

PROVERBS 13: Selected Verses

- ² From the fruit of their words good people eat good things,
but the desire of the treacherous is for wrongdoing.
- ³ Those who guard their mouths preserve their lives;
those who open wide their lips come to ruin.
- ⁵ The righteous hate falsehood,
but the wicked act shamefully and disgracefully.
- ⁶ Righteousness guards one whose way is upright,
but sin overthrows the wicked.
- ⁹ The light of the righteous rejoices,
but the lamp of the wicked goes out.
- ²¹ Misfortune pursues sinners,
but prosperity rewards the righteous.
- ²⁵ The righteous have enough to satisfy their appetite,
but the belly of the wicked is empty.
- ²⁰ Whoever walks with the wise becomes wise,
but the companion of fools suffers harm.

There are fewer proverbs chosen from chapter 13, allowing us to meditate a little more deeply on each one.

1) The first set (2-3) are all about our words. Have we ever thought of our words like they are fruit given to people? Does what they eat from our words fill them with nutritious goodness? Or does it harm them? Verse 2 emphasizes intention behind our words. Treachery involves betrayal as well as deception. The intention is harmful rather than helpful, and even as we may try to justify or rationalize our reasons, we cannot find inner peace through harmful words.

Verse 3 emphasizes more the importance of restraint with our words. When we are upset we speak out and sometimes we speak out in ways we may wish we had not had we been more grounded, thoughtful or restrained rather than reactive. There is always the danger of saying too little, not speaking up when we should and not speaking truth when it is called for. But there is also the danger many of us fall into of saying too much, too fast and too impulsively and carelessly to the harm of others. What do you think?

2) The second set of verses (5,6,9,21,25) are held together by contrasting the righteous and the wicked/sinful. While much content is not provided about what it means to be righteous rather than wicked, the imagery communicates volumes. The righteous “hate” falsehood (5). Hate is strong language. Do we have that kind of feeling toward what is false no matter what? Or does

it depend on the situation and who is affected? Unless we “hate” what is bad, life will push and pull us hard enough that we fall into the bad before long.

Righteousness guards one whose way is upright, but sin overthrows the wicked (6). Have you ever thought of righteousness (commitment to and practice of what is right) or sin (anti-love feelings and practices) as powers of influence that can shape you and in the case of righteousness, even protect you? How do you cultivate righteousness and continually purge yourself of the pull of sinfulness? If you think it’s easy, beware that you are not already under the deceptive influence of sin.

Verses 9, 21, 25, use practical imagery to express the benefits of righteousness and the costs of wickedness. There is dark and light, hunger and fullness, misfortune and prosperity. Are we talking about practical and material benefits or something else? If our strongest motivation for pursuing righteousness is material benefit, is this worthy of righteousness? And is fear of misfortune, hunger and darkness, real as this is, the best reason to pursue righteousness? Or must righteousness grow to become its own reward and part of our core identity even when it costs us in contexts where wickedness is rewarded? Fear is a big motivator for any of us. How may the growth of righteousness in us become a means of overcoming fear because we trust goodness will fulfill us and make us strong beyond any harm that may come?

Even as righteousness can sometimes also reward us when people recognize it and approve it in us, we live in a world where injustice all too often succeeds while righteousness is trampled underfoot. And so this brings us back to intention. Do we “hate” wickedness enough to resist it no matter what? Many of us have and many of us will be tested in our lives. And sometimes we will fail and fall. We will need to find our way again, seek out the mercy of God and the forgiveness of those we have wounded. But it is never too late to find our path on the way of righteousness again. What do you think?

3) Finally, there is verse 20. If you think you can be righteous and avoid wickedness all on your own, you are fooling yourself. We need good people around us and we need to separate ourselves from bad influences wherever and however we can. That’s not easy. We have family and work relations that can be difficult and harmful and it’s not easy to separate ourselves. But we also need to be immersed in relationships and communities where we are continually inspired, encouraged, challenged and empowered in the ways of righteousness. We are humans vulnerable to influence and the desire to please and be liked. We are humans vulnerable to fear of being on the wrong side of those who can do us harm. Choosing right can be challenging and sometimes it’s hard to get clarity as to what to choose, where compromise, where to take a stand and where to let go. We need support and we need understanding. Have you found that?

PRAYER: Help us, O God, in our speaking. May our words heal rather than harm and raise up rather than tear down. Even when we must speak some difficult truths with honesty rather

than treachery as our intention, make us ready to listen and learn from others as much as tell them what we think they need to hear. Give us the courage to be truthful with ourselves and others and the faith that you will carry us through any dying that must happen into resurrection as we keep evolving and renewing our humanity made in your image. Help us find our purpose at this time of our lives after loss, disappointment or a breakdown of some kind. Remind us of our worth even when circumstances and people have made us question it. Thank you for the people in our lives who not only model what righteousness can look like in our times, but also influence, encourage and strengthen us as we make our own journey. In Jesus' name we make this our prayer; Amen.