

Proverbs 23-12-13a

Greetings fellow members of Grace and Truth Bible Church. This is the 13th of December, 2023. We're in Proverbs chapter 13.

We've covered the first four verses, and we're going to be looking at verses five and six, and then moving into the next section, which begins at verse seven tonight, very fascinating material here, dealing with how we talk and how we act. That's fairly pertinent to life, since that's mostly what we do is talk and act. So the guidance we have here should be helpful.

Let's ask God's blessing on our fellowship and study, and we'll dive in. Father, we are grateful for your forgiveness, your cleansing grace for when we fail and fall short, you lift us up, you place our feet on the rock. You give us new hope and new momentum, new potential.

Your mercies are renewed every morning. Great is your faithfulness, and we're thankful. We're thankful for the Lord Jesus, his representative ministry, as he sits beside you, making intercession on our behalf, and in him, we have so many wonderful blessings.

We pray that tonight, as we look at this portion of your word together, that the Holy Spirit, which is one of those blessings, will impress these truths on our hearts, help us to understand them, to apply them, and to reflect the character and the example of the Lord Jesus in our love, in our sacrificial treatment of each other, that in all things, your glory will shine through. We ask it in Jesus' name, amen. Proverbs chapter 13, as noted over the last week or two, this chapter is a unit unto itself, this is a great chapter division, beginning at verse one and ending at verse 25, it is composed of four sections, we are completing our look at the first section, which is verses two through six, verses two through six, and we had the introduction in verse one, and this two through six that we're looking at right now is the focus on our speech and the implications thereof.

So, after the exhortation to listen to the speech from authoritative and worthy sources, the heeding of the Father's instruction and responding to rebuke, if we are, if something is pointed out where we're erring or coming up short to have that pointed out, so verses two through six are our speech, and we've seen this, the fruit of the mouth, or feeding on violence, does our speech tend toward productive progress, toward unity, toward healthful relationship, reflecting a good testimony, as we've seen in Timothy, what is the impression left by the church to outsiders who view public worship, who hear public prayers, who see people coming and going from the assembly, are they putting on the dog and overdressing and trying to impress with their wealth and being indifferent and insensitive to the poor who might also be coming, this is why women are to adorn themselves with good works instead of jewelry, but this idea that we are here not only to learn and grow and have an inward spiritual life, but we are here as the body of Christ in

the New Testament sense, and we are here to be seen and to reflect God's glory in a way that those who are looking and seeking will see that and be drawn in the direction of God in their own relationship with Him. Well, these Old Testament words cast the same idea to Israel, Israel as a nation was to accomplish that purpose. They were to be a light to the Gentiles and their nation and their enshrinement of God in the tabernacle and in the temple and their obedience and faithfulness to Him and their willing allegiance and their conformity to God's law, not because it made some extraneous kind of common sense to dress a certain way, to eat a certain way, to behave a certain way, but that these marked them out and distinguished them as following these practices because they were God's will.

And their witness and their testimony was, our God is the God. Our God is the one God, the creator God. And we do what we do because He has told us to.

It is His word and His will. And we have fidelity. We have faithfulness to Him.

And as goes, as I've said so many times in many ways, as goes the nation in the Old Testament, so goes the individual believer in the New. And this is why the Old Testament is so fruitful for us because looking at God's requirements for national Israel, we find His desires and goals for us individually, we as groups, as assemblies, as ecclesia, as church, I think as small groups, as united groups, as loving and caring and integrated and gifted and performing the one another's amongst ourselves are to do in miniature in this age with the presence and power of the Holy Spirit, what the nation of Israel was called to do in the old. And that is to shine a light so that those who are drawn will come to us and join us in the Old Testament.

If you wanted to worship God, the creator God, you found Him in the God of Israel and you came and became a proselyte and an Israelite by attraction, looking to dwell with God's people and to serve the living God. In this age, people who see that light are drawn to the fellowship of believers and to be united with them through the baptism of the Holy Spirit and relationship with God through Christ as the way, the truth and the life, and to join that fellowship and be a part of that assembly. We are little miniature Israels in that sense, but we transcend the law because we have the law of God written in our hearts, and that is the law of love, love for God and love for one another.

Jesus inaugurated this summary of fulfilling God's word and God's will in the Old Testament by saying all of the law and prophets are summed up with love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, soul, strength and mind and love each other sacrificially, love others as you would love yourself, do for others what you would like to have done for you. And if you have that uppermost, if that is your goal and your guiding policy, attitude, conviction and practice, you will by default fulfill the requirements of the law. That was a description of someone who had that heart.

And to do it artificially without that heart is hypocrisy to put on an act and pretend

without having a change of mind and a change of heart and a true dedication to God and an outflow of love for one another because there is a vertical love relationship with God. That's the hypocrites. That's the whitewashed tombstones.

That's what Jesus came and condemned. So these Old Testament studies are fruitful for us because they elaborate what this life looks like. And you say, well, they didn't have the Holy Spirit.

The goal and the description is the same. And part of what happened in the Old Testament ages without the ubiquitous ministry of the Holy Spirit, people needed the Spirit to fulfill it. And the Holy Spirit came by request.

Now we have even less excuse because we have Him by default. And we are that much more responsible from those to whom much is given, much is expected, much is required. We have been given much.

And the standard of measure is high for us. What is our excuse if we've got the Word of God just as no one has ever had it in the history of the planet? The accessibility of it in digital forms with all of these tools and commentaries and explanations and the availability. I don't know anybody that doesn't have a stack of Bibles in their home.

If you collected them all and put them in one table, we've all got multiple Bibles for centuries and centuries. There were people that the only way they could hear the Word of God is to have somebody read it. They couldn't read.

They didn't have their own copy. Look at the availability. What kind of responsibility does that place on us? So as we look at this chapter 13, are we wise and are we heeding the instruction that comes from God's Word? It has never been more profligate.

It has never been more abundant. It has never been more multifarious and available than it is today. You can't swing a cat without hitting somebody who is willing to tell you their understanding of what the Word of God says.

You can get a copy of the Word of God in any number of translations and compare them and read it for yourself. Do your own study and investigation and collate and pray and ask for wisdom and light from the Holy Spirit and find out what this instruction is. And if we are so motivated, if we decide that this is the priority in our life is living in a way that pleases God because that is our expression of love for Him and worship of Him, appreciation for Him, this is our priority, then that makes us wise.

A wise son heeds his father's instruction. Who is our father in the ultimate and final sense? Jesus said, when you pray, pray like this, our father who art in heaven. So Old Testament and new, the instruction we receive from our father, if we heed it, that's the wise course.

A scoffer does not listen to that fatherly instruction, that fatherly wisdom. Why? It is taken as rebuke. Instead of looking at it as an opportunity to do better, we brook and we have to find a way to fend off and push away that which is unfavorable, that which isn't complimentary, that that doesn't fit the narrative we have about ourselves.

We go into defense mode and there's scoffing, there's mocking, they're shooting the messenger, there's no end of defenses against unwelcome information. And what do we know about the Word of God from 1 Timothy 2.15 and 3.16 of Timothy 1 and 2 and Hebrews 4.12 and such? The Word of God is doctrine, reproof, correction. That fourfold description in the center is rebuke and correction.

And some of us take that well, others of us don't. And when it's coming from God, we need to take it, we need to take it well, we need to take it gratefully, and we need to heed it and have a metanoia, a change of mind. So if we're wise, we will heed our father's instruction.

But if we deafen ourselves to rebuke, that is a bad path. Well, then that leads to this first section, verses two through six, which is our own speech. What we take in is what we're going to put out.

And if we are not taking in the Word of God and the truth, we are not going to be able to speak the truth. We're going to be reflecting problems that are within. If God's Word doesn't come and cleanse us, the washing of water by the Word, if we are not acknowledging our sins and allowing God to purify our hearts and our souls and our minds, then the output of our souls, when you squeeze a piece of fruit, whatever kind of juice is in there is what comes out.

And when we're under pressure, what's in comes out. And if we begin to notice that that which comes out is kind of rancid and distasteful, rather than worrying about, well, how can I change this output? How can I fix this awful taste? We need to work on what is within. And this is God's grace to us in giving us His power to be cleansed within.

So a man will eat well by the fruit of his mouth. The soul of the unfaithful feeds on violence. So the fruit of our lips is going to be what is welling up from within.

Jesus said, out of the heart proceeds what is good and what is evil. And so we need to go to the source if there is a problem. He who guards his mouth preserves his life.

He who opens wide his lips shall have destruction. This is a very interesting word in Hebrew, opens wide. It's only used one other place.

And it is talking about a Israel pictured as a promiscuous woman. And this word is used. And these salacious desires are satisfied by the opening of the body parts and so on.

It's a pretty graphic verb. But it is a reminder that when lust has conceived, it brings

forth sin. And sin, when it terminates, when it comes to its conclusion and it's finished, brings forth death.

And these lips that open wide are out of a sensual picture. We saw this earlier in Proverbs talking about the crafty harlot, where her lips drip honey and her mouth is smooth as oil. And without going into detail, Hebrew is not without its double entendres and its recognition of our more base and craven desires.

And when we let those get the upper hand, bad things happen. And we are either moving in the direction of having our thoughts and intents of the heart judged and sanctified and cleansed and purified by God's word. And in our day, God's spirit or that which we are made of, which is the dust of the ground, is going to have its way.

And you can't get away from it. We are all as an unclean thing. Even what we think is righteousness is as filthy rags.

We fade like a leaf. Our iniquities, like the wind, carry us away. Without the grace of God, without active laying hold of and leveraging these wonderful provisions of God, the default is downward.

It's like entropy. We don't just kind of get better as time goes on. We very much get worse without divine upward movement.

It's like the sun, that without the power of the sun, plants don't get better. They wilt and die. Everything on the planet gets worse without the energy of the sun.

It's invisible, but it is so necessary. It's the same with God, his spirit and his word for us. And so this first section on speech in verse two and verse three is the first piece of bread.

Verse four is the meat in the middle of the sandwich. And this has to do with our actions. Are we lazy or are we diligent? It begins with what we listen to.

And what comes in and comes out, it doesn't mention the ears specifically, except that the fruit of the lips and the wisdom instruction of the father has to come in before we can speak wisdom and have it come back out. We don't invent wisdom. It doesn't become new.

This is one of the hazards of people who want to quote poets and authors and thinkers and get aphorisms and little refrigerator magnet notions. Man doesn't come up with wisdom that has any power. The power is in the word of God and only in the word of God.

That has God's divine transformative grace in it. The thoughts of man do not. You can't read Maya Angelou or Solzhenitsyn or somebody and get social or political wisdom that

is going to be transformative.

Not that you can't read it or can't appreciate it or understand it. But if you're looking for heart change and power over a fallen nature, you're not going to find it in literature, humanly generated. You're going to find it in and only in the word of God.

So this speech, what we take in and what we say, now we're going, it's kind of like sins. You know, we categorize sins as mental attitude sins, sins of the tongue and overt sins. Well, the mental attitude, the heeding the father's instruction, that's in the heart.

That's mental attitude progress. Heeding that instruction, listening to the word of God, letting the Holy Spirit work with it. Sins of the tongue, the opposite of that is good speech, the fruit of the lips that is wholesome and edifying and building up.

You eat, you partake. This is healthy. This is progress.

Now you go to the opposite of overt sins. This is productive activity in verse four. So the soul and notice soul is repeated in both lines.

The soul of the lazy craves and has nothing. And you have this idea throughout this, both expressed and implied of cravings. Are you like the soul in Psalms? My soul panteth after thee, O God, like a deer.

Is that your heart's desire? Is closeness with God, understanding, progress, fellowship? Is there love there? Is that the craving or is it a base and temporal craving? Is it earthly? Is it loving the world and the things that are in the world? And I want experiences and I want gratification and I want satisfaction and I want stimulation and I want this and I want that and I want this perceived need fulfilled and so on. So the soul of the lazy desires and I am nothing. But the soul of the diligent shall be made rich.

So these are going to tie into later things. Verses two through six, talk about our speech. Verses seven through 12 are going to talk about wealth.

This is going to be the next section we're going into tonight. Seven through 12 is wealth. 12 through 19 is back to this idea of cravings and longings and satisfaction.

12 through 19 and then 20 through 25 is going to put these in an eternal context. What's what is the destiny of the wicked or the righteous of the wise or the foolish of the one who guards his mouth or the one who opens his lips? And are we willing to listen to rebuke that's in verse one in the second line, and it's also in verse eight in the second line. And this is what gets our second section that begins in verse 12, ties it back to the introduction.

So there's a lot we could say about this. We have these these two little sections of verse two and three and verse five and six. Uh, are we lying? And in verse five, it says a

righteous man hates deceit, hates lying.

I don't do it myself and I don't want to hear it from others. Uh, falsehood, deceit, lying, that's anathema. And if we are righteous, deceitful untruthfulness, that's that's just off the table.

I don't want to perpetrate it and I don't want to listen to it. But a wicked man, it says, is loathsome and comes to shame. I believe with many Hebrew types who look at this, that there's been a slight corruption in the text here with a very slight emendation instead of loathsome.

There's not a very good parallel here when it says loathsome and it's talking about this is actually the word in Hebrew as it stands in the in the Masoretic text that of something that is odious or creates a stench. So it basically says, uh, a righteous man hates lying, but a wicked man stinks and comes to shame. And it's not, uh, it doesn't make a lot of sense.

You would think, well, odious. But, but if you fix this, and I think there's just a little bit of a wrinkle here. If you fix this, this word translated loathsome is actually bosh.

B-O-S-H. And you might remember what bosh means, uh, ish bosheth. Uh, one of the sons of Saul was Ishmael, uh, and it's man of the Lord.

You know, Baal is Lord that it's translated husband or Lord. Uh, Baal, the, the capital B Baal is the Lord in Canaan. Um, and Ishmael is, is man of the Lord, but because he was such a bad actor, the people in Israel gave him a nickname.

He wasn't Ishmael, he was Ish-bosheth or Mephib-bosheth. Instead of Mephib-baal, it was Mephib-bosheth. And the center word of that bosh means shame, shame.

And so I think the emendation is correct here. And this should say a righteous man hates, eschews, uh, is separate from, and stays away from deceit, lying, untruthfulness. But the wicked is a shame and comes to disgrace.

Shame and disgrace. Shame is sort of the personal attachment that you yourself are shameful. And, and it's in the same way that, that if this actually meant stench or, uh, odious, that's something that attaches to the person.

When you're around them personally, there's this odor or stench. It's them personally. Disgrace, uh, is the reputation in, in the world at large.

So it's, one is a personal characteristic and the other is the effect you have on the people around you, those who know you or have dealt with you. So one is, is more of a quality and the other is more of a perception on the part of the public. And again, we've seen this in Timothy.

What should the, uh, fabric, what should the soul of a healthy believer look like and be like? What should a fellowship be like internally? And then how should it be perceived by the world? And men should lift up holy hands. They should be praying for the government, not perceived as insurrectionists or rebels or, uh, ne'er-do-wells who want to undermine the government and are bad-mouthing and pointing out all of the wrongness in the government. That should not be the public perception of the church.

The church should be internally sanctified and proper and dedicated to God and to one another. And that perception should extend out to the world and all that you're going to be spoken of as evil. Same thing here, whether you take this as stench or as shame, I think it's bush.

And this idea that because the two parallels don't, uh, don't align, they're not opposites of each other. Um, lying is in the first line and, uh, disgrace and shame are in the second. These transfer across.

So it's compact. You're supposed to transfer the content of the second part to the first and the content of the first to the second. So to expand this, to unzip it, if you will, or add water to the dehydrated contents here, a righteous man hates lying and is not shameful and not disgraceful.

Shame and disgrace do not attach to the righteous because he doesn't engage in or tolerate deceit. He doesn't allow untruthfulness in his presence and he doesn't perpetrate it himself. But the wicked are shameful and disgraceful because deceit is a part of their operation.

Do you see how these two lines cross pollinate? This is so helpful. It's one of the features in Proverbs that really unpacks these and helps us, uh, not wonder what's going on here. These two lines don't even seem to, to what is the link between line one and line two in this particular verse? Well, this is a common feature in Proverbs, and we're seeing in chapter 12 and 13, the way Proverbs work.

And this is one of the ways they work is when you see unlike things in the two lines, first and second transfer them across the, they add, it's like mathematics, you know, that there's commutative and associative properties. This is the associative property of the first and second line. So deceit and untruthfulness attached to shame and disgrace and the righteous askew and don't tolerate those things where the wicked that is inherent and a part of it, the shame and disgrace specifically attach in this context to being untruthful, being deceitful.

And that is the meat in the center of this sandwich. Now you're back to the second piece of bread in verses six and seven. I'm sorry, verses five and six, two and three were the first part four is the middle five and six.

Now we're back to the, uh, let me back up. I'm confusing myself. Two and three talk about speech.

Four is how it works out in action. Are we diligent or are we lazy? And what is the outcome of that? Uh, if, if you don't take these things to heart and change your actions, you're going to have nothing. The soul of the diligent will be made rich.

The diligent associates with the righteous associates with the man who eats well by the fruit of his mouth. All of these are different descriptions. These all cross pollinate.

So verse four, the action is in the middle. Five and six now are the second piece of bread. Like the first go back to speech.

Are we deceitful and shameful and disgraceful, or do we eschew and depart from those things and therefore embrace and reflect righteousness? That brings us now to this section in verse seven, which is the second section in this chapter. And, uh, once again, this is going to be the, uh, what about our material goods? What about our possessions? How does that play into it? So there is one who makes himself rich yet nothing, and one who makes himself poor yet great riches. There are three different ways you can take this.

Um, you can say that this is, uh, this idea of great and wealth, great and wealth, uh, are the last two words of verse seven, great riches, great wealth, um, and increasing wealth, which is in verse 11, uh, wealth and increase. And that's one of the ways we see this section kind of, uh, bracketed is the words great and wealth seven through, uh, 11 here. And so you have this idea that can be taken three different ways.

Um, in one way, uh, it is someone who is greedy and making themselves rich at the expense of others. And they end up losing everything. It's illicit gains.

It's a temporary. You've seen these people that have made tremendous wealth by scams, and now they're in prison and so on. You could take the proverb that way, that there are those who make themselves rich yet they end up with nothing as their fate and, uh, commending those who, uh, you know, there is a man who gains the whole world, but loses his own soul in the first section or, um, those who, uh, in their poverty make themselves rich because they are spiritually rich.

They, they don't worry about physical possessions and they end up with genuine wealth and eternal wealth, lasting wealth, the durable riches that God provides in the spiritual realm. So you can take it that way. So you could put with this, uh, this view, uh, Matthew 16, 26, which I just quoted, what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world and loses his soul? Um, the, uh, parallel in Luke chapter 12, verses 16 through 21.

And, uh, the rich man and Lazarus, you know, the rich man dines sumptuously. This is Luke 16, 19 through 26. You know, he gains great riches, but he ends up with nothing.

And then you have Lazarus out there by the gate with nothing but dogs to lick his sores. And he ends up in Abraham's bosom. He is comforted.

So that's one way to take it. It can also be read as someone who thinks that they are rich. You go to, to Revelation and the church who says, you know, you, you think you are rich and you don't know that you're poor and miserable and blind and naked.

And, uh, this is Revelation 3, 17 and 18. Um, I counsel you buy from me gold refined in the fire, uh, so that you can be clothed that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed. Um, and the same thing in, in, uh, Luke 19 verses 11 through 27, people who are, uh, too blind to work with what they have.

And so you have the, the, uh, parable of the, uh, minas and the Lord who gives the minas and the guy that does nothing with it. Finally, you can take it as, uh, people who pretend, who put on airs and, you know, do everything on credit and look like they're rich and they actually have nothing. Um, the poor fool pretends to possess a great quantity in order to give the appearance that he's wise, that, that he's well off.

He wants to impress, and he's got a, a hollow wealth that isn't real all hat and no cattle, as they say in Texas. Um, and then there is the rich guy who pretends to be poor because he's dodging taxes. You know, uh, Mr. Trump is being accused of inflating his property values and such, uh, pretending to be richer than he is to gain advantages of some kind, whether the allegation is true or false.

You can take this proverb in that way that someone is inflating and expanding their riches when they actually don't have what they pretend to have. And then there are others who have a lot, but they're hiding it because they don't want to pay taxes. They don't want to be besieged by, uh, people who are asking for charity and hounded by those who, who want to get in on it.

You know, people that win the lottery don't want their name published because, you know, the world descends on them trying to get at what they've got. Um, uh, so people who pretend to be rich get, get unmerited honor. Um, the, uh, the others, uh, deprive the world of, of help that they could provide.

They don't let on that, that they could actually be charitable or, or provide for those around them. Remember the Pharisees who said, well, I can't support you. Oh, parents, because I've done, I've assigned it all to God.

I'm giving it all to God when I die. So it's Corban and it's off limits. I can't help you because I would be giving you God's money.

They've actually got great wealth, but they're, they're setting it aside and not using it in a proper way. So when these things are exposed, when these deceptions and lies are exposed, there is shame and disgrace that attaches. So you see the unity of this.

What is the upshot? What is the, the application? There is this constant process of, first of all, what do we take in? What do we believe? You can believe the news. You can listen to narratives and adopt them and you can virtue signal and, and cover yourself in a robe of righteousness by wrapping yourself in the flag of a cause or a country or a, you know, somebody who's besieged or is, is, is portrayed as a victim and you can take that in and that becomes your self-definition and your, your idea of righteousness. I support a good cause that makes me a good person.

Other people support this cause and think that it's good. So they will think I am good because I share, and this is, this is a mutual admiration society virtue signaling kind of false, deceitful, shameful, and undignified righteousness. It's defined by self.

I define this as good. I espouse it. So I've defined myself as good.

It's deceitful, but you take it in and you adopt this untruthful narrative. Then that is going to come out the mouth and you're going to praise those who agree with you and you're going to condemn and disparage those who don't adopt your narrative and, and go along with your view. And that becomes the fruit of the lips.

And ultimately you then start deciding what to do with your resources and you do, or you don't use them depending on this, this chain of events. And that's what the first half of this chapter is describing. It begins with whether or not you heed wise instruction, or if you scoff and you don't get rebuked out of this untruthful self-deceptive false narrative of what righteousness and goodness is.

And it starts with what you take in. It proceeds to be adopted in the heart. It comes out in the speech and ultimately in the actions.

So where should the focus be? We can't stop with intake and throughout the life of our church, we have talked about this. You're not righteous because you listen to a good Bible class or, you know, read the word of God every day. This is a process that has to work all the way through us.

We start with asking and seeking and knocking for the truth. And when we hear it, we have to let it rebuke and correct and instruct us in righteousness so that that becomes our internal situation. Create in me a clean heart, O God, renew a right spirit within me.

Purge me with hyssop so I shall be clean. Wash me and I will be whiter than snow. That is first and foremost going to change the way we talk.

The way we speak and the fruit of the lips is going to be beneficial to ourselves and others or not. Then it's going to work itself out in action. And what we do with our diligence or our apathy, whether we pitch in or we don't, whether that righteousness works itself out in benefit to ourselves and others or not, what we say can benefit us and others.

What we do can benefit ourselves and others. And then what do we do with our resources? That's what this section is now moving into. And everything that is under our purview, everything of which we are stewards, everything that we have under our control, I can't change the world situation.

I can't change the economy. I can't change world events, wars, rumors of wars. What can I do? This chapter tells me here are the things that I can change.

Think about the serenity prayer. I can't be worrying about stuff and strutting and fretting about stuff that comes across my TV or my phone screen. What can I do? I can monitor what's going on in my heart.

What is the fruit of my lips? Is it true or false? What am I doing with my energy, with my actions? And what am I doing with my resources? So am I making myself rich, but I really have nothing? Am I looking at myself as poor, yet I've actually got great riches? You can take that any of the three ways. And I think it may be polyvalent. I think it may have all three meanings.

It's purposely ambiguous because any way you look at it, is there truth or deceit in how I view riches or how I view poverty? Am I hung up on my material possessions? Am I hung up on my income or my debts? And should I be? Am I in debt when I shouldn't be? Oh, no, man, anything doesn't mean never take out a loan, but it means don't be late on your payments. Don't take on a debt that you can't properly handle. And we're going to go on when we come back in verse eight and verse nine.

What is it talking about here? About rebuke compared to ransom. That's an interesting conundrum. But once again, this understanding that these proverbs cross pollinate, these lines cross pollinate is going to open these up and they become so intelligible and so useful to us.

And we'll see that when we come back from the break.