

Proverbs 23-05-10b

Let's resume our study now, we are in the book of Proverbs and we have taken a little time to remind ourselves of the approach to these. A legalistic, literalistic approach that expects them to always be true in every situation is clearly not the case. We are warned off of that in several instances, 26, 4, and 5 is not the only case where we have a seeming contradiction or the option of applying one proverb or another.

But as we pick up now in chapter 11, it begins by shifting, and this is not a bad chapter break here, because we saw the preceding section that gave us four verses that emphasized the problems of the wicked by putting them first. So, in verse 23, you have a contrast between the righteous and the wicked, and in verse 23, what is pointed out is the evil person finds doing evil stimulating, entertaining, enticing, gratifying. To pull off a scheme, to scam somebody, to fool somebody, a foolish person finds evil entertaining.

It's a great pastime. I do it just for the fun of it. And in these four verses, you always have the fool or the wicked put first and the contrast with the righteous following.

So it is a light thing for the wicked to perpetrate sin, in verse 23. It is like jesting to a fool to do wickedness, is one translation. It's fun.

Where wisdom is the delight of someone with discernment. When you recognize and you play the long game, you realize that momentary stimulation isn't in any way compensation for the long-term detriment of perpetrating evil, but someone who discerns recognizes that wisdom is a delight, and it is refreshing to live a wise and prudent life. So, when given an option, and we say, well, it would be fun to return evil for evil, it would be fun to get this easy revenge on someone, oh, you didn't help me in my time of need, now it's your time of need, ha ha, watch me deny you the coat you're asking for.

A wise person doesn't play that kind of game, doesn't find gratification in the human notion of tit for tat. And this gets back to, again, the Sermon on the Mount, which I am more and more compelled to revisit, at least in a brief special, that, you know, you've heard it said, an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth, you wronged me, now it's my turn to wrong you. This is what's being spoken of in this proverb, to do evil it's sport to a fool.

Ah, to return evil for evil, that's going to be fun. I'm going to delight in making you pay. You poked my eye, I'm going to poke yours, etc.

Verse 24, when the wicked are worried, they do well to worry. The fear of the wicked, it's going to come upon him. Ah, to the extent that the wicked recognizes that his wicked ways have consequences, and he worries about those consequences, well, that worry ought to motivate and provoke change.

If all you do is worry and you don't change, then that worry is going to be fulfilled. This is the principle. This is what is generally true.

So if we find ourselves worried about something that we know is wrong, the answer is not just keep on worrying, the answer is change of mind, change of ways. Forsake foolishness and pursue wisdom. Forsake wickedness and pursue righteousness.

Worry is a dashboard light. Worry is a gauge that says this is not right. This is not proper.

Your fuel is empty. Your temperature is high. Your coolant is gone.

Your oil has drained out. Make a change. If all you do is continue to observe the light, well, pretty soon, your engine is going to become a molten heap and you're done.

But the desire of the righteous is going to be granted. If we pursue righteousness and desire to be pleasing in God's sight, God is going to give us the wherewithal. He will not suffer us to be moved.

He will answer our requests for guidance. When we ask, it will be given. When we seek, we will find.

When we knock, it will be opened. Verse 25. The wicked.

Once again, you see these four proverbs lead with what happens to the foolish, to the wicked. Verse 25. The whirlwind passes by.

The wicked is no more. The wicked don't survive calamity. They're destroyed completely.

After the whirlwind is gone, you don't find the wicked anywhere. And what is this whirlwind? Could this be circumstances in time? Perhaps. But not always.

What is going to be true is if the whirlwind is judgment. You think about Matthew chapter 7. Once again, in the Sermon on the Mount. Whoever hears these sayings of mine and does them, I liken him to the wise man who built his house on the rock.

When the storm comes and after the storm passes, his house is still there. Foolish man, building on the sand. People can say, well, look, he built on the sand and he's fine.

Well, what about the storm? What about the whirlwind? And ultimately, this is the representation of God's judgment. And this momentary light affliction working an eternal weight of glory, the momentary prevailing, the momentary victory, the momentary, aha, look, I did it wrong and I'm prospering. I'm on top of the world.

I'm doing great. That's not the long view. Once again, Solomon, I had to look up to find the reference for the tall spirit versus the long spirit in Ecclesiastes.

If my memory serves, I think I found it in chapter 7, verse 3. Am I right? No, but it's in

there somewhere. The end of a thing is better than a beginning. Yeah, it's verse 8, 7, 8. The end of a thing is better than its beginning.

The patient in spirit is better than the proud in spirit. You remember literally the long spirit is better than the tall spirit. You're standing tall at the beginning, but it's the endurance that counts.

Well, these are biblical principles. They are divine truths. And when we face any situation and we've got options, this is what we want to bring to mind.

This is what we want to respect when the Holy Spirit activates it in our heart. Am I returning evil for evil here? Is this the path of endurance or is this the path of a momentary standing tall? Am I giving an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth? Somebody did me despot, I'm going to do despot right back. Or am I going to love my enemy? Am I going to do good to someone who has expressed a lack of esteem, hate, disrespect, inconsideration? No.

I would rather put myself out, even if it isn't appreciated, if there is a need, if it's in my immediate periphery, if it's something I can do, if I prayerfully consider the options, this is the better way. This is the way of love. This is the way of self-sacrifice.

I am going to respect the other principles that limit the application of this principle. I'm going to touch not the unclean thing. I'm going to hate the garment that is spotted by the flesh.

But if I can pull someone out of the fire without corrupting myself, without myself becoming contaminated and disqualified from fellowship with God, then I will do so. To the extent that it is up to me, I am going to pursue peace and that righteousness without which no one will see the Lord. I want to do what I do, maintaining my own personal righteousness, but at the same time sacrificial to self, beneficial toward others, not bearing a grudge, not seeking my own vengeance, my own justice.

This is the idea. These four verses are then followed by four that lead with the righteous. So 27, 28, 29, 31, and 32, these are actually seven verses that stress the positive results of making our priority, leading our life, establishing our way based on pursuit of righteousness and wisdom.

So in verses 27 and 28 we find that we have a hope. We have a positive expectation. Length of days and gladness.

Longevity in an unhappy state is not a blessing. Happiness that only lasts for a brief time is not a blessing. Having durable, long-lasting blessing and happiness, gladness over a long life, that's a blessing.

They are best when found together. You get to verse 29. The way of the Lord is strength

for the upright.

This is the glorious refuge, security, protection, confidence. And as I said when we covered this earlier, you can't help but think of Psalm 91. Psalm 91.4, under his wings we take refuge.

Abiding in his shadow we are secure and confident. The workers of iniquity ultimately, inevitably are going to be destroyed. And this goes back to what we saw in the earlier set of Proverbs.

The righteous shall never be moved. You got the vagaries and the vicissitudes of life. You don't necessarily see things coming.

You make a plan and suddenly there's an unforeseen circumstance and the plan's out the window. We provide for ourselves and now we can't make use of that provision because the situation has changed, location has changed, employment has changed, opportunity has changed, health has changed, whatever it may be. But by prioritizing our faith in God, our pursuit of wisdom and righteousness, looking to him, looking for the ministry of the Holy Spirit to bring to our minds those principles that are pertinent at this moment and in this circumstance, at this juncture, with this set of options, looking to the Lord, the righteous are not going to be moved.

Even in what looks like instability, we are stable. Waves may be crashing, but we are the rock that doesn't move and doesn't change. And this gives us an effect on others.

We end up with a beneficial effect. In evangelical Christianity, this is called your testimony, your witness, that what is visible to others in our life. And this is the mouth of the righteous bringing forth wisdom.

People say when they ask us a reason for the hope that is in us, the response is beneficial. It is truth spoken in love. It is a benefit.

It is wisdom. In the same way that good tree brings forth good fruit, there is a season. We are not always trying to run around saying, look how wise I am.

But when asked in season, we bring forth our fruit. Where the perverse tongue is going to be cut off. You think of those unproductive branches that Paul talks about in Romans 9 with the faithlessness, they're broken out.

Other branches are grafted in that are going to bear fruit. The lips of the righteous know what is proper in verse 32. What is acceptable.

The lips of the righteous. If we observe these other principles, are we answering a fool according to his folly at the wrong time? Are we not answering a fool according to his folly when he needs to be rebuked, needs to be corrected, needs to be called out in

public? This has the notion of a public venue. You're going to answer individually, lest he be wise in his own eyes.

You're going to answer corporately or not answer depending on whether it is going to just lump you in with him. There is a time and there is a season to every purpose under heaven. What is it? Well, we need discernment.

The lips of the righteous know what is proper. We know when to speak. This goes right along with those earlier verses.

We speak that which glorifies God, pleases God, edifies others, and we don't speak that which has the opposite effect. As James says, the one who can bridle his tongue will have his whole body under submission. How many times do we have the experience of looking back on an encounter, a conversation, time spent with others, and we just wince and say, Why did I say what I said? Why did I run on on that subject? Why did I let out that information? Why did I ever speak in that fashion? We have to prayerfully anticipate situations where that is a possibility and ask God for the grace, the strength, the wisdom, the alert, the danger warning message from the Holy Spirit within us to keep the door of our lips.

This was David's prayer. Oh Lord, set a watch on my mouth. Keep the door of my lips.

There is a time to speak and there's a time to be quiet. Stronger phrases that express that same idea. But the mouth of the wicked is completely perverse.

And it is like the septic sucking service truck springing a leak and you can't stop it. And it makes an awful mess. This is up to us.

And it brings us to chapter 11. And we continue with a set of contrasts here. These first 11 verses, 11, 1 through 11.

It's a lot of ones here. But these are all built around a common theme. And it begins with a reference to the Lord.

It begins with a reference to the Tetragrammaton. Dishonest scales are an abomination to the Lord, but a just weight is his delight. And these all deal with conduct in the light of God's observation.

What does the Lord think about what we are doing? What is his judgment of our conduct? We've seen the general pursuit of wisdom or folly of righteousness or evil in chapter 10. This is going to really focus on the pragmatic side, the practical side, conduct. How do I act? Not just what are the principles or the philosophies or the good and evil, righteousness, wisdom, or foolishness that undergirds what I do, but what am I actually doing? What does it say? What does it reflect? And what is God's view? So in the first verse, it's very simple.

Am I honest or am I dishonest in my dealings with others? What does God think about how I act? Am I prone to shortchange others, just do the minimum, just give the minimum? And this is expressed in the scales. And you know the way scales worked in the ancient world. It was a balance scale, and then you had a set of weights.

And if you're going to give somebody a measure of wheat, there is a stone that gives ostensibly a valid weight. If we were going to put it in modern terms, I've got a 10-pound weight to put on this side, and somebody says, I'm going to pay you for 10 pounds of barley. Well, the 10-pound weight should balance when there's 10 pounds of barley on the other side.

Dishonest scales meant that someone had hollowed out the 10-pound stone so that I only have to give them eight or nine pounds of wheat, and it looks like I'm being fair when I am really cheating. I appear to be fair, but I am actually cheating. My appearance is one thing, the reality is another.

This goes well beyond am I honest in business dealings, which is the common application of this proverb. What it really signifies in parable mode, understanding this as a parable, am I giving an appearance of righteousness that is hollow, and I am actually shortchanging, deceiving, cheating someone. The appearance is all above board.

You think about the gambling casino, and you go there, and apparently, the roulette wheel is spinning randomly. Apparently, the deck of cards is being shuffled, and someone is just playing the odds, but in reality, somebody is operating sleight of hand. In reality, there is an unbalanced die in the pair of dice.

There is a magnet in the roulette wheel, and some metal in the ball, and when it's an electromagnet, the operator can turn the thing off and on, and decide whether you're going to get black or red, whether you're going to hit a number or not, and it has the appearance of fairness, but it's a cheat. It has the appearance of honesty, but it's deceit. It has the appearance of being just and fair, and you're not, and you know it.

It's not an accident. It isn't, well, how was I to know that a mouse came and nibbled my 10-pound stone in the night, and I thought I was being fair, and it was an honest mistake. This is knowing deceit, knowing cheat.

You can't have a bad scale unless you make it so yourself, and then you present it to others as being fair. There's a lot in this, and it is in the eyes of the Lord. God knows what you did to the scale.

God knows your cheat, your deceit, your hollow appearances of fairness and justice. A false balance is an abomination. This word abomination is the same one that is used for death penalty offenses in Israel.

Homosexuality, man lying with man as with woman is an abomination to the Lord, and

when you start thinking about the similarity of attitude that God has, those things that are labeled abominations, this is a very sobering thought. How careful should I be to be absolutely fair, to be as honest and just and open as I can be? Well, if it's an abomination to the Lord, that ought to be very high on my list of priorities. A perfect weight is His delight, a just weight.

Notice the reference to the stone. Everybody can see that the empty scale balances, and so it's the stone that matters, and it is that one part. You can't keep pointing to how balanced the empty scale is if the stones are off.

The valid stone, that's His delight. You look at the next verse, verse two. This is essentially a contrast between humility and pride.

Pride comes, shame inevitably follows. To be puffed up, to think more of ourselves than we ought to think. This puts you in mind of Luke 14, 11.

Jesus says, whoever exalts himself will be humbled. If you overestimate yourself, you oversell yourself, you overestimate yourself, you think better of yourself than you ought to think. Whoever exalts himself will be humbled.

He who humbles himself will be exalted. Remember Jesus saying, when you come to a feast, take the worst seat. And it'll be great if somebody says, oh, come up here and take a better chair.

If you sit down in the best chair and somebody says, excuse me, but that's not your chair. Can you go sit over there in the back row with the spilled Coke and the chewing gum? That's your chair back there. He who humbles himself will be exalted.

He who exalts himself is going to be humbled. Luke 14, 11. And you find this, Paul mentioning the same thing in 1 Corinthians 10, 12.

Let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall. And you remember the context in 1 Corinthians, these that were disparaging Paul and his teaching and the policies that he had established in the church and these who were arrogating to themselves the equivalent of apostolic authority and setting themselves up as judge and jury and deciding what ought to be done. Let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall.

It's better to be suspicious of ourselves, to examine ourselves and make sure we are in the faith than to confidently assume that we've got it all nailed. And it goes back to this. Being lowly is wise.

With the lowly is wisdom. With the humble, it is wise to be humble. And it is the part of humility.

You can't become wise unless you are humble enough to be teachable, to receive

instruction, to accept commands and so on. So you almost get the idea that the wisdom is seeking out the humble and that's where it is going to reside. And by the same token, lady wisdom, pictured in those chapters 2 through 9, is calling out and those who have humility will follow her call and not that of the crafty harlot.

You come to verse 3. The integrity of the upright will guide them. The perversity of the unfaithful will destroy them. Once again, you may not see this in a snapshot of a situation.

You may not see it in a short-term evaluation, but over time, as it says elsewhere in scripture, wisdom is justified by her children. This is something that Jesus said. And you remember, we've covered this in our What Does God Require study.

And you go to Micah 6, verse 8. He has shown you, O man, what is good. What does the Lord require of you but to do justly, to love mercy? This gets back to how are you going to treat your enemy? How are you going to treat those who have spitefully used you? How are you going to treat someone who you are tempted to give an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth? How are you going to treat someone who you judge to be wicked? They've acted wickedly in the past. They're unreliable.

They've done you harm. They've done you an injustice. But now they're in need and they come to you asking for a coat.

What is your response going to be? Context, context, context. People who pull that do not resist an evil man, but if he asks you for a coat, give the cloak. Out of context, they can't make it work.

They say, well, this is just impractical. Evil is just going to overrun the earth if we don't resist it. Evil prevails when good men do nothing.

And that's true. But look at Jesus. He's giving an impractical ideal that nobody can follow.

Not if you see it in its context. When he says to not resist an evil man, what is the context? The context is, he's been evil in the past, but now he's in need. Now it makes perfect sense.

Now we don't apply it in the wrong circumstance. There's a time to answer the fool and there's a time to not answer the fool. There is a time to resist a wicked man and there is a time to not resist him.

His need is going to humble him. And this is an opportunity for love to make an inroad and create an opportunity for repentance and change of mind. And if you return evil for evil, when someone is in a vulnerable point, how are they ever going to decide that God's way is a good way? And the Lord Jesus is a viable option and one they should consider and perhaps pursue and accept.

God doesn't hold our past wicked life against us when we come to him and request forgiveness and cleansing. He doesn't hold it against us. Why would we hold someone's past evil against them when they come to us, when they approach? The other grievous error that is made in exegeting and interpreting the ministry of Jesus is thinking that all poor people were treated equally and all sinners were treated equally and all oppressed people were treated equally and being oppressed, being poor, being a sinner automatically qualifies you for the maximum expression of God's grace and that is not true.

That is a lie from the pit of hell. And to be fooled by it is to be deflected and neutralized in the conflict with evil. There is a genuine time to be loving toward an enemy.

And there is also a time to kill an enemy. There is a legitimate time to slay the enemy. Look at your Old Testament.

Blessed be God who teaches my hands to war and my fingers to fight. We have to know when. So, the integrity of the upright will guide them.

The perversity of the unfaithful will destroy them. This is a reliable guide for life. If I have a choice, I need to choose the path of integrity.

Whatever the apparent danger. God says, you maintain your integrity, I will look out for you. I will vindicate you.

In whatever way, shape, and form God chooses to do it. Whether now or in the ages to come, it doesn't matter. The integrity of the upright guides them.

If you have integrity, that tells you what the way of integrity is and you follow it at whatever cost. Perversity of the faithless will destroy them. Notice, the faithfulness or faithlessness is integral to integrity.

If you have integrity, you have faith. That's what enables you to maintain your integrity. Faithless people don't stick to integrity because they don't think it's going to pan out.

That perversity is going to ultimately destroy them. What kind of destruction? Physical destruction? Economic destruction? Social destruction? Does it matter? I leave that in God's hands. Perversity and faithlessness, God will judge.

The whirlwind is going to come and the wicked will be no more. Whatever form that takes, that's in God's hands. I just know I am not a part of it.

It is not up to me to perpetrate that destruction or to in some way engineer bad consequences for people who are perverse and faithless. Vengeance is God's. Judgment is God's.

Balancing the scales is up to the Lord. Our faith is committing ourselves to the hands of

a faithful creator and letting him make those determinations and execute those judgments. You come to verse 4. Riches do not profit in the day of wrath.

Righteousness delivers from death. When you say the day of wrath, whose wrath? Is it the wrath of the king? The wrath of the wicked? The wrath of the enemy? Well, if righteousness delivers, who respects righteousness? Who values righteousness? Who honors righteousness and punishes unrighteousness? This day of wrath is the day of God's wrath. So, whatever riches you have, are you going to seriously bring those to the divine judge of all creation and say, well, look at this material wealth.

God created all of it. God allowed you to accumulate it. Even if you did it by illicit means, God didn't stop you from expressing the wickedness of your nature and you ended up with these goods.

But do you seriously think you can bribe God? Will a man rob God? Will a man bribe God? Can a man influence God with earthly treasure? The only riches that count are the riches we saw in the preceding chapter, which are the riches of wisdom and righteousness and integrity that come from God and constitute righteousness, and that righteousness delivers in the day of death. So, this time of calamity is specifically judgment from God. Now, people have argued that there is human design at work here because if you look at verse 4, richest do not profit in the day of wrath, righteousness delivers from death.

You flip back to chapter 10, verse 2, treasures of wickedness profit nothing, but righteousness delivers from death. They say this is a virtual duplication here. What is our first, second, and third rule of interpretation? Why would this be repeated? It makes a difference because of its context.

What is the context of this statement in chapter 10? A wise son makes a glad father, a foolish son is the grief of his mother. There is a family context here. There is an immediate effect on my intimate associations, my relationships, my most treasured and closest relationships are going to be affected if I accumulate treasure by wicked means.

There is no profit to me and there is no profit to those around me. It is going to have the opposite effect. Righteousness delivers not only me, but those around me.

It is going to make my father glad. It is not going to be the foolishness that makes my mother sorrow. That is the immediately preceding context.

In verse 3, which follows it, the Lord will not allow the righteous soul to famish, He will cast away the desire of the wicked. If you are not famished, if you have adequate means, this also is a blessing to those around you. You are not dependent.

You are not a drain. You may be able to contribute to those around you. So this treasure of wickedness that doesn't profit you in a family and in a social context is now identically set in a larger context.

Integrity versus perversity in verse 3. This is a larger social context. And this is a divine context. Look at the verse that follows in verse 5. The righteousness of the blameless directs His way aright, but the wicked will fall by His own wickedness.

This is a moral context more than a practical context. More than a blessing by association or cursing by association context that you had in chapter 10. This chapter, this section was introduced by what does God approve? And so the horizontal is in view in chapter 10.

What effect are you going to have on those around you? How will you be perceived? Will you be a blessing or a curse to your father and your mother if you're accumulating treasures of righteousness? So it's a horizontal perspective. This is a vertical perspective. What is the judgment of God? Where do you stand morally? And what outcome is God going to determine upon your life? And so an identical statement based on its context has great riches of meaning because it is set contextually.

This is why it's a bad idea to view Proverbs as a ragtag collection. And we're going to see soon that it is carefully structured. The context is woven as a whole cloth for a reason.

And so this liberality versus selfishness is going to be judged by God. Not only its effect on those around us. Righteousness is often connected with being generous and liberal to those around us.

It's a particular kind of righteousness, not just a moral righteousness, but a sensitivity to the needs of others, irrespective of whether we judge them to have been wicked in the past, as we've seen. And then in verse 5, righteousness versus wickedness. This is where we will pick up next time.

But you see this theme, moral judgment from God on our behavior. God is going to determine consequences that are long-term. That are life and death.

That either give us hope or an expectation of disappearing off the scene. The wicked will be no more. The righteous are going to persist.

Their fruit is going to matter. Their presence is going to matter. So hopefully we're seeing that rather than looking at these as a quick fix instruction, apply this proverb and everything is going to be great, to view them as principles that should guide us, even when we're not sure what the outcome is going to be, to evaluate them and say, is this a time for me to speak? Or is this a time for me to remain silent? Is this a time for me to be generous? Or is this a time for me to be a good steward? Is this a time for me to forgive and be kind to someone who has wronged me? Not resist an evil person? Or is this a time to recognize that I am enabling and empowering somebody who is unrepentant, unreceptive, and is only going to abuse what I give them.

And I am making them codependent. I'm weakening them. I'm doing more harm than

good.

We have to judge when any particular principle is best applied. And some of these principles seem contradictory because it depends when and how are you applying it. Circumstance matters.

Context matters. Purpose and intention, goals, values, and priorities matter. Going to God and asking for wisdom and guidance matters.

And that's how these proverbs should be understood and how they should be taken. And this is why there is such a strong underpinning of are you wise or are you foolish? Are you righteous or are you wicked? Integrity versus perversity will guide us in the application of these truths when, where, and how. So important.

Well, we'll continue our study in chapter 11 next time. We'll close here in a word of prayer. Father, thank you for the truth of your word.

It enables us to successfully fight the principalities and powers and the rulers of the darkness of this age. It enables us to know what is pleasing in your sight and what is a blessing and an expression of love to those around us. We pray that as we reflect on these truths, God the Holy Spirit will illuminate them, will enlighten us, shine them as a light on our path so that we can hide them in our hearts and avoid sinning against you.

We pray it in Jesus' name. Amen.