

## PROVERBS 11: 1-10

A false balance is an abomination to the Lord,  
but an accurate weight is God's delight.

<sup>2</sup> When pride comes, then comes disgrace;  
but wisdom is with the humble.

<sup>3</sup> The integrity of the upright guides them,  
but the crookedness of the treacherous destroys them.

<sup>4</sup> Riches do not profit in the day of wrath,  
but righteousness delivers from death.

<sup>5</sup> The righteousness of the blameless keeps their ways straight,  
but the wicked fall by their own wickedness.

<sup>6</sup> The righteousness of the upright saves them,  
but the treacherous are taken captive by their schemes.

<sup>7</sup> When the wicked die, their hope perishes,  
and the expectation of the godless comes to nothing.

<sup>8</sup> The righteous are delivered from trouble,  
and the wicked get into it instead.

<sup>9</sup> With their mouths the godless would destroy their neighbours,  
but by knowledge the righteous are delivered.

<sup>10</sup> When it goes well with the righteous, the city rejoices;  
and when the wicked perish, there is jubilation.

There are clear contrasts in these proverbs. There is honesty and dishonesty, humility and pride, integrity and crookedness, righteousness and riches gained selfishly and at a cost to a neighbour, and finally, righteousness over against wickedness, treachery and godlessness.

Righteousness is not only the right way to live, but it also leads, ultimately, to genuine benefits. Wickedness, treachery and godlessness can achieve quick wins against a neighbour and toward one's material advantage, but in the end such behaviour leads to ruin.

Proverbs are intended to inspire and encourage good behaviour and wisdom by learning in humility, seeking to know other people rather than judge, dismiss or take advantage of them. And one way to do this is the promise that blessings will come in life not necessarily materially, but in one's heart and one's relations. Wise and righteous persons value different things than wicked, selfish and materially motivated persons. A big part of growth in wisdom is in maturing in what we truly desire. When we mature spiritually speaking, material riches do not excite our hearts as do beautiful relationships of trust, care and goodwill. Intimacy of love rooted in grace and compassion for others is far more fulfilling than relations where control, power and domination are priorities. Why? Because control, power and domination can never lead to genuine intimacy and trust through which genuine fulfillment in relationships can grow. As the philosopher Plato said: the tyrannical ruler may have power and wealth with total control of

the people around him, but he is also the loneliest person in the world because all his relations that survive are based on fear rather than heart-felt love.

OK, but then there is the biblical Job. What Proverbs teaches is true, but it is not always true. What happens when you are a good person and yet still suffer treachery, wickedness and misfortune? And what if in your suffering you observe how those who behave selfishly benefit not only materially, but seem to have a happy and peaceful life overall? Will you still be as committed to the way of righteousness? What's the wisdom here?

The life test is in developing clarity, courage and commitment to justice and goodness no matter what happens. Justice, goodness and love are aligned with God and God's will always. We are made for this even as the world and what happens in it functions independently of God. Any society that rewards goodness is a good society and any society that protects the vulnerable and supports the unfortunate is a good society. We all need supporting and caring relations and communities. Building such networks of relations and making our own contribution in such relations will serve us well in the face of all that can happen. But life will test us and some of us more than others. To choose the way of love always, with grace, mercy and forbearance, takes a lot of courage and perseverance sometimes. But building a resiliency of love can also enhance the quality of our lives like no other material or social benefit can.

What do you think? How have you been tested to choose love and grow in love, learning its wisdom and grace despite how you've been tested?

PRAYER: Thank you, O God, for giving us clarity as to what is right and what is wrong, what is better and what is worse when it comes to righteousness and wisdom. And yet, we also ask you for your providential care surrounding us when we are discouraged, disillusioned, frustrated and resentful in the face of the unfairness of life. Some people seem to get away with murder so to speak and harm doesn't touch them. Others are marked harshly even as they are good souls trying to do their best. Ground us again in your grace and forbearance with others. Liberate our hearts from the negative currents that bring us down. Give us joy as we align ourselves with your will of love even when it's hard work. Fill our hearts with gratitude and peace... In Jesus' name; Amen.