

## Proverbs Week #128 (12:17-20)

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*"A truthful witness gives honest testimony, but a false witness tells lies. Reckless words pierce like a sword, but the tongue of the wise brings healing. Truthful lips endure forever, but a lying tongue lasts only a moment. There is deceit in the hearts of those who plot evil, but joy for those who promote peace."*  
(Proverbs 12:17–20 NIV)

Our verses this week center on the idea of truth. They begin by illustrating the importance of a truthful witness in regard to legal matters. In our court system today people are expected to not only tell the truth but the whole truth and nothing but the truth. False words in courtrooms will cause justice to be perverted and will do great harm to the larger community. Individuals accused of a crime that lie about their involvements or deliberately hide behind half-truths pervert the process of justice.

Wisdom teaches that those who go around telling lies and who use their words recklessly are like those who cut people with swords. The words are destructive and hurtful. In contrast, those who have truthful lips bring healing. Those who are wise can bring health and restoration to broken relationships. They will promote true joy and peace.

A fool finds it hard to tell the truth. They think that the best way to avoid the pain of taking responsibility for wrongs done is to lie about what they have done. Who is responsible for almost every wrong done in the house of fools? "Not me." I would like to meet Mr. or Mrs. Not Me someday. If they could be expelled from our families one would assume that nothing would ever be broken, no mess would ever be present, and no fights would ever start. Young children and even adults sometimes find it hard to face up to the wrongs they have done. Again, Wisdom tells us that those who seek truth promote peace.

The Hebrew word for truth is *emet* and shares the root of the Hebrew word for faithful (*emunah*). Our two most important responsibilities, to love God and our neighbor, require both faithfulness and truthfulness. These character qualities are essential for love, trust, and maturity. Dishonesty will tear apart the relationships of friends, family members, communities and nations. *"Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Messiah. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work."* (Ephesians 4:14–16 NIV)

The Messiah is the source of our life. As each of us do our part in working for Him, we learn to stand together against the schemes and false teachings of evil men by speaking truth. Together we can pray the words of this Psalm.

*"Remove the false way from me, and graciously grant me Your Torah. I have chosen the faithful way; I have placed Your ordinances before me."* (Psalm 119:29–30 NAS95)

In the poetic parallel of these verses the false way is contrasted with the faithful way. In this request we ask God to exchange the false ways in our lives with His instructions. They are His gracious gift to us. For our part we are to place His ordinance before ourselves.

*"Thy judgments have I laid before me." What he had chosen he kept in mind, laying it out before his mind's eye. Men do not become holy by a careless wish: there must be study, consideration, deliberation, and earnest enquiry, or the way of truth will be missed. The commands of God must be set before us as the mark to aim at, the model to work by, the road to walk in. If we put God's judgments into the background we shall soon find ourselves departing from them.* (Spurgeon, Charles H. *The Treasury of David*. Accordance, OakTree Software, 2004.)