

Proverbs 23-12-06b

We'll pick up our study in Proverbs chapter 13 at verse 2. As I said, the introduction in verse 1 sets the tone. This is another marker that we have completed the unit that we studied in chapter 12. Chapter 13 is, and of itself, a carefully constructed unit.

And this first section now, this first sub-section, there's going to be four sections in it. And this first section is going to be in verses 2 through 6. We have the introduction in verse 1 that is once again an exhortation and reminder to listen to the content of the message. And it's so interesting that it is sometimes painful, you know, whom the Lord loves he chastens and he scourges every son whom he receives.

And to think through and past the hard edges of a rebuke is the key to benefiting from its content. Even the Lord Jesus himself is an example of this. If you think about the content of Hebrews 5, 8, although he was a son, yet he learned obedience by the things which he suffered.

And the idea of Jesus learning as he goes, it's great because he was like, you know, an A plus student in a class who is learning new things, but never misses a question on the test because they learn it so well. But it says he learned obedience through the things which he suffered. And he was insulted when reviled.

He did not revile in return. Remember that? And he looked past it and used it for benefit. He learned obedience by the things which he suffered.

And this harks back to Isaiah 50, verse 5, that was Hebrews 5, 8, Jesus' example, that when we find experiences or encounters painful, they can be instructive. It doesn't mean that all pain is designed to instruct, but much of our instruction does come at a cost. We have to sacrifice our pride on the altar.

We have to sacrifice our instinct for self-preservation and self-defense and vindication. Let me tell you how I'm not wrong. That kind of suffering, that kind of self-control is the means of and expression of spiritual growth and maturity.

Isaiah 50, verse 5, the Lord God has opened my ear and I was not rebellious, nor did I turn away. There is speculation about what it means that the Lord God has opened my ear. Is this the pierced ear servant where liberty is available and a servant is entitled to be free? And he says, I would rather stay in the household.

And so he would line himself up against a doorpost of the house and they would place an awl on his ear and knock it through. It's painful, but it was the by which that servant would be identified as a member of the household and a member and a servant to that master for life. And the Lord God has opened my ear.

I wanted to be a servant. I wanted to be useful. I wanted to learn and grow and reflect

God's glory.

And so he has opened my ear. He has put that hole through my ear into the doorpost. I was not rebellious, nor did I turn away.

If you want to understand it as just the ear being open to understand divine truth, everything still applies. I was not rebellious. You think about the Pharisees when Jesus tried to open their ears, they were rebellious and they did turn away.

And this can be viewed as a part of this sort of painful school of discipline. We say no pain, no gain. I think of whom the Lord loves.

He chastens and no chastening is pleasant at the point that you receive it, but it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness. So in this section, now we're going to see verses two through six, and it has two little bits with a piece in the middle. So we're going to see verse two and three are a unit.

Verse five and six are a unit. Verse four is the meat in the middle of the sandwich. And that is going to be this first section of chapter 13, verses two through six, two and three together, four and five, I'm sorry, five and six together with four in the middle.

So what does it say? I could give you a lot of information about how and why these connect, but there's a lot of Hebrew involved, a lot of this paranomasia and repetition of words. Just trust me, it's there. That's how we know these are units.

So that wise son of verse one is going to receive benefits associated with communication, with speech. So he is going to be receiving good benefits. Man shall eat well by the fruit of, notice his is in italics, I would scratch that out, it's fruit of the mouth.

And the reason that's important is, look at verse one, a wise son, his father's instruction, and you can fill in your own verb. He's a product of it. It matters to him.

He has heard it. He's responded to it. He is practicing it.

A wise son, his father's instruction is going to be visible and present and making a difference. Not the scoffer. And a man shall eat well by the fruit of the mouth.

Is it, he's producing fruit of the mouth in some kind of way that's, it comes out of his mouth and pops right back in and feeds him. It seems less likely than the idea that we are connecting back to the introduction in verse one, that that father's instruction is going to be the fruit of the mouth and it nourishes, it builds up, it strengthens what you take in by way of instruction. We think of this anytime we think about coming to the word of God and reading it for ourselves, reflecting on it, hearing it presented and explained and explicated a bit so that the interpretation and the application are more cogent and more clear to us.

But we figure that this is manna for the soul. This is our spiritual bread. As manna fell and filled the Israelites during the 40 years of wandering, this is the nourishment that fills us.

And it is the fruit of a mouth. It comes from God's mouth. It comes through intermediate communicators.

In this context, it is coming to a son from his father. And through that, there is benefit, there is nourishment, there is strengthening. When someone is weak, you try to get them to take nourishment.

So a man shall eat well. And the word well, this is the word tov, T-O-V. It's a soft B, tov or tov.

And this is to partake of good. You can say eat well, and you can treat it as an adjective. But a man imbibes, takes in, is nourished and strengthened by good.

The word is the word. And you can take it as a noun or an adjective. Either way, it's spelled exactly the same, pointed exactly the same.

So you could equally well translate this, a man shall partake of good. This word yakal means to eat or to consume, to take in for benefit. A man shall eat good by the fruit of the mouth.

There is good speech, good instruction, good wisdom. You take it in by listening. Remember the problem with the mocker in the preceding phrase? The mocker doesn't listen.

But if you consider the words that are coming, and not just from anybody, these are the words of the wise. This is the word of the father who is pictured as being a wise man. These Proverbs would kind of come unglued if you tried to picture a foolish and profligate and silly father trying to instruct his son.

The father is put for God in the sense that he is a source of divine wisdom. He is a source of genuine truth. So to listen to that, this is food for the soul.

They had this whole series of books, chicken soup for this person, that person, and the other. And the whole idea is that the chicken soup is a metaphor for that which nourishes, strengthens, heals, enables, and strengthens. And that's the idea here.

So this is very smoothly flowing from verse one. And you can see it. The instruction of the father is like physical nourishment to the body.

And if you take it in, you're taking in good, tov. But the soul of the unfaithful feeds on violence. The soul of the unfaithful, this is the bagad.

We had a little memory aid in Hebrew of which consonants in the Hebrew alphabet can take a dogish, can take an intensifying dot in the middle. And it's the bagad kafat. And bagad is the first part of that.

Bait and gimel and dalet can all take a dogish to strengthen them. And so can cough and pay and the tea. So bagad kafat, that's the ones, those can take a dogish.

And this is the word bagad. Why does that matter? It's easy for me to remember. But the unfaithful here, bagad is someone who is treacherous, deceitful.

They are untrustworthy. It says unfaithful. It's not so much their faithlessness that is in view as it is dangerous to put your faith in them.

And the nefesh of the unfaithful. And so now you've got a choice. You've had the fruit of the mouth in the first line.

So is this nefesh as the throat? This is sort of guilt by association. Nefesh means breath. Breath means life.

But breath also travels in and out of your body through your throat. And so nefesh in some contexts is translated throat. So having just seen the mouth, you get the idea that from the source, which is the wicked, foolish, and faithless, you get the idea that this is a continuation of the mocker in verse one.

The nefesh, the breath, the throat, what comes out from that person isn't fruit of the mouth. It's something from a deeper cesspool that comes out. And so the breath or the, you could say life, but the throat of the untrustworthy is a better translation.

This is more talking about how you should think of and treat this person. Don't trust them. They are unreliable.

They are deceitful. And it feeds on violence. There is no word here for feeds on.

It just says the nefesh of the Bogdim, the Bogad, the Bogdim. Then you have one final word for violence. This is a word you know.

This is a word you've heard every day since October 7th. Hamas, C-H-A-M-A-S, Hamas, violence. That's what it means.

A man shall imbibe good by the fruit of the mouth, but the nefesh, this throat breath of the untrustworthy, of the deceitful, Hamas. That's it. I don't know why they didn't put feeds on in italics here.

They should have, because there is no verb for feeds on. That's verse two. Remember, this is a two-verse unit, and it is talking about the consequences and nature of speech.

So you have that verse two. Now, what about speech? He who guards his mouth preserves his life. What do you think the word is for life? Nefesh.

He who guards his mouth. We have to watch what we volunteer. We have to watch how we respond.

We have to guard, set a watch. This is often translated as to keep or preserve a thing. It is translated as a literal guard, a watchman in places in the Old Testament.

It means to watch over, to set a guard, a watchman. This isn't guarding in the sense of defending. This is guarding in the sense of watching closely.

Don't let it out of your sight. Don't have your attention diverted. You know how they say, what we need is a diversion.

We'll distract whoever's guarding this, and then we can sneak in. We'll cut a hole in the fence, or whatever it is. But distraction, moving the attention away so that you can perpetrate something.

This verse says, if you want to preserve your soul, you've got to watch without distraction the mouth. And that's the reason you would think, well, why isn't the fruit of the lips in verse two? Because he wants to set a guard on the mouth in the next verse. And so you have the same word here in verse two.

The word is pay. And in verse three, the word is pay. It's P-E-Y, would be one way to, or P-E-H maybe, to transliterate it.

And this is preservation. You have two different words for preserve here. One is to guard in the sense of watch over and let it escape.

Don't let it come to harm. It's watching for any purpose where you can't afford distraction. And then you have preserving.

This is shamar. This is to keep our guard in the positive sense, keeping God's commandments. Heeding, to regard, to observe and give heed.

So the first verb is more of setting a visual watch. And the second one is more of heeding and guarding in the sense of guard these commandments, guard these precepts. Don't let them out in more of almost a verbal sense.

So he who sets a watch on his mouth without distraction guards and preserves and is taking heed to his entire life. The very life breath is preserved. You'd say, shouldn't I have health insurance? Shouldn't I have car insurance? Shouldn't I have house insurance so that if accidents happen, I'm covered? Our whole life is covered and guarded primarily by paying attention to our speech, both what we volunteer and in how we respond.

And it's that response thing that a lot of us have difficulty with. You hear something, catches you wrong, irritation, flares, and the prisoners escape out the mouth. So he who guards his mouth preserves his life, but he who opens wide his lips, he who opens wide his lips shall have destruction.

This word for destruction is ruin, terror, dismay, something that is in ruins. And this process by which something came to ruin was destructive and terrifying. It was a violent end, a ghastly conclusion.

It didn't just slowly fade away like an old soldier. This came to sudden and catastrophic ruin. Opening wide his lips, and how many times have we gotten into a heated conversation of some kind and very shortly thereafter just closed our eyes and said, words come back.

Why did I go down that road? Why did I say that? I can't unsay it. I regret it. I hate that it ever came forth.

I didn't mean it. It was heat of the moment. Words come back, but they can't.

So guarding our mouth, the only remedy for this is prevention. Only you can prevent forest fires. You say, well, I wish somebody hadn't flicked that cigarette butt out the car window because now there's 15,000 acres of California that's been burnt to a crisp.

Well, you can't unburn it. You have to, only you can prevent forest fires. He who guards his mouth preserves his life, but he who opens wide his lips shall have destruction.

And this is really just a preposition. He who opens wide his lips, lechwtai. This word for destruction, that's the end result.

And to have, it just, it's a preposition that means opening wide the lips, it is two or four. It leads to, it makes you qualified for ruin and destruction of a violent nature. In English, you could just say he opens wide his lips to slash for destruction.

And you can also produce destruction. It's not just that you shall have destruction. When you open wide your lips, that opening wide the lips spreads destruction in every direction.

It's like an artillery shell burst. Five, zero meters in all directions, there is shrapnel, and there is a 50% or greater possibility of inflicting death on a combatant. That's the bursting radius of a 155 millimeter shell.

And if your own observer is in there and he's called down fire on his own location, he's going to die as well. But the one who opens wide his lips, he can be destroyed, you can be destroyed, they can be destroyed. This violent destruction just is indiscriminate and omnidirectional.

It doesn't say he will have it. It is going to burst and anybody in the bursting radius is going to suffer. That's what it says.

You say, well, he'll get his for opening his lips. You can get yours as well. And this is a warning.

Just look at this one unit now, verses two and three. These are not only descriptive, but they are also prescriptive. Because when we see these descriptions of how to consume good, how to be nourished and strengthened and enabled by good, by heeding instruction and listening to rebuke, however harshly it may be delivered, that is a description on both sides.

And I can measure myself. It says, a wise son, his father's instruction. Well, I can say, yeah, certainly it would be wise to listen.

But I, do I consider myself wise? If somebody said, you got a one question quiz, do you qualify by the biblical definition as wise? How could I measure myself? Well, to what extent do I listen to authoritative? This is what it means by the father's instruction. Our authority is the word of God, by whatever means it comes to us. It doesn't have to be our physical father, but it's authoritative.

It comes from our father, capital H, capital F. So do I actually heed it or do I hear it and immediately forget it? Do I see it as in a mirror and straightway forget what it showed me? As in James, looking into the perfect law of liberty. Am I changed by it? Do I redouble my efforts to live in its light and think about it? Not just during Bible class, but after and tomorrow and in my next two or three conversations, is this going to be uppermost in my mind? Set a watch on my lips. I don't want to be a scoffer.

I don't want to be someone that fails to listen to input from other people, whether it is delivered gently or with moral indignation. That is what makes someone wise. So I can measure my own wisdom.

It's not a matter of looking around saying, well, there's a wise son and there's a wise son. Well, that guy there, he's a scoffer. I turn this evaluation and this description to my own benefit.

Do I consider myself to be wise? I'd like to think that I'm wise. Well, I'd like to think that, but is it true? Is my rightness meter malfunctioning once again? And I'm not actually wise because I refuse to listen to any kind of criticism. I don't consider it constructive.

I consider it mean and spiteful. If I'm wise, when there is authoritative criticism, now you can have people that are on the opposite side of an issue politically, economically, socially, world events wise or whatever. And they're saying, well, you're in favor of killing babies or you're in favor of this or that or the other.

That is not authoritative instruction. And my response to that is governed under a different set of rules. This is, am I a product of, am I amenable to, will I take on board and try to process authoritative instruction, even if it comes across to me as indignant and morally catching me as a rascal.

I'm doing something morally wrong. I am sinning. I am in sin.

I have the sin of anger. I have the sin of lack of forgiveness. I have the judging.

I have the sin of maligning or gossiping or I have whatever sin you want to plug into the gap there. If I'm called on it, if the word of God is brought to my attention by God, the Holy Spirit, or by anybody else, what's my response? If I am willing to discipline myself and have self-control and search the scriptures to see if these things are so, examine myself to see if I am in the faith, that's productive. And this is something we ought to do regularly instead of scoffing and saying, well, that's just silly.

That's without merit, without basis. I don't have to listen to this kind of nonsense. That's not me.

I'm not that. That's a dangerous attitude. A wise son, authoritative instruction hits and makes a difference.

If I do not listen to rebuke, that qualifies me as a scoffer, as someone who should not be sat down with. In Psalm 1.1, a man will imbibe, will internalize, will eat and benefit from tov, goodness, by picking and eating that good fruit. By the way, the word fruit, you'd say, well, the fruit of the mouth, that's still not quite clear.

Fruit in the ancient Near East was by definition, a good thing. To make fruit be bad, you've got to add an adjective. A good tree bears good fruit.

A bad tree bears bad fruit. You have to specify if you're going to incorporate the idea that there could be such a thing as bad fruit, fruit of any kind. You think about the famines and the droughts and the other things, the things that could interfere and not have a good crop.

But if there are figs on the tree, that's fruit. That's good. If there are grapes on the vine, that's fruit.

That's good. If there's grain on the heads of barley or wheat, that's good. Fruit intrinsically is a good thing.

So fruit of the mouth is assumed to be good fruit. This is good stuff. And when you take it on board, you are taking on good.

You're taking on tov. But if we are untrustworthy, if we are deceitful, and most people who deceive others also deceive themselves, because the heart is deceitful and many

people don't intend to deceive. It is a product of self-deception and a lack of attention to the truth or prioritization of the truth and getting at what is really wrong.

Well, it can't be me. Isn't it something that the common denominator in every bad situation that has ever cropped up is always me? And yet I always assume it's the other person's fault. Why is it that everything turns sour and everything goes bad? And if you look for the common factor, what is it that's always present when these things turn sour and go bad? Interestingly, it's always me.

I'm always there. Maybe it's me that's the problem. Maybe I ought to consider that possibility instead of just saying, what a terrible run of bad luck.

Every time I have a job, every time I have a relationship, every time I have a contact, every time I go into this activity or whatever, things turn sour. People are just rotten. What's the matter with these people? Common denominator.

Does it ever turn out well? Are you ever able to get very far down the road without it going bad? What's the common denominator? Well, we have to think about these things and it takes humility. The soul of the untrustworthy, the very life breath, violence, feeds on, isn't there. You can just scratch it out.

It's kind of an omission like the first phrase of 13.1. A wise son, his father's instruction. Soul of the unfaithful, violent end, destruction, ruin. He who guards his mouth, sets a watch and doesn't let it out of his sight.

Don't let it out of your sight for a moment. Saw a video of a guy that managed to get out of a prison. He walked over to a corner where there were two brick walls and he put his back on one wall and the other one was close enough that he could put his feet on it and he just walked himself right up the wall, right over the top and escaped.

And they had a camera that showed the video of this guy going over there. He had a confederate watching to make sure no guards or interested parties walked by while he was doing this. It only took him about 10 seconds to get in there and just walk his way up that wall.

They had a camera on it. They showed the video. So how did this guy get away? Somebody wasn't watching the screen.

He's right there on the camera, climbing up and getting away. And 10 seconds of a lapse and this guy's gone. Well, it doesn't even take 10 seconds.

If we take our eyes off our mouth for nefarious evil prisoners to escape, guard the mouth, preserve the life, the nefesh, the soul. Open wide the lips, open wide the borders. Who's going to come across? Everybody.

Look at some of the statistics on the nationalities of people swarming across the southern border. They just set a record yesterday, 12,000 encounters at the border in one day. That is a one day record in the history of the United States.

We have not had 12,000 people in a single day. And a great majority of them were not from South America. They're from China and from Africa, thousands of them, single unaccompanied males.

How do you think that's going to turn out? You want to talk about feeding on violence? Stand by. So this brings us to the center. Now, the meat in the middle of the sandwich is verse four, the soul nefesh.

Do you see how tightly integrated these things are? You've got soul in almost every verse. It's about your life. It's about the breath and the expression of your life is so often verbal.

And so the mouth, the lips, the speech, the instruction, the mockery, this is the nefesh, which is our nature. What is our nature going to be expressing? Well, it depends on if our nature is being transformed or not. So the nefesh of the lazy desires and nothing.

Notice *has* is in italics, scratch it out. Do you see this pattern of, I give you a description and I give you a consequence and I don't even need a verb. We saw it in verse one.

We saw it in verse three. You see it again here. The soul of a lazy man craves.

These are cravings. And really here, the soul nefesh is one of its meanings is appetite. So you have the nefesh of the lazy and that's what it means.

It's translated sluggard in the King James, the soul of the sluggard. You see a thing and you want a thing, but you can't get out of your chair to go get it. So it has these cravings.

And then there's a single Hebrew word, ayin. It's also a letter of the Hebrew alphabet. It comes right after you have alif, bet, gimel, dalit, hei, wau, zion, chit, teit, yod, kaf, lamed, meim, nun, ayin, pei, sade, ayin.

It's a letter of the alphabet and it means nothing. Soul of the sluggard craves nothing. Nothing happens, nothing comes, but the soul nefesh of the diligent.

This is the karutz, C-H-A-R-U-T-S. And this literally means sharp. The soul of the sharp.

That's what it means. It has the same connotation in Hebrew as it does in English. Wow, that guy's pretty sharp.

It means effective. It's translated as diligent because it gets things done. A dull knife doesn't cut.

A dull plow doesn't make a furrow. A dull spear doesn't penetrate. A dull arrow won't be effective.

We sharpen things because it makes them effective and they get things done. The soul of the sharp shall be made rich. This is dashan and it means to be made fat.

It's kind of like kavod. Glory is fatness. To be made fat, dashan, is to prosper, to grow fat, to become fat, to be prosperous.

And, you know, we think of being fat as a bad thing, but biblically it means well-supplied, ample, lots of resources to draw upon. This was used of the fat of the offerings that were brought before the Lord and it was acceptable in His sight. This is richness in the sense of acceptability, in the sense of provision, in the sense of prosperity.

Provision, prosperity, and acceptability, the fruits of God's approval are inherent in this description. This is the center. You have speech in the first part of this and you have the integrity, a walk, a life of integrity in the section that we're going to see next time in verses five and six.

Living truthfully, living righteously, and in a blameless way. So we move from speech to conduct. But at its center, if you're going to achieve proper speech, and if you're going to live a blameless and a worthy life, you got to pay attention.

It takes diligence. You got to be sharp. And this part of this is fellowship.

As iron sharpens iron, so a man sharpens the friend. This is the sparks that fly in God's chastening. It is a painful process in some cases.

Most people who get fit have to deny themselves food and you suffer with hunger. You have to work out and you suffer with some physical discomfort. But as they say, no pain, no gain.

And the extent to which you are willing to endure hardship as a good soldier of Christ Jesus, to endure the pain of absorbing criticism, absorbing instruction that is authoritative and comes from a trustworthy source, that bears all of these wonderful fruits and blessings along with it. But it is painful. It's hard.

And that's why you have so many people who aren't in shape, who don't progress and who don't advance because the pain is too off-putting. I don't want to go through that. I'm content the way I am.

Well, that is the way of ruin. That is the way of coming to a violent end because our spiritual life is not a stairway where you can stand on the fourth step up and just remain. It is an escalator.

It's a single escalator and it's got an up button and a down button. And if we are not

leaning diligently on the up button and we let go, it defaults to going down. We will regress.

We will retreat. We will have greater and greater failures. We never stand still.

We are either advancing or we are falling. There is no stasis. We are either on the march or we are in a retreat.

So these exhortations and these descriptions are not just, oh, look at that wise son, look at that foolish mocker. These are measures for ourselves and we can benefit by applying them and prayerfully availing ourselves of the resources God has given us in his word and spirit become these profitable and useful and beneficial things. We can be those who can speak the truth to where others are blessed and benefited.

We can end up being the father who provides this beneficial and essential instruction. So it's very powerful. We're going to pick up next time in verses five and six and then we'll move to the next section in verses seven and following.

We're going to see these four sections, how they are internally consistent, so carefully composed that meet at the center. If you want this to happen, if you want to be on the positive side of these descriptions, be diligent. Don't be a sluggard.

Be dedicated to the truth. Do you want to be loathsome? That's coming up in verse five. So we'll see it next time.

Father, thank you for the truth of your word. Thank you for the provision that you have made so that it isn't something that we hear and cannot accomplish, that it sets a bar too high for us to attain. But you've granted us the presence and power of your spirit.

You have showed us how we can be worthy children, worthy and able to reflect the glory of the Lord Jesus and your plans and purposes, your desire that all men be saved and come to knowledge of the truth. We pray that we can be those who have been delivered from our own fallen nature and are able to speak the truth in love so that we can both bless and be a blessing, be blessed through the power of your truth and the presence of your spirit. We ask it in Jesus' name.

Amen.