

# The Blessings of the Righteous



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## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Prov. 10:1–14, Matt. 19:19, Proverbs 11–12, John 3:16, Proverbs 13.*

**Memory Text:** “Blessings are on the head of the righteous, but violence covers the mouth of the wicked” (*Proverbs 10:6, NKJV*).

As the title suggests, this lesson looks at the blessings of the righteous. The Hebrew word *zaddiq*, for “righteous,” is the key word in our texts. *Zedeq* (also translated “justice”), from which it is derived, appears in the introduction of the whole book: “The proverbs of Solomon . . . to receive the instruction of wisdom, justice [*zedeq*] . . .” (*Prov. 1:1–3*). What the book of Proverbs is telling us is that wisdom is righteousness, and “righteousness” means to walk according to God’s commands—to walk in faith and obedience to what the Lord has called us to be and to do. Righteousness is a gift, one that comes from God. The opposite is folly and unfaithfulness. Wisdom is justice, or righteousness; folly is sin and wickedness—and in the verses we will study, the contrast between them is stark.

\* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, January 31.

## Righteousness Is Holistic

**Read** Proverbs 10:1–7. What various principles about life and faith are revealed here?

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There is a story about a man in a boat who began to drill a hole under his feet where he sat. When people in the boat demanded that he stop, he responded: “This is none of your business. This is my place!” This absurd response is often the excuse used by the sinner to justify his or her behavior. “This is my life; it has nothing to do with you.” Of course, anything we do or don’t do has an impact on others, especially on those nearest to us. Who hasn’t felt, in a big way, the results of other people’s actions, either good or bad?

The principle of unity between the spiritual-moral life and the physical-material life is dealt with in verses 3–5. The main idea is that wickedness or moral deficiency does not pay, even if one is rich; and that righteousness is always rewarding, in one way or another, even if one is poor.

In verses 6 and 7, we see here an earlier expression of what Jesus said about how lust is adultery, or hatred akin to murder. Hiding our hatred behind our words doesn’t always work either. Wicked thoughts are often betrayed in our body language and the tone of our voice. The best possible starting point for good relations with others is, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (*Lev. 19:18, NKJV; compare with Matt. 19:19, NKJV*). As the texts also suggest, the impression you make for good can have a lasting influence on others. In the end, we’re dealing with a certain amount of common sense: Isn’t it better to have a good name than a bad one?

**What important decision are you going to be making soon? If you haven’t already done so, consider carefully the impact that choice might have on others, for good or for evil.**

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## The Mouth of the Righteous

The mouth (with its components, the lips and the tongue) is the most important organ 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 particularly important theme in Proverbs 10–29.

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

**Read Proverbs 10:11–14. What is the contrast there between how the righteous person speaks and how the fool does?**

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In verse 11, notice the expression the “well of life.” It symbolically refers to qualities of wisdom. It is used in reference to the Lord (*Ps.* 36:9), the Source of life. The same image is used in relation to the sanctuary, from which the stream of water springs (*Ezek.* 47:1, 2). Jesus uses this metaphor to illustrate the gift of the Spirit (*John* 4:14). So the comparison of the mouth of the righteous to “a well of life” amounts to relating it to God Himself.

What characterizes this mouth is the positive gift of “life.” This quality tells us what the proper function of the mouth should be. It should be a force for good, not evil; a source of life, not death. What is being said here is seen also in James 3:2–12.

Remember, too, that it was through speech, through the “word of His power” (*Heb.* 1:3, *NKJV*), that God created the heavens and the earth. Speech, therefore, should serve only creative purposes.

**Consider just how incredibly powerful words are. With your words you can fill people with self-confidence, 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 wield the power of your tongue?**

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## The Hope of the Righteous

“The integrity of the upright shall guide them; but the perverseness of transgressors shall destroy them” (*Prov. 11:3*). What evidence do we have of the truth of this verse? What examples have you seen or heard about in which this spiritual truth has been revealed? By contrast, what things have you seen that mean, so far at least, that you have to take this text by faith?

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**Read** Proverbs 11. Though it touches on so many topics, what are some of the great blessings that come to the faithful as opposed to what happens to the wicked?

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The sense of a future and the value of what is not yet seen (*see 2 Cor. 4:18*) help motivate the righteous to live rightly. Because of their hope in the future, the righteous behave with humility, honesty, and compassion.

On the other hand, wicked people live only in the present; they are concerned only with what they see and with the immediate reward. They think of themselves before others and will resort to deception and abuse. For instance, the salespeople who deceive their customers might perhaps get an immediate reward with a higher price, but they ultimately could lose their customers, and their business might fail (*Prov. 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) factors into your choices?**

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## The Truth of the Righteous

**Read** Proverbs 12 and focus on the theme of words, especially in the context of telling truth or telling lies. What message do we find here about honesty and lying?

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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.

Ellen G. White wrote: “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.

When we think of how powerful words are, we must think about lying, as well, because most lies are told with words. Who hasn’t felt the sting, the betrayal, the sense of defilement when lied to? It’s not hard to imagine a society falling into total chaos when lying is the norm rather than an aberration from the norm.

There’s another angle, too: the effect of lying on the one who lies. Some people are so used to the practice that it doesn’t bother them; many people, though, do feel a sense of guilt, of shame, when they lie. Good for them, because that means there is still some receptiveness to the Holy Spirit.

Imagine, though, the danger for the one who lies but doesn’t even think twice about it.

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

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## The Reward of the Righteous

As we have seen in Proverbs, so much of the instruction and teaching given has been presented by contrasting two types of people. “The wise person does this, the fool does that.” “The godly man does that, the wicked man does this.”

Of course, in reality, there’s often a bit of wisdom and foolishness in all of us. With the exception of Jesus, we all are sinners, we all fall “short of the glory of God” (*Rom. 3:23*). Fortunately, we have the wonderful promise that comes in the next verse: though we are sinners, by faith we can be “justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus” (*vs. 24*).

In the end, all humanity is going to be in either one of two camps: people who are going to be saved or lost.

**Read** John 3:16. What two options does all humanity face?

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**Read** Proverbs 13. How does this chapter contrast the experience and fate of the righteous with that of the wicked?

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The wise are compared to a lasting lamp, while the wicked are compared to a lamp that will be put out (*Prov. 13:9*). The wise person will enjoy the good fruit of his or her work, while the sinner will reap evil (*vss. 2, 25*). Through their children (*vs. 22*), the wise have a future even beyond themselves; the wicked, instead, will leave their wealth to strangers, even to the righteous (*vs. 22*).

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

**Putting aside the big issue of the promise of eternal life, what are some of the immediate, day-to-day advantages that you have experienced through living a life of faith in Christ?**

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**Further Study:** “It is not enough to make a profession of faith in Christ and have our names registered on the church roll. . . . Whatever our profession, it amounts to nothing unless Christ is revealed in works of righteousness.”—Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, pp. 312, 313.

“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. . . . The darkest chapters of history are burdened with the record of crimes committed by bigoted religionists. . . . 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. . . . 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.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 309, 310.

### Discussion Questions:

**1** Discuss how our decisions impact others for good or for evil. Why is this an inescapable fact of life? This truth was first revealed in the story of the Fall, where even to this day the impact 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’s risky, because we often don’t know the impact of our choices. Why, then, in light of God and His law, must we choose to do what’s right, regardless of what we fear the consequences might be?

**2** Proverbs makes a sharp distinction between the righteous and the fool, and from these verses we learn about what is right and wrong. Why, though, must we be very careful whom we judge as fools? On the other hand, how often have we been deceived by those whom we once thought were righteous?

## *The Lesson in Brief*

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► **Key Text:** *Proverbs 10:6*

► **The Student Will:**

**Know:** Understand the contrast between good results of good choices and bad results of bad choices.

**Feel:** Trust in God's wisdom and desire for our well-being.

**Do:** Be aware of the causes of positive and negative effects in our lives and commit to making better choices.

► **Learning Outline:**

**I. Know: Our Choices Make a Difference.**

- A** What kinds of choices do we have in life?
- B** How and why do our choices cause positive or negative effects for ourselves and others?
- C** How do our inner attitudes affect our choices?
- D** How does God guide and encourage us to make good choices?

**II. Feel: God Is Wise and Desires Our Well-Being.**

- A** Why do we sometimes put our own judgment above God's, rather than trusting that He knows what is best for us?
- B** Why might we regard God's instructions as arbitrary and irrelevant to our well-being, as opposed to believing that He wants the best for us?
- C** How do our feelings about God come across to others?

**III. Do: Be More Aware and Make Better Choices.**

- A** Which aspects of your life that are under your control could be better?
- B** What efforts are you willing to put forth in order to understand what is going on and to make changes?
- C** What will you do if changing is difficult?

► **Summary:** God explains the principles of cause and effect at work in our lives so that we can know how to make choices that benefit us and others.

## Learning Cycle

### ►STEP 1—Motivate

**Spotlight on Scripture:** *Proverbs 10:1–7*

**Key Concept for Spiritual Growth:** God created humans with free choice so that we can love Him and one another. Without free choice, there can be no love. But if we are free to choose God and His love, we are also free to reject Him and choose selfishness instead. Rather than forcing us to choose Him, in which case there would be no real choice or opportunity for love, God clearly sets out the alternatives and their consequences before us so that we can make informed choices rather than being deceived through ignorance.

**Just for Teachers:** The proverbs of Solomon in chapter 10 of the book of Proverbs are mainly constructed as contrasting parallels. The two halves of each proverb are connected by a common element but separated by factors that are opposite. Thus, the two parts of verse 1 are linked by the topic of a son’s effect on his parents. Whether a parent is happy or experiences grief depends on whether the son is wise or foolish. By analyzing relationships between the two parts of these proverbs, we can find concepts that we might otherwise miss.

For example, Proverbs 10:6 reads, “Blessings are on the head of the righteous, but violence covers the mouth of the wicked” (*NKJV*). The unifying element is the effect of one’s character on a part of the person’s body. The idea of violence covering the mouth can be taken in two ways. First, the mouth could be a source of violence (*compare vs. 11*), so that the guilt of violence would cover it (*compare Mal. 2:16*). Second, a wicked person could suffer violence in such a way that he could not even cry for help (*compare Esther 7:8–10*). By combining the two ideas, the reader gains the meaning that setting evil in motion with one’s mouth comes back to affect the mouth. Not only does the punishment fit the crime, it results from the crime.

**Opening Discussion:** The fact that Proverbs presents so many choices shows the importance of our power of choice. God gave Adam and Eve a perfect world, but He also gave them the freedom to choose something else through eating the fruit of the “tree of the knowledge of good and evil” (*Gen. 2:17*). They did not need it; nor was it good for them, but they could have it if they wanted. By choosing that one tree, they were imprisoned by its world of moral weakness, sorrow, suffering, and death (*Genesis 3*). Now their choices, and those of all their descendants, would be difficult and complicated.

**Questions for Discussion:**

- ❶ How do sin and its results complicate our choices?
- ❷ How does the book of Proverbs show the complexities of life and how to safely navigate through them?

**►STEP 2—Explore**

**Just for Teachers:** Proverbs emphasizes that our Creator gives us great freedom of choice, but He has also set up causes and effects that make things work in our world according to our nature. So, violating the relational boundaries that God has made for our good (see Deut. 10:13) is an invitation to disaster as a matter of cause and effect, not because God inflicts arbitrary punishment. Every sane person wants to achieve a sense of well-being, happiness, and success in life; so, Proverbs motivates by appealing to common sense.

**Bible Commentary**

Proverbs teaches about values and their results. Those who are loving and humble often receive the benefits of these virtues in their lives. Even if they suffer in the present age, Jesus is coming to reward them in the age to come (Rev. 22:12).

In Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28–30, God promised to lavish blessings on those who would faithfully follow Him and receive the benefits of living according to the principles of cause and effect that He has set up. By blessing them, He can attract others to follow Him too (Deut. 4:6).

**I. Love Covers All Sins** (Review Proverbs 10 with your class.)

Proverbs 10:12 observes, “Hatred stirs up strife, but love covers all sins” (NKJV). Here, covering sins is good because it results from love, which is the opposite of hatred. However, 28:13 says, “He who covers his sins will not prosper, but whoever confesses and forsakes them will have mercy” (NKJV).

Covering sins as a cover-up is not good. Here, a person covers up his or her own sins, but, in 10:12, our love for others will cover their sins against us. The Hebrew noun for “sin” here is a strong one, which is often translated “transgression” elsewhere in the Bible. It carries the idea of “rebellion” (compare the related verb “rebel” in 2 Kings 1:1). Thus, Proverbs 10:12 is powerful: if you have love that is willing to overlook and forgive the kinds of offenses against you that break relationships, you will enjoy peace rather than strife. We can forgive others as God forgives us, because we love people as God and His Son love us (John 3:16).

**Consider This:** Can you think of times in your life that love has preserved and healed your relationships? Can you see how love for oneself and others (*compare Lev. 19:18*) underlies specific illustrations in Proverbs?

## II. Wisdom in Humility (*Review Proverbs 11, 12 with your class.*)

Proverbs 11:2 says, “When pride comes, then comes shame; but with the humble is wisdom” (*NKJV*). The wisdom of humility and the foolishness of pride is a prominent theme in the book of Proverbs (*for example, see 16:18*). Proud, arrogant people do not listen to others, because they are sure that they are right. Proverbs 12:15 calls such a person a “fool.”

Humility is a basic requirement for wisdom because a humble person respects the Source of wisdom and therefore is teachable. Above all, a humble person respects the divine Source of all wisdom. This is why “the fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom” (*Prov. 9:10, NKJV*). Pride is sin because it rebels against God and His goodness (*Prov. 8:13; Isa. 14:13, 14*), but God promises to dwell with humble people and revive them (*Isa. 57:15*). The basis of this revival is the sacrifice of Christ, who humbled Himself and therefore is exalted (*Phil. 2:5–10*). His acceptance of humility looks like foolishness to the world, but it is the greatest demonstration of divine wisdom (*1 Cor. 1:18–25*).

**Discussion Questions:** How did humility or pride affect specific people in Bible stories? How have you seen the different effects of humility and pride in your life?

## III. Reward of the Righteous (*Review Proverbs 13 with your class.*)

Proverbs 13:21 lays out two alternatives: “Evil pursues sinners, but to the righteous, good shall be repaid” (*NKJV*). Here, evil is a dynamic, active force that hunts down those who violate God’s law of love, but the righteous will surely enjoy the results of their choices.

In Psalm 23:6, goodness is also an active force: “Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life” (*NKJV*). The Hebrew verb translated as “follow” means “pursue.” It is the same word that appears in Proverbs 13:21. So, those who pursue good are pursued by it! They don’t need to worry about the reward they will receive; it will surely come (*Matt. 6:33*). This dynamic explains Proverbs 13:7: “There is one who makes himself rich, yet has nothing; and one who makes himself poor, yet has great riches” (*NKJV*). A person who seeks first to be rich in this life ends up with nothing, but one who gives all to serve others, as Jesus did, will have an eternal reward.

**Consider This:** Where do you find the idea of rewards for the righteous elsewhere

in the Bible? What particular kinds of rewards do you want in this life and the life to come? How does the way you live reflect the kinds of rewards you want?

### ►STEP 3—Apply

**Just for Teachers:** Love, humility, and deferring the enjoyment of rewards until the next life are not natural for fallen human beings. Help your class to grasp the big picture of long-range cause and effect so that they are motivated to live by faith in God's promises and instructions and not just by what they see around them.

#### Application Questions:

① In what ways are we loving and humble people? How do these basic qualities affect those around us and our witness for Christ?

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② How can we apply Romans 5:5 and Philippians 2:1–11 in our lives to become more loving and humble?

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### ►STEP 4—Create

**Just for Teachers:** This study of Proverbs 10–13 has identified major opportunities for personal growth and effectiveness in sharing God's goodness. Emphasize to your class the practical results of humbly receiving and passing on His love and blessings.

#### Activities:

① List specific ways in which your church group can be a more powerful witness for Christ by humbly serving others through love.

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② Conduct a survey in your community to find ways in which your church can help meet its needs. What do the results of the survey reveal about how your church can best serve? Commit to putting one of the suggestions on the survey into action.

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