

“The Path to Peace” (Prov. 15:1ff.)

1. Tempered Speech (1-2). V. 1 Avoiding negative escalation. Soft and hard are an obvious contrast but the subtleness lies in “answer” or “response” and “word.” Answer or response implies that a statement, claim, or accusation is made hence a tempered reply is the best course of action (being guilty or not guilty of the claim). It may even turn away wrath when one is guilty. God gives grace to the humble and resists the proud. Or, it can deescalate a situation by demonstrating poise under even a false accusation. Conversely, a harsh “word” or statement could – not only fail to disarm a situation, but *cause* an unnecessary quarrel.
2. V. 2. Wise speech is knowledge rightly employed. One’s character is revealed by his speech.
3. Impetus for Wisdom is Fear of the LORD. Eyes = metaphor for knowledge (omniscience) – and that knowledge runs deeper than optics! Cf. 2 Chron. 16:9; Heb. 4:12-13.
4. Power of Speech. “Healing” vs “harming” speech. Perhaps there is a Hebrew word play i.e. ‘broken’ or ‘duplicitous’ tongue = broken spirit. There is a motif of this contrast throughout Scripture e.g. single eye verses duplicitous eye and divided loyalties (Mat. 6:22-24). A healing tongue (speech) brings life although it requires hurtful truths – it doesn’t harm but rather heals. Jesus, the living Word of God said harsh things so as to warn of righteous justice cf. Mat. 23. Therefore, we must use discernment in how we speak (the way we say things e.g. v. 1) yet not fail to be truthful with the Gospel’s bad news of our condition. The “wholesome” “healing” tongue may speak hurtful truths but it offers healing from the very “tree of life” who is Jesus! Conversely, “broken” duplicitous speech knows neither tact nor truth thus keeping souls in the dark and discouragement. Excurses: To reiterate that “wholesome” “healing” speech is not necessarily gentle speech – but counter to the “perversity” contrasted by the author; I offer some Luther quotes (mostly against the papacy):
 - a. “You are desperate, thorough arch-rascals, murderers, traitors, liars, the very scum of the most evil people on earth. You are full of all the worst devils in hell – full, full, and so full that you can do nothing but vomit, throw, and blow out devils!” Against the Roman Papacy, and Institution of the Devil. Luther’s Works, Vol. 41, p. 277
 - b. “You are like a magician who conjures gold coins into the mouths of silly people, but when they open their mouths they have horse dirt in them.” Ibid p. 264
 - c. “You are the worst rascal of all the rascals on earth.” Ibid. p. 341
 - d. “May God Punish you, I say, you shameless, barefaced liar, devil’s mouthpiece, who dares to spit out, before God, before all the angels, before the dear Son, before all the world, your devil’s filth.” Ibid. p. 349
 - e. “You are an excellent person, as skillful, clever, and versed in Holy Scriptures as a cow in a walnut tree or a sow on a harp.” Against Hanswurst, Luther’s Works, Vol. 41 p. 219
 - f. “You are a brothel-keeper and the devil’s daughter in hell.” On the Councils and the Church, Luther’s Works Vol. 41, p. 160
 - g. “Even if the antichrist appears, what greater evil can he do than what you have done and do daily?” Why the Books of the Pope Were Burned Vol. 31, p. 393
 - h. “You people are more stupid than a block of wood.” From Against Latomus p. 242 of Luther’s works Vol. 32
 - i. “A natural donkey, which carries sacks to the mill and eats thistles, can judge you - indeed, all creatures can! For a donkey knows it is a donkey and not a cow. A stone knows it is a stone; water is water, and so on through all the creatures. But you mad asses do not know you are asses.” From Against the Roman Papacy, an Institution of the Devil, pg. 360 of Luther's Works, Vol. 41

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- j. “Your home, once the holiest of all, has become the most licentious den of thieves, the most shameless of all brothels, the kingdom of sin, death, and hell. It is so bad that even Antichrist himself, if he should come, could think of nothing to add to its wickedness.” From *The Freedom of a Christian*, pg. 336 of Luther's Works, Vol. 31
 - k. It's a bit curious and certainly hypocritical for Christians (in name) (now I sound like Luther) to condemn someone like Trump for His blunt speech while elevating Luther to saint status. I once made a simple (and blunt) comment re: John MacArthur opening his church during the pandemic, “Finally, a pastor with a spine.” And someone hyperventilated over such a comment and reverted to attacking me with personal attacks etc. That's about the time I left social media three years ago. Many in our culture simply can't handle the truth. Or, they simply can't handle another perspective. Cancel culture overrides our Constitution and the first amendment in the Bill of Rights. It literally prevents the spreading of truth and thwarts the simple from readily embracing it. Again, we see how Jesus handled the Establishment who had the position and influence to spread the truth yet suppressed it. Read Mat. 23 for yourselves.
5. Regarding Righteous Instruction (5-19). V. 5 Keep correction become prudent. Abiding in the corrective Word yields eventual and inevitable fruit from the tree of life and knowledge. One only becomes prudent – and spiritually mature – by heeding and abiding in the Word cf. e.g. Jn. 15:3-4; 17:17-19; 1 Pet. 1:22-23. You see, sanctification comes via the agency of the Word of truth. Hence, the “knowledge of truth” (which is stated at least five times verbatim. See Heb. 10:26; 1 Tim. 2:4; 2 Tim. 2:25; 3:7; Titus 1:1) is linked with salvation (1 Tim. 2:4). “All we like sheep have all gone astray” and thus we need instruction and correction – nay, we need salvation! Cf. Isa. 53:6.
 6. Treasure vs Trouble. What distinguishes treasure from trouble? Righteousness. Perhaps the term “house” indicates “household.” If so, “treasure” and “revenue” are contrasted rather than compared. In other words, the “treasure” of a righteous household is the fruit, impetus, object, and value of righteousness while mere “revenue” for the wicked is trouble – because, they not only do evil with it but covet mammon i.e. worldly gain.
 7. The wise have a “treasury” of wisdom from their household (see v. 6 above) and thus can spread knowledge from such whereas the fool is spiritually bankrupt.
 8. Like verse 3; vv. 8, 9, & 11 claim the sovereignty and righteousness of the LORD. V. 8. Even when the wicked offer sacrifices, God sees them for what they are viz. superficial, offensive, and hypocritical. But God is not manipulated by façade. Pretend righteousness (self-righteousness) is an abomination to Him. Conversely, an *earnest* prayer alone (vs supposed sacrifice) is delightful to God.
 9. Verses 9 & 10 continue the path motif contrasting the ways and ends of each. Picking up on v. 8, v. 9 restates that the wicked's ways are abominable to God. And thus the righteous God loves those who abide in such. Christ's sacrifice was the earnest delight of the Father. God delighted in His sacrifice (read 1 Pet. 2:23) as the only satisfactory reconciliatory means (Eph. 5:2; 1 Pet. 1:18-19; 2:21-25). Therefore, only those in Christ (who abide in Him Jn. 15) are a delight to Him. Read Col. 2:8-15 & 2 Cor. 2:14-17.
 10. Related to the previous verse's paths motif, v. 10 reveals the repercussions of the evil path which rejects wisdom and ultimately its source (Christ) and thus ends in death.
 11. The omniscient and pure Judge who knows the *end* of all souls knows the “**hearts**” of each soul. It's not merely about outward performance but inward impetus. The most earnest offering we can give God (in my humble understanding) is our honesty. To bear our hearts before Him is to humbly

repent, grab hold of Christ, confessing our sins and His person and work which secures redemption for such.

12. The opposite of humility is pride and self-righteousness which is seen in this verse.
13. A happy heart yields a cheerful countenance “face.” A sorrowful heart is indicative of a broken spirit. The *outward* appearance may be detected because of a merry heart but the *inward* spirit may be broken due to a sorrowful heart. Nevertheless, the outward appearance is not always indicative of the inward feeling. It is much easier to fake happiness than sadness. Scripture doesn’t just state the obvious but searches our hearts (knows them perfectly) and makes the counterintuitive claims such as Mat. 5:3-4. In fact, Eccl. 7:3 states, “Anger is better than laughter, for in a troubled face the heart is made well (lit. “brightens”).¹ Read Eccl. 7:1-8. Conclusion: Many make merry to avoid the harsh realities of life but until one accepts reality, mourns over his innate depravity as well as that around him, and comes to the Savior; his spirit will not be made well. Our culture celebrates for several reasons: 1. It worships pleasure. 2. It is prideful and pretends its own authority. 3. It knows of the world’s troubles but seeks to avoid them through pleasures. This is why sorrow and anger are better than making merry and putting on a façade of happiness. There is a wise saying in the 12 step programs viz. “accepting life on life’s terms,” which simply means accepting reality for what it is and, instead of manipulating people and circumstances, doing the appropriate and necessary things while depending on God for the results. And then there is the matter of the dry drunk – who may be abstaining from drink but failing to trust God, live disciplined, and help others – which is the key to a healing spirit.
14. Humility of the wise & arrogance (or ignorance) of the fool. The wise understand they need more understanding while the fool or simpleton only feeds on foolishness; presumably because it is more attractive on the surface. Related to v. 13, is the willful ignorance of ignoring truth and righteousness. When a majority celebrates evil (which is harmful, unrighteous, and hostile towards truth) the perpetrators feel safety in numbers and thus feed on more foolishness. The wise know better and seek still for more understanding – including charitable tactics for presenting a case for preaching repentance to those lost, feeding, and dying in sin. Furthermore, “mouth” is more accurately translated “face”² thus contrasting the mere façade of a painted face with the inner peace of a peaceful heart.
15. “Evil” can and should (in my understanding) be translated “hard” or “difficult.” It also connotes “inferior quality” including morality hence the translation “evil.” If I’m correct, the proverb contrasts the “distress” not “evil” of the afflicted viz. their circumstances of want with the feast of life when lived with a healthy heart. In other terms, although life is very difficult (including evil), the oppressed may enjoy the feast of a merry heart. Bruce Waltke conveys the principle by pointing to Scripture. “The proverb does not contrast the afflicted, who are innocent and exploited, with a cheerful heart. Rather, the afflicted in health and/or wealth may have the cheerful heart that enables them to endure and to overcome their circumstances (cf. 2 Cor. 4:8; 6:9–10; Heb. 10:34).”³ Tremper Longman offers this: “The metaphor of the feast is a sensual one. The word is for a “drinking party” (*mišteh*), not a religious festival (*hāg*). This makes one wonder whether the thought here may be related to Qoheleth’s [the “preacher” of *Ecclesiastes*] idea that, though life is meaningless, a person

¹ Longman, T., III. (2006). *Baker Commentary on the Old Testament: Proverbs* (p. 317). Baker Academic.

² 7156 פִּי (pā-nē(h)): n.masc.; ≡ Str 3942, 6440; TWOT 1782b—1. LN 8.9–8.69 **face**, i.e., the front part of the head, including main organs for perception and speech; eyes, mouth, etc.²

³ Waltke, B. K. (2004). *The Book of Proverbs, Chapters 1–15* (p. 625). Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.

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can find some satisfaction in “eating and drinking.”⁷ Additionally, this proverb can be related to 31:6–7: “Give strong drink to those who are perishing, and wine to the bitter of heart. Let them drink and forget their poverty and no longer remember their hard [or difficult] work.”⁴ This proverb could be somewhat of a sad consolation but w/o literal advisement e.g. 1 Cor. 15:19, 32. Those who refuse Christ may as well attempt to have pleasure while there is time – but it is infinitely better to sacrifice *carpe diem* i.e. “seize the day” and live for eternity.

16. It should appear obvious that being of little means while knowing God is preferred to being rich without Him. Although *Proverbs* teaches that the wise often enjoy wealth due to their wisdom, such wealth cannot secure redemption. Some commentators suggest that the trouble linked with treasure is related e.g. the trouble of seeking, securing, and gaining more wealth has its troubles which elude peace. It’s hard for the rich to enter the Kingdom, said Jesus.
17. Another reminder about priorities and values. God’s Kingdom is not eating and drinking but love and relationships.
18. “Blessed are the peacemakers.” A soul w/o peace can only stir more strife. The ‘slow to anger’ are not timid cowards but those who harness strength with patience. Fearing i.e. ‘trusting’ God provides us assurance that He will be our defender and avenger and thus we can avoid unnecessary strife. Nevertheless, we must take stands against sin, evil, and all that disparages Christ. Vengeance for our personal threats is His and the battle against powers/principalities attacking the Gospel is ours. Cf. Mat. 10:32-39; Eph. 6:12.
19. The Denial of Laziness. The lazy man is contrasted not with the go-getter but with the upright. The path motif emerges again and ironically, the one who avoids the right labor endures “thorns” rather than cruising the highway – which is less toil-filled. Rigged for righteousness: whereas v. 13 speaks of the results of accepting or denying reality, this verse also hints at the impetus for both. Those seeking righteousness seek the good path while those who want it easy thus taking the seemingly easy path, ironically reap the thorny path.
20. It’s true that a multitude of children have embarrassed their parents but we are told here that such behavior is indicative of despising their parents. The younger generation knows so much better than their antiquated parents’ virtues/instruction. It would also be hard to deny that some parents have likewise embarrassed their children. See 12:1. It is true that I brought my parents grief and shame which proved I despised them. But only by God’s grace in Christ did I see the joy in my dad’s eyes after I was redeemed and began to love.
21. Convenience revels in the folly of shallow joy while conviction resolves to walk righteously. We see our culture revel in folly and evil e.g. Ro. 1:30 as if such were reason to celebrate and promulgate. Those who know Truth (Christ) will walk uprightly and endure culture’s attacks, not wavering or allowing infiltration of such. E.g. some (many) in the universal Church have attempted to find a middle ground to appease the rebellious sinners while presenting the Gospel to them. However, Christ bids us to come and carry our crosses and die to ourselves – especially our sin. But how will they repent if not demanded to do such (Acts 17:30). Martin Luther so brilliantly stated, “If I profess with the loudest voice and clearest exposition ever portion of the truth of God *except precisely that little point which the world and the devil are at the moment attacking*, I am not confessing Christ, however boldly I may be professing Christ. Where the battle rages, there the loyalty of the soldier is proved. And to be steady on all the battle fields besides is merely flight and disgrace if he flinches at that point” (emphasis mine).

⁷ For the *carpe diem* [“living for the day”] passages in Ecclesiastes (2:24–26; 3:12–14, 22; 5:18–20; 8:15; 9:7–10), see the comments offered by Longman, *Ecclesiastes*, 106–10, 121–22, 131, 160, 168, 172, 182–84, 216, 221, 224, 250.

⁴ Longman, T., III. (2006). [*Baker Commentary on the Old Testament: Proverbs*](#) (p. 318). Baker Academic.

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22. All sin is truly repugnant but I have a special hatred for presumption. This is yet another proverb against such. The world preaches not to second guess yourself, to be your own person and live your own truth. Even preachers scoff against such a proverb as this by promoting hearing the ‘word of the Lord.’ They undermine this discipline, sacrificing counsel and other necessary spiritual disciplines that nurture/promote wisdom. They prioritize spontaneous and new revelations, as if from God himself. Theirs is a deliverance/declaration model of ministry opposed to the biblical discipleship/dependency model of ministry. Perhaps expound.
23. Piggy backing on the last verse, learned understanding (for which there are no shortcuts) is able to discern and offer wise timely counsel. Rather than a hasty reply, the wise have stored knowledge to employ. They also have the discerning ability to offer the apt word at the appropriate time. This is why wisdom must be cultivated.
24. The ‘two pathed’ motif: Here the respective destinations are implied by their trajectories. “The way of life” which leads upward (connoting towards God) is only found in Jesus (Jn. 14:6).
25. Presumption is again attacked and condemned here. Jam. 4:6. Related to vv. 13, 15; the poor in spirit (represented by the widow) will inherit the joyful Kingdom whilst those who are proud in spirit (making merry) fail to be broken on the Rock of Salvation and thus are destroyed (cf. Mat. 21:44).
26. The heart of the matter. The problem for the wicked is not in their words or even their “thoughts,” but the heart from where their thoughts come (Mat. 15:18). Conversely, the righteous (redeemed) have had their hearts renewed thus they actually produce pleasant words – which is more than mere thoughts.
27. Gain from bribes = destruction and death. Though receiving ill-gotten gain may be for reasons to provide for one’s household, it could serve to bring it down instead. Furthermore, dishonesty is the path to death!
28. The wise “righteous” ‘studies’ to rightly defend the faith e.g. 1 Pet. 3:15 having taken the time to be disciplined rather than the foolish wicked who are quick to speak and with no understanding. Evil readily and indiscriminately pours forth from their mouths while the wise rightly provide the hope which they have learned to articulate.
29. Related to v. 25 (and others), God is far from the wicked because they despise Him. Those who rely on Him pray to Him and thus He is near to them, hearing and answering their requests. Jam. 4:3 clearly states why some prayers are not answered. When Jesus instructed His disciples to ask in His name, it meant according to His values, priorities, attitude, and motive; which is representative of His name.
30. This may be one of the more obviously attained proverbs. It offers a balance to the facades mentioned previously where merriment is made with painted faces and repugnant celebrations. This proverb likely acknowledges the window to the soul viz. the eyes. It is difficult to truly hide what is in the heart. Here such is used in a positive manner. We can mostly detect when our loved ones are smiling on the outside but have a missing light in their face or demeanor. And as the brightness of the eyes reveals the inward joy, a good report brings a health to the inner core.
31. Vv. 31-33 close this section with sober realities regarding instruction. Vv. 31 Instruction’s Peers & vv. 32-33 Instruction’s Partition, Person, Path, & Pinnacle. Again presumption is forsaken. Those who abide with the wise know they must continue to receive (and at least hear) counsel. Furthermore, “the rebukes of life” would seem to include (if not state) the results and consequences of actions both inward and outward. The wise do not avoid all mistakes, sin, and trouble; but they learn from their mistakes and sins’ consequences as well as from those of others.
32. The Partition of instruction reveals that those who refuse it actually hate their own souls. This is in stark contrast to those who receive rebuke! Our culture has erroneously defined love as tolerance

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and approval, and truth as whatever feels right. To such, a rebuke is hateful and to heed it would be to hate oneself. Not unlike eating junk food, fast food, processed food is hating one’s body.

33. The Person, Pinnacle, and Path of instruction are found here. Person = The LORD: Source of all truth, righteousness, blessing, and love. Pinnacle = Honor. I’ve often asked myself, “Will I hear the words from Jesus, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant.’” Path = Humility specifically Phil. 2:1-11. Jesus is the Person, Pinnacle, & Path to wisdom and life eternal.

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Not unlike the rest of *Proverbs*, we find instruction here. It’s not easy to find the theme of a chapter (if there is a clear one) but I think a theme of peace or morale is predominant in the first twenty verses or more. [Nevertheless, there are certainly definitive clusters of verses (pericopes) in *Proverbs* which convey specific themes within the chapters as we possess them today.] What is unique to the instruction in the Bible’s universal wisdom literature is that this word of instruction to the earnest soul is a part of the Word that indeed secures the soul. Heeding this particular instruction is part of abiding in the entire Scripture. And the relationship the Old Testament saints had with the Scripture is not altogether unlike ours. It is relational, intimate, and trustworthy; yielding life to those who adhere to it. It is the path to peace with God. And like then, it has abundant relevance for our time and circumstances. So it is to the instruction of God’s revelation we turn and in it we shall abide.