

We often talk as though *words* come first – and then deeds.

There is some truth to that.

But very often it is *deeds* that come first – and then words!

Do you wait for your child to understand something before you make them do it?

No!

If they *start* life doing it, they will grow into their understanding of it.

The way of wisdom is like that.

Blind obedience is not enough.

But sometimes that is where we start!

Introduction: The Antithesis (Proverbs 10-15)

Proverbs 10:1-22:16 has long been acknowledged as a single unit of literature.

It contains 375 proverbs.

The name Solomon has the numerical value in Hebrew of 375.

That is hardly an accident!

There are further collections of Solomon's proverbs later in the book,
but these 375 were deliberately structured together.

In 1:1 we had the main heading: "The proverbs of Solomon, son of David, king of Israel"

Then chapters 1-9 gave us the father's discourse on wisdom,

contained in twelve addresses to his son,

bracketed by two speeches from Wisdom herself (1:20-33 and ch 8).

Chapter 9 concluded with the father setting before his son the two ways,

the two women-

the son must now set out on the path of life.

He has been trained in wisdom's ways,

and so now he is prepared to understand the proverbs of Solomon.

If you have learned wisdom and prudence from chapters 1-9,

then you are ready to understand chapters 10-31.

Proverbs 10:1-22:16 is the next unit of Proverbs.

It is very self consciously designed as the body of instruction

that the son must now utilize on the path of life.

It is not designed as a rule book.

You cannot mechanically put the proverbs into action.

Only the wise son will understand how to apply the proverbs.

A couple of general comments about Proverbs 10:1-22:16

1) Proverbs 10-15 consists largely of antithetical proverbs.

The way of wisdom and the way of folly are sharply contrasted in this section-
following up on the father's contrast between wisdom and folly.

Proverbs 16-22 then uses largely synonymous proverbs,
focusing less on the contrast between the righteous and the wicked,
and focusing more on the gulf between man and God-
demonstrating the results of wise and foolish actions.

Proverbs 10-15 set out the basics of wisdom-
the general principles, the ABC's of the godly life;

Proverbs 16-22 then starts to point out exceptions.

2) the adulteress, who has been a key figure in chapters 1-9
will drop out of view until Prov 22.

In her place we find the fool, the wicked, the sluggard, the one who lacks sense.

Proverbs 10:1 launches this section by reminding us of Proverbs 1-9:

"A wise son makes a glad father, but a foolish son is a sorrow to his mother."

No longer do we hear the language of instruction and exhortation.

Now we are in the aphoristic world of the proverbs-
sometimes blunt and obvious,
sometimes subtle,
and sometimes playing on words-
but always short and to the point.

We will not be looking at every proverb!

Rather, we will take a few themes and trace them through Proverbs.

Tonight we will look at two of the most prominent,
and the two that drive chapter 10:
wealth and speech.

Righteousness in action – and righteousness in speech.

1. Righteousness in Action: A Theology of Work and Wealth (10:1-5)

One of the most prolific themes in Proverbs is that of money and wealth.

10:2-5 launches immediately into this theme:

*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.*

The father had warned against ill-gotten gain in Proverbs 1:10-19,

and now the first proverbs that the young man must understand return to the same theme.

Verses 2-3 provide the theological contrast between the righteous and the wicked.

The four lines of the quatrain open and close with the wicked:

treasures gained by wickedness do not profit

There may be temporary gain,

(after all, it is said that the treasures are *gained* by the wicked)

But they do not profit-not in the end

but righteousness delivers from death.

Some have said that Proverbs is only about the here and now-

that Proverbs has no eschatology-no view of a future life.

If that is so, then the "wise men" who assembled it were idiots.

If 10:2 means that wickedness does not profit *in this life*,

and that righteousness delivers from death *in this life*,

then we can safely assume that Solomon was blind, deaf, and dumb.

In our experience-as in his-the wicked sometimes prosper.

The righteous sometimes perish.

But Solomon teaches us that this is not the end.

Verse three gives the theological rationale for verse 2:

The LORD does not let the righteous go hungry, but he thwarts the craving of the wicked.

God feeds the righteous, but starves the wicked.

When a man breaks free from God and does not get his wisdom from him,

then he becomes "rasha" - the wicked,

who follows the impulses and inordinate desires of his evil heart. (Waltke, 454)

Proverbs 21:10 says

The soul of the wicked desires evil; his neighbor finds no mercy in his eyes.

21:12 *The Righteous One observes the house of the wicked; he throws the wicked down to ruin*

21:13 *Whoever closes his ear to the cry of the poor will himself call out and not be avenged.*

God will thwart the cravings of the wicked.

If verses 2-3 speak of the theological foundations of wealth,

verses 4-5 then speak of the practical outworking:

4. *A slack hand causes poverty,*

but the hand of the diligent makes rich.

To be careless and negligent is a sure road to poverty.

Notice that Proverbs does not say that a slack hand is the only cause of poverty!
But it is a sure road to poverty.
If you want to be poor, then be lazy!
And if you want to be rich, then be diligent!

5. *He who gathers in summer is a prudent son,
but he who sleeps in harvest is a son who brings shame.*

The sonship theme returns again.
But now the focus is how the child reflects on his parents.
The son who gathers in summer is prudent-
he is taking thought for the future.
He plans wisely.

But parents will be ashamed of the son who sleeps in harvest.
In verse 3 we heard that the LORD does not let the righteous go hungry.
God provides for his people.
And in verses 4-5 we hear of one way that God provides!
He provides through the diligence of the wise and prudent son.
We won't be going through every chapter of Proverbs,
so hear what else Proverbs says about diligence and honor:

"The hand of the diligent will rule,
while the slothful will be put to forced labor." (12:24)
"The soul of the sluggard craves and gets nothing,
while the soul of the diligent is richly supplied." (13:4)
"Poverty and disgrace come to him who ignores instruction,
but whoever heeds reproof is honored." (13:18)
"Whoever is slack in his work is a brother to him who destroys" (18:9)

The way of righteousness is the way of *diligence*.

Children, are you diligent in your studies?
Do you focus on your work and get it done right the first time?

Laziness and sloth will bring destruction.
The slothful will be put to forced labor!
Haven't you found that is true?
If you do not stay focused on your work,
someone else will put your nose to the grindstone!
If you want the freedom to be in charge of your day –
then be diligent in your use of time!

All of this call to wisdom must be heard as God's call to his son-

first to Israel, and to Israel's king-
because God promised David that he would be a father to David's sons.
Which means that the call to wisdom is the call of the Father to the Son,
as God called Jesus to be diligent in his labor.

Therefore it is also a call to you, in Christ, to be wise and use the time that God has given you
in order to serve him and walk in the way of life.

The second part of our passage than turns to...

2. Righteousness in Word: How Your Words Influence Your Life (10:6-14)

Verses 6-14 are all about "the mouth" "the name" "the babbling" "the lips"--
in other words they are proverbs about *speech*.

The eight lines of verses 6-9 focus on the effect of our speech on ourselves,
while the eight lines of verses 11-14 focus on the effect of our speech on others.
At the middle (verse 10) is a statement regarding the future of the wicked.

Notice that verse 10 is the one verse that is not a contrast
between the righteous and the wicked.
It sits in the middle of this section as a warning
that points both to the effects of your folly on yourself ("will come to ruin")
and the effects of your folly on others ("causes trouble").

The first quatrain contrasts the righteous and the wicked:

*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.*

The righteous, in Proverbs, are those whose speech and conduct is characterized by wisdom.
They say and do what is right.
At this point in Proverbs, the righteous are almost a caricature-
they are almost too good to be true!
But then again, Proverbs 11-15 is setting forth the way things *ought* to be.
Later, in Proverbs 16-22 we'll see that things aren't always that way.

But in a properly functioning world,
blessings are on the head of the righteous.

(And of course, that is where the eschatology of Proverbs is so important:
because Solomon believes that someday the world *will* function properly;

indeed, the Davidic king is a sign that someday the kingdom of God
will be all that it should be!)

And the memory of the righteous is a blessing to others.

Think of the great heroes of the faith.

The memory of Augustine, Irenaeus, Jonathan Edwards, John Calvin, Charles Hodge,
indeed is a blessing.

We remember those who lived uprightly and walked before God.

But this is more than just *our* memory.

Because God also remembers them.

Nehemiah's plea throughout his memoirs was "Remember me, O God!"

And God will remember the righteous.

He will not leave his holy one to decay-as David said in Psalm 16.

Yes, that speaks first of our Lord, Jesus Christ,

but it also speaks of those who are in Christ.

The name of the righteous will never rot!

But the name of the wicked will rot.

Not just their bodies!

But also their names.

They will be forgotten-abandoned to hell forever!

And in this life their names will be vilified.

Think of the name of Adolf Hitler.

How many "Adolfs" do you know?

The name-the memory-of the wicked will rot.

It was a pretty common German name *until 1945!*

Verses 8-9 emphasize the importance of wisdom and integrity:

*8. The wise of heart will receive commandments
but a babbling fool will come to ruin.*

*9. Whoever walks in integrity walks securely,
but he who makes his ways crooked will be found out.*

Again the focus is on the results of your speech and walk for yourself.

The wise will hear and will receive God's commands.

But a babbling fool is too busy talking to listen.

The implication is clear:

if you listen to the wise, and keep your mouth shut,

then you will not come to ruin-

but if you are constantly talking about yourself and are too busy to hear the wise,

then you will destroy yourself.

Likewise, in verse 9, the "walk" of integrity brings security,
but the crooked way will be found out.

Again the focus is on the results of your "conversation" in the old sense of the word
(the way you conduct yourself both in speech and action).

Speaking straight – and living straight – is important!

Verse ten then contrasts *doing* evil with speaking evil!

10. Whoever winks the eye causes trouble, but a babbling fool will come to ruin.

The second half of the verse repeats the second half of verse 8-
connecting back to the theme of how your speech affects yourself.

But the first half of the verse speaks of causing trouble-presumably for others.

The one who "winks the eye" is sending covert signals
in order to "cause trouble" for others.

We saw this in 6:12-15,

where the wicked use body language to communicate their evil plans.

But the point here is that not only do the wicked cause trouble,
but in the end, they also come to ruin.

Proverbs 10-15 is reminding us of how things *should be*,
but also how they *will be*.

Rest assured, my friends, that justice *will come* in the end!

Verses 11-14 then speak of the consequences of our speech for others.

*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 offenses.*

Notice that the second half of verse 11 repeats the second half of verse 6-
thus connecting the two parallel sections of verses 6-14.

But here we are shown two mouths:

the mouth of the righteous which is a fountain of life,
and the mouth of the wicked which is a cloak for violence.

Is your mouth a fountain of life?

Is there a well of living water in your heart,
so that your lips overflow with life-giving blessing to others?

Here it is easy to say that Jesus is the righteous one
whose mouth overflows with living water for us!

But this is also to be true of those who are in Christ.

How do you speak to your wife?

How do you speak to your husband?

Your children?

Your parents?

Your friends? neighbors? co-workers?

How can your lips overflow with living water for others?

James 3 says that the tongue is a fire – “a world of unrighteousness.”

Who can tame the tongue?!

“It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison.

With it we bless our Lord and Father,

and with it we curse people who are made in the likeness of God.

From the same mouth come blessing and cursing.

My brothers, these things ought not to be so.

Does a spring pour forth from the same opening both fresh and salt water?” (3:6-11)

As we are seeing from John’s gospel,

our Lord Jesus is the fountain of living water!

And when he gives us his Holy Spirit,

that fountain – even now – begins to pour forth living water in your life!

So now it's time to practice!

How can you use your tongue as a fountain of life?

How can you encourage others?

How can you bring the blessing of God to those who are hurting?

Verse 12 provides some suggestions:

Hatred stirs up strife, but love covers all offenses.

Don't use your tongue for gossip, or for talking behind other people's backs.

Use your tongue to bring reconciliation and peace.

“Covering” offenses does not mean *ignoring* offenses!

When there is strife and difficulty,

the path of wisdom does not say, “Let’s just ignore this!”

After all, what happens if you ignore it?

Well that depends!

If it wasn’t really a problem – then ignoring it will make it go away!

But if it *was* really a problem – then ignoring it will make it worse –

and it will just blow up bigger and badder than ever!

Love covers offenses by resolving them rather than stirring them up.

*13. On the lips of him who has understanding, wisdom is found,
but a rod is for the back of him who lacks sense.*

*14. The wise lay up knowledge,
but the mouth of a fool brings ruin near.*

How you speak affects others.

Do you have understanding?

Do you understand God's word?

And do you understand the human heart?

Then you have wisdom!

Use that wisdom in speaking to others.

The wise lay up knowledge-

this is not saying that the wise hoard knowledge and hide it from others!

Rather, this is saying that the wise keep a large store of knowledge

so that they might be able to use it in the service of others.

This is clear from the antithesis:

"But the mouth of a fool brings ruin near."

Why do you study the word of God?

Is it for yourself alone?

No!

You want to be a better father, a better friend, a better Christian.

And that means to live in community.

The mouth of a fool brings ruin near.

The fool has lots of ideas,

but does not understand the word of God or the human heart,

and so all his "good ideas" turn out to be worse than rubbish!

They bring disaster to others.

3. Action (v15-16)

Verses 15-16 then return to the relationship between the righteous and the wicked contrasted in terms of wealth and poverty:

"A rich man's wealth is his strong city;
the poverty of the poor is their ruin."

At first this does not appear to have anything to do with "righteousness or wickedness" – it is just a "factual" statement regarding wealth and poverty.

If you are rich – you can take care of yourself.

If you are poor – you cannot.

This reminds us that we *tend* to think of wealth and poverty in terms of material possessions.

If you have a lot of stuff – you are rich.

If you don't have much stuff – you are poor.

But that is not the way the Bible talks about the rich and the poor.

Notice that the poor man is not *yet* ruined.

But he is about to be ruined.

And indeed, his poverty precipitates his ruin.

He is ruined because he is poor.

Poverty has more to do with access to power – than with material goods.

That's why it says that “a rich man's wealth is his strong city.”

The image of the city involves more than just “walls and property” –
it includes *people* – connections.

If you are *connected* then you have a better chance when trouble comes!

But then verse 16 goes on to point out that even *material* wealth is not all equal:

“The wage of the righteous leads to life, the gain of the wicked to sin.”

You can acquire material possessions on whichever path you take!

But only on the path of the righteous do your wages lead to life.

On the path of the wicked, your “gain” leads to sin – and thus to death.

And how do you learn to know the difference?

That is where words come back into play:

4. Word (v17-21)

This is why we need wisdom.

Because we need to know how to speak to each other!

Verses 19-21 continue this theme later in Proverbs 10:

*19. When words are many, transgression is not lacking,
but whoever restrains his lips is prudent.*

This is terrifying.

As your pastor, I speak to you for an hour every Sunday-
to some of you I speak much more!

Do I lay up knowledge to teach you wisdom?

Or do I bring ruin near!

Whoever restrains his lips is prudent.

I look back at all my chattering and wish that I had said less!

But then notice in verses 20-21 how Solomon connects words – wealth – and righteousness, together with the theme of *life*.

*20. The tongue of the righteous is choice silver;
the heart of the wicked is of little worth.*

*21. The lips of the righteous feed many,
but fools die for lack of sense.*

Jesus Christ is the Word of God whose lips feed many.

May we all be satisfied to sit at his feet and be fed unto eternal life!

Verses 22-28 then speak of the heart.

5. Righteousness in the Heart: the Blessing of the LORD (v22-28)

*The blessing of the LORD makes rich,
and he adds no sorrow with it.^[b]*

*²³ Doing wrong is like a joke to a fool,
but wisdom is pleasure to a man of understanding.*

*²⁴ What the wicked dreads will come upon him,
but the desire of the righteous will be granted.*

*²⁵ When the tempest passes, the wicked is no more,
but the righteous is established forever.*

*²⁶ Like vinegar to the teeth and smoke to the eyes,
so is the sluggard to those who send him.*

*²⁷ The fear of the LORD prolongs life,
but the years of the wicked will be short.*

*²⁸ The hope of the righteous brings joy,
but the expectation of the wicked will perish.*

We're back to the fear of the LORD – the blessing of the LORD –
and how the desire of the righteous will be granted –
how the righteous is established forever –
and the hope of the righteous brings joy –
because the fear of the LORD prolongs life.

But the expectation of the wicked will perish.

There is no future in folly.

The years of the wicked will be short.

Solomon is describing the world *ethically* the way it *should be* –
and – *eschatologically* – the way it *will be*.

The last four verses of the chapter then blend words and actions together:

6. The Result: in Actions and Words (v29-32)

*The way of the LORD is a stronghold to the blameless,
but destruction to evildoers.*

³⁰ *The righteous will never be removed,
but the wicked will not dwell in the land.*

³¹ *The mouth of the righteous brings forth wisdom,
but the perverse tongue will be cut off.*

³² *The lips of the righteous know what is acceptable,
but the mouth of the wicked, what is perverse.*

This describes our Lord Jesus Christ.

He is the righteous one.

The faithful one.

The one whose mouth brought forth wisdom –
and who will remain seated at God's right hand forever!

And because you have been united to Christ –
this has begun to become true of *you* as well.

Solomon wants *you* to think this way – talk this way – and *practice* living this way!

Because the more that this way is engrained in the way you think,
the way you speak,
and the way you act –
the more true it will be in your everyday life!