

PROVERBS – Lesson 15

HONESTY

By Beverly McKey

I. INTRODUCTION

- A. Truth is the core virtue of God and it is the foundation of Christianity.
1. Jesus said in **John 8:31** – *“If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed.”* ³² *And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.”*
 2. Indeed, Christianity is based on the knowledge that the Bible is truth and it is inspired by God.
 3. Nothing is more destructive to Christianity than FALSE teaching.
- B. For our study on “Honesty”, we will consider five categories:
1. Dishonesty for the Sake of Gain
 2. Dishonesty That Perverts Justice
 3. Dishonesty’s Bitter Fruit
 4. Dishonesty’s Taproot Motive
 5. An Exhortation to Honesty.

II. DISHONESTY FOR THE SAKE OF GAIN

- A. One given to lying will do so for almost any reason.
1. This fact has created the modern proverb: *“Some will lie when the truth is easier.”*
 2. However, many who would not lie for any other reason will lie to make financial gain.
 3. Often the rationale is given, *“It’s not personal. It’s just business.”*
- B. God, in His wisdom, addressed the very matter of dishonesty in business:
1. **Proverbs 11:1** – *“Dishonest scales are an abomination to the LORD, but a just weight is His delight.”*
 - a. In the past, and often today, goods for sale were often weighed in front of the buyer to guarantee that a just measure was being received.
 - b. Weighing out an agreed-upon amount of gold, silver, or some other precious material was often how payment was made in the past.
 - c. Those who engaged in trade of any kind carried scales and a set of weights.
 2. **Micah 6:11** – *“Shall I count pure those with the wicked scales, and with the bag of deceitful weights?”*
 - a. Dishonest men would carry two kinds of weights:
 - b. The lighter weights were for selling purposes, which gave the purchaser less volume for his money.

- c. The heavier weights were for buying. When he wanted to purchase goods that were to be weighed, he used heavier weights to ensure that he would get more than he was paying for.
 - d. So, the very tools (scales and weights) that were created to ensure fair trade was changed into a tool for dishonesty.
 - e. Isn't it fascinating how almost any great invention created for the benefit of mankind can also be modified to bring about evil.
 - f. The mind of mankind is worldly in nature and gravitates toward evil unless that mind is centered upon God and godly values.
- C. Honesty in our business life was so important to God that these instructions were part of the Law of Moses:
1. **Leviticus 19:35-36** – *"You shall do no injustice in judgment, in measurement of length, weight, or volume. ³⁶ You shall have honest scales, honest weights, an honest ephah, and an honest hin: I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt."*
 - a. An ephah is a dry measure equal to a bushel.
 - b. A hin is a liquid measure equal to 5.5 quarts.
 2. **Deuteronomy 25:13-16** – *"¹³ You shall not have in your bag differing weights, a heavy and a light. ¹⁴ You shall not have in your house differing measures, a large and a small. ¹⁵ You shall have a perfect and just weight, a perfect and just measure, that your days may be lengthened in the land which the LORD your God is giving you. ¹⁶ For all who do such things, all who behave unrighteously, are an abomination to the LORD your God."*
 3. Sadly, these dishonest merchants even cheated the poor, those who could little afford to pay higher prices or get less than they paid for.
 4. The Jews in the time of Amos, the prophet, were so wicked that they spent their holy celebrations and days of worship saying, *"When will this be over so we can go back to selling."*
 - a. **Amos 8:5-6** – *"Hear this, you who swallow up the needy, and make the poor of the land fail,⁵ saying: 'When will the New Moon be past, that we may sell grain? And the Sabbath, that we may trade wheat? Making the ephah small and the shekel large, falsifying the scales by deceit,⁶ that we may buy the poor for silver, and the needy for a pair of sandals — even sell the bad wheat?' "*
 - b. They were so greedy for dishonest gain that they considered the time set aside for worship an interruption in their wheeling and dealing.
 - c. This is why Solomon wrote: **Proverbs 11:1** – *"Dishonest scales are an abomination to the LORD, but a just weight is His delight."*
 - d. The word "abomination" means *"disgrace, obscenity, outrage, evil."*
 - 1) It is not a trivial matter to cheat the customer in business, falsely report your income, misrepresent the quality of your product or charge outrageous prices to those who can least afford it.

- 2) It is also an abomination for employees to rob their employer by taking company property for personal use or to cheat the employer by lazy, unproductive work habits.
- D. Dishonesty may seem to be the path to quick and easy wealth, but it must not be done by those who serve God. Trading your soul for monetary gain is not a “good deal” at all.
1. **Proverbs 16:8** – *“Better is a little with righteousness than vast revenues without justice.”*
 - a. To trade righteousness for money is the worst bargain anyone can strike.
 - b. The dishonest man may collect material wealth, but righteousness is the only treasure that lasts.
 2. **Proverbs 10:2** – *“Treasures of wickedness profit nothing, but righteousness delivers from death.”*
 3. Solomon predicts that the schemes of the dishonest often backfire and get the opposite result.
 - a. **Proverbs 22:16** – *“He who oppresses the poor to increase his riches, and he who gives to the rich, will surely come to poverty.”*
 - b. **Proverbs 21:6** – *“Getting treasures by a lying tongue is the fleeting fantasy of those who seek death.”*
 4. **Jeremiah 17:11** – *“As a partridge that broods but does not hatch, so is he who gets riches, but not by right; it will leave him in the midst of his days, and at his end he will be a fool.”*
 - a. Jeremiah gives an example of a bird that sits on a nest protecting eggs that will never hatch, which is a waste of time.
 - b. So, life is for the person who spends his life working for dishonest gain. In the end it is all in vain because his soul faces eternal death.
 - c. Eventually he finds himself without the things he desires in this life, nor the things he needs for eternity.
 5. Many justify their dishonest business practices by saying that it is just not possible for them to stay in business without “cutting a corner here and there.”
 - a. That is not true! If one is engaged in a lawful and upright business, dishonesty is not necessary.
 - b. The real problem is that such a business person finds himself never satisfied with his profits and always wants more and more.
 - c. It is this greed for profit that causes some to reduce the quality and the quantity of the products he sells in order to increase profits.
 - d. If someone’s business offers a needed service and provides a high quality the public will line up to get that service.
 - e. Parents must begin with their young children to teach them the value of working at an honorable job.
 - 1) One that will never require them to compromise their religious values in order to succeed.

- 2) We must constantly remind them what Jesus said in **Matt. 6:33**:
"...seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you."

III. DISHONESTY THAT PERVERTS JUSTICE

- A. A second area addressed by many of the Proverbs is the practice of dishonesty by witnesses and judges who seek to pervert judgment.
1. Man has instituted many different systems of justice, each with its own strengths and weaknesses.
 2. However, no system can produce judgment when its participants substitute dishonesty for the truth.
 3. Justice is part of the nature of God. Because of that, Solomon has much to say about the obligation to be just.
 4. Justice depends upon truth, therefore, a false witness is corrupts justice.
 - a. Solomon defines a true witness as one who will not lie:
 - 1) **Proverbs 14:5** – *"A faithful witness does not lie, but a false witness will utter lies."*
 - 2) Notice that a false witness is not defined as one who has lied or is lying but as one who will lie.
 - 3) If there are circumstances in which a man will lie, he, by God's definition, is a false witness.
 - 4) Honesty is not situational and it is not relative.
 - 5) **Proverbs 12:17** – *"He who speaks truth declares righteousness, but a false witness, deceit."*
 - a) A person who cannot be relied on always to tell the truth cannot be relied on ever to tell the truth.
 - b) The reason for this is that righteousness and deceit are mutually exclusive.
 - c) In a righteous person, the truth and a lie cannot reside in the same tongue.
 - 6) James taught this same principle in **James 3:11-12** :
⁸ *But no man can tame the tongue. It is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison.* ⁹ *With it we bless our God and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the similitude of God.*
¹⁰ *Out of the same mouth proceed blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be so.* ¹¹ *Does a spring send forth fresh water and bitter from the same opening?* ¹² *Can a fig tree, my brethren, bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs? Thus no spring yields both salt water and fresh."*
 - b. No matter what his claim, the false witness is further described in **Proverbs 19:28** – *"A disreputable witness scorns justice, and the mouth of the wicked devours iniquity."*
 - 1) He perverts judgment with his lying tongue because he has no respect for justice.

- 2) He has no respect for good because his own actions are evil and his motives are corrupt.
 - c. The damage that can be done by a false witness is impossible to overstate: **Proverbs 25:18** – *“A man who bears false witness against his neighbor is like a club, a sword, and a sharp arrow.”*
 - 1) These the three weapons (club, sword and arrow) are used by the Solomon to emphasize the damage done by a false witness.
 - 2) It is no wonder that the Psalmist cries out in distress in **Psalm 120:2** – *“Deliver my soul, O LORD, from lying lips and from a deceitful tongue.”*
- B. What is the fate of one who through dishonesty brings about such destruction?
1. Let’s see what Solomon said about this:
 - a. **Proverbs 19:5** – *“A false witness will not go unpunished, and he who speaks lies will not escape.”*
 - b. **Proverbs 19:9** – *“A false witness will not go unpunished, and he who speaks lies shall perish.”*
 - c. **Proverbs 21:28** – *“A false witness shall perish, but the man who hears him will speak endlessly.”*
 - 1) This proverb tells us that even though the false witness may perish, the words he spoke will live on and will be repeated by those who hears his lies.
 - 2) The victim of the false witness may continue to suffer damage to his reputation long after the false witness is dead.
 2. The fate of the false witness is so great that we must heed the warning of Solomon: **Proverbs 24:28** – *“Do not be a witness against your neighbor without cause, for would you deceive with your lips?”*
 3. Why is the judgment against the false witness so strong?
 - a. Because a man’s words are the true reflection of the thoughts of his heart. **Proverbs 23:7a** – *“For as he thinks in his heart, so is he.”*
 - b. Because is it listed among the seven things that God hates: **Proverbs 6:19** – *“A false witness who speaks lies, and one who sows discord among brethren.”*
 4. Jesus lectured the Pharisees on evil speech:
 - a. **Matthew 12:34** – *“³³ Either a tree is good and its fruit is good, or else the tree is bad and its fruit is bad; for a tree is known by its fruit. ³⁴ Brood of vipers! How can you, being evil, speak good things? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. ³⁵ A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good things, and an evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth evil things.”*
 - b. **Matthew 15:18** – *“But those things which proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and they defile a man. ¹⁹ For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies.”*

- c. God gave Jeremiah this message for the people of Judah:
 - 1) **Jeremiah 9:3 & 5** – ³ *“And like their bow they have bent their tongues for lies. They are not valiant for the truth on the earth. For they proceed from evil to evil, and they do not know Me,” says the LORD.”*
- 5. Speaking lies is not the only way we can be a false witness.
 - a. **Proverbs 29:24** – *“Whoever is a partner with a thief hates his own life; he swears to tell the truth, but reveals nothing.”*
 - b. The partner of a thief perverts judgment by remaining silent when he is required to give testimony regarding their crime.
 - c. According to the Law of Moses, if a witness does not tell what he has seen or knows about a crime, he is judged equally as guilty as the one accused.
 - Leviticus 5:1** – *“If a person sins in hearing the utterance of an oath, and is a witness, whether he has seen or known of the matter—if he does not tell it, he bears guilt.”*
 - d. Keeping silent, when you have important information that would contribute to a trial being held is as serious an offense as actually giving false witness.
- C. What does God’s word have to say about the one who dispenses judgment in legal matters.
 - 1. **Proverbs 23-24** – *“It is not good to show partiality in judgment. ²⁴ He who says to the wicked, ‘You are righteous,’ Him the people will curse; nations will abhor him.”*
 - a. It is a fundamental error in the administration of justice to show partiality for or prejudice against those who are being tried.
 - b. To show either partiality or prejudice perverts justice and is an abuse of power by the judge.
 - c. The Law of Moses also forbid the perversion of justice:
 - 1) **Exodus 23:2** – *“You shall not follow a crowd to do evil; nor shall you testify in a dispute so as to turn aside after many to pervert justice.”*
 - 2) **Deuteronomy 16:19** – *“You shall not pervert justice; you shall not show partiality, nor take a bribe, for a bribe blinds the eyes of the wise and twists the words of the righteous.”*
 - 3) **Deuteronomy 24:17** – *“You shall not pervert justice due the stranger or the fatherless, nor take a widow’s garment as a pledge.”*
 - 2. By way of contrast, consider the judge who rules righteously.
 - a. **Proverbs 24:25** – *“But those who rebuke the wicked will have delight, and a good blessing will come upon them.”*
 - b. He will be respected and loved by those who recognize in him as an equitable spirit of right judgment.

- c. Even the most debased man would prefer to have his case heard before a righteous judge **if** he were the one who had been wronged.
 - d. On the other hand, every criminal knows that a corrupt judge can be bought just as easily by the opposing side so it is still to his advantage to have a righteous judge.
3. God never perverts justice. Even Job's friend, Elihu, pronounced Job guilty of sin based on the fact that "*He (God) repays man according to his work, and makes man to find a reward according to his way. Surely God will never do wickedly, nor will the Almighty pervert justice.*"
Job 34:11-12
 4. It is true that God will not pervert justice Himself, and He will not tolerate those who do.

IV. DISHONESTY'S BITTER FRUIT

- A. Let's consider the fruit of dishonesty as it relates to how we are viewed by our fellowman.
 1. Only a fool begins to build before counting the cost of completing the project. **Luke 14:28-30** – "²⁸ For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not sit down first and count the cost, whether he has enough to finish it—²⁹ lest, after he has laid the foundation, and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him,³⁰ saying, 'This man began to build and was not able to finish?'"
 2. Only a king destined for failure goes into battle without first counting his men and logically and accurately considering his odds for victory.
 3. **Luke 14:31-32** – "³¹ Or what king, going to make war against another king, does not sit down first and consider whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand?³² Or else, while the other is still a great way off, he sends a delegation and asks conditions of peace."
 4. Since the book of Proverbs was written to instruct us in "*wisdom, justice, and judgment, and equity*" (**Proverbs 1:3**), we must understand the fruit of dishonesty in order to help us avoid the consequences that dishonesty brings.
- B. First, God's people must be known for "keeping our word".
 1. **Proverbs 25:14** – "*Whoever falsely boasts of giving is like clouds and wind without rain.*"
 2. All of us have felt the great disappointment of being promised something that never materialized.
 3. Whether it is the repayment of money owed, or a promotion at work, unfulfilled promises leave a wake of disappointment.
 4. So it is with the dishonest man who promises much and delivers little.
 - a. He is compared to a rising cloud in the sky after a long summer drought.

- b. The breeze has the smell of rain, but the wind carries them away and the rain never appears.
 - c. This untrustworthy person destroys his own reputation and those with whom he associates.
 - d. Once a person proves himself untrustworthy, every word from his mouth is instantly suspect.
 - 1) Even his good deeds are often questioned as though they came from evil motives because he cannot be trusted to deliver what he says.
 - 2) Because nothing he says can be taken at face value, he often finds others avoiding him and actively seeking to exclude him from their lives.
5. The Law of Moses contained serious regulations regarding making an oath of any kind.
- a. **Leviticus 5:4** – *“Or if a person swears, speaking thoughtlessly with his lips to do evil or to do good, whatever it is that a man may pronounce by an oath, and he is unaware of it—when he realizes it, then he shall be guilty in any of these matters.”*
 - a. **Numbers 30:1-2** – *“Then Moses spoke to the heads of the tribes concerning the children of Israel, saying, “This is the thing which the LORD has commanded: ² If a man makes a vow to the LORD, or swears an oath to bind himself by some agreement, he shall not break his word; he shall do according to all that proceeds out of his mouth.”*
 - b. Jesus had a solution for eliminating the opportunity to break a promise.
 - c. **Matthew 5:33-37** – *“³³ Again you have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform your oaths to the Lord.’³⁴ But I say to you, do not swear at all: neither by heaven, for it is God’s throne; ³⁵ nor by the earth, for it is His footstool; nor by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. ³⁶ Nor shall you swear by your head, because you cannot make one hair white or black. ³⁷ But let your ‘Yes’ be ‘Yes,’ and your ‘No,’ ‘No.’ For whatever is more than these is from the evil one.”*
- C. Secondly, and more importantly, consider the fruit of dishonesty as it relates to how God views us.
- 1. **Proverbs 12:22** – *“Lying lips are an abomination to the LORD, but those who deal truthfully are His delight.”*
 - a. How terrifying it would be to be an abomination to the Lord!
 - b. Being an abomination to the Lord places the liar in a class some of the most heinous crimes and wickedness.

Revelation 21:7-8 – *“⁷ He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be My son. ⁸ **But** the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers,*

*idolaters, and **all liars** shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death."*

- c. Most people in the world do not equate telling a lie with sins like murder and sexual immorality.
 - d. Some even categorize lies into "white lies", which are really not so bad and the "big fat lies" that are terrible.
2. However, if we will but speak the truth and deal honestly with all people, we will be the "*delight*" of the Lord."
- a. The word "delight" comes from a Hebrew root word that refers to something that has been found pleasing enough to satisfy a debt.
 - b. God gave Jeremiah this message: **Jeremiah 9:23-24** – "²³ *Thus says the LORD: "Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, let not the mighty man glory in his might, nor let the rich man glory in his riches; ²⁴ but let him who glories glory in this, that he understands and knows Me, that I am the LORD, exercising loving kindness, judgment, and righteousness in the earth. For in these I delight," says the LORD.*"
 - c. Solomon knew how important truth is to God, and so he passed that on to his son:
 - 1) **Proverbs 22:19-21** – "*So that your trust may be in the LORD; I have instructed you today, even you. ²⁰ Have I not written to you excellent things of counsels and knowledge, ²¹ that I may make you know the certainty of the words of truth, that you may answer words of truth to those who send to you?"*
 - 2) **Proverbs 12:19** – "*The truthful lip shall be established forever, but a lying tongue is but for a moment.*"

V. DISHONESTY'S ROOT MOTIVE

- A. What is the motive behind the practice of lying?
 1. Some are motivated by greed, and others by fear.
 2. However, the Proverbs reveal to us what the underlying motive behind all lying, the "root" of the dishonesty:
 - a. **Proverbs 26:24** – "*He who hates, disguises it with his lips, and lays up deceit within himself,"*
 - b. It is a hatred for God, His Word, His children, himself, and all things that are right that leads one to dishonesty.
 - c. Solomon warns us to be cautious when dealing with such a dishonest person.
 - d. **Proverbs 26:25-26** – "²⁵ *When he speaks kindly, do not believe him, for there are seven abominations in his heart; ²⁶ though his hatred is covered by deceit, his wickedness will be revealed before the assembly.*"
 - e. Why can he not be believed?

- 1) Even his flattering words are insincere and have an ulterior motive.
Proverbs 29:5 – *“A man who flatters his neighbor spreads a net for his feet.”*
- 2) He has no conscience that forbids him to harm others with his lies.
Proverbs 26:28 – *“A lying tongue hates those who are crushed by it, and a flattering mouth works ruin.”*
3. On the other hand, love will not resort to lying even if it seems easier at the moment.
 - a. Love will not resort to lying even if the truth will be painful to the one who hears it.
 - b. **Proverbs 27:5-6** – *“Open rebuke is better than love carefully concealed. ⁶ Faithful are the wounds of a friend, but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful.”*
 - c. Unfortunately, the words of truth may sometimes be painful and cause wounds.
 - d. The same might be said of surgery.
 - 1) Surgery is almost always painful, causes wounds, and sometimes leaves deep scars.
 - 2) However, it is also often necessary to ensure health and life.
 - 3) An enemy will kiss and flatter us with lying words and false accolades because he hates us.
 - 4) A true friend will always speak the words of truth even when they are painful to hear.

VI. EXHORTATION TO HONESTY

- A. The verses in Proverbs chapter thirty are written by a man named Agur who also offer some very wise counsel.
 1. **Proverbs 30:7-9** – *“Every word of God is pure; He is a shield to those who put their trust in Him. ⁶ Do not add to His words, lest He rebuke you, and you be found a liar. ⁷ Two things I request of You (Deprive me not before I die): ⁸ Remove falsehood and lies far from me; give me neither poverty nor riches — feed me with the food allotted to me; ⁹ lest I be full and deny You, and say, “Who is the LORD?” Or lest I be poor and steal, and profane the name of my God.””*
 2. Christians must choose the way of honesty at all times and in all things.
- B. We must value truth above all things if we are to be pleasing to God. We must be truthful in our speech and diligently seek the truth of God’s word as a guide for our lives.
 1. We must value the truth as Jesus did:
 - a. **John 8:31-32** – *“³¹ Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, “If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. ³² And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.””*
 - b. Those who do not listen to the word of Jesus are children of the Devil:

John 8:43-45 – ⁴³ *Why do you not understand My speech? Because you are not able to listen to My word.* ⁴⁴ *You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources (his own native language), for he is a liar and the father of it.* ⁴⁵ *But because I tell the truth, you do not believe Me."*

2. Always remember the reward awaiting those who serve God and others in truth.
 - a. Consider the description of heaven given by the apostle John. Please read the entire chapter of **Revelation 21** for all of the details. But give close attention to the last verse:
 - b. **Revelation 21:27** – ²⁷ *But there shall by no means enter it anything that defiles, or causes an abomination or a lie, but only those who are written in the Lamb's Book of Life."*
 - c. **Psalm 25:5** – *Lead me in Your truth and teach me, For You are the God of my salvation; On You I wait all the day."*
 - d. **Psalm 25:10** – *All the paths of the Lord are mercy and truth, To such as keep His covenant and His testimonies."*
3. Never forget the punishment awaiting those who speak lies.
 - a. **Romans 1:18** – *For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness."*
 - b. Hiding part of the truth is as serious as twisting the truth into a lie.
 - c. We must be able to confirm what we teach to others in the New Testament.