

The Proverbs

Lesson 11

Proverbs 10:15-32

Rich/Poor

Proverbs 10:15 The rich man's wealth is his fortress, the ruin of the poor is their poverty.

Rich people are rich because rich people do what rich people do, no matter how much money they earn in a lifetime. Conversely, poor people are poor because poor people do what poor people do, not matter how much money they earn in lifetime. Wealth and poverty are two ends of the spectrum of economic, social, mental, and spiritual life. You can be wealthy in one area but poor in another. Mental and spiritual wealth is available to all and many of the poorest in this world are wealthy beyond measure in these two areas because of their relationship to the Lord of lords and King of kings. Yet, Solomon intends for this passage to address the social and economic aspects of wealth and poverty. The truly wealthy spend a lifetime building their nest egg, the truly poor will spend all they have as quickly as they can on things that do not matter.

Righteous/Wicked

Proverbs 10:16 The wages of the righteous is life, the income of the wicked, punishment.

Here, Solomon uses the word righteous and therefore sets the intent of the proverb as one with spiritual meaning. Righteousness leads to eternal life; wickedness leads to eternal punishment. The payment for a righteous person's work is life with the Lord. The payment for the wicked person is the penalty of life without the Lord.

Heed/Forsake

Proverbs 10:17 He is *on* the path of life who heeds instruction, but he who forsakes reproof goes astray.

On this "path of life", none of us have arrived at our final destination on this side of eternity. Solomon does not use the words righteous and fool here, but they fit the context perfectly. Righteous people are always learning, storing knowledge, hungering and thirsting for the truth, seeking the next diamond or fleck of gold from the Lord. They are eager for a word of reproof, a sentence of correction, a road sign pointing to a new direction at the end of every day. Some road signs point to good; some point to evil. The righteous know the difference. The fool believes he has arrived; he pompously knows all the answers and rejects any input from anyone, good or evil. He never learns. He is stuck in his ways, never growing, never knowing more about that which is important. His path leads nowhere.

Righteous/Fool

Proverbs 10:18 He who conceals hatred *has* lying lips, and he who spreads slander is a fool.

This proverb does not fit the pattern of the antithetical nature or the rest of the proverbs in this section. The change causes concern about its translation and original structure; however, a look at the Septuagint answers the concern showing that the English translation should say, “Righteous lips cover enmity; but they that utter railings are most foolish.” The Hebrew Tanakh says, “Dissembling lips keep hatred secretly, but he that speaketh any slander, is a fool.” “Dissembling” means play acting. Therefore, the Septuagint and Tanakh pose a new problem with one using the word “righteous” and the other using the word “dissembling”. Nevertheless, the two remove the idea of “lying lips” which helps discern the meaning. Whether one is righteous or play acting, the wise person will keep secret his hatred until the proper time to reveal it but the fool will spread his hatred in false reports.

Loose Lips/Restrained Lips

Proverbs 10:19 When there are many words, transgression is unavoidable, but he who restrains his lips is wise.

People do not like talkers! Even though a talker may be telling the truth, a “transgression is unavoidable.” A transgression is the sin of overstepping the limits or boundaries. People who tell all they know will eventually overstep the limits or boundaries of what is proper for them to say. It does not mean that what they are saying is false; it just means that it is not their place to say what they are saying. Conversely, the wise person will store up what he knows and never use the pretense that because it is truth, it can be told.

Righteous/Wicked

Proverbs 10:20 The tongue of the righteous is *as* choice silver, the heart of the wicked is *worth* little.

When Solomon wrote this proverb, silver was the most valuable metal in the world, followed by gold. Not until 500 BC did gold take the lead as the most precious metal on earth a fact which can be seen in all the books of the Bible written after that date. For Solomon, the “tongue of the righteous” is the most precious commodity attainable. On the other hand, wickedness is the least valuable commodity attainable and even more dangerous because it represents the intent of the heart of the person.

Righteous/Fool

Proverbs 10: 21 The lips of the righteous feed many, but fools die for lack of understanding.

Words spoken by the “lips of the righteous” will provide God’s blessing and foster enjoyment and comfort. Conversely, words spoken by the fool bring troubles and difficulties which are not the property of God. Righteous words lead to life; foolish words lead to death.

Blessing/Sorrow

Proverbs 10:22 It is the blessing of the LORD that makes rich, and He adds no sorrow to it.

Here, the opposing points are blessings versus sorrows. The LORD does what He does in His Providence to bring about richness without one drop of sorrow. Properly, the word rich in this context does not mean wealth but rather growing or accumulating as in the case of wisdom. What better riches can be found than those of growing in a relationship with the LORD and

doing so without the need for grievous labor? It is not hard to grow in the LORD; it is harder to grow in wickedness and suffer the sorrow of troubles like a fool.

Wise/Wicked

Proverbs 10:23 Doing wickedness is like sport to a fool; and *so is* wisdom to a man of understanding.

“Sport” might be better translated laughter in this passage. The word “sport” could have a negative interpretation when associated with wickedness and wisdom in the same verse. The Hebrew word is translated laughter in other places in the Bible and it seems more appropriate for today’s use. In this verse, wickedness comes easily as laughter for the fool; conversely, wisdom also comes easily as laughter too for the wise man. Both occur easily, but have a different destination.

Righteous/Wicked

Proverbs 10:24 What the wicked fears will come upon him, and the desire of the righteous will be granted.

The truly righteous person should have no fear of that which will come. A time will arrive in every righteous person’s life during which the LORD will extend this physical life or He will begin eternal life. In either case, the LORD’s will is done and the righteous person has life. It is different for the wicked person. Although a wicked person may say he fears nothing, it is a lie; he has fear, mainly of death. A wicked person will face death; it will come and when it arrives, it will overtake him with a vengeance.

Righteous/Wicked

Proverbs 10:25 When the whirlwind passes, the wicked is no more, but the righteous *has* an everlasting foundation.

The wicked are not anchored to that which is everlasting in the LORD. The physical tornadoes of this world can snatch the wicked away and take them to eternal death away from the presence of the LORD. Not so with the righteous. The physical tornadoes can also snatch the righteous away but nothing, absolutely nothing, can rip the righteous out of the everlasting foundation of the presence of the LORD. In the Hebrew, “everlasting foundation” actually means that which shall never be shaken.

Righteous/Wicked

Proverbs 10:26 Like vinegar to the teeth and smoke to the eyes, so is the lazy one to those who send him.

We do not know how much the people of Solomon’s day knew about the parts of the body but they had discovered the detrimental effect of two things, vinegar and smoke. Today we know that the enamel of the mature tooth is one of the hardest materials created by the body; however, vinegar, which is acetic acid, can damage the enamel with prolonged use and therefore greatly affect the life-long health of a person. We might think of it as a silent enemy of the teeth as we use it to flavor foods while it quietly destroys the teeth. Smoke is different. We all know about the irritating nature of smoke to the eyes. It attacks the tender vessels causing pain, tears and

redness. It is readily noticeable to all as it almost shouts its irritation aloud. On one hand, the lazy sluggard quietly undermines his employer, and on the other hand he shouts things which bring irritation that cannot be undone.

Worship/Wicked

Proverbs 10:27 The fear of the LORD prolongs life, but the years of the wicked will be shortened.

We do not know how much Solomon understood the concept of eternal life; nevertheless, true life includes eternal life. Even though the body may die, the days of our lives will continue into eternity either in the presence of the LORD or in the lake of eternal fire. Fear in this passage, as in most of the Old Testament, means worship. The life of a person who worships the LORD will be extended by the LORD in eternal life. The life of a person who is wicked will enter into eternal death in torment.

Righteous/Wicked

Proverbs 10:28 The hope of the righteous is gladness, but the expectation of the wicked perishes.

The words hope and expectation are used today in many conversations. Hoping involves an optimistic attitude with a yet-to-be undetermined outcome. Not so in the Scripture. When the Bible uses the word hope, it is a sure fact, it will happen, it is written in eternity! For those who are righteous, gladness is assured in eternity. Conversely, for those who are wicked, the only sure expectation is that they will perish.

Stronghold/Ruin

Proverbs 10:29 The way of the LORD is a stronghold to the upright, but ruin to the workers of iniquity.

The word upright is another way of saying righteous. A stronghold means strength. Therefore, for the righteous, the LORD is the strength for the righteous person. The way of the LORD is also the ruin or destruction of the wicked workers of sin. The way of the LORD means the standards of the LORD. His standards determine that which is Godly and that which is sin. Those who fail to walk by the standards of the LORD will be judged by those standards and they will be found guilty and for that, they will perish.

Righteous/Wicked

Proverbs 10:30 The righteous will never be shaken, but the wicked will not dwell in the land.

It is obvious that wicked people live everywhere; therefore, it seems only right to interpret this proverb in terms of eternity. In eternity, the righteous will not be shaken. What does that mean? It means that the righteous will not be removed because their lives are built on the eternal foundation of the LORD and they will live with Him eternally when He returns to earth to set up His kingdom. When that event occurs, the wicked will not live in the land; they will be banished from His presence and condemned to eternal punishment.

Righteous/Perverted

Proverbs 10:31 The mouth of the righteous flows with wisdom, but the perverted tongue will be cut out.

Only in eternity will the mouth of the righteous flow with wisdom. At that time, the full knowledge of the LORD will be known; it is the wisdom of the LORD without one shred of error. That state can be obtained only in eternity. At that time, the tongue of the wicked will not be able to speak; no word of perversion will exist in the LORD's eternity; therefore, "the perverted tongue will be cut out."

Righteous/Wicked

Proverbs 10:32 The lips of the righteous bring forth what is acceptable, but the mouth of the wicked, what is perverted.

Righteous lips know what is acceptable as well as pleasing and profitable in this world and in the community of faith. The Hebrew words "bring forth" literally mean to bear fruit. It is as natural for a righteous person to speak words that are upright and acceptable as it is for a wicked person to speak words that bring forth that which is perverse.

Chapter 10 ends with this proverb. It is an arbitrary break in the proverbs and has nothing to do with the context of a passage. Chapter 11 continues with more proverbs which exhibit the same structure as those in Chapter 10.