

Proverbs 23-10-04b

Let's pick up our study now. We're ready to look at the second portion of, and conclude the second portion of chapter 12 that begins in verse 15, which we've already seen. It is going to describe for us the kind of behavior, speech, and action that a fool engages in that he thinks is right.

He is not warned, he's not admonished, he's not diverted, he isn't changed in any way in perpetrating this because it seems right in his own eyes. And so the first section of this after the introduction of verse 15 that we've already seen is in verse 16, a fool's wrath is known at once, but a prudent man covers shame or conceals. And initially what you see here is the fact that the disturbance, the irritation, the being stirred up idea here is impossible for a fool to conceal.

When this aggravation, if you will, this irritation springs up inside, the fool has no power to control it. Now, what is our larger context? What are the features of life that we're in view in this chapter? It is our words and our deeds. So the fool is gonna think that he's right, but his being stirred up, this word translated wrath means to be stirred up, to be aggravated, to be irritated, to have this sense of injustice and I've got to say or do something about this.

This is really pressing on me in a unsatisfactory way. And so it immediately is apparent. How is it gonna be apparent? I suppose you could look at someone's face and see an expression that reflects these emotions, this impulsive anger, this impulsive dissatisfaction, but it's going to express itself in what is said and in what is done.

You see people get aggravated. This is usually in something you watch on television or in a movie, but they get a piece of bad news and they pick something up and hurl it across the room and you think, well, that's so childish, but it feels right at the time. It may be seconds later, you say, wow, that was valuable and I just broke my 63-inch flat screen with it, but in fact, I saw one of these fail videos where someone wanted to fool someone else and so they put in a USB stick into this brand new flat screen TV, one of the big ones, 80-something inches.

They said, I'm gonna do a funny. And so they loaded a picture of a broken flat screen with all of the colors and I could show you one. There's one right behind me.

And they loaded that up and displayed it and waited for the new owner to come in. Well, they came in and took one look at this TV and were so aggravated that it was brand spankin' new and someone had broken it that they picked up a nearby object and threw it at the screen and broke it for real. And before somebody could say, wait, wait, wait, we're just fooling with you, it's just a picture and let me change from displaying pictures to the channels and all will be well, but that impulsive frustration ended up actually ruining what was supposed to be a funny.

But this, what's really interesting about this, and once again, I just want to demonstrate the beauty and the integrity, the organization and the structure of scripture that is so easily overlooked when people take a shallow and impulsive view of it. I want you to circle, if you, or at least note in your mind in verse 16, three words, you see the word fool, you see the word covers or conceals and you see the word shrewd or prudent. Notice the order, fool is the second word in English and you see the prudent who conceals.

Now just keep track of the fact that we're in verse 16, but this section, this subsection of the second half of the chapter is composed of two parts, just like the first one was. And this first part is verse 16 through 23. So look down at verse 23, what's the first word you see? Prudent or shrewd, this is a room, just as we had in verse 16, conceals the exact same word we had up in verse 16 and the heart of fools, the very same word we had up in verse 16.

This is the envelope, this is the bracket, this is the circle around this section. These three words bracket the content of this, what you might call a sub unit. You can also see the inside here in verse 17 and verse 22, because you have in the beginning of verse 17, he who speaks truth and this is the declaring of righteousness in verse 17, but a false witness declares deceit.

And you look at verse 22, those who deal truthfully, the word for truth in verse 17 and truth or truthful in verse 22 are the same. And you have the ones who are an abomination to the Lord in verse 22 and the deceitful. These are the conscientious in the first part of verse 17.

He who speaks truth is declaring righteousness and that same truthfulness is in verse 22. So there is symmetry, there is structure. And these were designed to be memory aids to those who would hear these scriptures read, have them reviewed and these are kind of like acronyms.

They're helps for remembering what comes in between these repetitions, these symmetries and so on were designed to help it catch and stay in the mind. There are many other internal links here. You have the body parts that pertain to speech.

We're talking about what you say and what you do. So you have the lips in verse 19. The truthful lip will be established forever in verse 22, lying lips.

You have, and of course that goes back to verse 13 in the preceding section that talked about the wicked is ensnared by the transgression of his lips, that the righteous will come through trouble. There's so much here that I don't have time to cover. I'm just gonna tell you one quick thing about verse 13 in the preceding section, talking about lips.

The word that is used for snare in that passage, the wicked is ensnared. If you do some research on this, this word for snare, there were four different kinds of snares that were used in the ancient Near East to catch birds and small animals. And this word for ensnared refers to one of those traps.

This particular kind of trap was composed of two curved sticks. One is fixed to the ground, the other raises up and is on a spring with a trip. And when the animal would come inside to take the bait and trip this snare, the top curved stick would snap down on its neck or its leg and hold it.

Well, this snare is shaped like a pair of lips, just like a pair of lips. And it's no accident that of the possible snares that could have been mentioned, it's the mouth shaped snare with that upper lip that snaps down and traps the prey that is in view. There's a lot else going on in that because there is an indefinite genitive in there that you can't tell if this is the guy that is caught in the trap or the guy who set the trap.

And if you say, well, is the wicked, the one who set the trap or the one who was caught in the trap? And the answer is yes. The indefinite genitive encourages you to think of it both ways. His own lips snare him, other wicked lips can snare the wicked.

It is true that wicked snares trap the wicked and it has to do with conversation, with what is said, with what is spoken. Remember the old World War II encouragement on posters, loose lips sink ships. And it has to do with lack of self-control, lack of self-discipline.

And this is a theme that is introduced back in verse 13 and is expanded here in the second section of the chapter. So you have the truthful lip in verse 19 and you have the lying lips contrasted in verse 22. You also have the mouth in verse 14.

A man will be satisfied with good by the fruit of his mouth and the recommends of a man's hands will be rendered to him. This is the speech and the deeds and that there are consequences, there are outcomes. And these consequences and outcomes are superintended by God, by the Lord.

So with that in mind, you have the tongue in verse 18. There is one who speaks like the piercings of a sword but the tongue of the wise brings health. You get the mouth, you've got the lips, you've got the tongue and it's found again in verse 19.

With the truthful lip, that truthful lip is established forever but a lying tongue is but for a moment. And what is behind what we say? Obviously it is what goes on in our heart. And so the heart is referenced in verse 19 and in verse 23.

So you have the, where does this take place? What is the motivation? It is the motivation of the heart. The heart is behind what we say. Turn with me to James chapter three.

You remember this, but it's worth reviewing. You almost get the idea that maybe James in the course of writing his letter had been reading Proverbs chapter 12. James chapter three.

My brethren, let not many of you become teachers knowing that we, teachers, shall receive a stricter judgment. Why? Because if you screw it up, you're having an effect on many people. It's one of any number of reasons why I'm grateful for a small church.

If I mess up, it's a contained damage. You know, it's a small room. But look at verse two.

We all stumble in many things. If anyone does not stumble in word, if you manage to communicate without stumbling, without going astray and leading others astray also, that is a not perfect, but mature. This is something that only comes with experience, with maturity, by grace.

This is why Paul tells Timothy, be careful who you lay hands on. Here are the qualifications for an elder, tells Timothy and Titus, that it can't be somebody who's a neophyte, somebody who has demonstrated experience in self-control. If anyone does not stumble in word, he is a mature man able also to bridle the whole body.

If you can control your speech, if you have discipline in your conversation, notice the juxtaposition here. If you can control your speech, you can control your actions. You can bridle the whole body.

You cannot do foolish things if you can keep from saying foolish things. A mature man is able to bridle the whole body as well as his tongue. Indeed, we put bits in horses mouths that they may obey us and we turn their whole body.

This is a metaphor. If you control the mouth, you control the body. Speech, conversation, what we say leads us down a road.

Look at verse four, look at ships. Although they are so large and are driven by fierce winds, they are turned by a very small rudder wherever the pilot desires. Even so, the tongue is a little member and boasts great things.

We think back to the earlier part of the chapter talking about the man who works for himself versus the man who talks a big fight, talks a big game, all hat, no cattle. And you may be despised because your endeavors seem small or insignificant. You're doing it yourself versus someone who boasts great things but he's got no bread.

These threads weave in and out of the Proverbs in a very intentional fashion. And you find these truths reflected here in James. The tongue is a little member, boasts great things.

See how great a forest a little fire kindles. And these California wildfires, and they go

back in somebody's campsite, they didn't get the coals quite out. Somebody flicks a cigarette butt out the window.

Next thing you know, tens of thousands of square miles are incinerated. The tiniest little spark. I think of this every time I light the grill, which I just did last night.

And there's a big bottle of propane under there. You turn the burner on and there's a little sparker there. It's just a momentary spark, but this whole burner lights up.

And from that, the other three burners light up and you got a fire big enough to cook dinner from this just a little bitty spark. And without it, I traveled one time to camp and Patty and I were gonna cook over our little portable grill and had the meat, had the spices, had the grill, had the propane bottle, got it all hooked up. And I had no source of ignition for the propane.

And you just take for granted that there's always some little match or some little trigger thing with a spout that you can start a fire with. But if you don't have one, you're thinking, well, if I gotta try to find a piece of flint and hit the fingernail file in my little knife or how am I gonna ignite this? But that little tiny spark is all it takes to make a fire any size you want. See how great a forest a little fire kindles.

Notice it doesn't say see how great a fire, see how great a forest. Because the destruction of a forest in the ancient day was a big deal. A little spark and you lose a forest.

This is big time resources. This is losing money in the bank. This is losing figs.

This is losing dates. This is losing pomegranates. This is losing food in that day.

Verse six, the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity. The tongue is so set among our members that it defiles the whole body and sets on fire the course of nature and is set on fire by hell. If what we say ends up being fire, a destructive fire, you're in league with the devil and you're destined for judgment.

Every kind of beast and bird of reptile and creature of the sea is tamed and has been tamed by mankind. But no man can tame the tongue. It is an unruly evil full of deadly poison.

Shifting his metaphor now. Full of deadly poison, no man can tame the tongue. So you say, well, if nobody can tame it, it's hopeless, right? No man can tame the tongue.

Where is the power of self-control when it comes to what we say? Where is the power? How does the power of God come into the life of the believer? What is the final fruit of the spirit that is mentioned? Self-control is a fruit of the spirit. How do we cultivate the presence and power of the spirit? The spirit is mute without the word. He doesn't speak.

Jesus said, he's not gonna take from himself. He's gonna take my things and express them to you. The voice of the Holy Spirit is the word of God.

And he will bring to our minds. He will lead us into all truth. He will, Jesus said to his disciples, he will remind you of everything I have told you.

It is in his power that you're gonna be able to make disciples, teaching them to observe the things I've commanded you to teach them. It's the teaching. And in the presence and power of the Holy Spirit, that is what supernaturally enables us to bring this hell ignited poisonous tongue that resides in our head.

With our tongue, we bless our God, verse nine, and father. And with it, we curse men who have been made in the similitude of God. Notice what a terrible thing it is to curse men with our tongue.

What I alluded to in the first session, one of the big problems today, why we can't find compromise. We can't find common ground. Churches split and divide and other theologies shout down those who want to speak the truth, those who want to point out what scripture says.

You're quoting that because there's a problem with you. And I have the power to judge you and exegete you and find fault with you. Instead of let's look at the scripture together and see if these things are so.

And regardless of my faults or your faults, what sayeth the scripture? What does the word of God have to say? What proceeds from the mouth of God? That's what ought to define us. That's what ought to motivate us. That's what ought to guide us and enable us and empower us instead of biting and devouring one another, as Paul puts it.

Out of the same mouth, proceed blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be so. Does the spring send forth fresh water and bitter from the same opening? Can a fig tree, my brethren, bear olives or a grapevine bear figs? Thus, no spring yields both saltwater and fresh.

If we cultivate self-control so that what comes out of our mouth is fresh water and not fire, this is a conscious bracketing. Is your tongue going to be set on fire by the flames of hell? Or is it going to be a spring of fresh water that soothes, that refreshes and restores, that brings life and health, not bitterness and sickness. People stranded on the open sea, you've heard what happens if they get so thirsty, they lose self-discipline and drink saltwater, hastens your death enormously.

Can't drink that stuff. Salty water is not to be drunk. Fresh water is what you need.

Well, this is the New Testament affirmation of what the Proverbs are telling us here in chapter 12. And this entire chapter is words. And from the same heart, if we can

cultivate the heart that has the discipline to conceal a matter, to restrain itself, to wait to speak until we have something profitable to say, that same discipline in both chapter 12 of Proverbs and chapter three of James, that same discipline will enable us to bridle the body and ensure that our actions are equally a blessing, healthful, restorative, encouraging, comforting, a blessing to others.

It's the same discipline. You trace it back to the heart that is characterized not by foolishness, but by wisdom that seeks counsel and doesn't consider itself to be right. And brook no argument, listen to no other views.

Humility versus pride, wisdom versus foolishness, God's perspective versus the way that seems right in our own eyes. It's so powerful. It is so clearly conveyed here, so compelling if we will just decide to hear it.

What were our first nine chapters about in Proverbs? Do you want to listen to the crafty harlot or do you want to listen to lady wisdom who cries out and appeals to all of us? Turn you at my reproof, God says. Listen, this is life and health to you and to those around you, your household, those that are affected by your business and to the nation itself, to the city and to the nation. We've seen all of this in the past.

Well, that is verses 16 through 23. We don't have time to exploit every detail. I could happily spend the rest of my life in Proverbs, but we're just going to sample it with these insights, with understanding, watching for symmetries, watching for structure, watching for the intentionality of these sections of Proverbs and these groups of Proverbs, we can all go for ourselves.

Get a little thing up on your browser from Bible Hub that will let you look at the Strong's number and you'll see that prudent is the same in verse 16 and in verse 23, that fool is the same in 16 and 23. And when you suspect that there is a symmetry there, figure out, okay, God is telling me something. He's emphasizing something.

What is in the center of this symmetry? And so on, as we've seen so often with chiasmic structures. As I said in the content of verse 16 of chapter 12, you have the fool's wrath is known at once. And this is this word for vexation, for unhealthy internal excitement.

What do we call this in the modern day? Stress. You let something get under your skin and it stresses us out. It does not spark joy, it sparks anger.

It sparks vexation. It sparks impatience. It sparks critical views of others.

That person is to blame. That person spilled my coffee in my lap. That person made the coffee too hot.

I saw one of these things where a lady was able to escape an attacker that was about to do her harm, but she had a cup of coffee in her hand that she had just bought and she

splashed it in his face. And that was the means of her escape. Generally, hot coffee is not something you want to encounter anywhere other than cooling it down enough to drink it.

There've been lawsuits at McDonald's because the coffee was too hot. And it's McDonald's fault instead of you for not paying attention and saying, this might be hot. If I can't hold it in my hand, I probably shouldn't drink it type of thing.

But this word, kaso in Hebrew means to be incensed, to have this flame that bursts into existence within us. And it just, it kind of drives us crazy. Well, you can say, how can I help my impulsiveness? Well, you can't.

James says, no man can tame the tongue. And the tongue is the first way that people typically express this vexation. So what do we need? I need the presence and power of God that will reign in.

If you've ever had a really impulsive dog that you were trying to walk, you're going down a walking trail and somebody comes around a corner and they've got a dog and all of a sudden your dog is on attack mode. What keeps your dog from getting loose and maiming the other dog and possibly its owner? You got a harness and a leash. And you prepared that in advance.

You didn't leave home without having your impulsive dog in a harness, on a leash. And you've got a good firm grip. When we had impulsive dogs, I would wrap that leash around my hand a couple of times and not rely on the loop.

What if this dog lunges and the little rivet that holds the loop turns loose? Or the stitching or the leather itself? I would put that loop on my hand and then I would put a couple of wraps. And if the dog unexpectedly lunged, there was something already in place to restrain it. You can't wait until the moment and say, where art thou Holy Spirit? What is the verse I learned from Proverbs 12 that pertains? Has to already be present.

You know how we do it? Evening and morning and at noon, I will pray and cry aloud. So my morning devotions cultivate the presence, remind me of the power of God's word and God's spirit. And I go forth with the harness and the leash already in place on my tongue and on my spirit.

And when something that would formerly incense me and spark that fire of hell in me, I proveniently made sure that God's power is in there to keep me in check. No man can tame the tongue, but God's Holy Spirit can, God's word can. And just taking that beat, the Holy Spirit just saying, hold on now, stop and think, who are you? Why are you here? Do you need to say something? Do you need to express that impulsive flash of being stirred up here, excitement, upset, incensed? Job chapter five, verse two, you can write it in the margin.

Wrath kills a foolish man. It's the same Hebrew word, kaso. Job five, two, wrath kills the foolish man and envy slays the simple one.

Those things well up and get out of control before you can put the lid on it and it kills you. Kills the situation, kills a relationship, kills fellowship, kills the mood, kills the day, kills the opportunity. Remember in verse 16, the prudent conceals that which would create shame, bottles it, keeps it inside.

There is a time, you know, they encourage in secular wisdom, they encourage children to just express themselves, follow your heart. You know, if it feels good, do it. That's not what scripture says.

Scripture says there are things that ought to be bottled up. Don't say everything you feel. Don't tell everything you know.

Don't walk in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of the scornful. Actually, it's walk in the counsel of the ungodly, stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of the scornful. And anytime you are in the company of those individuals, conversation takes place.

And if that conversation takes a bad turn, and you say, well, I could certainly add to the pile here, conceal it, restrain it, look for a way to maybe turn the conversation and its topic in a more profitable and helpful direction. Well, you know, that might be something you could say, but here's something good. I have to say this person has been a benefit and was there when I needed help and try to provide some balance, try to provide some objectivity, try to provide something that the Lord Jesus would be pleased to have said on his behalf.

Since we are here as his representatives, would the Lord Jesus pile on and chime in and say, well, I've got a story I can add to that. I've got an observation. You know, it isn't an entirely bad idea to think as a representative of the Lord Jesus, would he be saying and doing what I am saying and doing? We have that additional benefit of the New Testament witness in addition to what you find here in Proverbs.

What do we say and what do we do? And how can we control it? The disadvantage in the Old Testament day is unless you were actively asking for the Holy Spirit, he wasn't there by default. He wasn't there automatically. The Spirit was not yet given.

Christ was not yet glorified. We have that privilege. He is even closer and even more available.

And we don't have to rely on ourselves. We just have to have the humility to turn to the strength that we need when we can't generate it. So this mood of irritation is dangerous.

And the wise know how to conceal it, know how to constrain it. The fool does not. And so what happens? Well, you look at, we'll see it in chapter 17, verse 25.

As we have seen in the past, a foolish son is a grief to his father and bitterness to her who bore him. We saw that paralleled in earlier chapters. And the fool is also a vexation to the wise.

You go to chapter 27, verse three. A stone is heavy, sand is weighty, but a fool's wrath, this very same word, is heavier than both of them. It's heavier to bear.

It's heavier to put up with. It has weight. It changes things.

A lot of rocks and a lot of sand, that's tough. And 27.3 of Proverbs points that out. It's also found, and I say this somewhat carefully, but in Proverbs 21.19, it is better to dwell in the wilderness than with a contentious and cussow woman.

A woman that is stirred up on the inside, to dwell with her, you're better off going to the wilderness. The question is, when you think of 21.19, why is she vexed? Why is she stirred up in the soul? Is it your fault, oh husband? If you're vexing her and stirring her up, maybe you need to go to the wilderness until you get the self-control that prevents her from having to rely on her self-control. There is a quote I found in one of the commentaries that I really like, quoting a rabbi from the 200s or 300s of this era, AD 200, 300, there was a rabbi named Iliash.

And he said, you can recognize a person from his cup, from his purse, and from his annoyance level. This is the kos, the kiss, and the kaas. It all rhymes in the Aramaic Hebrew they spoke in those days.

You can know a man by the kos, the kiss, and the kaas. The cup, the purse, and this kaas is derived from our word in this passage, kaso. The ka and s are all there.

What did he mean? Well, the cup, what are you like when you've been drinking? How do you handle your money? Are you conservative or are you profligate? And how do you act when you're in a state of agitation? Kaso. How do you handle that impulsive situation? So you can recognize someone by how they act under duress, how they act when their inhibitions are removed for some reason. So do you, conceal, do you constrain or do you reveal? That's the difference between foolishness and wisdom.

Well, we're largely through with chapter 12. You can see in verse 23, the concealing or the proclaiming idea. And everybody has something they can proclaim.

All of us have things that we should conceal. It's directly symmetrical with whether we are wise or whether we are foolish. And particularly spiritually, do we have the wisdom of God and the power of God at work in our lives? Or are we doing what's right in our own eyes? And as you continue in the second section, the second subsection of that last half of chapter 12, you see this anxiety in the heart of a man causes depression.

We're back to that inner agitation. But a good word makes it glad. This is a good

message.

This is an observation. This is what we can do speaking the truth to one another in love. This is the effect of the word of God that we can resurrect in our own heart, in our own mind and say, well, but I've got a promise that covers this.

Jesus said in this world, I'd have tribulation, but to be of good cheer, because he has overcome the world. Paul says it's a momentary light affliction, working in eternal weight. And that good word can overcome the anxiety.

That good word can make me glad, even in the midst of what would make me anxious or certainly make others anxious. Verse 26, the righteous should choose his friends carefully. The way of the wicked will lead you astray.

How does Paul put it? Bad company corrupts good morals. How does David put it in Psalm 1? If you walk in the counsel of the ungodly, stand in the way of sinners and sit in the seat of the scornful, you're gonna end up like a tumbleweed. Do you wanna be the tree planted by the rivers of water, bringing forth your fruit in your season? It's permanent, it lasts.

We take verse 26 to heart. 27, the lazy does not roast what he took in hunting. Diligence gives a man precious possessions is really a better way of translating this.

Do you wanna have possessions that are valuable, precious, and that last? The lazy man, he's got game in his hand and he doesn't even cook it. He's got a good meal right in front of him and he wastes it. It spoils.

And then finally in verse 28, the summary for the second section, in the way of righteousness, life. Notice the verb isn't even there. In the way of righteousness, life.

In its path, not death. Partaking of the eternal, leveraging and exploiting our eternal life in the presence only happens by the power of God. And we know exactly how to access it, how to make use of it, how to be defined and empowered by it.

And that's the gift that God gives us in his spirit and in his word, both gifts in and through the Lord Jesus Christ, our savior, from God the Father in his love and in his grace. Well, we will pick up at the threshold of chapter 13 and see its beauty and its structure when we come back in a couple of weeks, but we'll close here in a word of prayer. Father, thank you for the wellspring of life, grace and truth that we find in the pages of your word.

We ask that your Holy Spirit will make them live and breathe in our souls, that they will come readily to our mind as we prepare to meet the day, as we journey through our circumstances and accomplish our tasks. And as we review at the end of the day, how we did, where we could have done better, then prepare ourselves for those times that

we can redeem. Without doing so, we know that the days will be by default evil, but we can rescue them.

We can redeem them and invest them in treasure in heaven, in life eternal, both now and in the ages to come. We know that this justifies and vindicates the work of the Lord Jesus in saving us and in giving us these precious gifts, and it prepares us for life and function both now and in the kingdoms to come. We pray that that will be the case for each one of us, and we ask it in Jesus' name, amen.