

Proverbs

There has been a loss of practical spirituality. For example, the proverbs we've covered so far make it clear that you cannot teach a fool (*or anyone who prefers their own way to doing what is loving and in the interests of the group*) to be wise, yet we believe we can, with relentless efforts and God's help.

Proverbs 21

1. The king's heart is like channels of water in the hand of the LORD; He turns it wherever He wishes.
 - a. **Principle:** God has the power and means to determine and control every decision and word of a ruler, and can do so according to His own will.
 - b. However, according to Old Testament stories, God is selective as to when, where, and for what purpose He does this. For example:
 - i. During the ten plagues brought upon the Egyptians, Pharaoh hardened his own heart the first five times. God did not step in until plague six, and then again in plagues 8-10. It is probable God did this to ensure that His intended punishment of the Egyptians for their cruelty to the Israelites would be fulfilled.
 - ii. In **Ezra 1:1-4**, we read that God "stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia" to send any Israelite who wanted to go back to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple.
 - iii. **Jeremiah 51:11**, Sharpen the arrows, fill the quivers! The LORD has aroused the spirit of the kings of the Medes, because His purpose is against Babylon to destroy it; for it is the vengeance of the LORD, vengeance for His temple.
 - iv. In **Revelation 17:17** we read that God will put it in the hearts of the world's rulers to join and serve the Beast.
 - c. For the most part, rulers are good or bad on their own, yet there are times when God uses them and their positions of power to accomplish His purposes in our world – sometimes to their benefit and sometimes to their harm, but never unjustly or without due cause.
2. Every man's way is right in his own eyes, But the LORD weighs the hearts.
 - a. **Proverbs 16:2**, All the ways of a man are clean in his own sight, But the LORD weighs the motives.
 - b. We are prone to judge ourselves as doing what is right, or best, or safe, or expedient – without examining our motive or reason for doing what we are doing. God not only judges our actions, He also examines the motives

driving our actions – because our motives make it clear that a seemingly selfish action is actually a selfish action.

- i. For example, the person whose primary need is approval and acceptance may do many loving, serving, helping things for the good of the people around them. On the outside this looks like Christian love. Yet if we examine their heart, we see that their primary motive is self-serving – to satisfy their felt-need for acceptance and approval.
 - ii. The person whose primary need is to be in control may quickly volunteer for leadership positions, be adept at organization, and have good people skills, yet their primary motive is self-serving – to give them a greater sense of security and well-being by being in control.
 - c. If you are not self-aware yet want to see and understand your true motives, (1) ask God to search you and show you (**Psalm 26:2; 139:23-24**), and (2) ask a mature Christian or godly counselor for help in identifying your true motives.
3. To do righteousness and justice Is desired by the LORD more than sacrifice.
 - a. **Principle:** To do righteousness and justice is to seek the good of all as opposed to seeking the good of self at the expense of others. As **Romans 13:10** says, “Love **does no wrong** to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.” If there is a need to make a sacrifice to God, it is because we have acted selfishly and sinful, to the harm of others. Therefore, though God provides this means of making amends and remaining in good standing with Him, His desire is that we love (**do no wrong to**) those around us for the good of all.
 - b. In response to King Saul disobeying God’s directions, Samuel said, “Has the LORD as much delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed than the fat of rams. [23] For rebellion is as the sin of divination, and insubordination is as iniquity and idolatry” (**1 Samuel 15:22-23a**).
 - c. **Mark 12:33**, To love [God] with all the heart and with all the understanding and with all the strength, and to love one's neighbor as himself, is much more (*much better*) than all burnt offerings and sacrifices.
 4. Haughty eyes and a proud heart, The lamp of the wicked, is sin.
 - a. **Haughty eyes** represent the disdainful, contemptuous, arrogant way you look at the world and people around you.
 - b. A **proud heart** represents the excessive, conceited, presumptuous way you see yourself.

- c. When this combination becomes the lens and light you use to decide how you will think, speak, and behave in the daily affairs of life, the only possible outcome is sin.
5. The plans of the diligent lead surely to advantage, But everyone who is hasty comes surely to poverty.
 - a. To be **diligent** in carrying out your plans is to give careful attention to what you are doing and make an earnest effort at doing it.
 - b. To be **hasty** in an endeavor is to act without due deliberation, preparation, and caution. **Haste** is often driven by impatience.
 - c. **Diligence** leads to good outcomes, while **haste** leads to mistakes and losses that end up costing more than you had hoped to gain.
 - d. **Proverbs 19:2-3**, Also it is not good for a person to be without knowledge, and he who hurries his footsteps errs. [3] The foolishness of man ruins his way, (*yet he blames God*) and his heart rages against the LORD.
6. The acquisition of treasures by a lying tongue Is a fleeting vapor, the pursuit of death.
 - a. **Vs 6 & 7** contain the same basic message and express the same basic **principle**: No one gets away with evil forever. If not in this life via human justice, then in the next via God's justice, justice will prevail.
 - b. The one who gains wealth dishonestly not only exposes himself to earthly justice, but also to God's justice – which may be applied in this life, but for certain in the next.
 - i. No one can gain wealth dishonestly without making victims of and impoverishing those they mislead – this brings God's judgment.
 - ii. **Proverbs 28:20**, A faithful man will abound with blessings, but he who makes haste to be rich (*using illegal means*) will not go unpunished.
 - iii. **Proverbs 20:17**, Bread obtained by falsehood is sweet to a man, but afterward his mouth will be filled with gravel.
7. The violence of the wicked will drag them away, Because **they refuse** to act with justice.
 - a. Anyone who sins, even grievously, can repent and turn from their evil ways and turn to live godly. However, if a wicked person does not repent, that is, if they know better yet refuse to do what is just and godly, they will experience the justice due them, if not in this life via human justice, then in the next via God's justice.

- b. **Psalm 11:5-7**, The LORD tests the righteous and the wicked, and the one who loves violence His soul hates. [6] Upon the wicked He will rain snares; fire and brimstone and burning wind will be the portion of their cup. [7] For the LORD is righteous, He loves righteousness; the upright will behold His face.
8. **The way** of a guilty man (*guilty of wrong-doing*) is crooked, But as for the pure (*of heart, conscience*), his conduct (*choices/behavior*) is upright.
- The person whose choices and behavior frequently lead him to being guilty of wrong doing is a person whose focus in life is primarily directed toward doing what is wrong. To think of him otherwise is foolish.
 - The person whose choices and behavior show him to have a pure heart and a good conscience is a person whose focus in life is primarily directed toward doing what is right. To think of him otherwise is foolish.
 - To follow or live like the guilty is foolish, but to follow or live like the pure is wise.
9. It is better to live in a corner of a roof Than in a house shared with a contentious (*high-maintenance*) woman. (*Repeated in 25:24*)
- To be **contentious** is to be frequently disagreeable, quickly quarrelsome, and often argumentative – all for the purpose of getting your way or maintaining the upper hand. Such a person is hard to please, and the price of failure is contention and strife.
 - Principle:** Better to live alone than with a husband or wife who is hard to please, rarely content, often argumentative, and makes you pay an emotionally painful price for displeasing them.
 - Other proverbs of a similar message:
 - Proverbs 21:19**, It is better to live in a desert land than with a contentious and vexing woman.
 - Proverbs 19:13**, A foolish son is destruction to his father, and the contentions of a wife are a constant dripping.
 - Proverbs 27:15–16**, A constant dripping on a day of steady rain and a contentious woman are alike; [16] he who would restrain her restrains the wind, and grasps oil with his right hand.
10. The soul of the wicked desires evil (*it is his nature to do evil*); His neighbor finds no favor in his eyes.
- Because wickedness is driven from within, its expressions are independent of circumstances or the behavior of others. It is for this reason that the wicked person ignores such things as love, compassion,

mercy, kindness, and even simple neighborliness. Therefore, the wicked person, because of his wicked nature, will act wickedly even toward his neighbor, regardless of the harm it does.

11. When the scoffer is punished, the naive becomes wise; But when the wise is instructed, he receives knowledge (*and becomes wiser*).
 - a. **Proverbs 19:25**, Strike a scoffer and the naive may become shrewd, but reprove one who has understanding and he will gain knowledge.
 - b. A **scoffer** is someone who is driven by conceit (*an inflated view of self*) and arrogance (*looking down on others*). Because his scoffing is both obvious and offensive, when he is punished for his bad behavior, the naive (*the gullible who do not carefully use their critical thinking abilities*) are able to realize the consequences of scoffing and guard their behavior.
 - c. In contrast, the wise learns and grows without needing to see the cost to oneself of being foolish (*includes scoffing*).

12. The righteous one considers the house of the wicked, Turning the wicked to ruin.
 - a. Two differing translations:
 - i. **English Standard Version**: The Righteous One (*God*) observes the house of the wicked; He (*God*) throws the wicked down to ruin.
 - ii. **Amplified Bible**: The righteous man considers well the house of the wicked—how the wicked are cast down to ruin.
 - b. The **ESV** makes sense of this proverb by making the “righteous one” refer to God and the ending refer to God’s judgment on the wicked.
 - c. The **AB** makes sense of this proverb by making the “righteous one” refer to godly people whose observation of the outcome of the wicked motivates them to continue being godly.
 - d. **Principle**: Learning that leads to putting off ungodliness and growing in godliness is good/useful leaning. This principle is supported by **vs 11 and 12**.

13. He who shuts his ear to the cry of the poor Will also cry himself and not be answered. (**Note vs 26**)
 - a. **Luke 6:38**, Give, and it will be given to you. They will pour into your lap a good measure—pressed down, shaken together, and running over. For by your standard of measure it will be measured to you in return.
 - b. **James 2:13**, For judgment will be merciless to one who has shown no mercy; mercy triumphs over judgment.

14. A gift in secret subdues anger, And a bribe in the bosom, strong wrath.
 - a. Whether giving a gift or using a bribe, doing it in secret protects the receiver from looking bad or getting into trouble with the Law while protecting yourself from (*unjust*) anger and wrath.
 - b. This proverb does not appear to be justifying bribes, but rather it shows the value of going personally and privately to the one who is angry at you.

15. The exercise of justice is joy for the righteous, But is terror to the workers of iniquity.
 - a. A possible understanding is when the righteous act justly, it brings them inward joy – because they know they have pleased God and served their fellow man. When the workers of iniquity sin, they experience inward fear over the possibility of getting caught and having to pay the consequences.

16. A man who wanders (*goes astray*) from the way of understanding Will rest in the assembly of the dead.
 - a. **2 Peter 2:20–22**, For if, after they have escaped the defilements of the world by the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and are overcome, the last state has become worse for them than the first. [21] For it would be better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn away from the holy commandment handed on to them. [22] It has happened to them according to the true proverb, “A dog returns to its own vomit,” and, “A sow, after washing, returns to wallowing in the mire.”

17. He who loves pleasure will become a poor man; He who loves wine and oil will not become rich.
 - a. If we pursue pleasure because it makes us feel good, and if we love wine because it dulls our senses so we don’t feel so bad, and if we love oil for its medicinal properties in order to get relief from our ailments, then our focus is a happier, self-gratified life which, by its nature, will prevent us from being productive and providing for ourselves.
 - b. Pleasure, wine, and medicine are not bad in themselves, but when we use them in place of God and God’s love and comfort, we make them an idol (*an alternative to God*) that we turn to to do what we ought to be turning to God to do. This works against living a wise and therefore productive life and against receiving the blessings of God.

18. The wicked is a ransom for the righteous, And the treacherous is in the place of the upright.
 - a. The wicked and the treacherous seek personal power and wealth by taking from those who are weaker and unable or unwilling to protect themselves. Yet in due time (*this life*) or in the end (*eternity*), what the evil have taken via evil means will be taken from them and given to the righteous.
 - b. An example of this is the Egyptians who paid the price (*ten plagues, clothing, jewelry, and the loss of their army in the Red Sea*) for Israel's freedom.
 - c. A biblical promise of this reality is the third Beatitude: Blessed are the meek (*gentle*), for they shall inherit the earth.

19. It is better to live in a desert land Than with a **contentious** (*see vs 9*) and **vexing** woman.
 - a. To be **vexing** is to repeatedly harass by being annoying and irritating.
 - b. **Principle:** Better to live alone in a harsh setting than with a husband or wife who repeatedly annoys and irritates you by being hard to please, argumentative, and therefore obnoxious in emotionally painful and relationship unpleasant ways.
 - c. **Truth:** How we treat the people around us makes life better and more pleasant or harder and more painful. The first is a joy to live with. The second is hard to live with.

20. There is precious treasure and oil in the dwelling of the wise, But a foolish man swallows it up.
 - a. The wise are careful/prudent in the use of what they earn and what they have in store so that they have sufficient to meet today's and tomorrow's needs.
 - b. The foolish foolishly spend what they earn as quickly as they earn it, and use what they have as if they won't have need for it tomorrow. Therefore, when a time of need arrives, they do not have what they need nor the means to meet the need.

21. He who pursues **righteousness** and loyalty (*or loving-kindness*) Finds life, righteousness and honor.
 - a. I am not sure why the NASB chose to translate the Hebrew word "chesed" as loyalty. They translate this Hebrew word as loving-kindness 183 times and as loyalty 6 times. For me, pursuing righteousness and love makes more sense than righteousness and loyalty.

- b. **New Living Translation:** Whoever pursues righteousness and unflinching love will find life, righteousness, and honor.
 - c. **Principle:** If we will intentionally and persistently pursue righteousness and godly love in order to better live a godly life, we will – as a result –
 - (1) enter into and experience the abundant life Jesus promised to give us,
 - (2) gain increased understanding of and growth in righteousness, and
 - (3) receive honor from God and from those who value righteousness and godly love.
22. A wise man scales the city of the mighty And brings down the stronghold in which they trust.
- a. **Ecclesiastes 9:14-15,** There was a small city with few men in it and a great king came to it, surrounded it and constructed large siegeworks against it. [15] But there was found in it a poor wise man and he delivered the city by his wisdom. Yet no one remembered that poor man.
 - b. **Septuagint:** A wise man assaults strong cities, and demolishes the fortress in which the ungodly trusted. (**2 Corinthians 10:4**)
 - c. **Principle:** Wisdom is mightier than strength.
23. He who guards his mouth and his tongue, Guards his soul from troubles.
- a. **Proverbs 13:3,** The one who guards his mouth preserves his life; The one who opens wide his lips comes to ruin.
 - b. **Matthew 12:36-37,** But I tell you that every careless word that people speak, they shall give an accounting for it in the day of judgment. [37] For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.
 - c. Not only do we answer to others for our words, we will one day answer to God. It is in having to answer to God that our soul may or may not be in jeopardy.
 - d. Therefore, guarding our mouth/tongue is one way to keep unnecessary, unkind, unloving, unjust, abusive, and careless words from exiting our lips, thus guarding our soul from troubles – be they from God or man.
24. "Proud," "Haughty," "Scoffer," are his names, Who acts with insolent pride.
- a. **Proud:** Someone who openly exaggerates his importance, skill, power, looks, and/or intelligence to feed his need to feel superior.
 - b. **Haughty:** Someone who is arrogant and contemptuous in his view of and dealings with others – treating them as if they are unworthy of common respect and consideration.

- c. **Scoffer**: Someone who ridicules, mocks, and scorns those he deems inferior to him.
- d. **Insolent pride**: Someone who thinks of himself as so superior that he believes he is justified in despising and meanly mistreating anyone he wishes, as often and whenever he wishes.
- e. Haman is an example of insolent pride: **Esther 3:5-6**, When Haman saw that Mordecai neither bowed down nor paid homage to him, Haman was filled with rage. [6] But he disdained to lay hands on Mordecai alone, for they had told him who the people of Mordecai were; therefore Haman sought to destroy all the Jews, the people of Mordecai, who were throughout the whole kingdom of Ahasuerus.

25. The desire of the sluggard puts him to death, For his hands refuse to work;
- a. **Principle**: The excessive, undisciplined desire for ease and pleasure brings loss and ruin to the sluggard (*the habitually lazy*).
 - b. **Vs 26** is a follow-up to **vs 25**.

26. All day long he (*the sluggard*) is craving, While the righteous gives and does not hold back.
- a. The **sluggard** wants others to give him, and often expects them to give him what he needs and wants – as if they owe him.
 - b. The **righteous** is looking to serve, love, and care for others, so he gives liberally.
 - c. The **sluggard** covets what he does not have. The **righteous** gives liberally out of what he has.
 - d. In light of eternal salvation, the sluggard is foolish while the righteous is wise (**Note**: Parable of the sheep and goats, **Matthew 25:31-46**).

27. The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination, How much more when he brings it with evil intent!
- a. When a sacrifice is an **abomination** to the Lord, it means it is extremely disgusting, abhorrent, loathsome to Him.
 - b. To seek God's forgiveness (**bring a sacrifice**) because you are sorry over your sin, are heart-broken over the rift your sin has caused between you and God, and because you want your relationship with God repaired and restored, is to seek forgiveness with good intent.
 - c. To seek God's forgiveness (**bring a sacrifice**) without remorse/broken heart over what you have done and without genuine repentance because you want to appease Him and retain His good favor, is to seek forgiveness with evil intent.

- d. **Psalm 51:16-17**, For You do not delight in sacrifice, otherwise I would give it; You are not pleased with burnt offering. [17] The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; A broken and a contrite heart, O God, You will not despise.
28. A false witness will perish, But the man who listens to the truth will speak forever.
- a. **Proverbs 19:5**, A false witness will not go unpunished, And he who tells lies will not escape.
- b. **Revelation 21:8**, But for the cowardly and unbelieving and abominable and murderers and immoral persons and sorcerers and idolaters and all liars, their part will be in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.
- c. **Matthew 25:46**, These (*goats-unrighteous*) will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.
- d. **Principle**: Whatever advantage the false witness may gain in the moment, all will be lost in the end, including his life. The wisdom gained from listening will last forever, as will the one wise enough to listen.
29. A wicked man displays a bold face, But as for the upright, he makes his way sure.
- a. Though the **wicked** may be confident, bold, and committed, his future is always under the threat of getting caught by the legal authorities or getting into trouble with others who are as wicked as they.
- b. The **upright** uses wisdom and forethought to do what is right and therefore has a more certain future in this life and a certain one in the next.
30. There is no wisdom and no understanding And no counsel against the LORD.
- a. **Isaiah 40:13-14**, Who has directed the Spirit of the LORD, or as His counselor has informed Him? [14] With whom did He consult and who gave Him understanding? And who taught Him in the path of justice and taught Him knowledge and informed Him of the way of understanding?
- b. **Romans 11:33-36**, Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways! [34] For who has known the mind of the LORD, or who became His counselor? [35] Or who has first given to Him that it might be paid back to him again? [36] For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen.

c. **Principle:** The proud act as if they know more than God, but the wise humble themselves and submit to God as the all-knowing, all-wise Father.

31. The horse is prepared for the day of battle, But victory belongs to the LORD.

a. **Psalm 20:7**, Some boast in chariots and some in horses, but we will boast in the name of the LORD, our God.

b. **Psalm 33:16-17**, The king is not saved by a mighty army; a warrior is not delivered by great strength. [17] A horse is a false hope for victory; Nor does it deliver anyone by its great strength.

c. These scriptures do not say that we are to do nothing while depending or waiting on God to do everything. They say we are not to trust in and depend on human strength or worldly powers as if we have no need for God.

d. **Principle:** We are to be responsible, take necessary action – within the limits of our abilities or capabilities, and use wisdom accordingly **while** depending on God to work all things out for good.