

The Blessings *of the* Righteous



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?

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.

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?

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?

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?

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?

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?

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?

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?

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?

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

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 (*vs. 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?

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?

A Light in the World

Heather Ueeck grew up in Delta Junction, a small town at the end of the Alaska Highway. As a child, Heather loved going to camp every summer and kept a record of her experiences, listing her daily activities. Early on she wrote, “And of course we had to do worship, and that was dumb.”

But as the years went by, camp worships became more meaningful to Heather. One worship that made a big impression involved a candle and a balloon. “They held a balloon over a lit candle, and the balloon popped right away. Then they put water into another balloon and held it over the candle, and it didn’t pop! The presenter explained that we are like the balloon and the water represents Christ. If we have Christ in us, He calms us and gives us peace and strength. He’s a resource that we can latch on to.”

Heather now tries to pass on these lessons to campers as she works at Camp Polaris. “The kids aren’t Adventists, and they don’t come from the best families. They aren’t used to discipline, to structure, and people caring about them. They often act up. Sometimes it seems as if they hate camp, but they keep coming back. Even with the struggles, underneath they realize that we actually care about them.”

Heather admits that working at Camp Polaris has taught her patience. “It’s my job to lead the kids toward God. Patience and flexibility are so important, and trusting in God. It’s given me a strong tool for facing situations that will come up in my life—just learning to deal with the things that this world throws at you. It’s given me an appreciation for others who have served me and has given me the attitude that I want to help other people and be a light in the world.”

Camp Polaris is in need of updated facilities, such as “bear-proof cabins,” says Heather. And now that the Moodys have left, the only way to ferry the children to camp is by making several one-and-a-half-hour trips by small boat. Restroom and bathing facilities include two outhouses, a steam sauna, and the icy waters of Lake Aleknagik.

But the primitive accommodations are not a deterrent for Heather. “I’ve lived in Alaska all my life,” she says, “and [Camp Polaris] is the most isolated I’ve ever been. But it’s definitely a place where you can feel very close to God. I really love it up there.”