

A Path of Integrity

Printed Text: Proverbs 11:1-14

Background Scripture: Proverbs 11

Devotional Reading: Proverbs 10:27-32

Proverbs 11:1-14

The Lord detests dishonest scales, but accurate weights find favor with him. ² When pride comes, then comes disgrace, but with humility comes wisdom. ³ The integrity of the upright guides them, but the unfaithful are destroyed by their duplicity. ⁴ Wealth is worthless in the day of wrath, but righteousness delivers from death. ⁵ The righteousness of the blameless makes their paths straight, but the wicked are brought down by their own wickedness. ⁶ The righteousness of the upright delivers them, but the unfaithful are trapped by evil desires. ⁷ Hopes placed in mortals die with them; all the promise of their power comes to nothing. ⁸ The righteous person is rescued from trouble, and it falls on the wicked instead. ⁹ With their mouths the godless destroy their neighbors, but through knowledge the righteous escape. ¹⁰ When the righteous prosper, the city rejoices; when the wicked perish, there are shouts of joy. ¹¹ Through the blessing of the upright a city is exalted, but by the mouth of the wicked it is destroyed. ¹² Whoever derides their neighbor has no sense, but the one who has understanding holds their tongue. ¹³ A gossip betrays a confidence, but a trustworthy person keeps a secret. ¹⁴ For lack of guidance a nation falls, but victory is won through many advisers.

LESSON AIMS

After participating in this lesson, each student will be able to:

1. Contrast the actions of a righteous person with those of one who is dishonest.
2. Explain how personal integrity can be destroyed by pride and dishonesty.
3. Perform an integrity checkup in his or her life.

LESSON BACKGROUND

It is helpful to review the concepts of knowledge and wisdom as presented in the book of Proverbs. Knowledge is knowing what God expects us to do, recognizing His standards of right and wrong. Wisdom is discerning these standards and choosing to obey God. Foolishness is knowing the expectations of God but choosing to do the wrong thing. In the realm of integrity, the Bible teaches that our integrity is never for sale and never to be sacrificed. Wisdom, therefore, is keeping one's word, no matter what the consequences. The fool is the person who breaks his or her word for money or other selfish reasons that are within his or her control.

A vivid illustration of the importance of integrity is found in Job 2:9, 10. Job is a righteous, God-fearing man who has experienced every type of personal tragedy imaginable. At the height of his suffering, Job's wife berates him for maintaining his integrity-that is, his trust in God. She pushes him to "curse God and die." Job refuses to do this and preserves his integrity. He will not abandon his obedient relationship with God. Significantly, Job calls his wife a foolish woman.

As in Proverbs the fool is the one who concedes integrity in difficult situations. The verdict of the text for Job's decision is that by not giving up his integrity, Job did not sin.

The Hebrew word translated integrity in Proverbs 11:3 (below) has several related words with various shades of meaning in the Old Testament. It can have the sense of perfect (Job 1:1). It can also mean simplicity in the sense of innocence (2 Samuel 15:11). The "perfect" person (the person of integrity) may be a target of attack by the wicked (Psalm 64:4). Integrity can have a protective function (Psalm 25:21). Most importantly, God is a protective shield to those who "walk uprightly" (Proverbs 2:7). A wise man will live a life of integrity; that is, his deeds and words will be consistent with his profession of faith in God.

THE IMPORTANCE OF HONESTY-Proverbs 11:1-3

THE IMPORTANCE OF GODLY SPEECH-Proverbs 11:11-14

Since God has created the world, what He thinks is what makes something good or bad. He is the very essence of truth and goodness. Dishonesty and lies are Satan's domain (cf. John 8:44).

"*Detests*" (Prov. 11:1) is a strong word. God does not just dislike dishonesty. It is abhorrent to Him. "*Dishonest scales*" refers to the scales used to weigh items in commercial transactions. The weights were stones. As Robert Alden explained, "Each merchant had stone weights which supposedly matched some national standard, yet many had more than one set of stones; marked the same but with different weights" (Proverbs, Baker). He might use different weights depending on whether he was buying or selling.

1. What is meant by a "dishonest scales" (Proverbs 11:1)?

God delights in honest dealings because such honesty shows a spirit of obedience to the way God has made things to be. When God's people are honest, it testifies to the fact that they trust Him to take care of them. A man of faith does not have to take matters into his own hands.

2. How does honesty show that a man has faith in God?

Verses 2 and 3 emphasizes the consequences of right and wrong ways of living. There is a direct correlation between boastful pride and lack of integrity. When we inflate and tout our accomplishments and virtues, credibility and integrity evaporate. Sometimes it feels good to be able to say we are the smartest, the richest, or the cleverest in a given situation. The wise person realizes that pride is fleeting, that false claims will be found out. It is better to live in humility and simplicity, not seeking the acclaim of others. While this kind of life may not seem as exciting, it will safeguard the wise person from the social embarrassment that inevitably comes to the boastful, exaggerating individual.

3. What is the connection between boastful pride and lack of integrity (vs. 2,3)?

THE IMPORTANCE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS-Proverbs 11:4-10

The reality is that riches will not do a person any good when death and the day of judgment come. The Bible is full of warnings on this point (cf. Ps. 49:6-20; Luke 12:16-21; 16:19-23). Nor do riches provide protection when calamities come in this life. The one who is righteous is the

one who possesses true riches. Many Bible believing commentators believe the writer was stressing the protection in the world that righteousness offers. God watches over the righteous, and their way of life keeps them from dangerous paths of sin. However, we should not take the verse to mean that a believer will never suffer tragedy. All of us will die, and some will die young.

To fully appreciate verses like Proverbs 11:4, we must remember the broadly typological nature of the entire Old Testament. The temporal blessings promised to Israel on so many occasions point to the far greater spiritual blessings that come through Christ. It is important to interpret even the Wisdom literature of the Old Testament with this in mind. We know that Christ's righteousness does deliver God's people from eternal death.

The word "*righteousness*" in verse 5 does not mean absolutely sinless. Rather, it refers to someone who is blameless in the basic direction of his life. His basic desire is to do right

4. In what way does righteousness bring deliverance (vs. 4-6)?

God does not promise this. To the contrary, the Bible is full of stories of people who suffer because of their personal stand for integrity. Daniel was committed to praying to God every day. When his enemies conspired to have a law made that required prayer be made only to the king, Daniel did not sacrifice his integrity. He opened his windows and continued to pray to God (Daniel 6:10), knowing full well that he was putting his life on the line.

Proverbs teaches that righteous people, those who walk in integrity, have the blessing and the protection of God (see Proverbs 28:18). This does not mean that righteous people never suffer or that the way of integrity is easy. It means that God ultimately will vindicate us and reward our intentions to live lives of integrity and righteousness (compare Revelation 6:9-11). To some degree, righteousness is its own reward. But the Bible promises more than this. God notices our efforts. He smiles upon those who choose integrity.

The "*knowledge*" referred to in verse 9 is that understanding of what is right, which results from a relationship with God. It is more than mere head knowledge. It is wisdom that sways the heart.

5. Is the life of integrity one in which we have no problems, trials, or trouble (v. 7)?

THE IMPORTANCE OF GODLY SPEECH-Proverbs 11:11-14

One of the main ways someone's character is revealed is through his words. As James 1:26 declares, "²⁶*Those who consider themselves religious and yet do not keep a tight rein on their tongues...their religion is worthless.*"

The "*blessing*", in Proverbs 11:11 may well refer to the speech of the righteous, since it stands in contrast to the "mouth" of the wicked. This blessing may come through the prayers the righteous man offers or through the godly wisdom he shows that guides the community in the right direction. The words spoken by the wicked, however, will lead to a city's destruction. They foment discord and the selfish pursuit of personal gain at the expense of anyone who stands in the way. Law and order break down; the glue of society dissolves.

6. What does the "blessing" in verse 11 refer to?

A wise man knows when he should refrain from speaking out, while the evil fool will blurt out whatever his depraved heart has in it.

Gossip and false accusations are standard fare in the speech of the wicked. An evil man "*derides his neighbor*" (v. 12) by soiling his reputation through his words. The wise person, by contrast, is continuously mindful of the evil that can be unleashed by the tongue (see James 3:6-8).

Wisdom in speech does not just mean knowing the right words to say; it also means knowing when it is better to say nothing at all. We should be especially careful not to speak about others in a negative way unless the circumstances absolutely demand it. In this way we will not be guilty of character assassination and will stay out of needless conflict.

Proverbs 11:13 continues the discussion about speech. The "*gossip*" or talebearer, cannot keep himself from saying everything he knows about everybody. The kind of gossip referred to here is the malicious sort who loves to stir up trouble. On the other hand, you can count on a trustworthy person ("he that is of a faithful spirit") to keep quiet about whatever he is told in confidence. He (or she) is concerned about the well-being of the person confiding in him. He is the soul of discretion.

7. What kind of speech does a wise person not engage in (vs. 12,13)?

The wise man renders one of his most important services by sharing words of wisdom. This verse concerns the life of the nation in particular. The problems and issues facing a government are too complex for any one fallible man. A wise leader will consult with trusted advisers to help him know what to do. Solomon was the author of this proverb (cf. 10:1). Despite the great gift of wisdom he received from God (cf. 1 Kings 3:5-12), he recognized that he should not depend on just himself.

By consulting with many good people, a leader is more likely to see all aspects of a situation and come to the right decision (cf. Prov. 15:22; 24:6). We should all humbly recognize our need for others. We should also recognize that everyone is in need of God's counsel most of all.

8. Why should a leader be sure to consult with trusted advisers (v. 14)?

CONCLUSION

Satan Hates Integrity

The book of Job has a lot to say about integrity. In the conversation between God and Satan at the beginning, God points to Job as a shining example of this characteristic (Job 2:3). Satan thinks that Job's integrity will crack under pressure and proceeds to test him mightily. Satan is always looking to attack the people of God in the area of integrity.

There is a practical side of this for Christians. In the book of Titus, Paul instructs his apprentice to appoint church leaders who are "blameless" or men of integrity (Titus 1:6, 7). Titus himself is to be a model of integrity or incorruptness (Titus 2:7; see Lesson 13 from winter).

Why is this? The underlying principle is that church leaders need to be seen as people of integrity in the community so that unbelievers will not be offended. The church is open to all who believe, even those who struggle with matters of integrity. But leadership must be restricted to those who have proven themselves to be people of honesty and truth. Otherwise, the reputation of the church will be damaged, and our Lord Jesus will suffer undue disgrace.

Satan would like nothing better than to besmirch the name of Jesus and His followers. May we have the strength to resist giving Satan that victory.

THOUGHT TO REMEMBER

Sacrificing integrity for temporary benefit is a long-term disaster.

PRAYER

God of truth, we ask that You help us follow Your examples. You always tell the truth. You always keep Your promises. You are the ultimate and perfect model of integrity. Make us people of truth and integrity. We pray this in the name of Your Son Jesus, the full embodiment of truth, amen.