

Fruits of Righteousness

Proverbs 11:15-31

Proverbs 11:15-31 - *“He who is surety for a stranger will suffer, but one who hates [avoids] being surety is secure.*

A gracious woman retains honor, but ruthless men retain riches.

The merciful man does good for his own soul, but he who is cruel troubles his own flesh.

The wicked man does deceptive work, but he who sows righteousness will have a sure reward. As righteousness leads to life, so he who pursues evil pursues it to his own death.

Those who are of a perverse heart are an abomination to the LORD, but the blameless in their ways are His delight.

Though they join forces, the wicked will not go unpunished, but the posterity of the righteous will be delivered.

As a ring of gold in a swine’s snout, so is a lovely woman who lacks discretion.

The desire of the righteous is only good, but the expectation of the wicked is wrath.

There is one who scatters, yet increases more; and there is one who withholds more than is right, but it leads to poverty.

The generous soul will be made rich, and he who waters will also be watered himself. The people will curse him who withholds grain, but blessing will be on the head of him who sells it.

He who earnestly seeks good finds favor, but trouble will come to him who seeks evil.

He who trusts in his riches will fall, but the righteous will flourish like foliage.

He who troubles his own house will inherit the wind, and the fool will be servant to the wise of heart.

The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life, and he who wins souls is wise.

If the righteous will be recompensed on the earth, how much more the ungodly and the sinner?”

Background Notes

As we read these verses, notice the word “but” is used numerous times. This is “antithetic Hebrew parallelism.” The second line of the couplet is in contrast to the first line.

Another category of Hebrew parallelism is “emblematic parallelism.” In emblematic parallelism, a word picture is used in one of the lines of the couplet. The words “as” and “so” connect the two lines. Look at Proverbs 11:22 - *“As a ring of gold in a swine’s snout, so is a lovely woman who lacks discretion.”* In this example of emblematic parallelism, the word picture of the gold ring in the pig’s nose is the first line. A beautiful woman who lacks discretion or moral perception is the second line, connected by the word “so.” That’s emblematic parallelism.

What’s the meaning of this proverb? Some background is helpful here. In that culture, women wore costly nose rings as jewelry to enhance their beauty. But a pig with a gold ring in its snout has no appreciation of its value or significance – it’s a waste of valuable gold! In the same way, a beautiful woman who is not morally wise doesn’t appreciate the value of her

God-given beauty - beauty that should be used for God's glory. This proverb should motivate all of us to appreciate whatever gifts God has given us, and to use them for His glory.

Doctrinal Point

The proverbs are wise advice for everyday living.

Verse 15: *"He who is surety for a stranger will suffer, but one who hates being surety is secure."* This is the same very practical and wise advice that we had back in Proverbs 6:1-5: *"My son, if you become surety for your friend, if you have shaken hands in pledge for a stranger, you are snared by the words of your mouth; you are taken by the words of your mouth. So do this, my son, and deliver yourself; for you have come into the hand of your friend. Go and humble yourself. Plead with your friend. Give no sleep to your eyes, nor slumber to your eyelids. Deliver yourself like a gazelle from the hand of the hunter, and like a bird from the hand of the fowler."*

"Surety" is a formal pledge or guarantee that one makes to secure the loaner against financial loss. You are "surety" when you guarantee payment by co-signing another person's loan. If you co-sign for a stranger, don't be surprised if you get burned! You're safe from all entanglements if you avoid getting involved in surety.

Verse 16: *"A gracious woman retains honor, but ruthless men retain riches."* Brute force may get you money and power, but it won't get you honor. A gracious woman can obtain the honor that the rich and powerful desire.

Verse 17: *"The merciful man does good for his own soul, but he who is cruel troubles his own flesh."* Again, here is that well-known biblical principle that God has ordained as part of His moral universe. You reap what you sow - both in good ways and bad ways.

Verse 18: *"The wicked man does deceptive work, but he who sows righteousness will have a sure reward."* Wicked people may make a lot of money, but wealth is deceptive. It entangles you. No matter how much you have, you want more. It doesn't satisfy, and it can disappear overnight. But the fruit and reward of righteousness endures forever!

Verse 19: *"As righteousness leads to life, so he who pursues evil pursues it to his own death."* This verse is not teaching salvation by works, but as the Lord Jesus said, *"By their fruits you will know them"* (Matthew 7:16). The visible fruits of righteousness are evidence of salvation unto life, and the works of evil are evidence of unbelief unto death.

Verse 20: *"Those who are of a perverse heart are an abomination to the LORD, but the blameless in their ways are His delight."* We know the Lord hates hypocrisy and pride. He also hates a perverse heart – a heart that is purposely set on doing the wrong thing. But the Lord delights in the person who is trying to do the right thing. Notice the verse does not say "sinless" - but "blameless." No one is sinless. But if we confess our sin, God is faithful to forgive us - and we are blameless (1 John 1:9).

Verse 21: *"Though they join forces, the wicked will not go unpunished, but the posterity of the righteous will be delivered."*

The Tower of Babel is a negative example of this proverb, and the Abraham's descendants are a positive example.

Verse 23: *"The desire of the righteous is only good, but the expectation of the wicked is wrath."* What would you say if someone asked you, "What are your goals in life?" Your truthful answer will give away what's in your heart, or what kind of person you are.

Verses 24-26: Here we are three proverbs that encourage giving because of the blessings involved. *"There is one who scatters, yet increases more; and there is one who withholds more than is right, but it leads to poverty. The generous soul will be made rich, and he who waters will also be watered himself. The people will curse him who withholds grain, but blessing will be on the head of him who sells it."*

This is a paradox that the world cannot understand. The world says, "Hang onto your hard-earned cash. Keep it all for yourself." Worldly business savvy says if you're selling something people desperately need, like grain, hold on to it and you'll drive the price up! But the Lord says - If you give, you will not only be blessed, but the well will never run dry (2 Corinthians 9:8-11)! The Lord Jesus said, *"Give, and it will be given to you. Good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over"* (Luke 6:38).

Proverbs 11:27: *"He who earnestly seeks good finds favor, but trouble will come to him who seeks evil."* Again the moral principle: "You reap what you sow" (Galatians 6:7-8).

Verse 28: *"He who trusts in his riches will fall, but the righteous will flourish like foliage."* The Bible belabors this theme: Don't trust in material things! But people don't listen - including many Christians. Thus they do not flourish.

Verse 29: *"He who troubles his own house will inherit the wind, and the fool will be servant to the wise of heart."* How would you like to be the recipient of a will that reads, "You have inherited wind"? A foolish person ends up with nothing of value - in fact, he ends up serving those who are wise.

The proverbs are wise advice for everyday living.

Practical Application

Make your applications in the light of the rest of Scripture.

Verses 30-31: *"The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life, and he who wins souls is wise. If the righteous will be recompensed on the earth, how much more the ungodly and the sinner?"*

In the context, verse 30 refers to persuading people to follow the way of wisdom. Can this verse be applied to evangelism - winning souls for Christ? Of course! The rest of Scripture would certainly support the truth that winning souls for Christ is following the way of wisdom.

But what about verse 31? What's the best application of this verse? Remember the important principle of biblical interpretation: **there is only one interpretation of a Scripture, but there can be many applications.** And all **applications we make must be subject to the rest of Scripture!**

So what is the application for this verse 31: *"If the righteous will be recompensed on the earth, how much more the ungodly and the sinner?"* This verse is quoted in 1 Peter 4. *"For the time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God? And if the righteous one is scarcely saved, where will the ungodly and the sinner appear?" (1 Peter 4:17-18).*

So the proper application of the "recompense" in Proverbs 11:31 is found in 1 Peter 4:17. It has to do with the discipline and correction of believers. For example, for his disobedience, Moses was not allowed to enter the Promised Land. David was disciplined for his sins of adultery and murder. And if we're following correct principles of interpretation, we should definitely take 1 Peter 4:17-18 into account when we're applying Proverbs 11:31 for today.

So the best application of the first part of verse 31 (*"if the righteous will be recompensed on the earth"*) is **not** speaking of rewards for faithfulness. No! It refers to recompense - discipline - for unfaithfulness!

Thus our Practical Application for this Talk is: **always remember to form your biblical applications in the light of the rest of Scripture!**