; 20MR 30.6-31.1.

17. How many TV programs depict people who lie to get out of almost any kind of problem? What do we learn if we watch them?
18. Often, in the culture of our day in movies and programs on television, it is implied that someone who lies is somehow benefitted while the one to whom he lies is the one who suffers. But, what effect does lying have on the one who does the lying? Have you ever come across a person who seems to believe that lying is just natural? If a person reaches a stage where he feels completely comfortable without any sense of guilt or shame when he lies, it suggests that he is no longer responsive to the promptings of the Holy Spirit. Does reality punish liars?
19. It might be nice if everything were so clearly black-and-white as seems to be presented in Proverbs. But unfortunately, we are all sinners, and our lives sometimes exhibit selfishness almost alongside our efforts to do what is right. At such points, we must turn to the Lord and ask for His forgiveness which He is willing to give freely. But, He recognizes—as we should—that sinning scars us. And we need to remember that ultimately, there will be only two options available. (John 3:16) Could we fairly be called "sinning Christians"?
20. Read Proverbs 13. This chapter provides us with a series of contrasts between the results of being righteous and the results of being wicked; the results of being wise and the results of being foolish. Can we understand the meanings of these proverbs?
21. Apart from the issue of eternal life, are there advantages to living a life of faith in Christ?
22. Sooner or later, do people figure out who is being truthful, honest, humble, and helpful in contrast to those who are not? Does God actually punish the wicked? Or, do they just reap the results?

The greatest deception of the human mind in Christ's day was that a mere assent to the truth constitutes righteousness. In all human experience a theoretical knowledge of the truth has been proved to be insufficient for the saving of the soul.

It does not bring forth the fruits of righteousness. A jealous regard for what is termed theological truth often accompanies a hatred of genuine truth as made manifest in life. The darkest chapters of history are burdened with the record of crimes committed by bigoted religionists. The Pharisees claimed to be children of Abraham, and boasted of their possession of the oracles of God; yet these advantages did not preserve them from selfishness, malignity, greed for gain, and the basest hypocrisy. They thought themselves the greatest religionists of the world, but their so-called orthodoxy led them to crucify the Lord of glory.

The same danger still exists. Many take it for granted that they are Christians, simply because they subscribe to certain theological tenets. But they have not brought the truth into practical life. They have not believed and loved it, therefore they have not received the power and [310] grace that come through sanctification of the truth. Men may profess faith in the truth; but if it does not make them sincere, kind, patient, forbearing, heavenly-minded, it is a curse to its possessors, and through their influence it is a curse to the world.

The righteousness which Christ taught is conformity of heart and life to the revealed will of God. Sinful men can become righteous only as they have faith in God and maintain a vital connection with Him. Then true godliness will elevate the thoughts and ennoble the life. Then the external forms of religion accord with the Christian's internal purity. Then the ceremonies required in the service of God are not meaningless rites, like those of the hypocritical Pharisees. (*Desire of Ages* 309.2-310.1)

Professed Christians who are not real Christians are a curse.

23. When you make an important decision in your life, do you always consider first how it might impact others? Was Eve considering the impact of her behavior on her husband and future generations and the universe?
24. How do we determine what is right and what is not? What kinds of choices do we have in life? Sociologists have studied human behavior in great depth. Famous men like Piaget and Kohlberg have suggested there are levels of moral behavior. Why do you do what you do?

If you are a believer and are seeking to do God's will what makes you willing to obey?

Could you say, "I do what I do because God has told me to, and He has the power to reward and destroy"? Is this why you don't murder or commit adultery, because God has said you mustn't? You would otherwise, but you can't afford to incur His displeasure. [What does this imply about your relationship with God?]

This might be all right for a beginner or a little child, but it suggests that God's laws are arbitrary and do not make good sense in themselves. That does not speak very favorably of God.

Would you rather say, "I do what I do as a believer because God has told me to, and I love Him and want to please Him"? Is this why you don't steal or tell lies? You would see nothing wrong or harmful about doing these things. It is just that you want so much to please God. For some reason He does not like it when you steal or lie, and since He has been so good to us, you feel under some [34] obligation to please Him. It would only be grateful and fair.

Again, this might be all right for a beginner or child. It might even be progress beyond the obedience prompted only by fear of punishment and desire of reward. But it still implies an arbitrariness in God's commandments and does not speak so well of His character and government.

There is another possible approach to obedience. Could you say this? "I do what I do because I have found it to be right and sensible to do so, and I have increasing admiration and reverence for the One who so advised and commanded me in the days of my ignorance and immaturity." Then hastening to add, "Being still somewhat ignorant and immature, I am willing to trust and obey the One whose counsel has

always proved to be so sensible, when He commands me to do something beyond my present understanding.—A. Graham Maxwell, *I Want To Be Free*, pp.33-34. [Content in brackets is added.]

Is such a person motivated only by logic? Or, by principle?

25. Why is it that sometimes we regard God's instructions as arbitrary and irrelevant to our well-being? What is implied by this section from *Steps to Christ* page 105?

The man who attempts to keep the commandments of God from a sense of obligation merely—because he is required to do so—will never enter into the joy of obedience. He does not obey. When the requirements of God are accounted a burden because they cut across human inclination, we may know that the life is not a Christian life. True obedience is the outworking of a principle within. It springs from the love of righteousness, the love of the law of God. The essence of all righteousness is loyalty to our Redeemer. This will lead us to do right because it is right—because right doing is pleasing to God. —*Christ's Object Lessons* 97.3-98.0 (1900)

A sullen submission to the will of the Father will develop the character of a rebel. By such a one service is looked upon as drudgery. It is not rendered cheerfully, and in the love of God. It is a mere mechanical performance. [If he dared, such a one would disobey. His rebellion is smothered, ready to break out at any time in bitter murmurings and complaints.] Such service brings no peace or quietude to the soul.—*MS 20*, 1897 (*MR # 970*); *Signs of the Times*, July 22, 1897 par. 11. Section in brackets is omitted in *That I May Know Him* p. 120.4; *12MR* 236.1.

26. In considering the portions of Proverbs in today's lesson, is the contrast clear enough to encourage us to take stock once again of our own choices?
27. God clearly created us with the power of choice. He recognized the risk when He did so. But, without freedom to choose, we could not love; and a God who is love personified refused to deal with a universe full of robots. So, He took the risk.
28. While we all—with a little careful thought—recognize that freedom of choice is a good thing, most of us will also realize that choices have consequences. Please notice that we are not saying *punishments* but *consequences*. What we do produces its own results. (*1SM* 235)
29. Read Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28-30. These two fairly lengthy passages are God's presentation of the contrasting good effects from good behaviors and bad effects from evil behaviors. Why was it that the children of Israel had such a hard time seeing and understanding and living according to these guidelines? What kind of guidelines would God give us today? Would they be significantly different from those given to ancient Israel?
30. The very idea of Proverbs is to suggest that the wise are those who are willing to learn. This, of course, requires a certain amount of humility. In his pride, Satan thought he knew what was best. He thought he did not need to learn anything, even from God Himself! No wonder Proverbs 9:10 tells us, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." Pride will lead to rebellion against God and His goodness. (Proverbs 8:13; Isaiah 14:13-14)
31. Read Proverbs 13:21 and Psalm 23:6. These two verses suggest that evil pursues sinners while goodness and mercy pursue those who do what is right. The word *pursuing* in these verses suggests a dynamic, active force like hunting down a wild animal.
32. In conclusion, we should not overlook the fact that love, humility, and deferring the enjoyment of rewards until the next life are not natural traits for fallen human beings.
33. So, what have we learned from these chapters in Proverbs? Can you see any areas for personal spiritual growth?

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Last Modified: December 22, 2014

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