

Edification of the God-Fearer vs. Destruction of the Godless

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[0 : 00] Thanks, John, for showing that kind of last minute.

Also want to thank all the people who decided to take the technical difficulties away from me. It seems like there always has to be a couple, and so I appreciate that.

But this morning we're going to be looking at Proverbs chapter 15, the whole chapter. Last week, Sean used a few of the verses, but we're going to take the whole chapter this morning.

And so let's start off by reading that together. Proverbs chapter 15. A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.

The tongue of the wise commends knowledge, but the mouths of fools pour out folly. The eyes of the Lord are in every place, keeping watch on the evil and the good.

[1 : 03] A gentle tongue is a tree of life, but perversionness in it breaks the spirit. A fool despises his father's instruction, but whoever heeds reproof is prudent.

In the house of the righteous there is much treasure, but trouble befalls the income of the wicked. The lips of the wise spread knowledge, not so the hearts of fools. The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord, but the prayer of the upright is acceptable to him.

The way of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord, but he loves him who pursues righteousness. There is severe discipline for him who forsakes the way. Whoever hates reproof will die.

Sheol and Abaddon lie open before the Lord. How much more the hearts of the children of man. A scoffer does not like to be reproved. He will not go to the wise.

A glad heart makes a cheerful face. But by sorrow of heart the spirit is crushed. The heart of him who has understanding seeks knowledge. But the mouths of fools feed on folly.

[2 : 09] All the days of the afflicted are evil, but the cheerful of heart has a continual feast. Better is a little with the fear of the Lord than great treasure in trouble with it.

Better is a dinner of herbs where love is than a fattened ox in hatred with it. A hot-tempered man stirs up strife, but he who is slow to anger quiets contention.

The way of a slugger is like a hedge of thorns, but the path of the upright is a level highway. A wise son makes a glad father, and a foolish man despises his mother.

Folly is a joy to him who lacks sense, but a man of understanding walks straight ahead. Without counsel, plans fail, and with many advisors they succeed.

But with many advisors they succeed. To make an apt answer is a joy to a man, and a word in season how good it is. The path of life leads upward for the prudent, that he may turn away from Sheol beneath.

[3 : 13] The Lord tears down the house of the proud, but maintains the widow's boundaries. The thoughts of the wicked are an abomination to the Lord, but gracious words are pure.

Whoever is greedy for unjust gain troubles his own household, but he who hates bribes will live. The heart of the righteous ponders how to answer, but the mouth of the wicked pours out evil things.

The Lord is far from the wicked, but he hears the prayer of the righteous. The light of the eyes rejoices the heart, and good news refreshes the bones. The ear that listens to life-giving reproof will dwell among the wise.

Whoever ignores instruction despises himself, and he who listens to reproof gains intelligence. The fear of the Lord is instruction in wisdom, and humility comes before honor.

I think it's probably safe to say of most of us that when we were growing up, there was parental advice that we would get at different times.

[4 : 21] For me, one of those phrases that I remember was, you're either going to be a leader or a follower. And I don't remember a specific situation where that was said to me.

It was usually when we were going out, maybe for a weekend or hanging out with friends. But we knew with that, Matt, right? You were either going to stand strong and be a leader and make right decisions, regardless of what other people did.

Or you were going to be a follower and just follow after what everyone else decided. That's a helpful statement, and it's true, but I think for this morning's passage, I want to go with a statement that's a little different.

And that is that everyone is a leader in their own way. Everyone is a leader, whether good or bad.

They are a leader in some way. You may be a leader and good at it or bad at it.

You may be a follower, but in your following, you lead. You lead as an example, whether doing it well or doing it poorly. Each of us lead in a different way in our household, in our family, in the group of friends or roommates that we live with.

[5 : 45] The people we may work around or do Zoom with more often. Whatever our life situation, we lead ourselves and we also lead or affect people around us.

And either that leading is towards God, wisdom, and life, or it's towards self-destruction or towards foolishness.

So you're leading yourself towards a destination, and in that, you affect other people. So what does that have to do with our chapter this morning, Proverbs 15?

There are a lot of topics that are hit in this Proverbs, but there's a heavier focus on our words, how we speak, and the condition or the stance of our heart.

And we're also told a little bit about how those are connected together, and we'll get into that. So how are you leading?

[6 : 47] Are you leading yourselves and others towards what is good and what you say and what your heart is like? Or are you leading others away from God and in a wrong direction? I think of it kind of like online reviews, right?

We may be reading them more lately because we're buying more online, but whether it's food or places or things that we're purchasing, we look at the reviews from other people and it affects us. They lead people one way or another, right? They affect my choices, and I'm sure they affect yours. I'm a big fan of online reviews, but I also hate online reviews.

The reason is because they're in conflict sometimes with one another. You read two different things in a review and it's not helpful. Our leading can be like that also, right?

Our leading can be in conflict with or out of step with what God calls us to do, how we're saying to one person the living in a different way.

[7 : 53] So our goal as a Christian is to present a good review to others, to be able to lead them toward God and not away from Him.

So before we begin, let's open in the word of prayer, and we'll start in verse 1. Lord, I ask for your help this morning as I preach, and Lord, I ask for ears that are open, not to hear the words that I have to say, but to hear the words that you have to say from your word.

Lord, I pray that you would give me the words to speak, that you would give me wisdom as I preach this chapter with a goal of teaching all of us what you desire, what you desire of our life, what you desire from our heart and how we live.

Lord, we seek to honor you. So Lord, we ask that you would help us this morning at this time to learn how to do that in a good and a right way so that we can bring you glory and you honor.

And Lord, we ask these things in your precious name. Amen. All right, so here's the summary. In our words and in our heart, how are we leading ourselves and others?

[9 : 23] In wisdom towards God or in foolishness away from Him? So as we look at Proverbs 15, there are a number of verses that deal with the tongue.

And I'll apologize ahead of time. Just the way that this chapter is written, we're going to jump around a little bit. So just bear with me and turn quickly and we'll try to cover them all.

Verse 1 says, A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger. When it comes to the words that we say, how do we lead, how do we affect those around us?

Are you the soft answer or the harsh word? Here, harsh word means a word of pain. A word of pain given usually invokes anger in another person.

So we affect others by what we say and how we say it. Do your words stir up anger or do they soothe and promote peace?

[10:36] In Matthew 5 verse 9, Jesus said, Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God. When you get upset, do you make your people feel how upset you are?

Or do you have to continue to argue so that your point is made? Do you have to get your say in there? Or are you able to hold back that harsh word and instead give a soft answer?

So is your speech peaceful? Jumping down to verse 18, it says, A hot-tempered man stirs up strife, but he who is slow to anger quiets contention.

A hot-tempered man is someone who doesn't have control of their anger, their emotions. They're not under control. And so they stir up strife. That is, conflict that wasn't there is now there because they have created it.

A person who is slow to anger, they have their emotions and their words under control. And so they're able to quiet contention or smooth the waters.

[11:44] A decision made in the heart to keep the words, our words, in check. Humbly saying, I will control myself and hold back what I really want to say so that there is peace.

So that I can lead in righteousness and love. And so that God is pleased even in this conversation. So is your speech humble and patient?

Jumping back to verse 2. The tongue of the wise commends knowledge. That is, what the wise says makes knowledge appealing.

Knowledge becomes something people want because of the way it is said. But the mouth of fools pour out folly. In other words, what the fool has to say, no one wants.

What the wise has to say makes people want it even more. This verse connects well, actually, if you jump down to verse 28. It says, Why does the righteous ponder how to answer?

[13:00] Verse 23 gives us the answer to that. It says, To make an apt answer is a joy to a man and a word in season how good it is. Who doesn't want to give that appropriate answer at the right time?

Doesn't it feel good when you have that answer? To be able to give that word of encouragement, that word of comfort, or wise input to someone who's struggling.

It feels good. But not only that, it's helpful to others when we're able to do that. So the question is, is our speech desirable by others?

The gentle tongue, in verse 4, can be used for good or bad. It says, A gentle tongue is a tree of life, but perverseness in it breaks the spirit.

So kind and encouraging words are a tree of life. They can bring healing to someone who is hurting and in pain. However, that same gentle tongue can also bring with it something that's mean or twisted.

[14:07] So that's the perverseness that this verse is talking about. The perverseness in it that breaks the spirit. So a gentle tongue can be used for good or for bad.

For healing or for hurt. So hopefully our speech, our words, are healing. Verse 5 says, A fool despises his father's instruction, but whoever heeds reproof, that is, takes the instruction to heart. That person is prudent. We can quickly see a connection between verse 5 and verse 20, because we're talking about parents here. It says, A wise son makes a glad father, but a foolish man despises his mother.

This isn't a verse that's not a good person. This isn't a verse that's talking about, you know, if my kid's good, he's mine, and if the kid's bad, he's mom's. This is talking about godly parents. And so wisdom that comes from godly parents, the source of that is God's word.

And a fool does not want those words of wisdom. Verse 12 says, A scoffer, a fool, does not like to be reproved or corrected.

[15:24] He will not go to the wise. So here we see just a continuation of that. That son or that daughter who does not want to hear godly advice from a godly parent or from another godly influence.

They do not want it. They won't go to the wise person because they don't want that wisdom in their life. Learning to be wise means not just learning facts, but it's receiving correction.

And that receiving correction takes humility. So are you open to wise instruction? It's no surprise that there's a connection between our words and our heart.

I think we all know that. A lot of times what we're feeling comes out. Verse 7 points this out. It says, The lips of the wise spread or disperse knowledge, not so the hearts of fools.

In verse 2 we saw how the tongue or the words of the wise commends and makes knowledge look desirable. Here we see something a little different. They are able to spread or give out knowledge, the wise are, because it's in their heart.

[16:42] But you can't disperse something that you don't have. You can't disperse wisdom if you have foolishness in your heart. Foolish hearts spread foolish words.

So what is in your heart comes out in your words and in your actions. Proverbs 23 verse 7 says, For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he. So are you able, from the stance of your heart, are you able to give wise instruction?

Along with these verses dealing with our speech, we also have some verses of warning and judgment. We cannot properly lead ourselves and others toward God if we don't know what God desires.

And if we don't know the points of correction along the way when we're not doing that. So verse 3 is the first one that we come across. It says this in verse 3, The eyes of the Lord are in every place, keeping watch on the evil and the good.

Just a few things from this verse I wanted to point out. And the first one is how the word Lord is in all capitals. This means God's covenant name Yahweh.

[17:57] Expressing God in his fullness as sovereign Lord and creator of all. And this verse is saying he hates the sacrifices of the wicked, but the prayer of the upright is acceptable to him.

Going back to verse 3. Sorry, that was supposed to be down a little bit. Going back to verse 3. The eyes of the Lord are in every place, keeping watch on the evil and the good.

Notice here that it's not actions that God is watching, but it is the people. It's the good people. It's the evil people.

Those are the ones God is watching. If I were watching good people and evil people, and I wrote this verse, if I said that my eyes were on them, I would probably say that my eyes are on every place.

But we notice here that it says the eyes of the Lord are in every place. And I think there's something in that. The idea being that there is a deeper seeing that is going on.

[19:08] It's more than just seeing. It's a fully knowing what is happening. It's kind of like if you've ever watched a TV show that was muted. You see everything, right?

You can guess what they're saying a little bit. You can kind of pick up part of the story, but you miss a lot of what's happening. Not so with God. He sees everything. He knows completely.

Brothers and sisters, that should put us on alert this morning. We have a God who cares about how we talk to one another. He cares about how we love one another. And he holds us accountable for that.

Accountable not just for the words we say, but the hard attitude behind it. Verse 8 says, The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord, but the prayer of the upright is acceptable to him.

This goes back to verse 3 that we were talking about. This Lord that sees everything. That's the same Lord that finds the sacrifice of wicked, of the wicked and abomination.

[20:17] The mere act of offering sacrifice, apart from having a life that is righteous and set aside for God, is not acceptable to him. Hear these verses from Isaiah chapter 1.

It's verses 14 through 17. This is God speaking. Your new moons and your appointed feast, my soul hates. They have become a burden to me.

I am weary of bearing them. When you spread out your hands, I will hide my eyes from you. Even though you make many prayers, I will not listen. Your hands are full of blood.

Wash yourselves. Make yourselves clean. Remove the evil from your deeds from before my eyes. Cease to do evil. Learn to do good. Seek justice.

Correct oppression. Bring justice to the fatherless. Plead the widow's cause. We must turn from our evil and repent before our prayers are accepted by a holy and perfect God.

[21:20] Verse 9 says, Jesus said in Matthew 17, You hypocrites, speaking to the Pharisees, Well did Isaiah prophesy of you when he said, This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me.

If our hearts are turned from God, then we can't pursue him. Righteousness can't be our goal if we are going the opposite or the wrong direction.

So we want to lead in the direction of uprightness, not in foolishness and away from God. Because God hears our prayers. We want to strive after righteousness because it pleases God to do so.

And we know that God loves those who pursue righteousness. Not perfection. I'm not saying we pursue perfection, but we pursue what is right and good in the eyes of God.

Thinking back to verse 3, where God sees and knows what is happening. God is more concerned about the person and their heart than he is about the sacrifices and their actions.

[22 : 33] He's concerned more about that than our prayers and our sacrifices if our hearts are not on him. Now don't get me wrong. Prayer is important. I'm not saying that it isn't. And I'm not saying that our sacrifices to God, that is the giving of our time and our resources and money.

All that is important. But it has to start with our heart. If our heart is far from God, then all and everything that we do is abomination to the Lord.

Verse 11 says, Sheol and Abaddon, death and destruction, lie open before the Lord. How much more the hearts of the children of men. So death and destruction are not hidden from God.

These are things that are mysteries to us. We don't know about death. We know what it is to die.

We don't know anything after that except for what we learned from the word. It is unknown to us.

It is a mystery to us, but it is not a mystery to God. He knows them and uses them for his purposes. How much more does he know our hearts? We also see another warning in verse 10.

[23 : 46] It says, There is severe discipline for him who forsakes the way. For the person who leaves or departs from God's path, out of love and mercy, God will discipline them and bring them back.

For the purpose of bringing them back and restoring joy, because he loves them. And for the person who pushes back harder and does not want to turn from his ways, it says, Whoever hates reproof will die.

We know this. We can see examples of this all the time, where rules are where they are for a purpose, or someone is warned about something and they do not change, has an effect.

Right? It catches up to a person. The person who does not turn back. The person who hates correction. And they remain on the course away from God.

We know the end result of that is hell. Man's ways lead away from God. God's ways, only available to us through Jesus, brings us back to him.

[25 : 11] John 14, 6 says, Jesus said to him, I am the way, I am the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. We also see a couple of verses of correction in verses 24 and 25 and 26.

So we'll look at those. Verse 24 says, The path of life leads upward for the prudent. The prudent, that is the wise person who is concerned about their future.

They care about that path of life because they care about their future. The path leads upward that he may turn from shield or from death. Such a person seeks to be wise.

The further they are towards wisdom, the further they are away from foolishness. I mentioned earlier that the leading of ourselves, the path that we're on, what we do, it also affects others.

If we're leading towards God or not, that is if we're following him, others are affected by that.

There's a few verses actually in this chapter that talk about that. Look at verse 25.

[26 : 26] It says, The Lord tears down the house of the proud but maintains the widow's boundaries. The proud are at odds with God. 1 Peter 5.5 says, God opposes the proud.

Psalms 147.6 says, The Lord lifts up the humble. He casts the wicked to the ground. So in this verse, we see how God tears down those who are proud.

In this verse, the widow is an example of the humble person. A widow in the Old Testament is someone who had no one left to protect her or to secure her land.

And so she depended on God. God maintained the widow's boundaries, her possessions, her land.

So are you protected where you live as you live humbly for God?

Or do you live in pride and at odds with God? Do others see damaging pride by how you live? Or do they find strength in your humility?

[27 : 34] Verse 6 says, In the house of the righteous there is much treasure, but trouble befalls the income of the wicked. Now, the income of the wicked here refers not only to the methods used to

get rich or to bring that income in, speaking of dishonesty and bribery, but there's also the desire for more of it, the desire for more money and possessions.

We pick up on this connection by looking at verse 27. It says, Whoever is greedy for unjust gain troubles his household, but he who hates bribes will live.

Trouble comes to the house where there is dishonesty and greed. But for the house of the righteous there is freedom. It says, There is much treasure, meaning there is satisfaction and enjoyment that abounds.

Why? Because the freedom in living honestly and righteously. There is contentment in following God and trusting Him and not seeking after how you can gain things by your own doing.

1 Timothy 6, 6 and 7 says this, But godliness with contentment is great gain, for we brought nothing into the world and we cannot take anything out of the world.

[28 : 56] So how is your house? Maybe a house, an apartment, a condo, a shared space, whatever it is, are those around you in your house affected negatively through your pride?

Maybe through your dishonesty or your desire for more of the world? Or are they affected in a good way through your humility, through your righteousness, through your honesty?

Again, goes back to like reading a review. It affects people what they read. It affects people how you live. Here are some verses that talk about, that look into our heart.

So as we, let's do, um, how is your heart? Like, the words that you say, they come out of the stance of your heart.

How do they affect others? Look at verse 13. It says, a glad heart makes a cheerful face, but by sorrow of heart the spirit is crushed. By sorrow of heart, and know at times, because we live in a fallen world, we are going to have sorrow of heart and spirit that feels crushed.

[30 : 20] we're going to have things that happen in our life. Even as Christians, it doesn't mean life is great. We're going to have hard times, and we, our fear, our spirit will feel crushed.

But outside of those times, do you have a cheerful face? Do you have a heart that is glad, generally glad, overall, happy and content in the Lord?

verses 14 and 15 say, the heart of him who has understanding seeks knowledge, but the mouths of fools feed on folly.

All the days of the afflicted are evil, but the cheerful of heart has a continual feast. The person having a heart of understanding and wanting to grow in wisdom, they will seek after more of it. Fools, however, will feed on more foolishness. So, a happy heart accompanies that person whose understanding and desire is to seek more knowledge.

[31 : 27] There's a continual feast of delight and contentment because of where their focus is. Their focus is not on foolishness, on things that don't matter. Their focus is on wisdom and righteousness.

Our path to wisdom should bring us joy. It should bring us contentment in God. So, if we find that the path we're on is not bringing us closer to God, is not bringing us more joy and contentment, then we need to pause and analyze the path that we're on because something is out of whack.

whether God chooses to bless you with wealth or not, the contentment in life with whatever our circumstances are should be one of our attributes.

An attribute of a Christian should be contentment. Why? Because their foundation is Jesus Christ. Their eternity is heaven. Verse 16 says, Better is a little with the fear of the Lord than great treasure and trouble with it.

It is more important to live with the proper fear of the Lord than to have anything else. Even if it means to have very little compared to having a great abundance, the trouble with having great treasure is that it easily moves our dependence away from God and onto that abundance, that great treasure.

[32 : 58] and to not have the fear of the Lord puts us on the path to foolishness. That brings us to our last set of verses.

Let's look at verse 30 through 33. The light of the eyes rejoices the heart and good news refreshes the bones.

We spoke about this in another sermon, but the eyes are like a lamp to the whole body. So when the eyes see something to be happy about, that could be seeing a close friend or getting a good report, finishing a project that you've been waiting on, that makes the heart glad.

And good news refreshes the bones. Another translation says good news makes the bones fat, meaning that to receive good news is healthy for us.

The cheer that our spirit receives from that is like a feast that is spread before us and it fattens us. It makes us healthy in our bones.

[34 : 12] We find the ultimate example of this in the gospel. The news that Jesus died on the cross for our sins so that we can have salvation so that we, through our trust in Jesus, can have forgiveness and relationship with God.

Without question, that is, and will always be the ultimate news that lightens our eyes. It rejoices our heart and refreshes our bones.

Nothing will be able to do that on any level like the gospel, the saving gospel of Jesus Christ. It provides that healing and salvation for eternity.

Verse 31 says, The ear that listens to life-giving reproof will dwell among the wise. The gospel is that life-giving reproof.

If you were not a believer this morning, I want to encourage you to hear God's instruction. Do not close yourself to this good news, this life-giving, ultimate good news.

[35 : 22] Because without it, there is no dwelling with the wise that he talks about here. That is, the righteous that are in heaven. Jesus said in Mark 4, 9, He who has ears, let him hear.

Don't not hear this loving word from the Lord to bring good news that makes your bones fat, that makes them healthy for eternity.

Maybe you are a believer this morning. Have you been listening to God? Or have you been listening to yourself? Are your ears open to His guidance?

The next verse, verse 32, says this, Whoever ignores instruction despises himself, but he who listens to reproof gains intelligence.

Do you listen to godly instruction and follow it? When your words are off the mark and your heart is drifting from God and the Holy Spirit that's speaking to you that you're in the wrong, do you hear that correction?

[36 : 36] Or do you respond like the fool and you ignore it because you don't want to hear it? You're content in your foolishness. There are times when we will sin.

It's those times where it's easy to start down a path that takes us towards foolishness. We become wrapped in ourselves and we begin to turn from God.

It is then that we need to listen to that spirit inside. The words of correction from someone else or from the word of God if we're open to that at that point.

But we need to be able to listen to that correction. We need to humble ourselves and repent. Turn back to the one who loves you. The one that died for you and the one who has plans for you.

The last verse, verse 33, says this, The fear of the Lord is instruction and wisdom and humility comes before honor. To know the Lord, to have the proper reverence and awe for who he is and to live in that light that is wisdom.

[37 : 49] That is true fear of the Lord and living according to it. An important aspect of that fear of the Lord is humility. when we realize and we accept who we are as sinners, given this free gift of salvation by a holy and just God, then we are humbled.

We should be humbled. And the honor of being a child of God comes only after we humble ourselves as sinners before him. So today, as you think about how you lead with your words and your heart, do it not for your salvation, do it because of your salvation.

Jesus, the Son of God, came as the Word and wisdom of God. So as we think about how we use our words, we think about how Jesus was the ultimate Word.

He led with words of comfort and healing. He spoke wisdom and kindness. He taught, He exhorted, He loved, He served humbly and He loved greatly.

It is because of His leading that we have hope, a purpose in Christ and for Christ. So this morning, let us lead ourselves and let us lead others in that hope.

[39 : 17] You take a couple minutes just to think about that thought of how you lead with your words and your heart and how you serve as a review pointing to God, pointing to the hope of Christ.

How do others read that review and is it helpful to them? operation living to tumble to last time and to to .

Probably something here is