

Proverbs Week #96 (10:17-29)

“He is on the path of life who heeds instruction, but he who ignores reproof goes astray. He who conceals hatred has lying lips, and he who spreads slander is a fool. When there are many words, transgression is unavoidable, but he who restrains his lips is wise.” Proverbs 10:17-19

If words can be compared to water, what kind of person are you? Are you like an eyedropper, a garden hose, a fire hose, or Niagara Falls (the falls have a combined flow rate on average of 750,000 gallons per second). We all know that we should not gossip (tell stories – even if true – about others that might harm them or their reputation). One who “spreads slander” can be understood as one “who conceals hatred” and “has lying lips.” This kind of person is a fool. What makes this person even more foolish is that they do not hold back their words. They are like a fire hose or Niagara Falls who empty large amounts of water on the ears of anyone who is willing to listen (and often on people who would rather not listen).

“The tongue of the righteous is as choice silver, the heart of the wicked is worth little. The lips of the righteous feed many, but fools die for lack of understanding. It is the blessing of the LORD that makes rich, and He adds no sorrow to it.” Proverbs 10:20-22

Loving God and being wise should be understood from the perspective of our extended families and those who live as our neighbors. God’s command to love others has real people in mind. Our love for others is founded in our love for God. We are to love Him with all our hearts. The words in our hearts will find their way to our lips. Our lips can be used to build up or tear down. The beginning of wisdom in this area is understanding the condition of our own heart and crying out to God to create in us a new heart. As He does this, He will also enable us to train our families to know the difference between righteous and foolish uses of our tongues.

“A fool finds pleasure in evil conduct, but a man of understanding delights in wisdom. What the wicked dreads will overtake him; what the righteous desire will be granted. When the storm has swept by, the wicked are gone, but the righteous stand firm forever.” Proverbs 10:23-25 (NIV)

We need to remember that proverbs are not promises. A proverb does not always present all the truth on a given subject. They are not intended to be statements that can hold true under every single circumstance. For example, the above proverb speaks of a storm sweeping away the wicked but not affecting the righteous. Is this true of every storm in life? Do tornados, hurricanes, flash floods, or tsunamis only destroy those who are wicked? Proverbs need to be understood and we need to consider what they have to teach us.

“Like vinegar to the teeth and smoke to the eyes, so is the sluggard to those who send him.” Proverbs 10:26

Earlier we learned that the sluggard needed to learn wisdom by observing how ants live their lives (Prov. 6:6). The sluggard was described as someone who loved sleep too much. Their love for sleep would cause them to be poor (Prov. 6:9-11). Here we learn that the sluggard’s behavior affects others. Someone who sends a sluggard to do a job is going to be disappointed.

“The fear of the LORD prolongs life, but the years of the wicked will be shortened. The hope of the righteous is gladness, but the expectation of the wicked perishes. The way of the LORD is a stronghold to the upright, but ruin to the workers of iniquity.” Proverbs 10:27-29

These verses speak of themes of life that include hope, long life, and security. For those who are wicked and do wicked things their hopes will perish, the length of their lives will be shortened and the houses they build will lie in ruins. By God’s covenant faithfulness, we can live lives that are right with Him and even filled with joy! If we learn to fear the LORD, we can have confidence that the hope we have in Him will not disappoint.