

Proverbs 10 – Talk Less, Listen More

Proverbs 10 covers a lot of topical ground, but if you look closely, you'll find repetition of one particular theme: the mouth, lips, or tongue.

Again and again in Proverbs 10 we are reminded of the foolishness and wisdom we demonstrate with words. We tend to minimize the consequence of our speech, reasoning, "They're just words." But Scripture assures us that our words matter greatly, and Jesus told us "the mouth speaks from the overflow of the heart" (Luke 6:45). So they're not "just" words. They're a reflection of our hearts. And what our words often show is that our hearts need to change.

That change of heart we all need begins with a decision to listen. Think of it this way: your mouth is connected to your heart, and your heart is connected to your ears! Proverbs 10:14 puts it this way, *"The wise store up knowledge."* How do you store up knowledge? It's certainly not by talking (v. 19)! No, you store up knowledge by listening. Wisdom listens.

Verse 17 carries the principle even further, teaching that those who listen and follow instruction are "on the path to life," but those who do not listen and reject correction "go astray." You see, wisdom doesn't only listen to instruction that agrees with its point of view; it listens even when instruction confronts that point of view and calls for certain change.

We are tempted to quickly explain, defend, excuse, or justify our thoughts, attitudes, or behaviors. Instead, we need to be willing to humbly listen to godly correction and instruction—the type of listening that goes beyond merely hearing, in one ear and out the other, but results in an active and obedient faith.

What are some practical ways God instructs and corrects us? How does He speak to us? Proverbs provides practical advice. There is a right way and a wrong way to read the book of Proverbs. There is a right way to read Proverbs that leads to joy and life, and there is a wrong way to read Proverbs that leads to misery and or pride.

Proverbs talks about conduct. These behaviors are what the Lord is producing in those who are already his children—those who are already a part of his family. He is slowly, progressively conforming you to the image of Christ; he is making you more like Jesus Christ, who is the Wisdom of God. Proverbs is very much a book on sanctification. Proverbs 9 teaches us that when we fail to live up to God's wisdom it is evidence of idols in our hearts that we are worshiping rather than Jesus. It reveals a problem with Jesus in our lives.

If you see patterns of foolishness in your life with finances or relationships or a hundred other things, it reveals that you are worshipping someone or something other than Jesus. The main idol that leads us into foolishness is ourselves! When we exalt ourselves and put ourselves number one in our own lives, that will lead to all kinds of foolishness. Self is the idol at the root of so much foolishness in Proverbs, like not listening to anyone else when they give you advice or try to correct you because you think you know so much more than everyone else.

The practicalities of life laid out in Proverbs 10-31 reveal our worship life. Worship is not just about singing on Sunday. The Bible says that you should do everything, whether you eat or drink or whatever it is, to the glory of God (1 Cor 10:31). That is what Proverbs is about if you want to boil it down—it reveals where your life is idolatrous and where you are not believing the gospel.

The major categories in Proverbs are words, work, finances, relationships, and future rewards. Since these things reveal whether we are in right relationship with Jesus or worshiping idols, what Proverbs shows us is that there is no spiritual and secular divide in life. You do not have your religious life over here and your secular life over there. Proverbs says all of the areas of your daily life are spiritual in nature.

Wisdom in Work and Money (v2-5)

10 The proverbs of Solomon: A wise son brings joy to his father, but a foolish son brings grief to his mother. ² Ill-gotten treasures have no lasting value, but righteousness delivers from death. ³ The Lord does not let the righteous go hungry, but he thwarts the craving of the wicked. ⁴ Lazy hands make for poverty, but diligent hands bring wealth. ⁵ He who gathers crops in summer is a prudent son, but he who sleeps during harvest is a disgraceful son. ⁶ Blessings crown the head of the righteous, but violence overwhelms the mouth of the wicked. ⁷ The name of the righteous is used in blessings, but the name of the wicked will rot.

Jesus produces wisdom in your life in the way you work and handle money. *"Ill-gotten gains do not profit anyone, but righteousness rescues from death."* If you are a greedy person, if you are a person who cheats the government, or if you are a person who cheats your employer, then that will not profit you like you think it will.

Proverbs says that if you are a wise person, you will make more money, generally speaking. It does not say that every time you accumulate money you should take it as a sign of God's blessing in your life." Money-if it is not gotten in the right way or if you trust in it is destructive.

Proverbs 10:3 says that *the Lord will not let the righteous go hungry*. What about Christians in the Sudan who are starving to death? What about Christians in your church who lost their jobs and now their families are struggling? Does that mean they are not God's children or that God does not love them?

The key to understanding the Proverbs is that we must view them in light of Christ and eternity. Do not view them in terms of immediacy. Generally these things are true immediately, but they will always be true ultimately. The wicked may make more money now and the righteous may starve right now, but in the end those who are outside of Christ will have trouble and those who are in Christ will be trouble free. Those in Christ will be enriched, and those outside of Christ will lose all that they have. How can you come to know this

for certain? Look to the life of Jesus? Judas, who gets money in the wrong way-ends up dead; but the righteous one, Jesus, is delivered from death.

Proverbs 10:4-5 turns to the issue of work ethic when it says, *idle hands make one poor, but diligent hands bring riches*. The son who gathers during summer is prudent; the son who sleeps during harvest is disgraceful.

Solomon says two things: laziness will lead to poverty and shaming your parents, while diligence and hard work lead to riches where you are able to provide and bring joy to your parents. Again, wisdom is about the effect your actions have on you and the people around you.

Wisdom in Words and Mouth

⁸ The wise in heart accept commands, but a chattering fool comes to ruin. ⁹ Whoever walks in integrity walks securely, but whoever takes crooked paths will be found out. ¹⁰ Whoever winks maliciously causes grief, and a chattering fool comes to ruin. ¹¹ The mouth of the righteous is a fountain of life, but the mouth of the wicked conceals violence.

Jesus grows you in wisdom when it comes to the use of your tongue. Verse 8 says, "*A wise heart accepts commands, but foolish lips will be destroyed.*" The ESV uses the phrase "babbling fool". The fool is so full of himself that instead of having the capacity to accept wisdom he shares his own clever opinions, which are devoid of true wisdom.

If you are the kind of person who loves to hear the sound of your own voice and who speaks more than you listen, then you're probably a fool. You are probably worshiping the idol of self.

Wisdom in Relationships

¹² Hatred stirs up conflict, but love covers over all wrongs. ¹³ Wisdom is found on the lips of the discerning, but a rod is for the back of one who has no sense.

Wisdom has to do with relationships. Whether you are the kind of person who loves your neighbor or makes fun of your neighbor reveals whether you are wise or a fool (11:12). Whether you are the kind of person who can keep secrets reveals whether you are wise or a fool (11:13). Are you the kind of person who is told something in confidence, then a few days later you confide in another friend, "Hey, I'm only telling you this and you can't tell anyone else, but did you know that..."? Most likely the inability to keep secrets reveals that you worship yourself because you like to be the person who has and disseminates information. That has everything to do with your relationship with Jesus.

Wisdom has to do with all kinds of relationships. Whether or not you are generous to the poor (11:24), take care of your animals (12:10), listen to your parents (13:1), keep good company (13:20), or date the right people reveals whether or not you are wise and walking with Jesus. Jesus doesn't just reconcile you to God; he reconciles you to others (Eph 2:14).

This reality has everything to do with your relationship with Jesus. Jesus was the one who was perfectly wise and perfectly honored his parents. That is why Luke 2:51 points out that Jesus submitted in everything to Mary and Joseph. That is why in John's Gospel when Jesus hangs on the cross suffocating to death, he makes provisions for his mom to be taken care of after he dies (John 19:26-27). Why did Jesus do that? Jesus did that because he perfectly honored his parents. Through the Spirit, Jesus makes us the kind of children who bring joy to our parents.

Relationships are addressed in Proverbs 10:12, "*Hatred stirs up conflicts, but love covers all offenses.*" Hatred, anger, and a violent temper are not good conflict-resolution techniques. That seems simple, but we all need to hear it. Again, the root of this is idolatry, most likely worship of self that prevents you from letting go of a perceived wrong against you. What is a good conflict-resolution technique? Love!

Seeking the best in others, not just seeking the best in yourself. Giving the benefit of the doubt to others, not just giving the benefit of the doubt to yourself. Forgiving other people, not just overlooking your own sin while you fixate on others' sins. If you are constantly angry, if you are the kind of person who loves a good fight, and if you are continually stirring up conflict, you are a fool. The way that you resolve conflict in wisdom is this: *"A gentle answer turns away anger"* (15:1).

¹⁴ The wise store up knowledge, but the mouth of a fool invites ruin. ¹⁵ The wealth of the rich is their fortified city, but poverty is the ruin of the poor. ¹⁶ The wages of the righteous is life, but the earnings of the wicked are sin and death. ¹⁷ Whoever heeds discipline shows the way to life, but whoever ignores correction leads others astray. ¹⁸ Whoever conceals hatred with lying lips and spreads slander is a fool. ¹⁹ Sin is not ended by multiplying words, but the prudent hold their tongues. ²⁰ The tongue of the righteous is choice silver, but the heart of the wicked is of little value. ²¹ The lips of the righteous nourish many, but fools die for lack of sense. ²² The blessing of the Lord brings wealth, without painful toil for it. ²³ A fool finds pleasure in wicked schemes, but a person of understanding delights in wisdom.

So the wise man always has the advantage. The fool always goes to the bottom. Wise men continually add to their knowledge. Every wise man is a little wiser today than he was yesterday. Knowledge comes by self-correction. Wise men are not ashamed to say that they have made mistakes, and that they want to correct them. The wise man shows his wisdom in remembering what more has to be done than what has already been accomplished.

The wise man keeps up to date with all new literature, all new science, all new discovery; so that he may examine it and to receive whatever is divine. The mouth of the foolish and every word he utters brings him nearer and nearer to his destruction. The foolish man builds his house upon the sand.

"The rich man's wealth is his strong city: the destruction of the poor is their poverty" ([Proverbs 10:15](#)). This is taking a limited view of social situations. It

is the rich man who says that his wealth is his strong city. He believes that he can buy and possess everything, not knowing that money can never constitute true ownership. Money buys temporary rights; money buys the land, but it can never buy the landscape. The person who truly holds the title to the land is the one who loves it.

The destruction of the poor is in their poverty, because they are unable to take advantage of opportunities that come their way. They see the opportunity but cannot access it.

"The labor of the righteous tendeth to life: the fruit of the wicked to sin. He is in the way of life that keepeth instruction: but he that refuseth reproof erreth" ([Proverbs 10:16-17](#)). The wicked man grows in sin. We are not to stand still in sin while ignoring the reality of it. The wicked who persists in sin is worse today than he was ten years ago. He continues in decay until he is corrupted and almost totally destroyed by it.

"The blessing of the Lord, it maketh rich, and he addeth no sorrow with it" ([Proverbs 10:22](#)). Blessing may come in different ways: through chastisement, through discipline, through life's journey. "Rich" does not always mean wealth, or gold, or estates, things that can be numbered and valued and exchanged in the marketplace. The poor are said to be rich in faith even when he does not have life's necessities. Contentment always means true riches. The man who is blessed of God is rich in satisfactions of a spiritual kind—rich in wisdom, rich in hope, rich in gratitude: so rich that he never can be belittled, or bribed, or tempted in order to acquire some temporary advantage.

"It is as sport to a fool to do mischief: but a man of understanding hath wisdom" ([Proverbs 10:23](#)). Nothing is so easy as mischief. It is a fool's occupation. It is not difficult for him to spread false reports, to ask harmful questions, to suggest imaginary barriers. When his behavior is discovered and called out, he says he was not serious, meant no mischief and that it was funny. He does not understand that every action has consequences.

The man of understanding may have less excitement than the fool has: sometimes indeed he may seem slow, solemn, lifeless, taking little or no interest in the bubbles that are sparkling around him, and in the rockets that are hissing and spluttering in the night. His riches are within. His soul is at peace. He is a continual worshipper, who, praying without ceasing, holds large and profitable commerce with heaven, and in his very worship he grows in intellectual wisdom. There is no fallacy greater than that because a man is spiritually minded, he cannot be intellectually energetic.

Wisdom Leads to Rewards in Your Life and the Life to Come

²⁴ What the wicked dread will overtake them; what the righteous desire will be granted. ²⁵ When the storm has swept by, the wicked are gone, but the righteous stand firm forever. ²⁶ As vinegar to the teeth and smoke to the eyes, so are sluggards to those who send them. ²⁷ The fear of the Lord adds length to life, but the years of the wicked are cut short. ²⁸ The prospect of the righteous is joy, but the hopes of the wicked come to nothing. ²⁹ The way of the Lord is a refuge for the blameless, but it is the ruin of those who do evil. ³⁰ The righteous will never be uprooted, but the wicked will not remain in the land. ³¹ From the mouth of the righteous comes the fruit of wisdom, but a perverse tongue will be silenced. ³² The lips of the righteous know what finds favor, but the mouth of the wicked only what is perverse.

Following Jesus leads to rewards in this life and in the one to come. Solomon is a good teacher and doesn't just tell his son what to do, he tells him why he should do it. If you are wise, here is the good that can result. But if you are foolish in your life, here is the bad and the harm that could come out of it. He teaches his son using both the what and the why.

Verses 24-32 deal with the rewards and consequences of wisdom and foolishness. It is a matter of life and death. Verse 24 states, *"What the wicked dreads will come to him, but what the righteous desire will be given to them."* What do you fear? What are your nightmares? Do you fear financial ruin? Marital ruin? Do you fear your children not turning out the way that you want

them to? Do you fear not succeeding at your job? Do you fear not having a good reputation? Do you fear death and the judgment of hell? Solomon says that if you are a fool-outside of Christ-those are the things you will receive. What you fear is exactly what will happen to you. But if you are wise and righteous through Christ, which means your desires have now been transformed to be God's desires for you, then you will get what you desire! Whether that desire is eternal life, a strong marriage, a godly family, or whatever God is molding you and shaping you to desire, those are the things you will receive. Those rewards may come now in this life, but they will certainly come in the life to come because verse 25 says the righteous will be established "forever."

Throughout Proverbs 10 and following, these consequences are presented both as present and future. Proverbs 12:21 promises stability in your life and not chaos when you walk in wisdom, whereas 12:28 promises that the righteous will never die. The problem is, none of us are righteous; so this verse means hell for us. But in Christ we are counted righteous; and even though we might die, yet we will live forever. Faith in Jesus leads to life eternal beginning the moment you put your trust in him.

These scriptures should cause us to take stock of our lives. There were times when we did not listen to our parent. Some of the decisions we made brought sadness to our parents instead of happiness. We have said things that were harmful and hurtful. We did not listen. We can look back and see how we messed up repeatedly. We should reminisce with joy and not discouragement because now we possess the wisdom of Christ in our lives. We can trust Him to lead us in the right way.