

PROVERBS 10: 1-9

The Proverbs of Solomon

- 1 A wise child makes a glad father,
but a foolish child is a mother's grief.
- ² Treasures gained by wickedness do not profit,
but righteousness delivers from death.
- ³ The LORD does not let the righteous go hungry,
but he thwarts the craving of the wicked.
- ⁴ A slack hand causes poverty,
but the hand of the diligent makes rich.
- ⁵ A child who gathers in summer is prudent,
but a child who sleeps in harvest brings shame.
- ⁶ Blessings are on the head of the righteous,
but the mouth of the wicked conceals violence.
- ⁷ The memory of the righteous is a blessing,
but the name of the wicked will rot.
- ⁸ The wise of heart will heed commandments,
but a babbling fool will come to ruin.
- ⁹ Whoever walks in integrity walks securely,
but whoever follows perverse ways will be found out.

This section of Proverbs is attributed to Solomon the great King, the son of David, who was also reputed to be the wisest person of his time.

This section also contains many “aphorisms.” An aphorism is a short clever saying which is intended to express a deeper truth.

Each saying contrasts two very different kinds of people. There are the wise and the foolish, the righteous and the wicked. From earlier meditations you may note that what makes a person wise is their compassion and mercy versus the fool who is totally self-serving and full of themselves. What makes one righteous is integrity of character, humility and openness to listen and learn versus a foolish person who takes advantage of others and seeks their harm.

Also, while it is tempting to simply read each aphorism literally (which make them false to reality in the real world), we are being challenged to interpret them in a deeper way. The fool simply stays on the surface, but the wise digs below the surface to a deeper truth.

With these general comments, let's reflect on each aphorism, verse by verse, and consider the deeper truth each can teach us.

1 – We often blame parents for their children’s behaviour, but as any parent knows, it’s never that simple. Parents are not perfect and every child is as much a mystery as an open book. How they turn out can be a source of incredible joy and pride, but also profound pain, guilt and shame. Gladness and grief are both experiences of every parent.

2 – Treasures are about profit whether it is gained rightly or wrongly, and living rightly doesn’t always deliver from death. And yet, if we are talking about spiritual treasure, refraining from ill got gain is health for the soul and builds trust in relationships, whereas one can become ill spiritually and even kill the spirit before any physical death happens. Healthy habits are about the body but also about the spirit.

3 – While many good people go hungry in this world of ours, and many wicked people fulfill their cravings at the expense of the innocent and vulnerable, there is a spiritual fulfillment that can never be found by the wicked. And cravings satisfied by disadvantaging others or ignoring their needs rather than caring for and sharing with them can never ultimately satisfy at the spiritual level. If your craving satisfies you at the expense of another, your soul is disfigured. Is it worth satisfying yourself at the cost of your soul or that of another’s well-being?

4 – To be slack is to be loose, sloppy, lazy, irresponsible and uncaring. To be diligent is to be conscientious, showing care in what you do. While practically speaking one profits through diligence and is impoverished through slackness, spiritually speaking it’s all about compassion and care. Are you diligent in showing compassion and care?

5 – This follows verse 4. Summer is about opportunity and time. Unless it is seized and well-used it will be lost. There is a time to gather and a time to sleep. Observing the right time is prudent, and ignoring it leads to dire consequences practically and morally.

6 – 9 – An interrelated set of aphorisms remind us that there are consequences and rewards to growing in righteousness versus sliding into wickedness. Sometimes we prefer diluting the distinctions and choosing to compromise, imagining we can have our cake and eat it too. But choosing to discern what is right and what is wrong in every situation without compromising truth is a commitment we are challenged to make regardless of the difficulty. The choices are often clearer than we like to imagine, even when we delude ourselves about any negative consequences should we choose to compromise what is right.

There are times, especially in relationships, where we must be patient with others and allow things to be we are not comfortable with. But there also comes a time when compromise becomes the difference between wickedness and righteousness. What time is it for you?

PRAYER: Help us, O God... Help us find the truth, get clarity and help us find the courage to walk the way of righteousness even when people will be upset with us or it will cost us in our workplace, community or personal relationships. May we always discover that the reward of righteousness is always worth more than any benefits from wickedness. And may wisdom grow within us as we also grow in true love that does not compromise the demands of justice. We so pray, O God, in Jesus' name; Amen.