

The Blessings of the Righteous (Faithful People)



SABBATH—JANUARY 24

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Proverbs 10:1–14; Matthew 19:19; Proverbs 11, 12; John 3:16; Proverbs 13.

MEMORY VERSE: “Blessings are like crowns on the heads of those who do right. But the trouble caused by what sinners say destroys them” (Proverbs 10:6, NIV).

AS THE TITLE SUGGESTS, THIS LESSON LOOKS AT THE BLESSINGS OF THE RIGHTEOUS. The Hebrew word *zaddiq*, meaning “righteous,” is the key word in our verses. *Zedeq* (also meaning “justice”) appears in the introduction of the whole book: “The proverbs of Solomon . . . to receive the instruction of wisdom, justice [*zedeq*]” (Proverbs 1:1–3). What the book of Proverbs is telling us is that wisdom is righteousness. “Righteousness” means to walk according to God’s commands. It also means to walk in faith and obedience to what the Lord has asked us to be and to do. Righteousness is a gift that comes from God. Foolishness and unfaithfulness are very different. Wisdom is justice or righteousness. But foolishness is sin and wickedness. In the verses we will study, the difference between them is sharp.

RIGHTEOUSNESS IS HOLISTIC¹ (Proverbs 10:1–7)

Read Proverbs 10:1–7. What principles (important rules) about life and faith are shown here?

There is a story about a man in a boat who began to drill a hole under his feet where he sat. People in the boat told him to stop. But he answered, “This is none of your business. This is my place!” This foolish answer is often the excuse used by the sinner for his or her sinful actions. He or she probably would answer, “This is my life. It has nothing to do with you.” Anything we do or do not do has an influence on others and on those who are very close to us. Who has not felt the results of other people’s actions, either good or bad?

The principle of unity (oneness) between the spiritual or righteous (holy) life and the physical life is discussed in verses 3–5. The main idea is that wickedness does not pay, even if one is rich. And the second idea is that righteousness is always rewarding, in one way or another, even if one is poor.

In verses 6 and 7, we find here another example of what Jesus said about how lust is adultery² and that hatred is the same as murder. Hiding our hatred behind our words does not always work. Wicked thoughts are often betrayed in our body language and in our voice. The best possible starting point for getting along well with others is, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Leviticus 19:18, NKJV; compare³ with Matthew 19:19, NKJV). As the verses also suggest, the good impression (strong effect) you make on others can have a positive influence on their lives and the lives of others. In the end is it not better to have a good name than a bad one?

What important decision are you going to be making soon? If you have not already done so, think carefully about the influence that choice might have on others, for good or for evil.

DEFINITIONS

1. holistic—complete, whole, and having to do with every part of our lives instead of just parts or pieces of it.
2. adultery—sex outside of marriage.
3. compare—to show how two or more things are the same or different.

THE MOUTH OF THE RIGHTEOUS (HOLY) (Proverbs 10:11–14)



The mouth is the most important part of the body in the book of Proverbs.



Through speech, God created the heavens and the earth.

The mouth (with its parts—the lips and the tongue) is the most important organ (part of the body) in the book of Proverbs. 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 very important theme in Proverbs 10–29.

The basic theme is important: our words are very powerful, either for good or for evil. The tongue can be the best or the worst gift that we have been given. This understanding about the tongue is one of the most important lessons in Proverbs. The mouth gives life, but it also may bring death.

Read Proverbs 10:11–14. What is the difference between how the righteous person speaks and how the fool speaks?

In verse 11, notice the wording the “well [fountain] of life.” As a symbol, a well means the good things of wisdom. It also is used to point to the Lord (Psalm 36:9), the Creator of life. The same picture is used about the sanctuary, to describe the stream of water that flows from it (Ezekiel 47:1, 2). Jesus uses this symbol to show the gift of the Spirit (John 4:14). So, the comparison of the mouth of the righteous to “a well of life” points to God Himself.

What is important about this mouth is the positive gift of “life.” This should tell us what the “duty” of the mouth should be. It should be something for good, not evil. It gives life, not death. James 3:2–12 says the same thing about the mouth.

Through speech, through the “word of His power” (Hebrews 1:3, NKJV), God created the heavens and the earth. So, speech should serve only creative and positive purposes.

Think about just how powerful words are. With your words you can fill people with faith in themselves, cheer, and hope. Or you can break them down and damage them as surely as if you attacked them physically. How careful are you as you use the power of your tongue?

THE HOPE OF THE RIGHTEOUS (Proverbs 11)

“Those who do what is right are guided by their honest lives. But those who aren’t [are not] faithful are destroyed by their trickery” (Proverbs 11:3, NIV). What proof do we have of the truth of this verse? What examples have you seen or heard about in which this spiritual truth has been shown? On the other hand, what things have you seen that teach you that you have to take this verse by faith?

Read Proverbs 11. It touches on so many topics. But what are some of the great blessings that come to the faithful? And what happens to the wicked?

The sense of a future and the reward of what is in heaven (2 Corinthians 4:18) help encourage the righteous to live rightly. Because of their hope in the future, the righteous are humble, honest, and merciful.

On the other hand, wicked people live only in the present. They are interested in only what they see and in the worldly reward. They think of themselves before others and will lie to and abuse people. For example, the salespeople who deceive (trick) their customers might perhaps get a quick reward with a higher price. But they finally could lose their customers, and their business might fail (Proverbs 11:3, 18).

Think about some of the decisions you have to make and how you go about making them. How much long-term planning (as in eternity) influences your choices?

THE TRUTH OF THE RIGHTEOUS (Proverbs 12)

Read Proverbs 12. Pay close attention to the theme about telling truth or telling lies. What message do we find here about honesty and lying?

Philosopher⁴ Sissela Bok has shown how lying can be harmful to people. She writes, “In society some members were unable to tell the difference between truthful messages and lying ones. This kind of society would fall apart.”—Adapted from *Lying: Moral [Right or Wrong] Choice in Public and Private Life* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978), page 19. Augustine, a famous Christian thinker who was born in A.D. 354, is also mentioned in Bok’s book. He said, “When truth has been broken down or even weakened a little, all things will remain doubtful.”—Page 15.

Ellen G. White wrote, “Lying lips are disgusting to Jesus. He announces to the holy city ‘there shall enter no one [who is] a person who sins or lies’ [adapted]. Let truth not be twisted by lies. Let truth become a part of the life. Playing fast and loose with truth, and lying to suit one’s own selfish plans, will shipwreck one’s faith. . . . He who lies sells his soul in a cheap market. His lies may seem to serve in emergencies. He may seem to make business profit that he could not gain by fair dealing. But he finally reaches the place where he can trust no one. Himself a liar, he cannot trust the word of others.”—Adapted from *My Life Today*, page 331.

When we think of how powerful words are, we must think about lying too. Most lies are told with words. Who has not felt the sting, the betrayal, the sense of being cheated upon being lied to? It is not hard to imagine a society becoming a total mess when lying is more common than honesty.

Think also about what happens to the one who lies. Some people are so used to lying that it does not bother them. But many people do feel a sense of guilt, or shame, when they lie. Good for them, because that means the Holy Spirit is still working on them.

But think about the danger for the one who lies but does not even think twice about it.

When was the last time you lied? How did you feel when you did it?

DEFINITIONS

4. philosopher—a thinker who studies about life and truth.

THE REWARD OF THE RIGHTEOUS (John 3:16)

In Proverbs, much of the instruction and teaching has been given by showing the sharp difference between two kinds of people. “The wise person does this, the fool does that.” “The godly man does that, the wicked man does this.”

There is often a bit of wisdom and foolishness in all of us—except for Jesus. But the rest of us all are sinners. We all fall “short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23). Good thing we have the wonderful promise that comes in the next verse: we are sinners but “the free gift of God’s grace⁵ makes all of us right with him. Christ Jesus paid the price to set us free” (Romans 3:24, NIV).

In the end, all humans are going to be in one of two groups: people who are going to be saved or people who are going to be lost.

Read John 3:16. What two choices do all humans face?

Read Proverbs 13. How does this chapter show how different the experience and fate of the righteous are from that of the wicked?

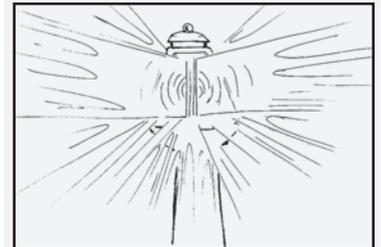
The wise are the same as a lamp that burns all the time. But the wicked are the same as a lamp that will be put out (Proverbs 13:9). The wise person will enjoy the good fruit of his or her work. But, in the end, the sinner will receive evil (verses 2, 25). Through their children, the wise have a future even beyond (ahead) themselves (Proverbs 13:22). But the wicked will leave their riches to strangers, even to the righteous (Proverbs 13:22).

The point is that a life of faith and obedience to the Lord is better than a life of disobedience and foolishness.

With the promise of eternal life, what are some of the present, day-to-day rewards that you have experienced through living a life of faith in Christ?



We all fall short of the glory of God.



The wise are a lamp that burns all the time.

DEFINITIONS

5. grace—God’s gift of mercy and forgiveness that He freely gives us to take away our sins.

ADDITIONAL STUDY: “It is not enough to just accept Christ and have our names listed on the church roll. . . . Whatever our beliefs are, it means nothing if we do not show Christ in all that we do.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, pages 312, 313.

“The greatest lie in the human mind in Christ’s day was that just agreeing with the truth meant righteousness. In all human experience the knowledge of the truth has been proven to be not enough for the saving of the soul. . . . The darkest chapters of history are full of crimes done by prejudiced or misguided Christians. . . . The same danger is still here for us. Many take it for granted that they are Christians just because they believe in several doctrines [beliefs or truths]. But they have not brought the truth into their lives. . . . Men may claim faith in the truth. But if it does not make them serious, kind, patient, heavenly-minded, then it is a curse to them. And through their influence it is a curse to the world.

“The righteousness which Christ taught is uniting [joining] the heart and life to the will [plan] of God.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, pages 309, 310.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

① Discuss how our decisions influence others for good or for evil. Why is this a fact of life? This truth was first shown in the story of the Fall. And even to this day the influence of Adam’s and Eve’s choice is felt in each of our lives. It might be tempting to try to measure the amount of good or bad our decisions might bring. But that is risky, because we often do not know the influence of our choices. Then why must we choose to do what is right?

② Proverbs makes a sharp difference between the righteous and the fool. From these verses we learn about what is right and wrong. But why must we be very careful whom we judge as fools? On the other hand, how often have we been deceived by people who claimed to be righteous but were not?