

The Proverbs

Lesson 18

Proverbs 15

Gentle/Harsh

Proverbs 15:1 A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.

The word “gentle” actually means soft. It is a soft answer that turns away the wrath or rage of a listener. The word “harsh” refers to a hurtful word which literally escalates the anger rather than calms it down.

Tongue/Mouth

Proverbs 15:2 The tongue of the wise makes knowledge acceptable, but the mouth of fools spouts folly.

The wise use their words to lead people to trust truth. Conversely, the fool bubbles forth words that show his foolishness. In verse 28, we will find that the fool’s folly is sin. In verse 14, we will find that he feeds himself on the folly of his sin.

Eyes/Watching

Proverbs 15:3 The eyes of the LORD are in every place, watching the evil and the good.

Habakkuk 1:13 says, “Thine eyes are too pure to approve evil, and Thou canst not look on wickedness with favor.” Many theologians teach that God cannot look upon sin because of this passage. However, they fail to continue with the context which says, “Why dost Thou look with favor on those who deal treacherously? Why art Thou silent when the wicked swallow up those more righteous than they?” One can quickly notice that this verse is not about God’s being unable to look at sin; it is about His not looking upon sin with favor. Additionally, this verse is part of Habakkuk’s prayer. In his proverb, Solomon is not concerned with the favor of God. His proverb states that the eyes of the LORD see everything, in all places and at all times, both good and evil. The LORD created everything and then deemed some of those things as good and some as evil. He then revealed to those who love Him that they should stay away from the things he considers evil.

Soothing/Perversion

Proverbs 15:4 A soothing tongue is a tree of life, but perversion in it crushes the spirit.

Once again, Solomon refers to the tree of life. Planted in the Garden of Eden, the tree provided Adam and Eve a food source that would allow them to live forever as long as they continued to eat from it. After their sin, the tree of life was hidden from all humans; however, one day it will again be revealed and eaten by all who love and belong to the LORD. Therefore, Solomon’s reference to the tree represents health, healing and growth. Words that are soothing encourage

and promote emotional well-being. Perverse words do exactly the opposite, depressing the morale and spiritual health of a person.

Discipline/Reproof

Proverbs 15:5 A fool rejects his father's discipline, but he who regards reproof is prudent.

With each proverb with this theme, Solomon builds a picture of the fool who rejects his father's training. In 1:3, he is introduced as a fool. In 1:7, he is hardened. In 12:1, he is stupid. In 13:1 and 15:12, he makes sport of his foolishness. In 15:32, Solomon says that the fool is self-hating and in verse 15:10, that he will die. Conversely, the wise will be mindful of his father's training and thus bring honor to his father.

Wealth/Income

Proverbs 15:6 Much wealth is *in* the house of the righteous, but trouble is in the income of the wicked.

Solomon uses this theme several times in his book. Regardless of how he states his point, the conclusion is always the same, righteousness is rewarded and wickedness brings trouble.

Lips/Hearts

Proverbs 15:7 The lips of the wise spread knowledge, but the hearts of fools are not so.

Wise people associate with wise people and share their knowledge with each other. Fools know what they know and rarely share with each other important helpful information.

Abomination/Delight

Proverbs 15:8 The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the LORD, but the prayer of the upright is His delight.

Every act of an evil person is a stench in the nostrils of the Lord - each evil thought, word, deed and sacrifice. Why are their sacrifices a stench? At times, wicked people find themselves before the LORD and participate in worship as if their heart is truly in tune with Him. Many times, wicked people intentionally attend worship services for a show or to make a token offering to the LORD. These people are the true hypocrites. All worshipers make mistakes and can be accused of being hypocrites, but people who knowingly offer a moment of worship seeking to feel as if they have done something religious are the true hypocrites.

Abomination/Righteousness

Proverbs 15:9 The way of the wicked is an abomination to the LORD, but He loves him who pursues righteousness.

The LORD detests the worship of hypocrites as well as their other sinful acts. Wicked people pursue that which is ungodly and unrighteous. It is not so with the godly and righteous who love the Lord; they chase after virtue, decency and honesty.

Discipline/Reproof

Proverbs 15:10 Stern discipline is for him who forsakes the way; He who hates reproof will die.

In this proverb, the second clause expands the thought of the first. It takes a firm and demanding training schedule to correct the one who abandons the instruction from the LORD, a father or a mother. Continuing to hate that instruction will most assuredly lead to eternal death.

Sheol Open/Hearts of Men

Proverbs 15:11 Sheol and Abaddon *lie open* before the LORD, how much more the hearts of men!

Here the second clause expands on the first as in verse 11. “Sheol and Abaddon” means Hades and the invisible world of torment. Both are open and under the watchful eye of the LORD. He controls both and He has prepared them for people who hate and reject him. “How much more the hearts of men!” indicates that “Sheol and Abaddon *lie open*” for the men whose hearts are against the LORD.

Scoffer/Wise

Proverbs 15:12 A scoffer does not love one who reproves him, he will not go to the wise.

Verse 12 follows the same pattern of the two previous verses with the last clause expanding the first. The scoffer cannot bear the instruction of the wise and he will not dare ask a wise one for help.

Joyful Heart/Broken Spirit

Proverbs 15:13 A joyful heart makes a cheerful face, but when the heart is sad, the spirit is broken.

The body will show the visible signs of the condition of the heart, whether joyful or sad. The heart and face represent the body and the soul, but what about the spirit? When the body and soul are in despair, the spirit is also shattered.

Mind/Mouth

Proverbs 15:14 The mind of the intelligent seeks knowledge, but the mouth of fools feeds on folly.

Wise people continue to search for wisdom and knowledge. Many times, the search simply reveals more proof about what they already know. The ignorant will often be satisfied with what they think they know and they will hold to that little bit of knowledge as if it is the whole and complete documentation on the subject. This belief is foolish and does not lead the ignorant to a place of true knowledge.

Afflicted/Cheerful

Proverbs 15:15 All the days of the afflicted are bad, but a cheerful heart *has* a continual feast.

Some people are stricken with a tormented mind and every day and every situation are uphill struggles. Others who have a “cheerful heart” find the best in everything, realizing that the LORD is in control and working all things for their good.

Fear/Treasure

Proverbs 15:16 Better is a little with the fear of the LORD, than great treasure and turmoil with it.

For most, there is a point in the accumulation of wealth and things that the increase begins to own and control the person’s life rather than allow the things to bring joy and happiness. It is truly better to own and control just a little in this life and continue to enter into worship of the LORD rather than allow the things to rob our time, energy and resources.

Love/Hatred

Proverbs 15:17 Better is a dish of vegetables where love is, than a fattened ox and hatred with it.

The conclusion to this verse is similar to that of verse 16. It is better to have simple food and have the time to share true love with those around than to eat the expensive opulent meal at a table surrounded by hate.

Strife/Anger

Proverbs 15:18 A hot-tempered man stirs up strife, but the slow to anger pacifies contention.

Solomon regularly returns to this theme! The hot-tempered will make almost every situation worse whereas the person who is slow to show anger usually will soothe every possible conflict.

Hedge of Thorns/Highway

Proverbs 15:19 The way of the sluggard is as a hedge of thorns, but the path of the upright is a highway.

For those who fail to work, life’s paths are thorny and difficult. For the godly person, the LORD makes the crooked ways straight and the rugged paths smooth like a straight and paved highway.

Glad/Despise

Proverbs 15:20 A wise son makes a father glad, but a foolish man despises his mother.

This proverb adds to Solomon’s thought in 10:1 which says, “A wise son makes a father glad, but a foolish son is a grief to his mother.” In 10:1, the foolish son grieves his mother, in 15:20, the foolish son has become a man and he despises his mother. The first speaks of what he causes the mother to do, the second reveals his attitude toward her.

Lacks Sense/Walks Straight

Proverbs 15:21 Folly is joy to him who lacks sense, but a man of understanding walks straight.

The wise person walks in a straight course; his steps are thoughtful and predetermined. The fool whose heart is void of the truth enjoys the crooked and obstructed path.

Without Consultation/Many Counselors

Proverbs 15:22 Without consultation, plans are frustrated, but with many counselors they succeed.

The act of reaching out for advice from the wise is addressed by Solomon here and in 11:14, 20:18 and 24:6. The words “many counselors” are *rob yoatsim* in the Hebrew and better translated “chief of the council,” as in the council of the Sanhedrin. Proper counsel from the appropriate place is mandatory in almost every situation. In this case, if the person does not seek approval of his plans, the project is likely to fail.

Apt Answer/Timely Word

Proverbs 15:23 A man has joy in an apt answer, and how delightful is a timely word!

This proverb addresses both the giver and receiver of an answer. When a man gives an answer, it should be correct. It should address the subject directly and as appropriately as possible. Such an answer brings joy to the man who shares it. The person who receives the answer is blessed when it is timely, encouraging and beneficial.

Upward/Below

Proverbs 15:24 The path of life *leads* upward for the wise, That he may keep away from Sheol below.

Solomon is aware of the two paths to eternity, one leading to eternal life and the other to eternal death. One leads up and the other leads down. One is the path of the wise and the other is the path of the fool. One is godly and the other is ungodly.

Tear Down/Establish

Proverbs 15:25 The LORD will tear down the house of the proud, but He will establish the boundary of the widow.

The widow is an easy prey for the proud evil man who exalts himself above others. In many cases, the proud are such because of the possessions they have collected. Many times they have set their eyes on the few possession of the widows; however, the LORD promises that He will protect the widows and destroy the proud.

Evil Plans/Pleasant Words

Proverbs 15:26 Evil plans are an abomination to the LORD, but pleasant words are pure.

Here Solomon begins to compare the characteristics of the ungodly and the godly person. The evil thoughts and schemes are a stench in the nostrils of the Lord whereas satisfying words are welcome to Him.

Profit Illicitly/Hate Bribes

Proverbs 15:27 He who profits illicitly troubles his own house, but he who hates bribes will live.

The word “illicitly” refers to gaining a profit by unjust or violent means. The man who feeds his family through acts of theft instead of gainful employment will soon bring sorrow to his house when he is thrown in jail. Bribes fall into the category of dishonesty and unjust greed. The godly person will abhor bribes and not fall into the traps of the bribers.

Ponder/Pour Out

Proverbs 15:28 The heart of the righteous ponders how to answer, but the mouth of the wicked pours out evil things.

The godly person carefully chooses the right words for the right time. The wicked literally gushes forth ungodly words like a bubbling spring that covers the grounds with water.

Far/Hears

Proverbs 15:29 The LORD is far from the wicked, but He hears the prayer of the righteous.

In this proverb, Solomon indicates that the LORD “hears the prayers of the righteous.” We should not interpret this proverb to indicate that the LORD does not hear the prayer of the wicked. The LORD is all-knowing, all-seeing and all-powerful. Surely, He hears the prayers of the wicked because He is God. Here Solomon says that “the LORD is far from the wicked,” which means that He distances Himself from them, refusing to shower them with the blessings He bestows on the righteous.

Bright Eyes/Fat on Bones

Proverbs 15:30 Bright eyes gladden the heart; Good news puts fat on the bones.

Solomon is indicating that nonverbal and verbal encouragement uplifts and brings joy to others physically, emotionally and spiritually.

Life-giving/Dwell

Proverbs 15:31 He whose ear listens to the life-giving reproof will dwell among the wise.

Once again in this chapter, Solomon stresses that wise people seek the counsel of wise people and thus live and work in the surroundings of wise people.

Discipline/Reproof

Proverbs 15:32 He who neglects discipline despises himself, but he who listens to reproof acquires understanding.

A person who ignores wisdom will suffer because of the loss and lack of knowledge and understanding. Here Solomon uses the word *musar* which is translated discipline. It does not mean training as in the other proverbs. Here the word means moral correction which indicates that a person “despises himself” as well as the LORD and brings harm to himself because of his rejection.

Wisdom/Honor/Humility

Proverbs 15:33 The fear of the LORD is the instruction for wisdom, and before honor *comes* humility.

In Proverbs 1:7, Solomon indicates that the worship of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge. Here, Solomon adds that worship of the LORD actually teaches a person and thus bestows added wisdom. How should a person worship the LORD? In Solomon’s words, we must worship the LORD with humility. When we worship with a humble heart, the LORD honors us with “instruction for wisdom.”