

SCRIPTURE LESSON TEXT

PROV. 15:1 A soft answer turneth away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger.

2 The tongue of the wise useth knowledge aright: but the mouth of fools poureth out foolishness.

3 The eyes of the LORD *are* in every place, beholding the evil and the good.

4 A wholesome tongue *is* a tree of life: but perverseness therein *is* a breach in the spirit.

5 A fool despiseth his father's instruction: but he that regardeth reproof is prudent.

6 In the house of the righteous *is* much treasure: but in the revenues of the wicked *is* trouble.

7 The lips of the wise disperse knowledge: but the heart of the foolish *doeth* not so.

8 The sacrifice of the wicked *is* an abomination to the LORD: but the prayer of the upright *is* his delight.

9 The way of the wicked *is* an abomination unto the LORD: but he loveth him that followeth after righteousness.

10 Correction *is* grievous unto him that forsaketh the way: *and* he that hateth reproof shall die.

11 Hell and destruction *are* before the LORD: how much more then the hearts of the children of men?

12 A scorner loveth not one that reproveth him: neither will he go unto the wise.

13 A merry heart maketh a cheerful countenance: but by sorrow of the heart the spirit is broken.

14 The heart of him that hath understanding seeketh knowledge: but the mouth of fools feedeth on foolishness.

15 All the days of the afflicted *are* evil: but he that is of a merry heart *hath* a continual feast.

NOTES

A Soft Answer over Wrath

Lesson Text: Proverbs 15:1-15

Related Scriptures: Proverbs 17:22-28; James 1:19-27; 3:1-12;
1 Samuel 15:12-23; Psalm 69:30-36

TIME: between 971 and 931 B.C.

PLACE: Jerusalem

GOLDEN TEXT—"A soft answer turneth away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger" (Proverbs 15:1).

Lesson Exposition

Imagine a bustling marketplace. In the middle of this lively scene, two vendors stand side by side. This scene mirrors the image of personified wisdom in Proverbs 1:20-33 and folly in Proverbs 9:13-18. Both wisdom and folly call out to those who pass by, and much of the book contrasts these two ways.

Proverbs 15:1-15 provides a contrast between the righteous and the wicked and explores the power of words and the value of wisdom. A gentle answer turns away wrath, while harsh words stir up anger. The passage invites us to reflect on our conduct, urging us to choose our words with care and wisdom, knowing that God observes both good and evil.

THE POWER OF SPEECH— Prov. 15:1-4

The power of speech is a central theme in Proverbs 15:1-4, highlighting the effect that words can have.

A gentle answer is better than a harsh one that stirs up anger. A gentle response calms tensions and fosters understanding, whereas harsh words escalate conflict. The way we respond in moments of tension can build bridges or burn them. Proverbs 15:1 is

echoed in James 1:19-20, which urges us to be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry. We are called to embody the grace of Christ by seasoning our words with patience and understanding. As we listen and choose our words with care, we reflect the heart of God, who is patient and kind.

Proverbs 15:2 contrasts the speech of the wise with the speech of fools. Wise people use their words to impart knowledge. In contrast, fools speak without thought, spreading folly. Words have the power to educate and enlighten, but when words are used carelessly, they can also mislead and harm.

Verse 3 reminds readers that God sees all. God's observation underscores our moral accountability for our speech. God knows the intentions of the heart. Knowing that God observes all our actions and words should inspire us to speak with integrity and wisdom. Divine oversight serves as a deterrent against deceitful and harmful speech, encouraging a life of righteousness and truthfulness.

Verse 4 contrasts the healing power of words with their potential to harm.

Words can be a source of healing, akin to a tree that nurtures and sustains. Conversely, deceitful words can wound deeply, crushing the spirit and causing lasting damage. Wise words can bring comfort and restoration, while deceitful speech can lead to broken relationships and mistrust.

THE VALUE OF WISDOM AND UNDERSTANDING—Prov. 15:5-7

Proverbs 15:5-7 teaches the great value of wisdom in our walk with God, something that should be more valued than all the wealth of the world.

Humility is required to receive correction. God often uses those around us to guide us. The fool rejects discipline. But the wise person embraces correction as a means of growth. We should cultivate a teachable spirit, recognizing that God's loving discipline reflects His care for our souls.

Verse 6 paints a contrast between the enduring blessings of righteousness and the fleeting gains of wickedness. The righteous, who walk in the light of God's truth, find spiritual riches—peace, joy, and divine favor. These treasures are not measured by earthly standards but are the fruits of a life surrendered to God. In contrast, the wicked, though they may amass wealth, find their gains tainted with trouble and unrest. Their pursuits lead to emptiness and despair.

Godly living includes principles such as hard work and prudence, which produce earthly blessings. Laziness and reckless living beget poverty. Although Proverbs acknowledges that there are exceptions (cf. 16:8), God's ways often lead to tangible blessings as well as spiritual ones.

The wise, filled with the Spirit of God, become vessels of His truth, spreading understanding wherever they go. Their words bring light to dark places and hope to weary souls. In contrast, fools fail to impart anything

of lasting value. Their words lead only to confusion and strife. As we immerse ourselves in God's Word, we become conduits of His wisdom, sharing His love and truth with a world in desperate need of His light.

THE ROLE OF THE HEART AND ATTITUDE—Prov. 15:8-11

Our disposition affects our relationship with God. Verse 8 shows the contrast between external religious acts and the sincerity of the heart. God, in His holiness, detests the sacrifices of the wicked. Such sacrifices, though outwardly impressive, are empty. In contrast, the prayers of the upright, offered with humility and sincerity, bring delight to God. The size of our gifts does not matter as much as the state of our hearts (cf. Mark 12:41-44).

We need to examine our motives and approach God with a pure heart, knowing that He values the authenticity of our prayers over mere ritualistic offerings. Psalm 69:30-36 and Proverbs 15:8 emphasize the power of words and attitudes in shaping our relationship. Both passages encourage us to choose expressions of gratitude and gentleness.

We see God's deep aversion to wickedness in Proverbs 15:9. Wickedness leads to destruction and separation from His presence. The wicked choose a path that is contrary to God's will, bringing His displeasure. God, however, loves those who pursue righteousness and seek to walk in His ways. The path of righteousness leads to life and divine favor. As we pursue righteousness, we reflect God's character and become vessels of His love and grace in the world.

Verse 10 underscores the importance of accepting divine discipline. Those who forsake righteousness and reject God's reproof invite consequences. Divine discipline is an ex-

pression of God's love and desire for our restoration. It is a call to return to the path of life and avoid the ultimate consequence of spiritual death (cf. Heb. 12:7-11).

God knows the hearts of all. Nothing escapes His notice. Verses 3 and 10 highlight the importance of obedience and the wisdom of aligning one's actions with God's will.

The words "Sheol" and "Abaddon" are translated as "hell and destruction" and refer to the place of the dead. Verse 11 highlights the omniscience of God, who sees and knows all things, even the hidden depths of Sheol. If the mysteries of the afterlife are laid bare before Him, how much more does He know the hearts of people? The point of verse 11 is that God's knowledge of our thoughts calls us to live with integrity. We cannot hide from God, and we are invited to surrender to His refining work.

THE IMPACT OF JOY AND SORROW—Prov. 15:12-15

Verses 12-15 provide wisdom that speaks to the human heart and the choices we make in response to challenges.

Verse 12 paints a vivid picture of mockers who are resistant to correction. The mocker proudly refuses to acknowledge his or her need for growth. Mockers have hard hearts and stir up discord in a community. They see correction as an affront rather than an opportunity for improvement. This attitude leads to a life devoid of wisdom and growth, as the mocker isolates himself from those who could guide him toward a better path. In contrast, the wise person embraces correction, recognizing it as a gift that leads to maturity and deeper understanding.

Our disposition influences our overall well-being (vs. 13). A joyful heart radiates through a cheerful face. In contrast, a crushed spirit saps our vitality, leading to weariness. Wisdom

invites us to cultivate a joyful heart, rooted in God's love and faithfulness.

The discerning heart is characterized by a pursuit of knowledge, seeking wisdom from God and His Word. This leads to contentment, purpose, and fulfillment as the discerning grow in wisdom.

In contrast, fools feed on folly. Disciples should cultivate hearts that hunger for the wisdom that only God provides and avoid pursuits that lead to spiritual stagnation.

A cheerful heart can turn any circumstance into a feast (vs. 15). The oppressed, weighed down by life's burdens, experience misery and despair. Verse 15 encourages us to cultivate a cheerful heart.

—Page Brooks

QUESTIONS

1. What key contrast does much of the book of Proverbs focus on?
2. What do the words of the wise and the foolish accomplish?
3. What is the practical application of knowing that God sees all?
4. Why is humility vital for us to grow in our faith?
5. Does Proverbs teach that wisdom leads to tangible blessings?
6. Why does God detest the sacrifices of the wicked?
7. Why is it important to accept divine correction?
8. What is the point of Proverbs 15:11?
9. Does the person with understanding need to seek knowledge?
10. How does verse 15 say we can respond to challenging situations?

—Tom Greene

PRACTICAL POINTS

1. By speaking gently and wisely, we can avoid stirring up trouble for ourselves (Prov. 15:1-2).
2. We should always act wisely, for God sees all, even our hearts (vss. 3, 11).
3. Wholesome speech is life-giving, so watch how you speak (vs. 4).
4. Those who learn from instruction are wise (vs. 5).
5. Righteousness has practical blessings in this life (vs. 6).
6. The Lord loves the righteous but is angered by hypocritical wickedness (vss. 7-9).
7. If we arrogantly refuse to learn from others, we are foolish and will suffer (vss. 10-12).
8. The attitude of our hearts affects the way we experience our circumstances (vss. 13-15).
9. The wise will seek to grow even wiser; the foolish are content with folly.

—Tom Greene

RESEARCH AND DISCUSSION

1. How can we guard our speech?
2. Who can you bless with your words this week? When can you do this?
3. Why is rejecting reproof ruinous?
4. Do you accept instruction?
5. How can we grow in humbly accepting constructive criticism?
6. Who do you know who is wise?
7. Why is the sacrifice of the wicked an abomination?
8. How can we grow in our prayer lives?

—Tom Greene

Golden Text Illuminated

“A soft answer turneth away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger” (Proverbs 15:1).

The power of a soft answer to turn away wrath challenges us to consider the impact of our words. A soft answer goes beyond volume. This softness is strength under control. It requires wisdom, self-discipline, and often great courage to respond gently in the face of anger or provocation. A soft answer has the power to defuse tension. It creates space for reconciliation, often disarming the angry party. In stark contrast, “grievous words stir up anger.” Such words have the power to escalate conflicts, deepen divisions, and cause lasting damage to relationships. As James warned us, the tongue can set our world on fire (cf. Jas. 3:5-6). We can use our words to either hurt or heal.

Cultivating a habit of gentle speech requires intentionality. At first, we may find responding gently to be frustrating. We may really want to let the other person have it! Even if we do not *feel* calm, responding gently can help us build a habit of honoring God and others with our words.

Practical steps for responding softly include pausing to take a deep breath before responding, seeking to understand the other person's perspective, and choosing words that validate others' feelings even when you disagree. Try to speak slowly and calmly, even when angry. Be willing to apologize and seek reconciliation when necessary. Our golden text reminds us of the power of gentle words. In a world full of anger and harsh speech, we are called to be peacemakers.

—Gene Kissinger