

Words of Truth



SABBATH—FEBRUARY 21

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Proverbs 22; Proverbs 23; Exodus 22:21–27; Proverbs 24; Ephesians 5:20; Ezekiel 33:8.

MEMORY VERSE: “I have written 30 sayings for you. They will give you knowledge and good advice. I am teaching you words that are completely true. Then you can give the right answers to the one who sent you” (Proverbs 22:20, 21, NIV).

DEFINITIONS

1. character—the special qualities that make something what it is.

SOME OF THIS WEEK'S PROVERBS HAVE MANY OF THE SAME IDEAS THAT ARE FOUND IN EGYPTIAN WRITINGS. With the Holy Spirit's leading, Solomon might have written these proverbs according to a Hebrew way of thinking. Here, the words of the Egyptians agree with the Spirit of Israel's God. And so, they became God's inspired (God-breathed; given by God) Word.

This knowledge is important, because it reminds us of the worldwide character¹ of “truth.” What is true for the Israelite should also be true for the Egyptian. If not, it would not be *the* truth.

These warnings are common to both Hebrew and Egyptian communities. Whoever you are, a believer or not, there are some things that *you should not do*.

THE KNOWLEDGE OF TRUTH (Proverbs 22:17, 18)

Read Proverbs 22:17, 18. What are we being told about how truth should influence our lives?

The first duty of the student is to listen and pay attention. “Incline your ear [listen] and hear” (Proverbs 22: 17, NKJV). In other words: “Concentrate [pay close attention]!” The important point is that the seeker of truth must be serious. He or she must truly want to learn what is right and then do it.

But it is not enough for the student to listen or even to understand what is being taught. Some people have a lot of Bible facts in their heads. But they have no real knowledge or experience with the Truth (John 14:6).

Instead, truth should reach the innermost part of the human person. The Hebrew wording in Proverbs 22:18, “within you” (NKJV), means the “stomach.” The lesson should not stay on the surface. It has to be “chewed” thoroughly to become an inner part of us. The message goes deep into our system and becomes rooted (fixed firmly) within us. Then it rises to our lips, and we can have a powerful testimony.²

Read Proverbs 22:19–21. What should an experience in truth do for us?

1. *Faith* (verse 19). The first goal of the teaching of wisdom is not wisdom *itself*. Proverbs does not aim at making smarter and more skillful disciples. The teacher’s goal is to strengthen the disciple’s trust in the Lord.

2. *Conviction*³ (verse 21). Students should know why these “words of truth” (NKJV) are certain. They should know why they believe what they do. Faith is belief in what we do not fully understand. But we still should have good reasons for that faith.

3. *Responsibility* (verse 21). The last step of education is to share with others those “words of truth” (NKJV) we have received. This is a very important part of our responsibility as Seventh-day Adventists.

Think about all the powerful reasons we have for our Seventh-day Adventist faith. What are these reasons? And why should we never forget them or forget to share them with others?



The first duty of every student is to listen and pay attention.



Truth needs to be deeply rooted in us.

DEFINITIONS

2. testimony—the act of sharing with others what God has done for you.

3. conviction—strong belief.

ROBBING THE POOR (Proverbs 22:22, 23)

Read Proverbs 22:22, 23 and Proverbs 23:10. What are we warned about here?



To take from someone who has less than you is worse than stealing; it is a crime against God and an act of cowardice.

It is always wrong to steal. This proverb makes sure we know that it includes never stealing from the poor or the weak. They are truly helpless. And so, they are a special part of God’s concern (Exodus 22:21–27). This reminds us of David, who killed Uriah in order to steal his wife, and Nathan’s parable⁴ of the ewe lamb (2 Samuel 12:1–4). Robbing from the poor is not just a crime. It is a sin “against the LORD” (2 Samuel 12:13). To take from someone who has less than what you have is worse than stealing. It is also an act of cowardice. *Do these thieves think that God does not see their actions?*

Proverbs 22:23 also suggests that even if the thief gets away without being punished, God will punish him. The mention of the word *Redeemer* (from the word *Goel*), or Jesus, may even suggest God’s part in the end-time judgment (Job 19:25).

So, this warning and others in the Bible speak against those who are interested only in the quick “profits” of their actions and not the long-term results. They take over and enlarge their properties at the expense of others. They are willing to cheat and kill for that purpose. They may enjoy it now, but they will pay later. This reasoning should discourage the thief and show our strong belief in the righteous rulership of God.

In England, some atheists⁵ had the following sign put on city buses: “There is probably no God. Now stop worrying and enjoy your life.” Think about it: if there were no God, then those who steal from the poor and get away with it now, really have nothing to worry about. And all those who have done great evil and seem to have gotten away with it will have really gotten away with it. How should faith in God and in His promises of judgment help to give us *some* peace of mind about all the injustice we see in the world now?

DEFINITIONS

4. parable—a very short story that teaches a spiritual truth.

5. atheists—people who do not believe in God.

BEING JEALOUS OF THE WICKED (Proverbs 23:17)

What do Proverbs 23:17; Proverbs 24:1, 2; and Proverbs 24:19, 20 warn us about?

Why would someone be jealous of the wicked? Most likely it is not because of the actual sins that they might be doing. Rather, it is because of the quick “profits” (wealth; success; power) that they get through their wickedness. Those are the things that people often wish for themselves.

Not every successful or rich person is wicked. But some may be the kind of people we are being warned about in these verses. We see their “good” life. And if we are struggling ourselves, it may be easy for us to be jealous about what they have.

But this is a very narrow and shortsighted view of things. After all, the temptation of sin is that its reward may be quick and short lived. We may enjoy the present satisfaction. But knowing that there is a life after this life can protect us from temptation. We need to look beyond the immediate “gains” of our sin and think about the long-term results of eternal life.

Besides, who has not seen just how destructive sin is? We never get away with it. We might be able to hide it from others so that no one knows what we are doing. (But sooner or later they will catch on.) Or we might be able to deceive ourselves into thinking that our sins are not that bad. (*After all, look at how many people do worse things!*) But sooner or later, one way or another, sin catches up with us.

We should hate sin because it is sin. We should hate it because of what it has done to us, to our world, and to our Lord. If we want to see the real cost of sin, look at Jesus on the cross. This is what our sin has cost. This understanding alone should be enough to make us want to avoid sin and to keep away as much as possible from those who would lead us into it.

Have you ever struggled with jealousy over someone’s success? What is the best cure for this deadly problem? (Read Ephesians 5:20.)



If we want to look at the real cost of sin, look at Jesus on the cross.

WHAT WE PUT IN OUR MOUTHS (Proverbs 23:29–35)

The first human temptation involved food (Genesis 3:3). It was by being disobedient and eating of the wrong thing that sin and death came into the world (Genesis 3:1–7; Romans 5:12). We should not miss the hard fact, too, that the first mention of wine drinking in the Bible is introduced in a very negative way or light (Genesis 9:21).

Read Proverbs 23:29–35. How is the use of alcohol shown in these verses?

Who has not seen just how destructive alcohol can be? Sure, not everyone who drinks becomes a drunk in the gutter (a terrible place). But most likely, drunks in the gutter never dreamed that when they drank alcohol for the first time they would end up in the gutter.

“The man who has formed the habit of drinking alcohol is in a terrible situation. He cannot listen to advice from others who want to help him stop drinking. His stomach and brain are diseased. His will power is weakened. And his appetite becomes uncontrollable. Satan holds him in slavery. And the drunkard has no power to break it.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, volume 3, page 1162.

Read Proverbs 23:1–8. Why should we control our appetites?

This warning is about more than table manners. The Bible verses are a warning to those who like to eat and who have great appetites (Proverbs 23:2). The symbol (word-picture) of putting a knife to one’s throat is very strong. It means controlling the appetite. It also suggests the risk to your health and even your life that could be caused by overeating. The Hebrew word *bin*, translated “consider carefully,” gives the idea of carefully deciding between eating different kinds of food. The same word is used by Solomon when he asks for wisdom to help him “discern [*bin*—see; judge] between good and evil” (1 Kings 3:9, NKJV).

Think about someone you know whose life has been destroyed by alcohol. Why should that example alone be enough to help you to understand why you should never put that poison into your body?

OUR RESPONSIBILITIES (Ezekiel 33:8)

“Suppose I say to a sinful person, ‘You can be sure that you will die.’ And suppose you do not try to get him to change his ways. Then he will die because he has sinned. And I will hold you accountable [responsible] for his death” (Ezekiel 33:8, NlrV). What basic principle (important rule) is shown here? How do we take this idea and use it in our everyday lives?

Years ago, in a big Western city, a woman was being attacked at night on a street. She cried out for help. Many people heard her, but not one person even bothered to call the police. Most people looked out the window and then went back to whatever they were doing. Soon the woman’s cries stopped. Later, she was found dead, stabbed many times.

Were the people who heard her cries but did nothing responsible for her death? They had not attacked her themselves, but was their inaction at least partially responsible for her death?

Read Proverbs 24:11, 12, 23–28. What important messages are here for us?

The law of Moses clearly warns that those who fail to report what they witness will have to accept guilt (Leviticus 5:1). We may not be able to act against crime. But we must not keep silent about what we see. If we do, we share the guilt with the criminal. By our silence, we become partners in the crime.

On the other hand, suppose we report the truth in our testimony, giving the “right answer” (Proverbs 24:26). We answer quickly and act as responsible people. This act is compared⁶ to a kiss on the lips. It means that the person telling the truth cares about other people.

It is sad enough to remain silent and do nothing as a woman is being murdered on your street. But what about many of the other evils in the world such as hunger, war, injustice, racism,⁷ and cheating or unfairly controlling people financially? What are our responsibilities?

DEFINITIONS

6. compared—to show how two or more things are the same or different.

7. racism—belief that one’s own race or kind is better than others.

DEFINITIONS

8. *Testimonies*—the writings of Ellen G. White.

ADDITIONAL STUDY: “Souls around us must get interested in the gospel and be saved, or they die. We must not waste a minute. We all have an influence that tells for the truth or against it. I desire to carry with me strong proof that I am one of Christ’s disciples. We want something more than just Sabbath religion. We need the living principle and to daily feel personal responsibility. This is ignored by many. And the fruit is carelessness, an uncaring attitude, a lack of watchfulness and spirituality.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Testimonies*⁸ for the Church, volume 1, page 99.

“Talk faith, live faith, develop love to God. This is proof to the world that Jesus is all and everything to you. Announce His holy name. Tell of His goodness. Talk of His mercy, and tell of His power.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Our High Calling*, page 20.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ① In class, go over your answer to Sunday’s final question. What can we learn from each other’s answers? What are ways that we can learn to build up our faith in what we believe?
- ② Someone wrote, “Remember two things: Christ died for you, and you will one day die.” Tuesday’s study talked about how we will have to answer for sin one way or another. So, what important lesson should we learn from this thought?
- ③ Here again is the sign put on the buses in London: “There is probably no God. Now stop worrying and enjoy your life.” What other problems do you find with that sign? What does this attitude (thought or feeling) tell us about how well Satan has twisted the character (goodness and love) of God in the minds of many people? In class, come up with different ways in which you could answer that sign. What are some short, clever sayings you could put on signs that could help people see the hope that we can have in God?