

Proverbs on Lying

Part 1: Practical Dangers

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Good morning and welcome to the Four Lakes congregation! We are glad you are here, and if you are visiting this morning or joining us online or on the phone, we are glad to have you with us as well. We'd like to ask that you fill out a visitor card online if you can, or you can use one of the cards from the pew in front of you. Whatever works for you, we would love to hear from you, and we invite you to pass along any questions or prayer concerns.

We are here this morning to worship God, and one way we honor God is to share what he did to save us. We were lost in sin, but he sent his only Son to this earth to die for us; he was buried, and he was then raised up on the third day. This is the gospel, or the good news. We obey this good news by believing the message, by turning away from sin, by publicly stating our belief that Jesus is the Son of God, and by being buried with him in baptism. There were many we could have shared this morning, but today we get to share one from right here in Madison! Last Sunday, Ian said that he was ready to be baptized, we studied together after worship, and after that study Ian was baptized by his dad. So, congratulations to Ian and the rest of the Vermillion gang, and we welcome Ian to God's family here in Madison this morning! As always, we are sharing this by way of encouragement: If you would like to study God's plan for your life, if you have any questions or concerns, please get in touch using the contact information on the wall up here (or on your screen at home). If you are joining us on the phone, you can send a text or give me a call at 608-224-0274.

This morning, we return to our long-term and very sporadic series of lessons from the Proverbs! And to give us some sense of progress, I've created a new slide so that we can see where we've been and where we are headed. We have the 31 chapters in Proverbs across the top of the page up here, with the verses down below. And in those verses, what we've studied I've put in red. So, as you can see, we've studied straight through the first nine chapters. We have some context in those opening chapters, so (starting several years ago) we studied those chunk by chunk, paragraph by paragraph. A few months ago, though, we finally got to Chapter 10, and starting in Proverbs 10 we lose all sense of context. From Chapter 10 onward, most of the book comes in no particular order. So, for the rest of the book we are arranging our studies by topic. And up to this point (at the request of one of our senior saints) we've looked at two verses on the danger of rejoicing when our enemy stumbles, we've looked at some random proverbs concerning the value of listening to wise counsel, and we've looked at some proverbs emphasizing the value of fearing the Lord.

Yesterday morning, I got to send a word problem to my wife the middle school teacher! I sent her this slide and asked for her help in calculating the percentage of Proverbs that we've covered at this point. This was my revenge for all of those word problems from my childhood where we had trains leaving the stations at different times and speeds and all that. But, by her calculation, we have now covered 33% of this book. We have studied 302 out of the 915 proverbs in the book of Proverbs.

This morning, as we continue changing the rest of these verse references from white to red, I want us to pull out those verses that emphasize the danger of LYING. I've pulled out 20 of the proverbs on this topic, and the message is very simple: God hates lying! And since God hates lying, we should too! Fourteen of these proverbs emphasize the practical dangers of lying (in other words, why lying is bad for us and for those around us here on this earth) – we will study these this week, and six of these proverbs emphasize the spiritual or eternal downsides of lying (in other words, why lying is so offensive to God and what this means for us spiritually) – and we will plan on studying these two weeks from today, if the Lord wills. So, we have the practical and the spiritual – the practical today and the spiritual two weeks from today. And as you can imagine, there is some overlap, but that will be the structure for our study of these proverbs on lying.

By the way, as I studied this week, I ran across an interesting statement from K. David Oldfield, who preaches out in Post Falls, Idaho. He says, "It is the temptation of every preacher, including this one, to make his messages cute in some fashion. Particularly after 25 years or more in one place, there is a felt need to make the next sermon unique and attention-grabbing. But not only is that unrealistic and impractical, it is a dereliction of the minister's duty. Sometimes the message should be excruciatingly simple, and at other times the text is so obvious that it becomes almost unnecessary to expound upon it." I love that! Some of you know that we started working with the Four Lakes congregation 24 years ago, as of April 12, and I am feeling what this guy is feeling. And it reminds me of some advice I remember hearing from an old preacher many years ago as he encouraged us as young preachers not to be "original." He wasn't saying "don't be creative," but he was emphasizing that we have been called to preach an ancient message, the "old, old story," as we sometimes say. And we don't need to improve on it, but we do need to communicate it faithfully. So, that's what I'd like to do this morning in the most simple way possible. God hates lying, and we should, too! So, let's jump right into it with the first fourteen of these proverbs, where Solomon warns his sons about some of the VERY PRACTICAL DANGERS OF LYING.

1. And we start with Proverbs 10:18, where King Solomon says that, "He who conceals hatred has lying lips, and he who spreads slander is a fool."

At first, we might think that concealing hatred is the real issue here, that Solomon is telling us to let it all out: If you hate somebody, just go ahead and tell them about it! But we need to look at both lines here. The issue is that the fool thinks one thing and says another. The fool is deceptive, and that's the "*lying lips*" part of this. It is foolish to hate somebody, but to praise them to their face, and then to slander them around others. That's the issue here. The problem here is the "*lying*." That's what slander is. Gossip is spreading something that shouldn't be spread (it may be true, it may be false), but slander is pretty much gossip that definitely is not true. Slander is spreading a lie about somebody. And here, it is motivated by hatred: I don't like this person. That hatred has a way of oozing out in what we say about that person to others. This, Solomon says, is foolishness. It's impractical. So, if a friend or coworker has a stupid idea, I think Solomon would suggest that we either address it in a way that can do some good, or move on; but are definitely not to praise that idea thinking that we can come back later to slander that person when they aren't there. This is foolish.

2. The next proverb comes to us in Proverbs 12:17 ****PPT**** where King Solomon says that, “He who speaks truth tells what is right, but a false witness, deceit.”

What I hope we notice here is that speaking the truth is tied to *“righteousness”* (as some translations have it), it’s tied to telling what is *“right”* (as the NASB has it). Truth and righteousness are tied together and cannot be separated. There can be no righteousness without truth, and there can be no truth without righteousness. The other side of this is that a false witness speaks *“deceit.”* And this is where we have the first reference to a *“false witness”* in these random Proverbs. Solomon, of course, was king, and would have dealt with cases where people might have been tempted to lie under oath. His sons would deal with this as well, and Solomon is saying that there can be no righteousness based on deceit. Without trust, society itself has a way of falling apart. So he says that those who are righteous will speak the truth.

3. The next statement on lying comes in Proverbs 13:5 where Solomon says that, “A righteous man hates falsehood, but a wicked man acts disgustingly and shamefully.”

And although lying is not mentioned explicitly, it’s implied in the contrast. On one hand, *“A righteous man hates falsehood,”* but on the other hand, the *“wicked man”* (we assume a liar in this context) is someone who is described as acting *“disgustingly and shamefully.”* Those who are wicked will often have no problem lying, and it’s disgusting; it’s shameful; it’s nauseating and repulsive (as the word suggests).

And this is as good a place as any to point out that many in the world these days have no concept of absolute truth. The world tells us that truth (like beauty) is in the eye of the beholder: What is true for you may not be true for me, and what’s true for me may not be true for you. And this has permeated society at all levels, even down to what it means to be a man or a woman. We need to study this in greater detail at some point, but I had an eye doctor appointment during the eclipse a few weeks ago, and on that health history questionnaire you fill out a few days before the appointment, there was a section about my sex “assigned at birth.” So, it’s not whether my chromosomes are x-x as opposed to x-y, but it’s what somebody “assigned” to me at the time I was born more than 50 years ago. There’s no concept of absolute truth in this world anymore. I was so tempted to leave it blank and to ask the doctor to just take a wild guess as to my chromosomes: I promise not to be offended if you get it wrong, but I will be looking for a new doctor if you cannot figure this out. But that’s the world we’re living in. Many will insist that there is no such thing as “absolute truth.” Perhaps we should ask whether they are absolutely sure about that.

But back to the proverb: A righteous man hates what is false, but the wicked man has no concept of what is true or false, and it is both disgusting and shameful.

4. Our progress through Proverbs now brings us to Proverbs 14:5, where King Solomon says that, “A trustworthy witness will not lie, but a false witness utters lies.”

So, we’re back to the idea of a *“false witness,”* someone who perhaps lies while testifying under oath. On one hand, a trustworthy witness will not lie, but a false witness will lie. It’s obvious, but Solomon is reminding his sons that not everybody will tell the truth. This is practical. Remember this. Don’t trust everybody, even in a court of law. And the same is true today, nearly 3000 years later. We are accustomed to “spin” (as it’s called) or “qualified statements.” We live in a time where truth itself seems a bit mushy.

5. We continue with Proverbs 14:25, ****PPT**** where King Solomon really gives the practical application of this last one as he now says that, “A truthful witness saves lives, but he who utters lies is treacherous.”

The danger of lying as a witness is that lives may be at stake. The word *“witness,”* by the way, goes back to the idea of repeating something. So, I see something, and then I repeat it by telling somebody what I saw. And you can do this truthfully or you can do this by lying in a way that is *“treacherous.”* I think back to pulling up behind somebody at a stop sign on Prairie Road years ago (on the southwest side of Madison). I was heading south on Prairie at the intersection of Raymond Road, and I stopped behind somebody who then backed up into me. We got out of our cars, and he and his friend started yelling about how they didn’t damage my car. He did a u-turn and sped off right as a Madison police officer drove by. She eventually gave up the chase through the residential area, concluding that the car was stolen. But here was a man who gave “false witness” to what he had done. Such a man is *“treacherous,”* Solomon says. And I don’t take that route anymore. It’s a shame, because it’s the shortest route from my house to just about anywhere on the west side of Madison, but I don’t need that drama in my life.

6. This brings us to Proverbs 17:4, where King Solomon says that, “An evildoer listens to wicked lips; a liar pays attention to a destructive tongue.”

I hope we notice in this one that the danger of lying is tied to listening. So, there’s danger not only on the sending side of this, but also on the receiving end. And a liar may listen with the intent of spreading something. So, if we think: Well, the real danger here comes in the telling of a lie and that it’s okay to listen, not so! Solomon warns his sons that an evildoer *“listens to wicked lips.”* And the second half of this proverb reminds us that a liar will pay attention to a *“destructive tongue.”* One issue here is that when we listen to destructive words without objecting, we may be giving the impression that we approve of the lie that’s being told. So, if somebody comes up to me and says, “You’ll never believe what Aaron did,” and if I listen without objecting, it may be implied that I agree with what’s being said.

So, what should we do if somebody comes to us with *“wicked lips,”* if someone whips out a *“destructive tongue”* in our presence? Solomon, based on this proverb, would tell us to refuse to listen; do not pay attention! Turn away from that. Now, if the person has a legitimate complaint, maybe we could offer to make the connection. I may need to give you Aaron’s phone number, or, “He’s right back there; let’s go check in on that.” Otherwise, if I listen to a destructive tongue, I contribute to that destruction. We are the ones who must change the subject. We are the ones who must walk away. We are the ones who must tell the person speaking evil about somebody that they really need to mind their own business.

I should probably add here that sharing something as a “prayer request” may, in fact, cross the line into destructive gossip, if we are not careful. I think of the concept down south that you can share anything about anybody as long as you qualify it with a “bless her heart.” So also, just saying that something is a prayer request doesn’t magically keep it from being gossip. I read something earlier this week that said, “Generally speaking, if the request for prayer takes longer than the prayer itself, something is probably off.” I hadn’t really thought about it that way before.

7. We continue with Proverbs 17:7, where King Solomon says that, “Excellent speech is not fitting for a fool, much less are lying lips to a prince.”

And here, King Solomon is specifically addressing his sons as future kings, and really all others who may serve in positions of authority. On one hand, if we hear a fool delivering a slick speech, we instinctively know

something is off. But just as that is inappropriate, ***“much less are lying lips to a prince.”*** Those who rule have been given a sacred duty. You may remember how (in John 19) Pilate tried to talk about his authority as governor in an attempt to get Jesus to speak, and Jesus replied by saying to Pilate, ***“You would have no authority over Me, unless it had been given you from above.”*** So also, Paul said (in Romans 13:1), ***“Every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God.”*** Those in positions of authority, then, serve with God’s permission (whether they realize it or not). King Solomon, then, makes the point that lying lips are in no way appropriate for a prince. He’s telling his sons, then: Be careful as a future ruler to always tell the truth. We look around us, though, and some of the most famous lies come from politicians. Maybe you’ve heard of the Liars’ Club over in Burlington, Wisconsin, where they’ve been awarding a winning lie every year since 1929, when it started as a joke among some reporters over there. But one of the only rules is that they don’t accept any entries from professional liars; in other words, they don’t accept any entries from politicians. Solomon, though, makes the point that lying lips are completely inappropriate for a ruler.

8. Solomon continues in Proverbs 19:1 by making the comparison, “Better is a poor man who walks in his integrity than he who is perverse in speech and is a fool.”

So, on one hand we have a poor man who tells the truth, and on the other hand we have a liar who is a fool. The comparison isn’t really apples to apples, is it? I would expect the poor man who tells the truth to be contrasted with a rich man who lies. But that’s not what we have here. It may be implied, but the point is: Telling the truth has to come first. Honesty is more important than how rich or poor we may be. Earlier, I made a reference to math in middle school. I vividly remember having some rough math homework when I was a kid, and I remember my dad coming in and sitting next to me at the kitchen table and reminding me, “Ultimately, what matters in life is that you grow up to be a faithful Christian.” And he emphasized that it ultimately didn’t matter what I ended up doing for a living or whether I figured out that math problem, because there are much more important things at stake in this life. And I’ve thought about that quite a bit through the years, which is probably why I solved all of my math problems by marrying a math teacher! But we’ve tried to remind our kids of the same thing: It is better to be poor and to walk in integrity than any other alternative. To be perverse in speech is foolish, regardless of how much money you may make. Being honest is more important than being wealthy.

9. The next proverb is similar, as King Solomon says in Proverbs 19:22, “What is desirable in a man is his kindness, and it is better to be a poor man than a liar.”

So, once again, if you must choose between being a poor man and being a liar, be a poor man, ***“It is better to be a poor man than a liar.”*** There’s no special virtue in being poor, but if you’re poor, at least be honest.

10. The next one comes a few verses later in Proverbs 19:28, where Solomon says that, “A rascally witness makes a mockery of justice, and the mouth of the wicked spreads iniquity.”

I had forgotten that the word ***“rascally”*** is in the Bible! But, we are back to a courtroom setting, where we have a witness who refuses to tell the truth or maybe he’s hard to nail down on something, the “I can see it both ways” kind of person. We have some issues in our criminal justice system today, and Solomon addresses one of those issues right here: If a witness can’t be honest, he makes a mockery of the whole system.

11. The next proverb on lying comes in Proverbs 25:14, where Solomon makes another comparison and says, “Like clouds and wind without rain is a man who boasts of his gifts falsely.”

Back then, the entire economy depended on getting rain at just the right time, but the picture here is of clouds rolling in without delivering the rain. In a sense, a cloud is the promise of rain, but sometimes clouds fail to deliver. So also the man who promises a gift but never gives it. Like a parent who promises to take a child to the zoo on Saturday but fails to do it, or like a supervisor who promises a bonus but fails to deliver, or like Pharaoh’s butler who was restored to his position and forgot to mention Joseph as he had promised to do – all clouds, but no rain. We may think of what Jesus said in Matthew 5:37, **“But let your statement be, ‘Yes, yes’ or ‘No, no’; anything beyond these is of evil.”** In other words, instead of swearing up and down that we will do something, we just need to say we will do it and then do it. Instead of saying **“Be warmed and be filled,”** we need to just do the warming and filling. Instead of over promising and under delivering, we need to under promise and over deliver; otherwise, we are lying.

12. The next proverb comes just a few verses later, in Proverbs 25:18, as King Solomon says, “Like a club and a sword and a sharp arrow is a man who bears false witness against his neighbor.”

We are back to lying in a court of law, and here Solomon compares a false witness to someone who would kill his neighbor using a club, a sword, or a sharp arrow. The **“club”** is like a maul or a sledgehammer. We have our wood splitting maul up here. This thing is rather heavy. But it brings back some good memories. I’ve used this for years, and years ago I got to give our daughter a lesson in wood busting as we listened to the gubernatorial debate between Scott Walker and Mary Burke out in our driveway on October 10, 2014. We had some good discussions about politicians that night, and we learned that hard work has a way of leading to a warm home, and so on. But imagine murdering your neighbor with a maul. That sounds awful. But that’s the picture here, **“Like a club and a sword and a sharp arrow is a man who bears false witness against his neighbor.”** We may never even think about hacking our neighbor to pieces or bashing his head in with a maul, but when we lie against a neighbor, we bludgeon, and cut, and puncture, and slice. We cause actual damage to people. We can destroy a person’s livelihood or reputation with just a few words.

13. The next proverb comes in Proverbs 26:28, as King Solomon says that, “A lying tongue hates those it crushes, and a flattering mouth works ruin.”

We’ve already discussed how lying can crush and destroy, so let’s focus in on the **“flattering mouth works ruin”** part of this. As I understand it, flattery is basically praise, but the intent is to deceive you into doing something the flatterer wants you to do. It is a form of lying, but it’s much harder to detect. It’s also harder to resist. It’s a lie disguised as a compliment. If you tell me that today’s sermon was the “best ever,” I will like you! So, it’s a way to break down someone’s defenses. Salespeople may flatter. Someone wanting to selfishly take the relationship to the next level may flatter. Students looking for a better grade may flatter their teachers. Children may selfishly flatter their parents. Politicians may flatter potential voters. Religious leaders may flatter potential followers. In Romans 16:17-18, Paul gives the warning, **“Now I urge you, brethren, keep your eye on those who cause dissensions and hindrances contrary to the teaching which you learned, and turn away from them. For such men are slaves, not of our Lord Christ but of their own appetites; and by their smooth and flattering speech they deceive the hearts of the unsuspecting.”** And here in Proverbs, Solomon also warns that we must be aware of the danger of flattering words.

14. The last of the practical warnings comes to us in Proverbs 29:12, where King Solomon gives a warning to his sons and says that, “If a ruler pays attention to falsehood, all his ministers become wicked.”

If a ruler has a predisposition to listen to advisors who are lying, that corruption will spread. Several times, we have prayed publicly, asking God to surround our president with wise counsel, and we’ve prayed for him to have the wisdom to listen to that counsel. We’ve done this for years, and we need to continue. One commentary suggested that “as sure as buzzards gather around a dead carcass, so will liars gather near a corrupt official.” That is exactly what King Solomon is warning about here. And his son Rehoboam failed to listen, didn’t he? He surrounded himself not with men who told the truth, but he surrounded himself with people who were like him, and the nation divided.

Conclusion:

This morning, then, we’ve started looking at LYING in the book of Proverbs, and today we’ve noted some of the practical aspects of lying, some of the practical dangers. Two weeks from now, I hope we can get back to the rest of this study by noting some of the spiritual and more eternal dangers of lying.

Next weekend, I hope to be speaking at the Minnesota Bible Lectures just south of Minneapolis (I’ve been asked to preach on 1 Peter 5 on Saturday), and then we hope to worship in Rice Lake, Wisconsin, on the way home. I’ve preached at least two special series of sermons up in Rice Lake through the years, and we hope to reconnect with Life and Stephanie Verlooy while we are up there. You might remember that Life spoke here in Madison a year or two ago. So, thank you in advance to Josh Yancy who will be preaching here in Madison next week.

As we close this part of our service, let’s go to God in prayer:

Our Father in Heaven,

We praise you today for being a God of truth, and as your people we want to be people of truth – people who believe the truth, people who recognize the truth, people who love the truth, people who speak the truth (even when it is difficult, especially when it is difficult). We pray this morning that you would protect us from deceit; protect us from false flattery; guard our hearts from the father of lies. Empower us to be honest and sincere in everything we do. Forgive us for those times when we have been less than honest in the past, for times we have exaggerated, for times when we have slandered, or gossiped, or lied. We want to be more like you and your Son.

We come to you in Jesus’ name. AMEN.

To comment on this lesson: fourlakeschurch@gmail.com