

Righteousness #3: From Proverbs – The Words of the Righteous

In previous lessons we introduced the topic of righteousness, looked at many of the promises of righteousness, and some of what it means to be righteous in our thoughts and attitudes. All of this was taken solely from the book of Proverbs, but with supporting references elsewhere.

If a man is righteous in his thoughts and attitudes, it will necessarily be revealed in his words and actions. Proverbs has much to say about this also.

Righteous Words

1. A righteous man does not speak frowardly

8:6-8 – (Wisdom speaking) “Hear; for I will speak of excellent things; and the opening of my lips shall be right things. For my mouth shall speak truth; and wickedness is an abomination to my lips. All the words of my mouth are in righteousness; there is nothing froward or perverse in them.”

“Frowardness” means obstinate willfulness, disobedience, and habitual opposition. Children, and childish adults, will do the very opposite of what they are told, just to show “You’re not the boss of me!”. Unregenerate men always fancy that they are their own masters, and do not want even God to control them. But their supposed autonomy is false – “Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin” (Jn. 8:34).

Proverbs also uses the word perverse, not as being sexually twisted, but for stubborn and cranky opposition, or words that are unreasonable, abnormal, or morally corrupt. All our words should align with truth and righteousness and excellence.

10:32 – “The lips of the righteous know what is acceptable: but the mouth of the wicked speaketh frowardness.”

Some people have no filter – they speak in ways that should make them ashamed. A righteous person knows what to say and what not to say, and how to say things in acceptable times, places, and company. A righteous person does not speak with dirty double meanings or implications, or plant doubts, lies, or gossip in the minds of others.

2. A righteous man is not a talebearer or a flatterer

11:13 – “A talebearer revealeth secrets: but he that is of a faithful spirit concealeth the matter.”

Perhaps this is what is meant in 1 P. 4:8 where it says that love covers the multitude of sins. It hushes up what doesn’t really need to be made public. A righteous man does not lie, but neither does he feel compelled to tell all he knows. Some things are better left unsaid. The Roman Horace said “A word once uttered can never be recalled.” A sincere apology is in order and may help, but is not the same as having never spoken the offending word. Gossiping words spread, and it is often impossible to “take back what you said” because you don’t even know who all has heard it. Another common quote is “A lie can travel halfway around the world before the truth can get its boots on”, sometimes attributed to Mark Twain, but the original source is uncertain.

16:27-28 – “An ungodly man diggeth up evil: and in his lips there is as a burning fire. A froward man soweth strife: and a whisperer separateth chief friends.”

18:8 – “The words of a talebearer are as wounds, and they go down into the innermost parts of the belly.”

20:19 – “He that goeth about as a talebearer revealeth secrets: therefore meddle not with him the flattereth with his lips.” Some people need to be avoided, because they have a poison tongue. Flattery hides their real purpose.

26:28 – “A lying tongue hateth those that are afflicted by it; and a flattering mouth worketh ruin.”

3. A righteous man does not speak proudly or viciously

We have all known people who use their mouths as weapons to wound and batter and cut. But of the godly woman it says “She openeth her mouth with wisdom; and in her tongue *is* the law of kindness.” (31:26).

12:18 – “There is that speaketh like the piercings of a sword: but the tongue of the wise is health.”

14:3 – “In the mouth of the foolish is a rod of pride: but the lips of the wise shall preserve them.” Pride is often a motivator of hate and violent speech. Men want to deflect from any consideration of their own guilt, and so use violent and profane speech to intimidate, and to turn the blame on others.

30:13-14 – “There is a generation, O how lofty are their eyes! And their eyelids are lifted up. There is a generation, whose teeth are as swords, and their eye teeth as knives, to devour the poor from off the earth, and the needy from among men.”

4. A righteous man does not speak too much.

Some people dominate every conversation, and others can't even get a word in edgewise. We should be able to listen to others without needing to prove them wrong, or to showcase our self-aware brilliance.

10:19-21 – “In the multitude of words there wanteth not sin: but he that refraineth his lips is wise. The tongue of the just is as choice silver: the heart of the wicked is little worth. The lips of the righteous feed many: but fools die for want of wisdom.”

17:27-28 – “He that hath knowledge spareth his words: and a man of understanding is of an excellent spirit. Even a fool, when he holdeth his peace, is counted wise: and he that shutteth his lips is esteemed a man of understanding.” A common variant is “Better to remain silent and be thought a fool than to speak and to remove all doubt.” This is often attributed to Abraham Lincoln or Mark Twain, but we don't really know.

21:23 – “Whoso keepeth his mouth and his tongue keepeth his soul from troubles.” How many of our troubles are caused by our own words?

29:11 – “A fool uttereth all his mind: but a wise man keepeth it in till afterwards.”

The whole chapter of James 3 speaks of the evils of an unbridled tongue.

5. The righteous man is not too quick to give an answer. He thinks before spouting off.

12:23 – “A prudent man concealeth knowledge: but the heart of fools proclaimeth foolishness.”

15:2 – “The tongue of the wise useth knowledge aright: but the mouth of fools poureth out foolishness.”

15:23 – “A man hath joy by the answer of his mouth: and a word spoken in due season, how good is it!”

15:28 – “The heart of the righteous studieth to answer: but the mouth of the wicked poureth out evil things.

Remember how Jesus answered about the woman caught in adultery, or whether to pay Roman taxes.

6. The words of a righteous man should be words of life, wisdom, and truth.

10:11 – “The mouth of a righteous man is a well of life: but violence covereth the mouth of the wicked.”

10:31 – “The mouth of the just bringeth forth wisdom: but the froward tongue shall be cut out.”

12:17 – “He that speaketh truth sheweth forth righteousness: but a false witness deceit.”

15:4 – “A wholesome tongue is a tree of life: but perverseness therein is a breach in the spirit.”

We may ask ourselves what is the effect of our words on others – are they producing life and encouragement, or death and accusations?

7. The words of a righteous man are pleasant, wise, edifying, and healthful

15:26 – “The thoughts of the wicked are an abomination to the LORD: but the words of the pure are pleasant words.”

16:23-24 – “The heart of the wise teacheth his mouth, and addeth learning to his lips. Pleasant words are as an honeycomb, sweet to the soul, and health to the bones.”

Eph. 4:29-32 – “Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers. And grieve not the holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption. Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice: And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you.”

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