

Words of Truth



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Proverbs 22, 23, Exod. 22:21–27, Proverbs 24, Eph. 5:20, Ezek. 33:8.*

Memory Text: “Have I not written to you excellent things of counsels and knowledge, that I may make you know the certainty of the words of truth, that you may answer words of truth to those who send to you?” (*Proverbs 22:20, 21, NKJV*).

Some of this week's proverbs show parallels with Egyptian texts. Under inspiration, Solomon might have shaped these texts according to a specifically Hebrew perspective. Here, the words of the Egyptians meet the Spirit of Israel's God, and thus they became divine revelation.

This observation is important, for it reminds us of the universal character of “truth.” What is true for the Israelite should also be true for the Egyptian; otherwise, it would not be the truth. It is important to remember that God's truths apply universally, to everyone.

The domain of these admonitions is common to both communities. That is, whoever you are, whether a believer or not, and wherever you live, there are some things that *you should not do*.

* *Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, February 28.*

The Knowledge of Truth

Read Proverbs 22:17, 18. What are we being told about how truth should impact our lives?

The first duty of the student is to listen and pay attention: “Incline your ear and hear” (*Prov. 22:17, NKJV*). In other words: “Concentrate!” The crucial point is that the seeker of truth must be earnest, must truly want to learn what is right, and then do it.

But it is not enough for the student to listen or even to understand, intellectually, what is being taught. Some people who have a lot of biblical facts in their heads have no real knowledge or experience with the Truth itself (*John 14:6*).

Instead, truth should reach the innermost part of the human being. The Hebrew phrase in Proverbs 22:18, “within you” (*NKJV*), refers to the stomach. The lesson should not stay on the surface; it has to be digested, assimilated, and become an inner part of our beings. Once the message has gone deep into our system and becomes rooted within us, it will then rise to our lips, and we can have a powerful testimony.

Read Proverbs 22:19–21. What should an experience in truth do for us?

1. *Faith (vs. 19)*. The first goal of the teaching of wisdom is not wisdom *per se*. Proverbs does not aim at making more intelligent and more skillful disciples. The teacher’s objective is to strengthen the disciple’s trust in the Lord.

2. *Conviction (vs. 21)*. Students should know why these “words of truth” (*NKJV*) are certain; they should know why they believe what they do. Faith by definition is belief in what we don’t fully understand. Nevertheless, we still should have good reasons for that faith.

3. *Responsibility (vs. 21)*. The last step of education is to share with others those “words of truth” (*NKJV*) we have received. This is central to our whole calling as a people.

Think about all the powerfully logical reasons we have for our Seventh-day Adventist faith. What are these reasons, and why should we never hesitate in keeping them ever before us and sharing them with others? Bring your answer to class on Sabbath.

Robbing the Poor

Read Proverbs 22:22, 23; 23:10. What are we warned about here?

Though it's always wrong to steal, this prohibition concerns stealing from the poor and the oppressed, who are the most vulnerable. They are truly helpless, and therefore they qualify for God's special concern (*Exod. 22:21–27*). The case of David, who killed Uriah in order to steal his wife, and Nathan's parable of the ewe lamb (*2 Sam. 12:1–4*) come to mind. Robbing from the poor is not just a criminal act: it is a sin "against the LORD" (*2 Sam. 12:13*). To take from someone who has less than what you have is worse than stealing; it is also an act of cowardice. *Do these thieves think that God doesn't see their actions?*

Indeed, Proverbs 22:23 implies that even if the thief gets away with no human punishment, God will repay. The reference to the Redeemer, the *Goel* (*Prov. 23:11*), may even allude to the divine scenario of end-time judgment (*Job 19:25*).

So, this warning, along with others in the Bible, speaks against those who are interested only in the immediate "gains" of their actions, and not the long-term results. They take possession and enlarge their properties at the expense of others, and they are willing to cheat and kill for that purpose. They may enjoy it now, but they will pay later. This reasoning should not only discourage the thief; it should show that our ethical values are intricately tied to the Sovereignty of God.

In England, some atheists had the following slogan placed on city buses: "There's probably no God. Now stop worrying and enjoy your life." Though there are many retorts one could give in response, think about this one: *if there were no God, then those who steal from the poor, and are getting away with it now, really have nothing to worry about. Indeed, all those who have done great evil and seem to have gotten away with it will, in fact, have really gotten away with it. How should faith in God and in His promises of judgment help to give us some peace of mind regarding all the injustice we see in the world now?*

Being Jealous of the Wicked

What do Proverbs 23:17; 24:1, 2; and 24:19, 20 warn us about?

Why would someone envy the wicked? Most likely it's not because of the actual sins that they might be committing. Rather, it's usually because of the immediate gain (wealth, success, power) that they achieve through their wickedness—that's what people often covet for themselves.

Though, of course, not every successful or rich person is wicked, some are—and they are probably the kind of people we are being warned about in these verses. We see their “good” life and, from our perspective, especially if we are struggling ourselves, it's easy to envy what they have.

This, though, is a very narrow and shortsighted view of things. After all, the temptation of sin is that its reward is immediate: we enjoy the present gratification. A perspective beyond the present can protect us from temptation; that is, we need to look beyond the immediate “gains” of our sin and think through the long-term consequences.

Besides, who hasn't seen just how destructive sin is? We never get away with it. We might be able to hide it from others so that no one, even those closest to us, has a clue about what we are doing (though sooner or later they catch on, don't they?); or we might be able to delude ourselves into thinking that our sins are not that bad. (*After all, look at how many people do worse things!*) But sooner or later, one way or another, sin catches up with us.

We should hate sin because it is sin. We should hate it because of what it has done to us, to our world, and to our Lord. If we want to see the real cost of sin, look at Jesus on the cross. This is what our sin has cost. That realization alone should be enough (though so often it isn't) to make us want to avoid sin and to keep away as much as possible from those who would lead us into it.

Have you ever struggled with envy over someone's success? What's the best remedy for this spiritually deadly problem? (*See Eph. 5:20.*)

What We Put in Our Mouths

It is no accident that the first human temptation concerned food (*Gen. 3:3*). It was being disobedient and eating of the wrong thing that brought sin and death into the world (*Gen. 3:1–7, Rom. 5:12*). We shouldn't miss the hard fact, too, that the first mention of wine drinking in the Bible is presented in a terribly negative and degrading story (*Gen. 9:21*).

Read Proverbs 23:29–35. How is the use of alcohol presented in these verses?

Who hasn't seen personally just how devastating alcohol can be? Sure, not everyone who drinks becomes a drunk in the gutter. But most likely drunks in the gutter never imagined, the first time they took a drink, that they would eventually wind up in the gutter.

"The man who has formed the habit of drinking intoxicating liquor, is in a desperate situation. He cannot be reasoned with, or persuaded to deny himself the indulgence. His stomach and brain are diseased, his will power is weakened, and his appetite uncontrollable. The prince of the powers of darkness holds him in bondage that he has no power to break."—Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 3, p. 1162.

Read Proverbs 23:1–8. Why should we control our appetites?

This admonition is about more than table manners. The biblical text is a warning to those who like to eat and who have great appetites (*Prov. 23:2*). The metaphor of putting a knife to one's throat is particularly strong: it not only means curbing the appetite, but also suggests the risk to your health and even your life that could be caused by overeating. The Hebrew word (*bin*), translated "consider carefully," expresses the idea of carefully deciding between eating various kinds of food. The same word is used by Solomon when he asks for wisdom to help him "discern [*bin*] between good and evil" (*1 Kings 3:9, NKJV*). The inspired writer has more in mind than just the issue of appetite control. His counsel may also concern banquets and social drinking, when we are pressured and tempted to "desire his delicacies" (*Prov. 23:3, NKJV*).

Think about someone you know whose life has been destroyed by alcohol. Why should that example alone be enough to help you to understand why you should never put that poison in your body?

Our Responsibilities

“When I say to the wicked, ‘O wicked man, you shall surely die!’ and you do not speak to warn the wicked from his way, that wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood I will require at your hand” (Ezek. 33:8, NKJV). What basic spiritual principle is revealed here? How do we take this concept and apply it to our everyday lives?

Years ago, in a big Western city, a woman was being attacked at night on a street. She cried out for help; dozens heard her, yet not one person even bothered to call the police. Most people looked out the window and then went back to whatever they were doing. Soon the woman’s cries stopped. Later, she was found dead, stabbed numerous times.

Were the people who heard her cries but did nothing responsible for her death? Though they hadn’t attacked her themselves, did their inaction kill her?

Read Proverbs 24:11, 12, 23–28. What important messages are here for us?

The law of Moses clearly warns that those who fail to report what they witness will bear guilt (*Lev. 5:1*). We may not be able to act against crime, but if we keep silent about what we see, we then share the guilt with the criminal. By our silence, we become accomplices.

On the other hand, if we report the truth in our testimony, giving the “right answer” (*Prov. 24:26*), we respond appropriately and behave as responsible people. This act is compared to a kiss on the lips, meaning that the person cares about another person.

It’s tragic enough to remain silent and do nothing as a woman is being murdered on your street. But what about many of the other evils in the world: hunger, war, injustice, racism, economic oppression? What are our responsibilities here, as well?

Further Study: “Souls around us must be aroused and saved, or they perish. Not a moment have we to lose. We all have an influence that tells for the truth or against it. I desire to carry with me unmistakable evidences that I am one of Christ’s disciples. We want something besides Sabbath religion. We need the living principle, and to daily feel individual responsibility. This is shunned by many, and the fruit is carelessness, indifference, a lack of watchfulness and spirituality.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 1, p. 99.

“Talk faith, live faith, cultivate love to God; evidence to the world all that Jesus is to you. Magnify His holy name. Tell of His goodness; talk of His mercy, and tell of His power.”—Ellen G. White, *Our High Calling*, p. 20.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 In class, go over your answer to Sunday’s final question. What can we learn from each other’s answers? What are ways that we can learn to build up our faith in what we believe?
- 2 Someone wrote: “Remember two things: Christ died for you, and you will one day die.” In the context of Tuesday’s study, which talked about how we will have to answer for sin one way or another, what crucial lesson should we take away from this thought?
- 3 Here again is the quote put on the buses in London: “There’s probably no God. Now stop worrying and enjoy your life.” Besides what the lesson talked about, what other problems do you find with that sentiment? Why would God’s existence be something that would make people worry to begin with? What does this sentiment tell us about how well Satan has distorted the character of God in the minds of many people? In class, come up with different ways in which you could respond to that slogan. What are some short, pithy slogans that could help people to see the hope that we can have in God?

Helping Mission Succeed

When Dan Jacko isn't busy helping people learn to walk again, he's assisting his church members with their spiritual walk. Pastor Dan, a professional physical therapist, is also serving as a lay pastor for the Mountain View Conference in the two church district of Elkins and Parsons, West Virginia. He also teaches biology and chemistry to the academy level students at Highland Adventist School in Elkins. His wife, Cheryl, is an educator and registered nurse and serves as the principal of the kindergarten through twelfth grade school. Their son, Jeremy, teaches Bible, math, and history.

Believing mission is important, every other year, Pastor Dan leads the students and church members on a mission trip. So far, they've been to Mexico, Panama, Honduras, and, in 2014, Costa Rica.

While in Costa Rica, they built a church during the day and presented evangelistic meetings and Vacation Bible Schools in four different churches in the evenings. In spite of his own full schedule, Pastor Dan was impressed with the dedication of the pastor in Costa Rica, who shepherds six churches and doesn't have a car.

Not only do Pastor Dan and his members build churches abroad—they also build them at home, where they recently completed their own church and school, located on five and a half acres (2.2 hectares), completely debt-free.

The most recent challenge for Pastor Dan and the 80-member Elkins church is keeping up with the many Bible study requests coming from their community. Over the course of three mailings in 2013 and 2014, everyone in the state of West Virginia received an invitation for the Voice of Prophecy's Discover Bible course. The response was overwhelming—with 10,000 people indicating that they would like to have Bible studies. Of that number, more than 200 came from the Elkins and Parsons area.

"Some are face-to-face Bible studies," explains Pastor Dan, "and others prefer to take them by correspondence, which are then graded by our local church members." The local churches are responsible for purchasing the lessons and providing postage for correspondence students.

"What makes this area even more of a mission field," says Pastor Dan, "is that you'll get a lot of people who say, 'I believe this,' but if their family isn't in favor of it, a lot of them just won't make the commitment."

Nevertheless, Pastor Dan and the small churches he leads see reaching people for Jesus in their territory as an important mission and are willing to give the time, effort, and funds needed to help it succeed.