

### Wisdom in Authority

#### Proverbs 20:16-30

**Proverbs 20:16-30** - *“Take the garment of one who is surety for a stranger, and hold it as a pledge when it is for a seductress.*

*Bread gained by deceit is sweet to a man, but afterward his mouth will be filled with gravel.*

*Plans are established by counsel. By wise counsel wage war.*

*He who goes about as a talebearer reveals secrets, so do not associate with one who flatters with his lips.*

*Whoever curses his father or his mother, his lamp will be put out in deep darkness.*

*An inheritance gained hastily at the beginning will not be blessed at the end.*

*Do not say, ‘I will recompense evil.’ Wait for the LORD, and He will save you.*

*Diverse weights are an abomination to the LORD, and dishonest scales are not good.*

*A man’s steps are of the LORD. How then can a man understand his own way?*

*It is a snare for a man to devote rashly something as holy, and afterward to reconsider his vows.*

*A wise king sifts out the wicked, and brings the threshing wheel over them.*

*The spirit of a man is the lamp of the LORD, searching all the inner depths of his heart.*

*Mercy and truth preserve the king, and by loving-kindness he upholds his throne.*

*The glory of young men is their strength, and the splendor of old men is their gray head.*

*Blows that hurt cleanse away evil, as do stripes the inner depths of the heart.”*

#### Background Notes

For background notes for the second half of Proverbs 20, let’s consider verse 26: *“A wise king sifts out the wicked, and brings the threshing wheel over them.”*

To understand the meaning of this proverb, we need to know about the ancient process of threshing and winnowing grain during the grain harvest. In threshing, a heavy sledge with spikes or sharp-rimmed wheels was pulled over the harvested grain to separate the grain from the stalks, and separate the seeds from the seed coverings (chaff). Winnowing followed threshing. The threshed grain was tossed up from a wide shallow basket in an area where the wind could blow the chaff away, or it was spread on the threshing floor, which was a good sized flat rock, so the wind could blow the chaff away.

The point of this proverb is not that the king should drive a literal threshing sledge over the wicked. The point is that, in order to maintain law and order and justice, a wise king should use strong and tough measures to clean out wickedness from his kingdom. You can’t just give a slap on the wrist or a short prison term to the wicked. The wicked must be separated out and removed, so they are no longer able to tear down society.

This proverb certainly has prophetic implications as well. The Lord Jesus Christ, as the wisest King ever, will return to earth and establish His glorious and righteous kingdom. Revelation 19:15 says that He will rule the nations with a rod of iron. Wickedness will not be tolerated in His kingdom of righteousness.

## Doctrinal Point

### The proverbs are wise advice for everyday living.

Verse 16: *“Take the garment of one who is surety for a stranger, and hold it as a pledge when it is for a seductress.”* The point in this proverb is that if you’re involved in any financial situation where the borrower could default, and you could be left to pay off the debt, then make sure you receive plenty of collateral - especially if you don’t know the borrower, or if there’s any question about the moral character of the borrower.

Verse 17: *“Bread gained by deceit is sweet to a man, but afterward his mouth will be filled with gravel.”* Did you ever try to eat a sandwich on a beach, and with the first bite you discovered that grains of sand had gotten on the bread? It doesn’t matter how good the sandwich is - you’re miserable just thinking about eating it. That may be the thought in this proverb. At first, dishonest gain tastes like a delightful dinner – but before long it will leave a taste like dry sand or gravel in your mouth. This refers to more than just dishonest gain in the area of money. What about shading the truth or exaggerating your credentials for your own advancement?

Verse 19: *“He who goes about as a talebearer reveals secrets, so do not associate with one who flatters with his lips.”* The last line of this proverb in Hebrew is literally *“Do not associate with one who is simple in his lips.”* Different translations render it as “talks too much” or “babbles” or “flatters with his lips” or “gossips.” In other words, he’s not discreet, and can’t control his talk. You can be sure that someone who talks too much to you about others will also talk too much about you to others. So what’s the solution? Stay away from folks who talk too much!

Verse 20: *“Whoever curses his father or his mother, his lamp will be put out in deep darkness.”* The word “lamp” is used here as a symbol for life. Here again we have the general truth that the divine principle for long life is honoring one’s parents, and the divine principle for a shortened life or a premature death is dishonoring one’s parents.

Verse 21: *“An inheritance gained hastily at the beginning will not be blessed at the end.”* The implication in this proverb is that the sudden inheritance was gained illegally, or dishonestly - like the prodigal son in Luke 15, or like the man in Proverbs 19:26 who wrongfully drives his father and mother away. There’s certainly no blessing there! But it’s generally true that even when a person receives a sudden inheritance honestly, most folks don’t spend or invest the money wisely - and in some cases, simply squander the money away. As a result, there is no blessing for anyone.

Verse 22: *“Do not say, ‘I will recompense evil,’ Wait for the LORD, and He will save you.”* This proverb isn’t saying that governments shouldn’t bring lawbreakers to justice. No, this proverb is in the context of others directing evil against us **personally**. We’re not to take revenge. We’re to wait for the Lord to vindicate us. Notice that we do not have to pray for the Lord’s vengeance to fall; we are simply to wait for the Lord. The implication is that the Lord does not always judge immediately, so wait!

The New Testament backs up this truth of leaving vengeance in the Lord’s hands. *“Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men. If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men. Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, “Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,” says the Lord” (Romans 12:17-19).* Wait for the Lord!

Verse 23: *“Diverse weights are an abomination to the LORD, and dishonest scales are not good.”* Wait a minute! Didn’t we just read that proverb recently? Yes, look back at verse 10. And Proverbs 11:1 says, *“Dishonest scales are an abomination to the Lord, but a just weight is His delight.”*

Remember, in ancient times changing the standard weights of the balance scale was a way to cheat in business. So why do the proverbs make such a big deal of this? Because as far as God is concerned it **is a big deal!** In fact, cheating in business dealings is not only wrong - the Lord considers it an **abomination**.

Verse 24: *“A man’s steps are of the LORD. How then can a man understand his own way?”* The main point of this proverb is that God’s control of our lives goes beyond our finite comprehension. We may think we’re calling all the shots - but it’s God who is *“working all things after the counsel of His will” (Ephesians 1:11)*. However, this truth does not excuse us or relieve us from making responsible decisions, while looking to the Lord for His guidance in the steps we take.

Verse 25: *“It is a snare for a man to devote rashly something as holy, and afterward to reconsider his vows.”* Did you ever promise the Lord something in an emotional moment, but then renege on your promise? “Lord, I promise that I’ll spend one hour every day studying your Word.” Or, “Lord, I promise that I will give a double tithe of my income - starting with my next paycheck.” Ecclesiastes 5:5 says, *“Better not to vow than to vow and not pay.”*

Notice how this proverb not only indicates that making rash vows is wrong, but they will entangle you like a snare when you realize how hard it is to follow through on those vows. Always think it through before you make promises.

Verse 27: *“The spirit of a man is the lamp of the LORD, searching all the inner depths of his heart.”* The Bible teaches that God created us with bodies, souls, and spirits (1 Thessalonians 5:23). Our God consciousness and our moral consciousness is associated with our spirit. We see in this proverb that the Lord, by His Spirit, operates on our spirit. He uses our conscience as a lamp to seek out all the hidden areas of our lives, and reveals where we need to clean house. And the closer we walk with the Lord, the more brightly the lamp of conscience shines!

Verse 28: *"Mercy and truth preserve the king, and by loving-kindness he upholds his throne."* Why is it so hard for rulers to learn the truth of this proverb? You don't gain respect and loyalty and stability as a leader through tyrannical and selfish government, but through mercy, truth and righteousness. Proverbs 14:34 says, *"Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people."*

Verse 29: *"The glory of young men is their strength, and the splendor of old men is their gray head."* Men, into which category do you fit? Both categories are essential, and both are needed in the church today. The strength of younger believers is needed for service, and the wisdom and experience of older believers is needed for counsel.

Verse 30: *"Blows that hurt cleanse away evil, as do stripes the inner depths of the heart."* It's generally true that physical punishment will restrain evil. It's true in a parent's proper discipline of a child and in God's discipline of believers. *"No chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful. However, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it"* (Hebrews 12:11).

The proverbs are wise advice for everyday living.

## **Practical Application**

### **Prepare and make plans for spiritual warfare.**

Verse 18: *"Plans are established by counsel. By wise counsel wage war."*

In the context, this proverb is talking about literal warfare. A nation should not go to war without first counting the cost, and first planning out the strategy, and making adequate military preparations.

This truth can be applied to spiritual warfare. Let's ask ourselves: Have I planned how to wage battle wisely in spiritual warfare? Have I put on the whole armor of God to prepare for spiritual warfare? Have I confessed and forsaken my known sins? Have I separated from this world's values? Do I pray regularly? Have I trained myself to use the Word of God - *"the sword of the Spirit"* - effectively? Ephesians 6:10-13 challenges us to *"put on the whole armor of God."*

Prepare and make plans for spiritual warfare.