

10 Proverbs from Proverbs 10

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Introduction.

- A. As we have noted before, our nation places a great deal of value on knowledge and education, but not nearly as much value on wisdom. Our major universities offer courses in every academic subject imaginable, but I doubt that any coursebook from any college in the country contains a single class on common sense. The consequences of this are evident everywhere. Just look at the recent downfall of New York governor Eliot Spitzer. The man's a genius—editor of Harvard Law Review when he was in school, corruption-fighting attorney general during the upswing of his political career—but he didn't have the sense to know what every Christian in this room knows—that carrying on with call girls is a bad idea, and will get you caught.
- B. Of course, Christians are not immune to the effects of this national wisdom deficit either. Satan does everything he can to get us to behave in foolish and evil ways too. He's always trying to get us to believe that we're going to be lucky, and the bad consequences of sin aren't going to apply to us. In reality, of course, it doesn't work that way. Look at the words of wisdom personified in Proverbs 1:32-33. Whenever we start getting cocky, whenever we start thinking that it isn't going to happen to us, wham! That's when the hammer comes down. The only way we can avoid the consequences of evil is by wisely seeking out righteousness.
- C. This, of course, is one of the major themes of the Bible in general and of the book of Proverbs in particular. In its pages, wise men like Solomon, king of Israel, emphasize repeatedly that evil is a foolish and self-destructive choice. This is a message that we need to hear constantly because only it can help drown out the seductive whispers of the devil. Let's listen to it again this evening, to a number of wise saying about the righteous and the wicked concentrated in one small section of Scripture. Let's look at 10 proverbs from Proverbs 10.

I. The Speech of the Righteous

- A. The first three of the proverbs we're going to be studying deal with the speech of the righteous. In logical order, the first of these three proverbs is Proverbs 10:32. Of course, in this context, "perverted" doesn't necessarily refer to speech that is lustful, although that may be. It refers to any speech that makes crooked the straight ways of the Lord. What this proverb is telling us to do, then, is to listen to what the people around us, and indeed what we ourselves, are saying. The speech always betrays the heart. If we hear nothing but gracious words out of the mouth of a brother in Christ, it tells us that he is a man with a gracious heart. By contrast, if we sometimes hear ourselves expressing ungodly thoughts, that tells us that we need to consider our own hearts, to figure out how to uproot the evil that is dwelling there. Let's listen to what words say.
- B. In similar fashion, the different uses to which the tongue may be put are explored in Proverbs 10:11. Many of us are familiar with the passage in James 3 that warns against the danger of the tongue, but this passage tells us why God gifted us with speech in the first place. Just as the tongue can be a powerful instrument for evil, it can also be a powerful instrument for good, and that's the way the righteous use their tongues. We need to ask ourselves constantly whether our tongues are a fountain of life. Do we use our tongues to teach our children about God? Are our tongues constantly employed in promoting righteousness around us? Or instead, do we use our tongues like the wicked do, to excuse sin and conceal our own flaws? If we're honest, we may well answer "Yes" to all of these questions. Our goal, then, must be to constantly increase the life that our tongue gives, rather than the lies that it tells. Only then is our speech becoming more pleasing to God.
- C. Finally, on the topic of the tongue, Solomon focuses his attention on the main point in Proverbs 10:20. This is a passage that tells us about the comparative value of a righteous tongue. Unlike the other two proverbs we've looked at, this one is not explicitly parallel. It contrasts the righteous tongue with the wicked heart. However, it's this apparent lack of parallel that makes the proverb's point. When we are righteous, not everything we do has to do with our tongue. We also have righteous hands, righteous feet, and a righteous heart, to name just a few of the other righteous body parts discussed in Proverbs. Our speech is not our whole life. However, by our speech alone, we make our lives valuable and worthwhile to God. By contrast, the wicked is out of luck in his search for value. Because his heart is corrupt, his entire being is also corrupt, so that even if he puts it all together, none of it is worth anything to God. Let's be valuable, not valueless.

II. The Hope of the Righteous.

- A. After the speech of the righteous, the next logical category into which we can sort these proverbs is the hope of the righteous. We see the first of these proverbs about attitude in Proverbs 10:29. This proverb is fairly hard to figure out at first. It seems to be talking about obeying God, but that doesn't make sense. After all, if the wicked follows the way of the Lord, not only will he not be ruined, he will cease to be wicked. Instead, this passage is talking about the way the righteous and the wicked perceive the way of the Lord. To the righteous, serving God looks like a wonderful idea, but to the wicked, it looks like disaster. For a lot of the people I went

to college with, becoming a Christian would be about the worst thing they could imagine. They'd have to give up the cussing, the drinking, the drugs, the fornication, and all the other things that defined their existence. The wicked hate righteousness; that's why they're wicked. This tells us, friends, that we need to be careful when we find ourselves resisting some commandment of God. We may make whatever excuse we want for our disobedience, but what's really happening is that some wickedness in our hearts is corrupting our actions. When we find ourselves kicking against the goads, we need to start looking for the source of the problem.

- B. The merits of these two attitudes toward God's way is revealed in Proverbs 10:28. Both the righteous and the wicked want the same thing: they want to be happy. However, they have two very different ideas about how to get there. The righteous seeks to be happy through righteousness and the wicked through wickedness. The righteous will be blessed with success, but the wicked will find only failure. Folks, if there's one lesson I want you to take from my preaching generally, it's that following the devil never makes anybody happy. He wants us to believe that sin will be good for us. He dresses it up as nicely as he can, but when we consider it wisely, we see that Satan's just putting lipstick on a corpse. All the promises of sin are lies, lies, lies. When we sin, we will find not happiness, but misery. Only righteousness can bring joy and contentment.
- C. In fact, the situation for the wicked is even worse than that. Consider with me Proverbs 10:24. One of the ironic things about sin is that it usually lands the sinner in exactly the situation he wants to escape. The liar lies because he's afraid of rejection, but once his lies get found out, he gets rejected anyway. The alcoholic drinks because he finds his life too harsh, yet his alcoholism will end up destroying what joy he has left. The adulterer seeks love and companionship, but his actions lead to alienation and loneliness. The situation of the righteous, however, is completely different, for their God is a rewarder of all those who diligently seek Him.

III. The Fate of the Righteous.

- A. Finally, though, the remainder of the proverbs in Proverbs 10 about the righteous and the wicked contrast the fate of the righteous and the wicked. We see our first example of this in Proverbs 10:25. This expresses one of the greatest advantages of the Christian: that he is able to turn to God for help in time of disaster. As many of you probably already know, several weeks ago, Lauren and I had a scare when it looked like some of the tests being run on our baby were pointing to serious problems. In the end, it turned out to be completely a false alarm, but in between, both Lauren and I turned to God. Both of us prayed constantly that our baby was going to be OK, but we also knew that even if it wasn't, no matter what happened, God was going to get us through it. If I hadn't been a Christian, I have no idea how I would have coped. The righteous have an everlasting foundation, but the wicked have nothing, so when the storm comes, they get blown away.
- B. We see another interesting contrast when we look at the legacies of the righteous and the wicked in Proverbs 10:7. I see this passage at work right here at Margaret St. all the time. I can't count the number of conversations I've had with you and with others in the area about the righteous men and women who used to worship here, but have since passed on. In fact, some of those departed Christians are so much talked about here that I feel like I know them, even though they died years before I arrived! What I don't hear about, though, are all the hypocrites and evil men who used to worship here, and I'm sure there were some. Nobody ever brings them up. The fact is, friends, people love the righteous, and they don't stop loving the righteous just because they fall asleep in Jesus. The wicked, on the other hand, folks just don't care about. This tells us, friends, that if we want to be well spoken of after we're gone, the way to get there is by righteousness.
- C. Another important point about the fates of the righteous and the wicked is raised by Proverbs 10:30. In its Old Testament context, this verse obviously refers to dwelling in the promised land of Canaan. In fact, time proved that this verse was exactly on target. When the children of Israel embraced unrighteousness as a nation, they were cast out and sent into exile. Of course, we no longer look to our inheritance of land in Palestine, but to our inheritance in heaven, an inheritance that will last forever. Heaven is in many ways a mysterious place, but I do know this about it: that there won't be any wicked people in it. I think many wicked people get into the habit of doing the wickedness they want to do now, and thinking that somehow, they'll slide past the pearly gates. Folks, it doesn't work that way. God knows exactly what every one of us is thinking and doing, and if we live evil lives, we will never see the inside of heaven.
- D. We see Solomon's conclusion about the righteous and the wicked in Proverbs 10:16. The really interesting thing about this proverb is that although it was true when it was written, it isn't true anymore, at least, not in more than a hypothetical sense. We certainly can earn death, but we can't earn eternal life. However, there's still hope for us. Paul was almost certainly reworking this proverb in his comments in Romans 6:23. Part of the old equation is still true. If we live a sinful life, we will receive death as the just penalty for our wickedness. However, thanks to Jesus, we don't have to worry about earning life. Instead, life is something that God offers to us freely. All of us have messed up. None of us can claim to have perfectly spotless records at obeying God's will, but God loves us anyway, so much that He gave His Son to pay the penalty in our place. This is the way that we claim life today, not on the basis of our own perfect merit, but on the merits of Him who was offered as a sinless sacrifice. This is our access into the blessings of God and heaven.

Conclusion. If you want to receive God's free gift of life today, obey His gospel and you shall have it.