

PROVERBS 10. 10-22

- ¹⁰ Whoever winks the eye causes trouble,
but the one who rebukes boldly makes peace.
- ¹¹ The mouth of the righteous is a fountain of life,
but the mouth of the wicked conceals violence.
- ¹² Hatred stirs up strife,
but love covers all offences.
- ¹³ On the lips of one who has understanding wisdom is found,
but a rod is for the back of one who lacks sense.
- ¹⁴ The wise lay up knowledge,
but the babbling of a fool brings ruin near.
- ¹⁵ The wealth of the rich is their fortress;
the poverty of the poor is their ruin.
- ¹⁶ The wage of the righteous leads to life,
the gain of the wicked to sin.
- ¹⁷ Whoever heeds instruction is on the path to life,
but one who rejects a rebuke goes astray.
- ¹⁸ Lying lips conceal hatred,
and whoever utters slander is a fool.
- ¹⁹ When words are many, transgression is not lacking,
but the prudent are restrained in speech.
- ²⁰ The tongue of the righteous is choice silver;
the mind of the wicked is of little worth.
- ²¹ The lips of the righteous feed many,
but fools die for lack of sense.
- ²² The blessing of the Lord makes rich,
and he adds no sorrow with it.

There are 13 aphorisms (an aphorism is a concise statement of principle or truth) in these verses and here's how they may be grouped.

1) Verses 10,17, both include the word: rebuke. To rebuke someone is to criticize their behaviour. All of us know what it's like to be criticized for what we say or do. Why is it difficult to hear such criticism? First of all, we don't like to be wrong or to be called out or found out. It's embarrassing, shameful and humiliating. It can cause us to feel defensive or guilty, or pressured to apologize and make amends in some way. Second, we don't trust that the rebuke is coming from a place of loving concern or respect. The person may be someone we may not respect very much or someone who lacks credibility in our eyes, and someone who is all too happy to call us out and point out our mistakes.

But imagine life without being able to learn from our mistakes and heed being called out in rebuke. We all need people who can speak truthfully to us and whom we can hear with trust

and respect. We also need people who tell us the truth rather than “wink the eye,” lacking straightforward transparency in what they are communicating.

2) Verses 11,13,14,18-21, are all about speech. Some of us talk a lot and some of us talk little. Some of us think through what we want to say using many words, sometimes going in circles, while others of us think a lot before we use any words to express our thoughts. What these verses zero in on is how what we say is connected to our hearts and the wisdom that emerges therefrom. Do our words bless or do they curse? Do they speak truthfully and honestly because we care or because we want to put someone down? Do our words come out of the wisdom of having learned from our own mistakes and experiences or are they rote platitudes and thoughtless sentiments without sincerity and care in them? Even as our hearts can be transparent or more hidden in what we are feeling, our words are what people experience up front from us. How much care do we put into our speaking?

3) Verses 15, 16, 22, offer a brilliant progression. Verse 15 on the surface can read as pertaining to material wealth and poverty, but then verse 16 shifts gain and loss to our alignment with justice and injustice. And then verse 22 links our actions to the experience of God’s blessing or lack thereof. Does God bless us with material security or the security of a moral foundation rooted in love and justice regardless of our material estate? Where is the greatest value to be found and prized?

4) And finally, there is verse 12 which in many ways is a crowning verse. Whether it’s in rebuke given or received, our words blessing or cursing, or where our treasure and therefore our hearts may be, is our life rooted in hatred or love. Love covering all offences does not mean we overlook them and shove them under the carpet. Rather, it’s about making room for others with their mistakes and wrong turns, becoming a space where they can trust truth will be spoken with care for their well-being and flourishing primary in our hearts. Hatred on the other hand happens in all kinds of ways creating tension, mistrust, paranoia, conflict and trampled self-worth.

Consider your relationships, especially the ones that may be challenging. What on your part may you do to build trust and care? Whether another is prepared to hear truth, how may you speak it? Do you speak too much or should you take greater care with your words? Do you really treasure your relationships more than winning an argument or making a point? Finally, when was the last time you learned from a rebuke or a mistake you made?

Wisdom doesn’t come easy, but it is the greatest of treasures and the greatest of God’s gifts. What do you think?

PRAYER: Thank you, O God, for truth spoken and truth heard. Thank you for correction and rebuke given out of love, respect and care for our growth and flourishing. Thank you for

enlarging our hearts and starving hate in us. Thank you for reminding us and re-grounding us in appreciating what is truly valuable and truly a treasure. Amen.