

Proverbs Week #129 (12:21-23)

"No harm befalls the righteous, but the wicked are filled with trouble. Lying lips are an abomination to the LORD, but those who deal faithfully are His delight. A prudent man conceals knowledge, but the heart of fools proclaims folly." (Proverbs 12:21–23 NAS95)

Our portion from Proverbs today presents three comparisons. The contrast shows the righteous, faithful, and prudent on one hand and the wicked, lying lips, and fools on the other. As often happens, there is no wiggle room or gray area between the two sets. The instruction here establishes one as good and the other bad. We must be careful as we apply these words to our own lives not to remove the sharp edges from these classifications.

Verse 21 speaks of the security from harm enjoyed by the righteous. The wicked are filled with trouble. We must remember that proverbs are not promises as we read and apply the truth they contain. Both the wicked and the righteous will experience harm and trouble in life. The confidence of the righteous is the LORD. He will establish their plans and ensure that no trouble or harm will ultimately overtake or consume those whom are His.

"The LORD nullifies the counsel of the nations; He frustrates the plans of the peoples. The counsel of the LORD stands forever, the plans of His heart from generation to generation." (Psalms 33:10–11 NAS95)

Verse 22 declares that lying lips are an abomination to the LORD. Last week I spoke about the importance of telling the truth and not telling lies. The punch of this verse hits those who lie because God has stated they are repugnant, disgusting, offensive, sickening, and/or filthy (synonyms of the word abomination). The verse declares their lips are an abomination. We also need to be careful as we understand God's love for us. He disciplines those He loves and these verses are part of His means to reach His ends. If you have spoken lies don't expect God to praise or overlook your wrong. His discipline leads us to change our ways to His ways.

When we place verse 23 in its larger context we gain a better understanding of what is being taught. The prudent man holds back knowledge but a fool speaks whatever is on their mind. Bruce Waltke comments on this verse, "The shrewd is one who conceals (*kōseh*; see 16b) knowledge because he is not driven neurotically by pride to parade his knowledge or by rage to wreak harm. He has the self-control to wait for the right situation and the prudence to know when to speak up."¹ Verses 16 to 23 contain many comparisons between a wise and foolish way to speak. A wise person does not rush to fix a problem but understands the right time to present truth. It takes wisdom and skill to wait for the right opportunities to speak especially when our relationship with another has high stress, tension, frustration, or anxiety. The stopwatch illustration I mentioned over the last few weeks asks us to wait at least 30 seconds before we speak. At times, maybe a calendar would be a better illustration that would teach us to even consider waiting days before speaking about tense issues.

In closing, we should to consider the importance and significance of the phrase "the heart of fools proclaims folly." The concept of the Hebrew word that we translate as heart carries with it the meaning of our deepest thoughts. These thoughts are connected to who we are and how we live our lives. What is truly in our hearts will be present in how we speak, treat one another, and live in relationship to God. Questions like "Is that really important to you?" or "Is that what you really believe?" will be answered from the storehouse of what is really in our hearts. It is reality. The student and teacher learn that it is the heart that needs to be changed if behavior is to be changed. Each of us can seek God and ask Him to continue the work of changing our hearts to His heart. We should never want to remain foolish and God is the source of true wisdom. Have you asked God for wisdom lately? How are you doing listening to Him?

¹ Waltke, Bruce K. *The Book of Proverbs, Chapters 1-15. New International Commentary on the Old*