

Proverbs 25-01-15a

Welcome to Grace and Truth Bible Church on Wednesday night. It's the 15th of January, 2025. We're continuing our study in the book of Proverbs.

We are at the juncture of chapter 15 and chapter 16. There's been debate and disagreement about where one chapter should end and the next begins. And I have carefully surveyed these opinions from the likes of notable and unsurpassed scholars such as Bruce K. Waltke, R.K. Harrison, and others who I highly respect.

And I have disagreed with all of them. I am going to wade out into the unbroken snow and tell you where I think it starts. And you can see the reasoning here from the passage, regardless of where it actually starts, the unit we're going to look at tonight is exceptional.

It is a wonderfully constructed, beautiful set of Proverbs. We're going to read Proverbs. If you have an unmarked Bible, you'll read them and think as is so typical in Proverbs, it's just one after the other, strung like beads picked up out of a bin in no particular order.

By the time we finish tonight, I hope you will see the beauty and the symmetry. And most of all, the fact that that beauty and symmetry communicates a point, a point of application, something that we can think about, something that will enable us and empower us with the Holy Spirit's presence to live the life to which we have been called. This information isn't just beautifully arranged.

It is beautifully presented and it is designed to communicate truth that will transform, will change us, enable us to repent and do better, enable us to be better than ourselves, to reflect the light of God's glory. That's our point. If we get there tonight, we will have accomplished our objective.

But let's begin by asking God's blessing on our time of fellowship and study, and we'll get started. Father, what a privilege it is to have the treasury of your truth, your wisdom, your statutes, the ordinances, the revelations of your character that we find in scripture, to have our own personal copy and the vast majority of people throughout history have never had access such as we to the written word. We can resort to it at any and every occasion.

We can get to it at any moment we choose through the information that is available across technology. We're so grateful and we know that you've given us this access and granted us this privilege for a reason. We need your truth.

We need the guidance that comes through your Holy Spirit. We pray tonight as we look at this portion of your word that the Holy Spirit will minister it to our hearts, help us to understand it, to see its pertinence and its application in our daily walk before you as we look for and haste the day when the Lord Jesus will return and take us to himself. We pray it in Jesus' name, amen.

This section I am going to say begins in verse 28 of chapter 15. It's extremely inconvenient. I have a wonderful, there is no one I hold in higher esteem than Bruce K. Waltke.

And I have a wonderful commentary by him that is a two volume set. It's Proverbs 1 through 15, and then it picks up at 16 and goes to the end of the Proverbs, which is 31. So 1 through 15, 16 through 31.

And yet it cleaves and divides the unit that I think is right here at the juncture. And so I had to get the second volume so I could finish looking at his observations about this unit. But we're going to call this, if you wanna put a title in your notes or a title in your mind as what we're driving toward tonight, this is the heart chiasm.

We all love a good chiasm. This is a beautifully constructed one and it is all about the heart. Now that's my clue.

We're gonna read this section. You can look at it on the page and see what you think. But by the time we finish tonight, you may have a few marks on the page, but I think it will help show the cohesiveness and the presentation of these truths in a beautifully symmetrical fashion.

So beginning in verse 28, "The heart of the righteous studies how to answer, but the mouth of the wicked pours forth evil." You can see, obviously there, we have a reference to the heart right at the beginning. "The heart of the righteous studies how to answer, but the mouth of the wicked pours forth evil. The Lord is far from the wicked, but he hears the prayer of the righteous.

The light of the eyes rejoices the heart and a good report makes the bones healthy. The ear that hears the rebukes of life will abide among the wise. He who disdains instruction despises his own soul, but he who heeds rebuke gets understanding.

The fear of the Lord is the instruction of wisdom and before honor is humility." And the final verse in this section is chapter 16, verse one. "The preparations of the heart belong to man, but the answer of the tongue is from the Lord." This is a seven verse section. It is chiasmic in its structure.

You know the nature of a chiasm. It is symmetrical. There are outside correspondences.

Inside those outer two, there is another pair. Inside those is another pair. And at the heart of a seven verse chiasm is the central gem around which these others serve as a setting to enhance and to explain and to reveal the facets of the central truth.

So what I have done and in Proverbs, I encourage you to have a number two pencil with a good clean eraser so that you can mark your text. It is so helpful to mark off these sections and to be able to label them. So when you come back to Proverbs, it's not a patchwork quilt with no symmetry, but it is a set of wonderful paragraphs with a purpose, with a theme, with explanation, with illustration, with promise, and so on.

So verse 28, this is A. All right. "The heart of the righteous studies how to answer, but the mouth of the wicked pours forth evil." I just want you to circle two things. I could go for a month, Wednesday, Sunday, Wednesday, Sunday, four classes a week and not finish this chiasm.

So I'm only going to give you the highlights. It will yield its beauty and its truth. The more you reflect on it and the more you look at it, much of it is just available to be seen by the naked eye.

You don't need a telescope. Don't need a microscope. Just sit and marinate for a while in what these verses say.

But I'll give you some of the highlights that have struck me as I've gone through it. The first is, if you notice in verse 28, there are two words that are particularly significant because we're not interested in being wicked. We're interested in being righteous, right? So if I am interested in righteousness and being pleasing in God's sight, I'm going to pay the most attention to those characteristics, those practices, those descriptions of the righteous.

What does it say? "The heart of the righteous studies how to answer." So if you got your pencil there, circle heart and circle answer. And that phrase alone bears some scrutiny and some thought. The heart of the righteous studies how to answer.

The word answer, remember in Hebrew, the nouns and verbs are very multi-purpose. Hebrew has a very limited vocabulary and so the words serve many different purposes and you find out their significance by context. But the heart of the righteous, what kind of a heart does a righteous person have? This is a heart that is full of God's wisdom, is desirous of being pleasing in God's sight, wants to live a life that reflects God's glory, loves the Lord with all the heart as well as the soul, the strength and the mind.

So you can spend some time fleshing out this phrase, "The heart of the righteous." There's a lot you know about the heart of the righteous. There's a lot you can say. There's a lot that the word of God has to say about the righteous heart.

How did it get to be righteous? Did it, were you just born righteous? There is a means of purification. The Old Testament sacrificial system is a picture of spiritual cleansing, spiritual atonement, the forgiveness and the washing away of sin. Psalm 51 is our go-to for that.

There are many other passages. If you start at Psalm 51 and get a new treasury of scripture knowledge, you can spend weeks on the repentant heart. "Create in me a clean heart, O God," David prays, "and renew a right spirit within me.

"Purge me with hyssop and I shall be clean. "Wash me and I shall be whiter than snow," and so on." So the heart of the righteous, this is a heart that knows how to go to the fountain of cleansing grace and to be purified, to be restored and renewed, to be brought back, to have its sins separated as far as the East is from the West and so on. The heart of the righteous.

All right, we've got an idea of what we're dealing with here, what is being proposed to us. The heart of the righteous. Then it says that heart studies how to answer.

This is speech. This is response. It involves many times more than just a verbal communication.

It can be actions. But a righteous heart takes its time. The word translated studies here is one that talks about spending time in reflection or meditation.

You can see a reflection of this in 1 Peter 3 15. Peter says, "Sanctify the Lord God in your hearts and always be ready to give a defense, an answer, an apologia in Greek, an apology in the classic sense of the word, not an I'm sorry, but a reasoned argument. Sanctify the Lord God in your hearts.

Have a righteous heart. Be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you. Do this with humility and respect." That's what meekness and fear are.

Meekness is humility. You offer this defense. You don't throw the pearls at fleeing swine.

But if someone asks you and seems interested in the reply, give the reply in humility, not in condemnation, not in sanctimonious looking down or holier than thou or bombastic rhetoric, humility and fear it says. Fear is respect. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.

This is respect and honor, recognizing God's place. And if someone is seeking a reason for our hope, we should return that answer, that defense in humility and with respect. Here in 1528 of Proverbs, the heart of the righteous studies.

This word is Haga, H-A-G-A-H. And it is translated in some cases to mourn. What happens when you are mourning? When you are in the grip of grief or sorrow, you're thinking about something.

It is consuming your thoughts. You've been bereaved. You've suffered a loss.

There's been a setback. You can think about people who are in the news today and have been in the past, whether it is tornadoes, whether it is floods, whether it is hurricanes, whether it is wildfires. There are people who suffer an unforeseen calamity and that is all they are thinking about.

How am I going to recover? How can I replace what was lost? There is grief for loved ones who may never return and so on. But the idea in Haga is not just that you're feeling bad or sorrowful or full of grief, but that you are consumed with thought about a thing. There's nothing more heart-consuming and thought-consuming than grief or sorrow.

You just can't escape it. So it is also translated meditate. It's translated imagine or study.

It is even translated in its more literal roots as to mutter or groan. You're thinking about something to such an extent that you're mumbling about it to yourself. You're talking to

yourself about it.

It is an all-consuming thought, not necessarily negative, although that's an easy illustration or example, but something that is important enough that you're consumed with thinking about it to the point that you'll even talk to yourself. Haga, the heart of the righteous, Haga, is dedicated to deep and intensive thought about how to respond. You think, well, what kind of a situation, what kind of an answer or response is in view? This is what the second half of the verse tells us.

Because the mouth of the wicked pours forth evil. And the word pour forth is one that is used of flowing or belching out. It's a spontaneous, impulsive gush of words.

Gush is a good colloquial translation. The mouth of the wicked gushes evil. Notice, this is sort of like shooting from the hip.

The heart doesn't seem to be involved. There used to be an old saying, be sure and engage your brain before you put your mouth in gear or words to that effect. Try to think before you speak.

And the mouth of the wicked just gushes. It's pre-programmed. And this informs the first part of the verse because now we're looking at the expression of wickedness.

And this is put for, verbal response is put for all kinds of response. It can be actions. It can be support.

It can be rushing into a situation without thinking, without reflecting and having nothing in the heart that would guide or inform that reflection. The heart of the righteous has got plenty of grist for the mill. There's the word of God in there.

There's in our age, the Holy Spirit in there to help us digest, weigh the factors, establish our goals and our values and our priorities in a way that is consistent with God's standards. But the mouth of the wicked just starts gushing. No control, no thought.

It isn't even often consistent with itself. It'll be this way today and some other way tomorrow. But if you circle those two words, the heart of the righteous studies how to answer.

This answer, this response comes from the heart, right? And I've suggested that this is a seven verse section, three verses leading in, a central verse, and then three coming back out. So the last one is gonna be chapter 16, verse one. When you read 16, one, what do you see? The preparations of the heart belong to man, but the answer of the tongue is from the Lord.

You might notice your circle words reoccur. Very helpful to have a clue as to the symmetry. And this verse also informs verse 28.

Notice the preparation of the heart is up to man. What does that mean? Righteousness is available. Purification, cleansing, restoration is available, but it's up to man to avail himself of that.

And so the preparation of the heart, i.e. developing a righteous heart, that's up to us. God isn't going to create a clean heart in someone who isn't asking and seeking and knocking and meeting the conditions and following the procedures that God has outlined for that to take place. So the preparation of a heart, i.e. a righteous heart, depends on what we choose.

You don't get it by default. It doesn't happen accidentally. It isn't an automatic result of salvation.

We are accountable and responsible for preparation of the heart. Ideally, it will be prepared in righteousness. It'll be prepared in the power by the grace of God.

So the preparation of the heart belongs to man, but the answer of the tongue, that answer that is a result of reflection and meditation and inward preoccupation, that will come from the Lord. It's similar to what Jesus promised the disciples. You'll come up before kings and the powerful and don't worry about what you're going to say.

It will be given to you in that hour, what you should say. And we can approach with trepidation, a conversation with someone who might be far from the Lord or has questions and we think, well, I may not know the answer to some of these questions. Or I may inadvertently say something that makes things worse instead of better or isn't helpful or whatever.

If we prepare our heart, if we ask and seek and knock, ask God for wisdom, ask him for self-control. The man who can bridle the tongue can control the whole body, James says. So we pray, we prepare our heart, our conversation, the thoughts that come to our mind as we're conversing with others will be guided by God.

It's a promise and what a wonderful relief that if we prepare, God will give us wisdom in the hour and will give us the right words. And by right, I don't mean everyone comes away smiling and hugging. They are the right words for the occasion.

Many times, the words that are delivered in keeping with the Lord's will don't end well for the recipients. Paul gave the word of the Lord in Lystra and they stoned him, they thought to death. The Lord Jesus never spoke anything but his father's truth and they crucified him.

All who endeavor to live righteously, live godly, Paul tells Timothy in our Sunday study. Those who desire to live godly in this world will suffer persecution. And you're doing everything right.

You're saying exactly what you should say. So what does it mean that the answer is from the Lord? It will accomplish the Lord's purpose, not necessarily our purpose. We may want to have wonderful beatific visions of sunrise and happiness and flowers and butterflies, and it may seem completely the opposite.

We have to trust that if we have prepared our hearts and we go into these situations prayerfully and thoughtfully, we've meditated and reflected, God will bring forth through our tongue, his words, his answer, and it will accomplish his purpose because it will reflect his word. And in the

same way that the answer comes from the Lord, we have to judge the outcome by the standards of the Lord. And those are not always human standards.

And there are times when people don't want to hear what we have to say. And we just have to commit the conversation to the Lord and trust that he's fulfilling this promise because we know we have prepared. We know we have been thoughtful.

We know we have been humble. We know we have been dedicated and interested and we have put in the time preparing our heart. And we prayerfully, humbly, and respectfully deliver that answer, as Peter says, 1 Peter 3, and leave the results in God's hands.

If it doesn't seem to end well from the human perspective, I can't tell you how many testimonies I've heard across my life of people who were quote unquote witnessed to by fellow believers when they were an unbeliever. And there was a terrible reaction. The people stomped off and how dare you and mock and insult.

But the word of God fell into a crack in that person's soul. And as they thought about it, and as the Holy Spirit worked on them with it, that was the key to their salvation or that was the key to their repentance and their change of mind and getting with the program as a believer. The initial reception was harsh, defensive, and very depressing to the person who shared the truth with them.

But afterward it yielded the peaceable fruit of righteousness. So our vision is limited. Our perspective is short.

We have to trust that God knows what he's doing. And man looks on the outward appearance, the Lord looks on the heart. So we're faithful, we're obedient, we are trusting, we are humble, we are respectful, but firm in delivering God's truth when someone asks.

If they're not asking, it's a waste of time talking. Has to be seeking. So these two verses compliment each other and help interpret each other.

The preparation of the heart belongs to man. It's man's responsibility. God is not gonna prepare our heart if we're not interested in doing so.

But if we do that, the answer of the tongue will be from the Lord. He will guide our conversation. He will use the unspoken testimony of our lives for his glory.

We focus on preparing our heart. God will handle how it is received by others. That's the truth contained here in the outside bracket of this heart chiasm.

Let's look at the next inside bracket. What does verse 29 say? The Lord is, and by the way, the heart is in every other verse. So one, three, five, and seven are going to explicitly mention the heart.

When you look at your English, you may argue with me, but all will become clear in time. One,

three, five, and seven explicitly mention the heart. And then there are these interleaved, even numbered verses.

That's what we're looking at now in verse 29. The Lord is far from the wicked, but he hears the prayer of the righteous. As we are studying on an issue, as we are meditating, groaning, talking to ourselves, as it says in verse 28, in how to respond, how to approach and deal with a situation that involves other people.

What is our answer? The Lord is going to be far from the wicked. If you're wicked, you're on your own. And no matter what you do, it isn't going to end well.

Even if it seems to end well in the human realm, it won't stand up at the judgment. The Lord is far from the wicked, but he hears the prayer of the righteous. Do you notice a word that ties this to the previous verse? There's a word in this verse that repeats one in the previous verse.

What is it? Righteous. The heart of the righteous is the one that studies how to answer. He hears the prayer of the righteous.

We're talking about the same person as back in verse 28. The one that is studying how to answer, what is a part of that reflection and meditation and intense concentration? Prayer. The Lord will hear your prayer when you are endeavoring to please him in coming up with the answer in a situation.

So prayer is added into the mix here. You come to the corresponding verse, what I would call, if that's B, then B prime is going to be verse 33. The one just above, 16.1. The fear of the Lord is the instruction of wisdom.

And before honor is humility. Put that next to the verse we just read. If we are going to be praying to the Lord, knowing that he hears us, what is gonna be the case? That is a reflection of the fear of the Lord.

We're not just trying to figure it out ourselves. We know that he's got the answer. He has the wisdom.

It's his spirit and his word that will guide, enable, and empower us. So as we pray, this is a reflection of our fear, our respect, our understanding of the place of the Lord in our lives. And the fear of the Lord is the instruction of wisdom.

So as I'm working on this problem, trying to determine the answer, the instruction of wisdom is going to come because I'm praying to the Lord and reflecting my fear of the Lord. And that is the instruction of wisdom. What a great promise.

If I take the time to approach this complex, perhaps difficult situation, I take the time to think about it before I start spewing out of my mouth. Instead of the mouth of the wicked pouring forth evil, my heart and my mouth are praying to the Lord. And instead of expressing

wickedness, it is respect and fear of the Lord.

And the instruction of wisdom is promised as a result. God will never deny. This is a prayer you can pray and you know 110% you're going to get a yes.

Many prayers you might say, I'm not sure what the Lord's will is. I would like Him to do this. I'm going to pray to that end.

This is a prayer you can pray with absolute total confidence that God is going to say yes. And that is the prayer for wisdom. If you pray for wisdom, if you pray that your actions and your speech, your thoughts, your behavior are a reflection of God's glory, God's wisdom, He will always answer with a yes.

There will be divine power infused into our life to make that happen. What a wonderful promise. You always get a yes.

This is why it says in another place that with the Lord, it is yea and amen. So the fear of the Lord is the instruction of wisdom and before honor is humility. Once again, this idea that Peter picks up, humility, fear and humility, respect and recognition that we are insufficient and inadequate in and of ourselves.

So verse 33 directly interprets and weaves together with verse 29. So that's your B and B prime. Let's look at the third shell here in this chiasm.

These are the ones that are going to surround the heart and the center. This is going to be verse 30. And in your English, it says, the light of the eyes rejoices the heart and a good report makes the bones healthy.

And you think, well, that's kind of an odd juxtaposition of ideas and images. This is something of a misunderstanding of what the Bible says. And I'm just going to cut to the chase.

And after working on this a long time and looking at various opinions, I will tell you my understanding of what this verse says. That the first word is maor. Or is the word, Hebrew word for light.

And when God said, let there be light, in Genesis chapter one, it's yahi, let there be. It's a word for being, that's part of God's name. Yehoshua, the Lord's salvation, but that YH part, Yehi'i, that's the word for being.

So this has an M in front of it, which means from. So instead of the light, this is from light, from the light. And I don't know why they didn't translate the preposition here.

And if you have Logos Bible software, they do a wonderful job of correcting and so on. But if you go to this in the inner linear, they have completely massacred. They've got this tied to a completely different word in the lexicon.

They tie it to M-A-A-R, ma'ar, which means fretting, pricking, to pain, prick, irritate, or to be in pain. And that's, when I mouse over this, that's what Logos gives me. So, you know, I love computers, I love software, but like AI and any other tool, you gotta keep an eye on it or you can go wildly astray.

This is not fretting, pricking, paining, irritating. This is, and they've failed to recognize the preposition here. Mame is a preposition, M. This is from the light of the eyes.

This is aneim, the Hebrew word for eyes is real close to English. It starts with E-Y and then has an N in it. Aneim, aneim.

But this is from the light of the eyes, tidings rejoice the heart. So the light of the eyes, from the light of the eye, I'm sorry, tidings is in the next, I've got so many pencil marks here correcting my Bible, I can't read my own notes. From the light of the eyes, the heart rejoices.

That's how this verse should read. From the light of the eyes, the heart rejoices. Now think about that.

Makes way more sense than what's in here. When you see something beautiful, when you see something delightful, our word for delight, it is infused with light. It is bright, it's comforting, it's reassuring.

It is positive, it's beautiful. From the light of the eyes, the heart rejoices. How does your heart know to rejoice? You see something that is good news.

You see something that is a positive development. You see the light. And when the light dawns, the Lord Jesus is associated with light.

When the sun rises with healing in his wings, he is the morning star, he is the day star that arises in our hearts. This idea of light, when we perceive the light with our eyes, with our understanding, if you love darkness rather than light, you're evil. But if you're not evil, then light is a rejoicing and you see the work of God.

You see the grace of God. You see the provision of God. You see answered prayer from God.

You see the character and the love of God expressed in a situation. From the light of the eyes, the heart rejoices. What heart? What heart have we been talking about in the past two verses? It's the heart of the righteous.

And this is another one where heart is explicitly mentioned, right? This is our heart chiasm. So from the light of the eyes, the heart rejoices. Makes perfect sense when you straighten out the translation.

And good tidings. This is not a good report. This is good tidings.

Good tidings anoint the body. This word can mean make fat, but its primary meaning is to

anoint. The whole idea of fat is that you're taking oil or fat and you're rubbing or covering or anointing a thing.

And the bones stand for the body. Many times this Hebrew noun is translated body rather than bones. In the same way that life and soul are interchangeable, bones and body are interchangeable.

It just means the main part of your body, your structural container. So good tidings anoint the body. Light from the eyes rejoices the heart.

Good tidings anoints the body. This is what people would do to celebrate. They would put on their good clothes.

They would anoint their head with oil like God does in Psalm 23. You know, you prepare a table before me. You anoint my head with oil.

My cup runs over. When your cup is running over, this is ladies dolling up in their best outfit, touch a perfume and so on, outfit. And this is a cause of celebration.

When you get good tidings, you're ready to go out and be seen and to share. When you anoint, this is a visible sign of happiness, prosperity, and blessing to others. It is a sharing.

You don't just anoint for your own benefit. Anointing, even anointing kings, anointing priests is a symbol to others. It communicates to others that there is favor on the one being anointed.

And you are favored and that favor is evident to others. That's what verse 30 means. Well, we're gonna pause here and take our break.

When we come back, we're gonna look at verse 32, which is the compliment, the other half of this idea, the other side in the chiasm. And then we'll focus on verse 31, which is at the heart. But we'll pause here and take our break.