



## Proverbs chapter 20:1-21:31

Taught at our Sunday evening service, 7th November 2021 @ Deal Christian Fellowship

**Reading:** Ephesians 5:15-21

**Good evening. Let's pray.**

### Introduction

We are continuing to study through the book of Proverbs, and as mentioned before, some view this as chronicling, for our benefit, the journey of a young man through life - for some, that can be a helpful way of looking at it, and of course that idea is born out of what we read - that Solomon is often saying "my son, if you do this" or "my son, if you keep yourself from doing that..."

But whether you find it help look at the structure book in that way or not, there are two critical things to get right about the content of the book. That is; don't make the mistake that this only applies to the young. And secondly, don't make the mistake of thinking this only applies to men.

What we read here applies to us all. Of course, young and old often behave differently, and men and women are designed and built differently, but when it comes to wisdom, knowledge, faithfulness and obedience to God's Word, there should be no difference.

## Themes in chapter twenty

In these two chapters there are a few themes repeated. In chapter 20 we see:

- Effort (v4, 13)
- Character (v6-7, 11, 22)
- Fairness (v10, 23)

## Themes in chapter twenty one

Then in chapter 21 we see:

- Effort (v25-26)
- Our worship (v3, 27)
- Pride (v4, 24)
- Choosing wisely (v9, 19)

## Chapter twenty

So, let's jump into chapter 20. We read there:

### **Proverbs 20:1**

Wine is a mocker,  
Strong drink is a brawler,  
And whoever is led astray by it is not wise.

This is the first time in Proverbs that there is a specific warning against the use and abuse of alcohol - and what does it inflame? Our tongues, and our tempers - both of which we've been warned of many times before. And therein is part of the problem with drinking - it often amplifies our emotions, turning things all over the place until we don't know which way is up. And that's not good!

Is it wrong to drink? No.

Is it wrong to be drunk? Utterly so.

Drunkenness should have no place in the life of a Christian - and you should not laugh about times you were, as if it were a badge of honour.

And if drinking, even moderately so, in front of someone else may cause them to stumble, you should be willing avoid it all together - that's the principle we find in 1 Corinthians 8.

Furthermore, knowing that it can lead to overindulgence in sensual pleasures, we'd be wise to keep a close check on what we permit. It certainly will do you no harm to avoid alcohol altogether, though the same cannot be said of drinking it.

In verse 2 & 3 we read...

**Proverbs 20:2-3**

The wrath of a king is like the roaring of a lion;  
Whoever provokes him to anger sins against his own life.  
It is honourable for a man to stop striving,  
Since any fool can start a quarrel.

We shouldn't always be looking for a fight - whether with our fists, or our words. The wise man looks for ways to avoid arguments, for ways to keep the peace, for ways to speak the truth in love. It's not only the right and honourable thing to do, but it's for our benefit too!

**Proverbs 20:4**

The lazy man will not plow because of winter;  
He will beg during harvest and have nothing.

In addition to being vinegar to the eyes of the one who sent him, so is the lazy man a hinderance to himself. We are to be self-motivated for our own good!

So work hard, even when you don't feel like it! I can tell you, being self-motivated is a huge asset to your employer, and to your spouse. Many are not willing to work when it's hard and cold, and then wonder why things are not easy when everyone else seems to be having things go their way.

The same is true spiritually. Often we can feel cold in our walk with the Lord, and don't feel like reading our Bibles, like praying, or like going to church meetings - but that's exactly when we should! And if we do, we'll reap the harvest - we'll see fruit in our lives.

**Proverbs 20:5**

Counsel in the heart of man is like deep water,  
But a man of understanding will draw it out.

Often, people don't open up about their lives - what they are feeling, what they are struggling with. But a wise man (and good friend) will ask good questions, and listen carefully, and with such a reputation of avoiding gossip - that even the secluded heart may yield it's thoughts.

**Proverbs 20:6**

Most men will proclaim each his own goodness,  
But who can find a faithful man?

I don't know about you, but I find this so true at work - there are many who boast of how good and great they are. Yet, this can happen in the church - and in his third letter, John calls out Diotrephes by name for wanting the preeminent place in the church, to the point of even keeping faithful people out of the fellowship.

But rather, we are not to be focussed on looking good, but being good. We are to be faithful. But faithful to who? Ultimately, to Jesus.

The problem is, like the rich young ruler in Matthew 19, we don't like the cost. We too easily think faithfulness means turning up once or twice on a Sunday - yet the truth is that we are to be faithful in every way, every day.

**Proverbs 20:7**

The righteous man walks in his integrity;  
His children are blessed after him.

That is, when there are no skeletons in your closet, when there is no possibility of shocking revelation about you - your children will benefit! Not only once you've died, but even before - for your children will follow after you in so many ways.

**Proverbs 20:8**

A king who sits on the throne of judgment  
Scatters all evil with his eyes.

When someone is just, even a look can stop you doing wrong - like a parent with a child! Finnis Dake comments: "A king who sits to judge men and execute the laws of God will strike terror in the hearts of evil men who know that they will receive justice for their deeds." Oh for government like that!

But before we quickly point the finger at our politicians, we read...

**Proverbs 20:9**

Who can say, "I have made my heart clean,  
I am pure from my sin"?

In case you're unsure of the answer, the Bible is abundantly clear.

We read in Psalm 14:1 "There is none who does good." - repeated in Psalm 53:1

Two verses later in Psalm 14:3 we read "There is none who does good, No, not one" - also repeated in Psalm 53:3

Ecclesiastes 7:20 says "For there is not a just man on earth who does good And does not sin."

And we should be familiar with 1 John 1:8 which says "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us."

Yet praise God that we have a Saviour! We read in Revelation chapter 1:

**Revelation 1:5a-6**

To Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and has made us kings and priests to His God and Father, to Him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

Back in Proverbs 20:10 we read...

**Proverbs 20:10**

Diverse weights and diverse measures,  
They are both alike, an abomination to the LORD.



So even in how we treat people financially, we are to be fair. And we'll look at this a little more when we tackle verse 23 of this chapter. But note that how well you treat others isn't a secret! We read...

**Proverbs 20:11**

Even a child is known by his deeds,  
Whether what he does is pure and right.

Your reputation starts young! And even as you grow in years, you are known by not only what you say, but also but what you do. If you say you love God, that should be evident in your life.

Yet, Finnis Dake makes an even starker warning from this verse. He writes:

The deeds of a child reveal his character and predict what his future will be if he is not properly trained and transformed by God's power.

**Finnis Dake**

We need to be properly trained, as he puts it. But trained in what? In the Word - which as we read in 2 Timothy...

**2 Timothy 3:16-17**

All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.

But the Word is not the only thing competing for our attention - so it's important to remember that as adults, our character is shaped so much by what we feed on with our ears and eyes:

**Proverbs 20:12**

The hearing ear and the seeing eye,  
The LORD has made them both.

God has given us both - but like any tool, they are only of benefit if used correctly. So use them well.

Solomon now instructs further regarding our eyes - but more talking about effort...

**Proverbs 20:13**

Do not love sleep, lest you come to poverty;  
Open your eyes, and you will be satisfied with bread.

So get necessary rest, but don't live for it. That is, don't sleep more than you should - but rather, go to work to support yourself. Of course, there are some who through no fault of their own cannot work - and it's great and good that they are supported by others. But where you can, you should. Paul wrote to the church in Thessalonica:

**2 Thessalonians 3:10**

For even when we were with you, we commanded you this: If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat.

That's motivation! And especially as Christians we are not to be lazy, we are not to sponge from others, we are to do our part in our families, and within our church family.

Unfortunately though, I think we've got the wrong idea, that our jobs and ministries should always be enjoyable. And so we wait a chance to do what we'd enjoy, rather than do what needs doing.

But that's not the reality we're presented with in either life or church ministry. So get up out of bed, get a job, get stuck into ministry. If you enjoy it, great! But even if you don't, you'll be providing for your needs, and serving the Lord.

**Proverbs 20:14**

"It is good for nothing," cries the buyer;  
But when he has gone his way, then he boasts.

I don't know about you, but this is easy to witness at boot-fairs or with selling items via eBay or Facebook. You advertise something for £50, and someone offers £5 because that's all they think it's worth. Yet you know they'd be thrilled if they got it at that price.

Really, it's not fair negotiation, it's disingenuous. And we'd do well to consider how we conduct ourselves in this regard.

**Proverbs 20:15**

There is gold and a multitude of rubies,  
But the lips of knowledge are a precious jewel.

Continuing the theme of value, Solomon here reminds us that while there are a lot of nice things, there are better things. And we need to get our values the right way round.

**Proverbs 20:16**

Take the garment of one who is surety for a stranger,  
And hold it as a pledge when it is for a seductress.

So first here is guidance to take security or a deposit from strangers, to ensure they meet their obligations. But followed by the warning that we should not seek to gain through deception ourselves...

**Proverbs 20:17**

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

Of course, sin is pleasurable in the moment, that's why we are attracted to it and that's why we do it. But prudence helps us to see the likely consequences. That in the end sin leaves a bitter taste.

**Proverbs 20:18**

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

So just as we started with last week in 18:1, we must not isolate ourselves - but instead get good counsel from others. And this is true in all areas of life - from the battlefields of war, to the battlegrounds of relationships. When dating Sian, I got others' advice before asking her to marry me - and I'm thankful for the good counsel I received.

But note this - I've learnt from that and other situations that you need to ASK for counsel. Others may be far too worried to give it to you unsolicited. And of course, you need to be prepared to listen!

But also, be careful who you confide in, and seek counsel from, for we read...

**Proverbs 20:19**

He who goes about as a talebearer reveals secrets;  
Therefore do not associate with one who flatters with his lips.

If someone shares gossip to you, they'll likely share gossip about you! Choose your friends wisely.

**Proverbs 20:20**

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

There's a special respect we should have for our parents. Of course, that's ideally in the context of having great parents. Yet, even if they are not good parents, and sadly many are not, that doesn't give us license to speak in a bad way about them. It's possible to describe or discuss without being disrespectful.

**Proverbs 20:21**

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

I can't help but think of the prodigal son here - he got his inheritance hastily, but surely regretted both that and his subsequent wasting of it in the end.

**Proverbs 20:22**

Do not say, "I will recompense evil";  
Wait for the LORD, and He will save you.

That is, God is the one who will bring justice - he doesn't need you as a key enforcer. Yes, there's a place for justice systems - but this is talking about personal retribution.

**Proverbs 20:23**

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

Following on from v10, this again says that there should be fairness in all we do. Don't overcharge your customers, don't shortchange those you buy from, don't under pay your employees, or take advantage of your employer. To intentionally do is an abomination to God.

**Proverbs 20:24**

A man's steps are of the LORD;  
How then can a man understand his own way?

We think too highly of ourselves when we forget the Lord has more than a hand in what we do, and what happens to us. I think we'll be surprised one day to see how much God did for us that we never knew - how amazing that will be!

**Proverbs 20:25**

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

We should be willing to devote much to the Lord, but we should do so wisely. No-one, including God, expects more than you can give. So commit only what you are willing to see through. Before you say "Lord, I'll do this" - be sure you're prepared to do it come what may. Including when you sing songs to Him.

Our warning is a man called Jephthah that we find in chapter 11 of the book of Judges - he vowed to God saying "If You will indeed deliver the people of Ammon into my hands, then it will be that whatever comes out of the doors of my house to meet me, when I return in peace from the people of Ammon, shall surely be the LORD's, and I will offer it up as a burnt offering."

But just a handful of verses later, after God granted that victory, we read "When Jephthah came to his house at Mizpah, there was his daughter, coming out to meet him with timbrels and dancing; and she was his only child. Besides her he had neither son nor daughter. And it came to pass, when he saw her, that he tore his clothes, and said, "Alas, my daughter! You have brought me very low! You are among those who trouble me! For I have given my word to the LORD, and I cannot go back on it."

To see how that panned out, you'll need to dig into that chapter - but the point is, don't promise God what you are not prepared to give - whether your time, money, energy or anything.

**Proverbs 20:26**

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

So will a wise employer determine who he can trust. We also don't put someone in ministry in this church any less than 6 months into their time here so that we can learn where their heart is at.

**Proverbs 20:27**

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

That is, there is something God has created in us that acts as a light to reveal the condition of our hearts - that thing is our conscience. That very word comes from two words - "con" meaning with and "science" meaning knowledge. And this is such an accurate description, that when we sin, we are acting with knowledge that it is wrong. Our conscience accuses us, and bears witness of our sin as we read in Romans chapter 2.

**Proverbs 20:28**

Mercy and truth preserve the king,  
And by lovingkindness he upholds his throne.

God prolonged the days and reign of King Hezekiah for the purpose of acting righteously. And all the time God has work for you to do on this earth, you're not going anywhere! Just be sure to do it!

**Proverbs 20:29**

The glory of young men is their strength,  
And the splendour of old men is their grey head.

Well, I like these verses about grey hair! But, taken in context of all we read - we can conclude that the wisdom of years is what Solomon is getting at. But that's not automatic. It's possible to be old and stupid. Likewise, while the young man may most often be interested in winning arm-wrestles and rugby tackles, the wise ones will be pursuing wisdom, knowledge and understanding too.

**Proverbs 20:30**

Blows that hurt cleanse away evil,  
As do stripes the inner depths of the heart.

We'll later read in chapter 27 that "Faithful are the wounds of a friend". And here Solomon is saying that sometimes the hard corrections, while painful, are most necessary to produce maturity in our lives. It can be those conversations that still hurt the next day, that are the ones that cause us to get our act together and purify our hearts.

## Chapter twenty one

Speaking of hearts, Solomon continues in chapter 21 verse 1, saying:

**Proverbs 21:1**

The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD,  
Like the rivers of water;  
He turns it wherever He wishes.

This is a deeply comforting verse - for we do not have a God who has lost control. Rather, we have one that is able to turn hearts for his purposes. But I urge you to remember, that He may use you in the process - that is, He may use us to turn a king's heart! Charles Spurgeon commented:

I often hear it said, 'Do not bring religion into politics.' This is precisely where it ought to be brought, and set there in the face of all men as on a candlestick.

**Charles Spurgeon**

Don't underestimate how God may use you in that arena, should that be where He calls you.



**Proverbs 21:2**

Every way of a man is right in his own eyes,  
But the LORD weighs the hearts.

Though we may have a self-righteous opinion of ourselves, God's law condemns us and our ways end in death, because our hearts are desperately wicked. We NEED a Saviour!

**Proverbs 21:3**

To do righteousness and justice  
Is more acceptable to the LORD than sacrifice.

This is just as we read in 1 Samuel 15:22 which says "to obey is better than sacrifice."

We might think we're offering sweet smelling praise and worship to our Lord, but if your attitude and actions stink, so does your worship.

**Proverbs 21:4**

A haughty look, a proud heart,  
And the plowing of the wicked are sin.

The proud heart and even the preparation to sin is offensive to God. And we read...

**Proverbs 21:5**

The plans of the diligent lead surely to plenty,  
But those of everyone who is hasty, surely to poverty.

That is, we are pay careful attention to all that we do - for if we put the bare minimum into life, marriage, work or ministry, we'll get the bare minimum back out.

As for our spiritual state, if you just have a quick flick through a chapter and think that's studying your Bible, you'll be headed for spiritual hunger. Remember it is those that hunger and thirst for righteousness that shall be filled.

**Proverbs 21:6-7**

Getting treasures by a lying tongue  
Is the fleeting fantasy of those who seek death.  
The violence of the wicked will destroy them,  
Because they refuse to do justice.

Note that whatever you can gain through wicked means won't last, and will actually be your own downfall in the end.

**Proverbs 21:8**

The way of a guilty man is perverse;  
But as for the pure, his work is right.

This all stems from the heart. Jesus said:

**Matthew 12:35**

A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good things, and an evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth evil things.

Next, Solomon gives some relationship advice:

**Proverbs 21:9**

Better to dwell in a corner of a housetop,  
Than in a house shared with a contentious woman.

Solomon is saying that it's better to have the humble one-bed rented flat in the cheapest part of town, than to settle down in the mansion in the rich district with continual arguments. And this goes for men and women. Choose a spouse based on their character, not their bank account.

Indeed this should act as a warning to any single person thinking that marriage is the ultimate solution to their problems and desires. JVM says "This is the man who did not know what true happiness was until he got married—and then it was too late!"

**Proverbs 21:10**

The soul of the wicked desires evil;  
His neighbour finds no favour in his eyes.

The wicked man is self-centred, and as such doesn't stop to consider his neighbours.

**Proverbs 21:11**

When the scoffer is punished, the simple is made wise;  
But when the wise is instructed, he receives knowledge.

There are two applications here - nationally, it is important that we have laws and punishments for certain crimes, and that we uphold justice, to act as a deterrent to those that might otherwise do the same things.

But closer to home, public correction is sometimes necessary for others to learn - whether in our homes, churches, or workplaces. Tolerating an unruly child, adult or employee is an encouragement to bad ones to act the same, and discouragement to the good ones.

**Proverbs 21:12**

The righteous God wisely considers the house of the wicked,  
Overthrowing the wicked for their wickedness.

You'll find a difference between some translations on this verse, but the same is in agreement - that it is God who will overthrow the wicked. He is good. And we should be very thankful that He is!

While no-one will be able to stand in His sight of their own accord, we will be able to stand before Him because of what Jesus has done for us.

**Proverbs 21:13**

Whoever shuts his ears to the cry of the poor  
Will also cry himself and not be heard.

As a church, our aim is not to launch a network of soup kitchens - it never should be - but if the Word is taught, that's exactly the sort of thing that should happen! Some may ask of our church "Why aren't we doing X?" - but the answer, should that ever be the case, would likely be "Because you're the church, and you're not doing it!"

The job of the pastor, and of the elders, is to ensure the church is well fed. When that happens, all manner of good things follow! So may this verse cause you to look for how God might use you to help others.

**Proverbs 21:14**

A gift in secret pacifies anger,  
And a bribe behind the back, strong wrath.

I believe this is a statement, not a recommendation! For we read in chapter 17...

**Proverbs 17:23**

A wicked man accepts a bribe behind the back  
To pervert the ways of justice.

But here in verse 21 Solomon immediately follows by saying...

**Proverbs 21:15**

It is a joy for the just to do justice,  
But destruction will come to the workers of iniquity.

That is, again, you'll reap what you sow.

**Proverbs 21:16**

A man who wanders from the way of understanding  
Will rest in the assembly of the dead.

So keep pressing on in your walk with Jesus! If you do nothing, you'll go nowhere and the place you'll grind to a halt is the congregation of the dead.

But don't settle for that. You are not to be the frozen chosen, but alive in Him!

**Proverbs 21:17**

He who loves pleasure will be a poor man;  
He who loves wine and oil will not be rich.

You might be thinking "hang on, oil tends to make a lot of money". But the oil spoken of here is referring to perfume or that used in anointing a person, not in running your car.

So I believe what Solomon is saying, is that we need to get our priorities right. For if all we do is covet the pleasures laid before us on Instagram, we'll be consumed by what we wish to consume, spending our efforts on what we can't reach, rather than using our time doing what we can.

**Proverbs 21:18**

The wicked shall be a ransom for the righteous,  
And the unfaithful for the upright.

That is, the wicked shall be cut off by God's judgments in order to preserve the righteous - the early Biblical examples being the flood in Genesis 7, and the Exodus.

But so then, how gracious is God that His righteous son died for you and I?!

**Proverbs 21:19**

Better to dwell in the wilderness,  
Than with a contentious and angry woman.

Here Solomon picks up what he said in v9, but now says you're better to be in a tent than a house with an argumentative wife. As a man with 300 wives, Solomon no doubt had a handle on what he was talking about! So single guys and girls, should you wish to marry, choose a wife or husband wisely!

**Proverbs 21:20**

There is desirable treasure,  
And oil in the dwelling of the wise,  
But a foolish man squanders it.

Prudence doesn't spend to the hilt. That is, just because you have money, there is no compulsion to spend all of it!

**Proverbs 21:21**

He who follows righteousness and mercy  
Finds life, righteousness, and honour.

Well, there's incentive! But the key here, is to have righteousness AND mercy. Righteousness without mercy leaves you accepting no-one, just like a Pharisee. But mercy without righteousness leaves you accepting everyone's ways, making you a fool.

**Proverbs 21:22**

A wise man scales the city of the mighty,  
And brings down the trusted stronghold.

Indeed it is better to be wise than mighty. As a real example, the ancient city of Babylon was very well defended, but a wise enemy drained the branch of the river Euphrates that went into it, and the army walked in along the riverbed before the Babylonians knew what was happening, and captured the city without any real fight.

**Proverbs 21:23**

Whoever guards his mouth and tongue  
Keeps his soul from troubles.

At this point, Solomon has already warned us about our words, our mouths and our tongues over 50 times. This verse underlines that saying we need to guard our mouths.

Maybe it's helpful to remember that unlike our ears, God did design our mouths to shut on occasion!

**Proverbs 21:24**

A proud and haughty man—"Scoffer" is his name;  
He acts with arrogant pride.

That is, he always thinks he knows better and that he could not be wrong. And he never seeks counsel, or opinion of others. You too can be arrogant if you fail to do that.

**Proverbs 21:25-26**

The desire of the lazy man kills him,  
For his hands refuse to labor.  
He covets greedily all day long,  
But the righteous gives and does not spare.

In this day and age, it's so easy to tune out of our responsibilities and sit and scroll through Amazon, eBay, shopping web sites and such, and not do the things we need to do.

And I wonder, are we more focussed on what we can get, than what we can give?

**Proverbs 21:27**

The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination;  
How much more when he brings it with wicked intent!

Building on v3, Solomon now says it is a problem when we bring wrong things, or a desire for wrong things to our worship. That is, we must not praise or worship God so that we can get something from Him - rather we praise Him for what He has already done! But also, if we serve, praise, or worship with time stolen from our employer, or with things taken unlawfully from anyone else, we are in serious error.

Finnis Dake notes:

Sacrifices offered to God must be the proper kind, obtained through lawful means, and offered with the right motives by the right persons and for the right reason.

**Finnis Dake**

In verse 28 we read...

**Proverbs 21:28**

A false witness shall perish,  
But the man who hears him will speak endlessly.



That is, we should be careful who we listen to - because it's possible to get excited by lies, especially when we don't know that they are lies.

**Proverbs 21:29**

A wicked man hardens his face,  
But as for the upright, he establishes his way.

So on one hand the wicked man puts on his poker face - as if he has done nothing wrong. But on the other hand, the upright considers what the right thing to do is.

**Proverbs 21:30**

There is no wisdom or understanding  
Or counsel against the LORD.

No-one can stand against the God who made everything, which is why we read Solomon's closing verse in this chapter which says:

**Proverbs 21:31**

The horse is prepared for the day of battle,  
But deliverance is of the LORD.

God is in control. We can and should plan - but also remember that He is the King of the jungle.

## Summary

Tonight, let's close simply with some application questions to think on during this week. I even suggest that these are questions you can talk about with your children, your spouse, and your Christian friends to help you all dig into God's Word and His will for your life.

## Application questions

- Are you lazy, or do you put effort into work and ministry?
- Do you ask other Christian's for their counsel?
- Do you worship God (in your life and song) rightly?

**Let's pray.**