

PROVERBS 21 Selected Verses

² All deeds are right in the sight of the doer,
but the Lord weighs the heart.

³ To do righteousness and justice
is more acceptable to the Lord than sacrifice.
²⁷ The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination;
how much more when brought with evil intent.

⁴ Haughty eyes and a proud heart—
the lamp of the wicked—are sin.
²⁴ The proud, haughty person, named 'Scoffer',
acts with arrogant pride.

²¹ Whoever pursues righteousness and kindness
will find life and honour.

²² One wise person went up against a city of warriors
and brought down the stronghold in which they trusted.

²⁶ All day long the wicked covet,
but the righteous give and do not hold back.

2 – Why do we do what we do? We'd like to think it's for the right reasons. But despite the good we often do, our motivations are often mixed. There is always fear. There is anger and resentment. There is contempt or envy. There is ego and there are other self-serving motivations too. What do our actions do for us as much as they may benefit others? Sometimes we overlook or play down our more negative motivations if there are good results externally. If someone else is helped or benefits from our actions, doesn't that justify what we do whatever our motivations? And yet, "the Lord weighs the heart." A purer heart always leads to purer actions, purer blessings on those who receive them, and purer fulfillment in ourselves. Self-examination, while not pleasant, is essential if our living is to be done with conscious awareness of the presence of God despite what we may convince others or ourselves about what is fully in our heart. What do you think?

3,27 – These proverbs speak of sacrifice. Sacrifice would be the kind of religious ritual people could offer to God out of duty rather than from the heart. There is self-interest in the motive in terms of getting right with God for blessing and good fortune. 27 speaks of intent. What's the intent in the sacrifice? Is it gratitude and sincere desire to give back to God? Or is it

something else more self-serving and therefore less worthy? But however clear our motive may or may not be, 3 makes it clear that doing justice (righteousness is a parallel word for emphasis) is more valuable than sacrifice, because it's about doing the right thing in relation to others and before God. And presuming God cannot see our harmful intentions or self-serving motives (such as making a sacrifice with the intent of receiving a blessing against those we wish to harm) is even more abominable. What do you think?

4, 24 – These proverbs are all about pride. Pride is a good thing when it's about self-affirmation, respect and worth. But it's a bad thing when it's arrogance, superiority and contempt toward others. To scoff is to dismiss, putdown or make fun of another in a way that can make them feel small. To scoff at someone or at something they say is to think you know better and are better. It's very difficult for one so proud to learn, grow, listen humbly and see others as having something genuine to offer us we can benefit from. What do you think?

21 – This proverb is simple and beautiful. It connects righteousness with kindness. We don't often think of righteousness (justice) combined with kindness because we imagine it is more about speaking truth and doing right in the face of resistance or opposition. And yet, justice without kindness at its heart can easily become harsh, even vengeful. If in our pursuit of justice we lose the kindness that should be in us, we have lost our way and need to start again. What do you think?

22 – This proverb requires some reflection. How does wisdom bring down a city of warriors and their stronghold (trusting in their might to win)? It requires creativity and care to fight against a might-makes-right or my-way-or-the-highway approach. How do we get people to listen and be open to alternatives? How do we find ways to pressure people and convict them morally rather than threaten them by counter force or punishment? How do we fight back without losing our souls or becoming the enemy we want to defeat? We can gain the world and lose our souls, and this happens in the big things and in the day-to-day interactions and one on one relationships we have too. Love must win again and again in our lives and through our lives. What do you think?

26 – This proverb contrasts the wicked and the righteous, and the measure in this case is very specific: generosity. While the wicked covet (namely, they want what others have and use all their means to take it), the righteous give generously, abundantly and liberally. What a commentary on our world right now, no?

PRAYER: Thank you, O God. Thank you for challenging us to examine and purify the motivations behind our words and actions. Thank you for challenging us to be more diligent in connecting our worshipping and praying to our doing and our doing to your justice. Thank you for challenging us to greater humility before others who may have more to offer than we often imagine they do. Thank you for challenging us to cultivate kindness in us even when we

prosecute an injustice that has upset us. Thank you for challenging us to becoming creative in our loving when we address wrongs and injustices with others. Thank you for challenging us to be generous hearted with others rather than envious and competitive with them. Fill us with your love and your peace so that we are at peace in ourselves and before you. In Jesus' name; Amen.