

Proverbs 21:15-30

We're going to start to pick our pace as we work our way towards the end of Proverbs. We're not going to be sloppy, but we will move a bit faster. A lot of what's in front of us has been stated and restated up to this point, and we've stopped and spent time reiterating the interpretation and application of those repeated truths.

There are a lot of things in life that are a matter of personal taste and preference. I love leftovers! Pastor Travis won't touch them, even if it's the leftovers of his favorite food! He won't touch any condiment that's white; mayonnaise, ranch dressing, bleu cheese, forget about it! I love leftover pizza cold, out of the refrigerator. That was one of my favorite breakfasts in college! My wife won't touch it unless it's reheated!

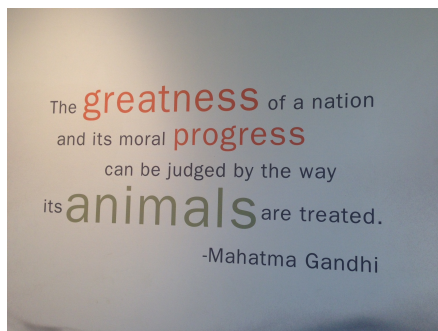
What's interesting is that we make character judgments based on personal preferences that have no attached moral value. I'm sure that there are Denver Bronco fans who pass moral judgment on Oakland Raider fans, and vice versa. I used to really hate country music. I thought it was going to be the muzak of hell! In fact my idea of hell was to be forever on a jet with motion sickness while a dentist drilled on my teeth with country music playing! Because I had such a personal distaste and low view of country music I had a distaste for, and a preconceived low view of those who were fans of it. I used to think that people who liked country music were at the least not saved and maybe possessed! If you didn't love the Beatles and U2 it was obvious you didn't know Jesus! For sure, there can be content within an art form that is an expression of the self-informed, self-defined, self-directed life of the songwriter, the film maker, or the artist. But I hope you get my point. Such contrasting sensibilities don't have a vertical component to them. (That being said — the way people think about or act towards those whose tastes contrast to their own can speak volumes about what's going on in the vertical axis of their lives!)

As we pick up in Proverbs 21:15 Solomon is creating a contrast that transcends mere personal preference and speaks to matters of righteousness, matters of right and wrong, good and bad. He speaks to affections that reveal to us whether the heart of a man or woman is beating after, longing for and loving the things that God loves. I know that

it's considered bad form in our culture to even pretend that there is such a thing as right and wrong or moral absolutes, and even worse form to reference God in such discussions. But I'll borrow from a quote I read today — *What is true for barbecue is also true for talking about truth and God: Nobody likes weak sauce.* So here we go!

¹⁵ When justice is done, it is a joy to the righteous but terror to evildoers.

FIRST — Justice implies standards of right and wrong. Not the sliding standards of “right” and “wrong” that shift with the prevailing winds of morality within a culture; Not the standards that are based on man's definition of what constitutes morality. I saw this in a pet shop in South Orange County



We've got PETA — the SPCA — Save the Whales — Save the Dolphins — if you're in Florida Save the Manatees — Save the Dogs — Save the Cats. So even though our culture is going to murder 3,300+ babies in the womb today, according to fallen man's definition of morality America is a moral place — a just place!

The justice that is referenced here is based on standards of “right” and “wrong” that have been defined by God who is infinitely wise and morally perfect.

Now I hope you can see what I had in mind in my opening thoughts. This proverb marks a contrast in affections — preferences! Only these contrasting affections really matter because they have radical and eternal implications. They have **radical** and **eternal** implications because they define where a person is in relationship to God.

Justice is a joy to the righteous — to the person in a right relationship with God through faith in Jesus — because God delights in justice.

***Psalm 89:14** Righteousness and justice are the foundation of your throne; steadfast love and faithfulness go before you.*

I stand amazed at how faith in Jesus knits the heart of a redeemed and reconciled rebel to the heart of God — the very God he used to be in rebellion against. I remember how I reacted to a TV news report I saw before I was a Christian. I was going to UCSB and I lived in Isla Vista (Isla Vista tried to secede from the Union in the 1960s). The News report featured an interview with Billy Graham. In that interview Billy Graham talked about the righteousness of God and God's moral standards. I started shouting at the TV — "Who is this Billy Graham and who does he think he is telling me about right and wrong, good and bad!" I was so angry that I wanted to throw stuff at the TV! A few years later I met Jesus and my whole view of right and wrong changed. Not because I went through some morality indoctrination, but because I had come to know and love the same God Billy Graham knew and loved! I had come to know and love the true and living God who is righteous. I loved Him and I began to find my heart loving righteousness and hating sin. I discovered in the pages of the bible that the ultimate standard for God's righteousness and God's justice is the cross of Jesus! How righteous is God? How unchanging are His standards of justice? Look at the cross of Jesus. That is where God's justice was satisfied. God didn't hedge on His standards of righteousness in order for us to be saved. He said that *the wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23)*. We all have earned judgment. The penalty of sin had to be paid in full for us to be redeemed and reconciled back to God. The cross of Jesus is where the righteousness of God is satisfied and we can have peace with God!

***Psalm 85:10** Steadfast love and faithfulness meet; righteousness and peace kiss each other.*

The cross of Jesus is where God is JUST and the JUSTIFIER of the one who has faith in Jesus!

HERE'S THE DEAL — If the justice that is rooted in God's eternally fixed moral purity terrifies you, it's because you're at war with God; it's because you've rejected God as the one who informs us about righteousness and justice. If you're terrified by God's justice it's because you don't love God, you love sin! If you are angry at the thought of having to meet God on His terms of justice; if hearing that there is a God who is just and who judges sin is like hearing finger nails on a blackboard — I can tell you that I know exactly how you feel! If you're terrified at the thought of your sin being judged, you should be. But listen to this —

***2 Corinthians 5:17-20** Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. ¹⁸All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; ¹⁹that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. ²⁰Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. ²¹For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*

¹⁶ One who wanders from the way of good sense will rest in the assembly of the dead.

Two ways to look at this. In the natural — deliberately turning one's back on wise, godly advice is self-destructive and can even result in choices that are fatal. But there's a spiritual take on this as well. The life that refuses to be informed, defined and directed by God has a destination: eternal separation from God along with all those who have rejected God. That is eternal death. You end up eternally dead, eternally separated from God because before you died you chose to reject the gift of eternal life and fellowship with God before you died. **1 Timothy 5:6** talks about those who are spiritually dead while they are physically alive.

¹⁷ Whoever loves pleasure will be a poor man; he who loves wine and oil will not be rich.

This is not about enjoying pleasure or enjoying wine and fine food. This is about master passions.

poor = “deficient, destitute, or in need.” It is used in Proverbs more often than in any other Old Testament book (6:11; 11:24; 14:23; 21:5, 17; 22:16; 24:34; 28:27).¹

Solomon is not making the case for a stoic life. He’s making the case against living for, being mastered by self-gratifying pleasure. That life is deficient; leaves you empty instead of full. That life leaves you destitute, even though you might be rich enough to afford anything. That life leaves you in need of the one thing those master passions couldn't supply — LIFE. Idols always lie; and without fail, idols always fail! Jesus IS life! Jesus is the cause and the consummation of all that is good!

Psalm 4:6-7 Many people say, “Who will show us better times?” Let your face smile on us, LORD. ⁷You have given me greater joy than those who have abundant harvests of grain and new wine.

¹⁸ The wicked is a ransom for the righteous, and the traitor for the upright.

This verse does not mean that **the wicked** redeem **the righteous**.

QUOTE: Jamieson, Fausset and Brown — By suffering what they had devised for the righteous, or brought on them, the wicked became their ransom, in the usual sense of substitutes ²

¹⁹ It is better to live in a desert land than with a quarrelsome and fretful woman.

¹ Buzzell, S. S. (1985). Proverbs. (J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck, Eds.)*The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*. Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

² Jamieson, R., Fausset, A. R., & Brown, D. (1997). *Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible*. Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

This echoes the truth we saw in **verse 9** — *It is better to live in a corner of the housetop than in a house shared with a quarrelsome wife*. Only this woman is so bad that rather than living in the corner of a rooftop the guy would be better off (literally – it would make you happy) to go live in the desert! If you’ve ever seen the Judean wilderness, that’s one crazy woman!

The big idea here is for the single man to look at the character of a woman before he marries her. But let me add this. There are women who went into marriage godly and agreeable but were wrecked by the carnality and sin of their husbands. I’m not condoning such a response, but here’s what can happen: Over time the laziness, self-centeredness, unkindness of the husband can result in deep seated bitterness and resentment until the wife will contend with her husband over anything, even the smallest of things.

Men — The godly woman you married may not be the same person today she was when you married her because you’re not the godly man she married!

²⁰ Precious treasure and oil are in a wise man’s dwelling, but a foolish man devours it.

Precious treasure and oil are not a reference to this man’s master passion! These are the result of wise living and hard work. The idea is this: Don't be wise enough and industrious enough to acquire treasure and then be stupid and spend it as fast as you get it.

HERE’S THE POINT — Men — work hard. Do your best to provide for your family. The Bible says that if *anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for members of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever (1 Timothy 5:8)*. When God blesses, receive it as from the Lord. Yes, *you* worked hard. Yes, *you* earned that paycheck. But when you have that paycheck in your hand, say “*Thank you Jesus! You gave me the health and the abilities to get this job and to accomplish this task.*” Then you need to ask, “*Lord, what do you want me to do with it? How can I use this for your glory?*” You’ve received it from the Lord in order to be used for the Lord. If you’re married — if you have children — the Lord surely wants you to use it to provide for their material well being.

But what other ways would he have you use it? Don't be the foolish man and devour it — use it all up with no regard for the Lord's work!

21 **Whoever pursues righteousness and kindness will find life, righteousness, and honor.**

A couple of things come to mind here — ¹. One of the trademarks of knowing God is the desire for and the pursuit of these things.

***Matthew 5:6** “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.*

***1 Timothy 6:11** But as for you, O man of God, flee these things. Pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, steadfastness, gentleness.*

². What a man possesses defines what he has pursued. Do you have **life, righteousness and honor**? Well then — that tells me that you've been pursuing righteousness — and ultimately, that means pursuing God who is righteous; it means pursuing the righteousness of God that is by faith in Jesus.

***Philippians 3:7-9** But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. ⁸Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ ⁹and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith—*

Do you have **life, righteousness and honor**? Well then — that tells me that you've been pursuing kindness (the Hebrew word here is **hêsêd** — the word used for God's loving kindness). Ultimately, that means you've been hungering for and seeking to know the relentless, unfailing, love of God because you've come to know that God's **hêsêd love** is better than life itself! That's exactly how king David of Israel saw it.

***Psalms 63:3 NLT** Your unfailing love is better than life itself; how I praise you!*

Life and honor come from pursuing God and His righteousness.

Matthew 6:31-33 *Therefore do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' ³²For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. ³³But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.*

If you don't have life and honor, it's because you've been searching for something other than God and His righteousness and His steadfast love!

²² A wise man scales the city of the mighty and brings down the stronghold in which they trust.

It doesn't say that the mightiest man scales the city of the mighty man and brings it down. It says that the person who is informed, defined and directed by God does it!

HERE'S THE POINT — Wisdom — being directed by God's Word and God's Wisdom trumps might. In fact, God's Wisdom informs us about our weakness and our utter need to depend upon Him — and that leads us to finding strength in the Lord. That is when you can stand in spiritual warfare and withstand the relentless attacks of the world, the flesh and the devil.

²³ Whoever keeps his mouth and his tongue keeps himself out of trouble.

This verse is very similar to **10:19** similar to **13:3**. If you weren't here for those studies please use the audio, video and text resources for those passages.

²⁴ "Scoffer" is the name of the arrogant, haughty man who acts with arrogant pride.

NOTE the two words the Holy Spirit uses to describe the "scoffer": **arrogant, haughty**. NOTE the two words the Holy Spirit uses to describes the action of the scoffer: **arrogant pride**. We **do** from who we **are**. The

proud man doesn't act in ways that are humble (sacrificial serving, putting others first) because he isn't that! Instead he acts with arrogant pride.

The scoffer — one who mocks — does so because he believes himself to be superior to others.

Proverbs 16: Everyone who is arrogant in heart is an abomination to the Lord;

²⁵ The desire of the sluggard kills him, for his hands refuse to labor.

²⁶ All day long he craves and craves, but the righteous gives and does not hold back.

Again — up to this point much has been said by Solomon about laziness.

Here Solomon adds this contrast: **the righteous** have something to give and they willingly give. That is a great picture of living on mission. You work hard because you're serving the Lord and you use what you earn to love and serve others for Jesus.

²⁷ The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination; how much more when he brings it with evil intent.

This harkens back to what we learned in **15:8** and **verse 3** of this chapter.

God knows when someone's heart doesn't match his actions. He hates it when someone tries to look as though they love Jesus. But it is even worse when their actions are motivated by **evil** intentions — guys acting like Christians to hook up with a girl; people acting like Christians to get something from Christians or from the church. Jesus dealt severely with the hypocrite of His day.

²⁸ A false witness will perish, but the word of a man who hears will endure.

Repeatedly Proverbs speaks against perjury. God hates lying and judges liars. By contrast, the testimony of someone who has listened carefully

and is able to give a truthful testimony will always be listened to. **Integrity and reliability have a long life!**

²⁹ A wicked man puts on a bold face, but the upright gives thought to his ways.

The **NLT** is a great commentary here — *The wicked bluff their way through, but the virtuous think before they act.*

³⁰ No wisdom, no understanding, no counsel can avail against the Lord.

We looked at this in our study of *Proverbs 19:21 — Many are the plans in the mind of a man, but it is the purpose of the Lord that will stand.*

No human wisdom — **no** plans of man can ultimately thwart the Lord's plans! **Psalm 2**

³¹ The horse is made ready for the day of battle, but the victory belongs to the Lord.

The big idea here has to do with the object of your faith! You make your military preparations. The context here is that of a nation going to war! You make sure that your weaponry is in perfect order, ready to deploy. But none of those are the functional savior! Your faith is put in the Lord because the victory belongs to God!

***Psalm 20:7-8** Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the Lord our God. ⁸ They collapse and fall, but we rise and stand upright.*

Who collapses and falls? The people who trusted in chariots and horses. They end up overthrown because *the war horse is a false hope for salvation, and by its great might it cannot rescue (Psalm 33:17).*

The people who **end up standing in the end** are those who knew where their salvation was going to come from — they **made Jesus their hope — looked to Jesus.**

You might not be going to military war — but we're all marching into a fallen and broken world. Are you putting your trust in your intellect, your skill set, your bank account? Having those things in order and good to go is a good thing. But those things can't be the object of your trust — your functional saviors! LOOK to JESUS! TRUST in Jesus!