

Wisdom in Weights

Proverbs 16:1-16

Proverbs 16:1-16 - *“The preparations of the heart belong to man, but the answer of the tongue is from the LORD.*

All the ways of a man are pure in his own eyes, but the LORD weighs the spirits.

Commit your works to the LORD, and your thoughts will be established.

The LORD has made all for Himself - yes, even the wicked for the day of doom.

Everyone proud in heart is an abomination to the LORD. Though they join forces, none will go unpunished.

In mercy and truth atonement is provided for iniquity, and by the fear of the Lord one departs from evil.

When a man’s ways please the LORD, even his enemies are at peace with him.

Better is a little with righteousness, than vast revenues without justice.

A man’s heart plans his way, but the LORD directs his steps.

Divination is on the lips of the king; his mouth must not transgress in judgment.

Honest weights and scales are the LORD’s. All the weights in the bag are His work.

It is an abomination for kings to commit wickedness, for a throne is established by righteousness.

Righteous lips are the delight of kings, and they love him who speaks what is right.

As messengers of death is the king’s wrath, but a wise man will appease it.

In the light of the king’s face is life, and his favor is like a cloud of the latter rain.

How much better to get wisdom than gold! And getting understanding is to be chosen rather than silver.”

Background Notes

For background, let’s consider the subject of money and how it was used in the days when Solomon wrote these proverbs. This will help us understand the proverb in verse 11: *“Honest weights and scales are the Lord’s; all the weights in the bag are His work.”*

Solomon wrote in the 10th century BC. The earliest coins date back only to around 700BC. So buying and selling back in Solomon’s day was done by bartering, using of scales and weights, depending on the product. Thus verse 11.

“But wait a minute,” you may say. “Didn’t Abraham use coinage as early as 2000BC when he bought a field from Ephron the Hittite for 400 shekels of silver? No. Back in that day shekels were not coins; they were weights of silver. In fact, *shekel* is the Hebrew word for “weight”. Thus we read in Genesis 23:16, *“And Abraham listened to Ephron; and Abraham weighed out the amount of silver for Ephron that he had named in the hearing of the sons of Heth: four hundred shekels of silver, currency of the merchants.”*

So with that brief background about money, we can better understand a number of Old Testament passages that talk about buying and selling before coins came into existence.

Doctrinal Point

The proverbs are wise advice for everyday living.

Verse 1: *“The preparations of the heart belong to man, but the answer of the tongue is from the LORD.”* You may have heard the expression, “Man proposes, but God disposes.” That’s not a Bible verse, but it is a Bible truth - and it’s taught right here in verse 1. God is sovereign, so even the words people say, whether good words or bad words, are ultimately under God’s sovereign control. In the Old Testament, Balaam is a good illustration of this truth. He wanted to curse Israel but his words came out as a blessing! (See Numbers 22-23.) Ephesians 1:11 says that God works all things after the counsel of His will. Does that include the words that people say? Of course! *“All things”* means **all** things.

Verse 2: *“All the ways of a man are pure in his own eyes, but the LORD weighs the spirits.”* **God sees the motives**, not the masks. The Lord judges not only what we do, but why we do it. Are we willing to pray as David did in Psalm 139? *“Search me, O God, and know my heart... see if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.”*

Verse 3: *“Commit your works to the LORD, and your thoughts will be established.”* This proverb is not saying that all your plans will work out as long as you pray about them. The point is that if you commit everything you plan and do and say to the Lord - roll it over to the Lord - then blessing, guidance, direction and stability in life will follow.

Verse 4: *“The LORD has made all for Himself - yes, even the wicked for the day of doom.”* At first glance, it might seem that this verse is teaching that God created the wicked to be damned. No. The Bible does not teach any kind of “doctrine of reprobation.” The point of this proverb is that God has ordained a day of judgment and place of judgment for the wicked. Hell does serve a purpose in God’s eternal and sovereign plans.

Verse 5: *“Everyone proud in heart is an abomination to the LORD. Though they join forces, none will go unpunished.”* God hates the sin of pride and all its bad fallout, so we can be sure that pride will not go unpunished. The idea here of joining forces or working hand-in-hand comes from the custom of shaking hands in agreement to a job. A question for Christians: how much reward will we lose out on at the judgment seat of Christ because of the pride in our hearts now?

Verse 6: *“In mercy and truth, atonement is provided for iniquity...”* This verse is not saying that we atone for our own sin by showing love and mercy to others, and by being truthful. No, that would contradict the clear teaching of Scripture. It is only through God’s love and mercy and faithfulness that salvation is provided for us in Christ. But now as believers we should demonstrate that same love and mercy and forgiveness and truthfulness toward others. As 1 Peter 4:8 says, *“Love covers a multitude of sins.”*

“...and by the fear of the LORD one departs from evil.” This second part of verse 6 is very practical. The more you fear the Lord, or have holy reverence and awe for the Lord, the more you’ll be motivated to do what’s right. For example, people who **truly** love and honor and fear the Lord will not have problems with internet pornography.

Verse 7: “When a man’s ways please the LORD, even his enemies are at peace with him.” Remember, this is a proverb - a general truth stated in general terms. Thus it is not a contradiction to the New Testament teaching of 2 Timothy 3:12 which says, “All who will live godly lives in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.” This proverb’s point is that, in general, when you live your life in line with God’s Word, you will have a peaceful life.

Verse 8: “Better is a little with righteousness, than vast revenues without justice.” God says that it is better to have a little money that is earned honestly, than great wealth with ethical questions surrounding it. Some prosperity preachers would wrongly add a third part to this proverb and say that with enough faith you’ll have a lot of possessions and a lot of money - but that is **not** biblically sound teaching!

Verse 9: “A man’s heart plans his way, but the LORD directs his steps.” This proverb is not saying that you shouldn’t plan ahead. No! It’s not wrong to make plans, but God is ultimately in control of our lives. Proverbs 27:1 says that “we don’t know what the day may bring.” God may have something even better in mind than our plans. For example, I never planned on going into fulltime ministry. By education and employment I was a research scientist - but God directed my steps into a very different way than what I had planned. So be open to God changing your plans. Even your good plans!

Verse 10: “Divination is on the lips of the king; his mouth must not transgress in judgment.” In this verse the word “divination” does not refer to witchcraft or sorcery. A better translation might be “wisdom from above.” In Israel, the king spoke as God’s representative, so he was responsible for making correct judgments. God’s authority backed up his edicts. Romans 13:1 says that all governing authorities are put in place by God, so they are responsible before God, and we should respect them.

Verse 12: “It is an abomination for kings to commit wickedness, for a throne is established by righteousness.” The point of this proverb is not that it’s wrong for kings to sin. It’s wrong for anyone to sin! But it is especially wicked if a king or leader does not set up a righteous government. Allowing oppression of the poor, or favoritism, or taking bribes, or any government wrongdoing is an abomination before the Lord, and God holds national leaders responsible. What does this say about our nation at all levels of government? Is our nation “established by righteousness”?

Verse 13: “Righteous lips are the delight of kings, and they love him who speaks what is right.” Good kings don’t want flattery and hypocrisy. They know that their kingdom is headed in the wrong direction and doomed for failure if there is no honesty and truth and justice. Sadly, bad political leaders don’t understand or appreciate this truth.

Verse 14: *“As messengers of death is the king’s wrath, but a wise man will appease it.”* This is a very practical proverb. It’s not suggesting compromising truth and justice. It’s just saying that it’s wise not to antagonize an authority figure who could take your life in his anger. If possible, it’s wise to take a course of action that will appease his wrath.

Verse 15: *“In the light of the king’s face is life, and his favor is like a cloud of the latter rain.”* When the king (or your boss) is smiling, it is like a time of refreshing rain in a country (or in the office)! This proverb can be applied to the home and to ministries as well. When parents in the home or directors of ministries are happy, it is like refreshing rain for everyone involved. A happy face encourages a happy home and workplace.

Verse 16: *“How much better to get wisdom than gold! And getting understanding is to be chosen rather than silver.”* When I was a teen, I followed this proverb without realizing it. With the money from my first job, I bought an encyclopedia! My friends thought I was crazy not to put the money towards a car, but I told them that learning was more important. (I wish I could say that I always made wise choices like that one!) Unfortunately, all too often our unwise lifestyle choices say just the opposite.

The proverbs are wise advice for everyday living.

Practical Application

Remember, God sees all the weights.

Verse 11: *“Honest weights and scales are the LORD’s. All the weights in the bag are His work.”* In our background notes we mentioned that coins or paper money were not used for buying and selling in Solomon’s day. For many products, commerce dealing used weights and a balance scale. A merchant could cheat a customer by using a sub-standard set of weights. After all, who would know?

God would know! He knows, and He is concerned about all the weights – the big ones and even the very small ones.

It can be all too easy to cheat in small areas, can’t it? Like not paying the highway tolls when the gate is open, or not paying back the store that undercharged you, or not returning borrowed items. Let’s not cheat. Let’s be careful to be ethical, even in the “small” areas. Remember, God sees **all** the weights!