

Commentary on Proverbs 15:21-33

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The **International Bible Lesson** (*Uniform Sunday School Series*) for **Sunday, September 18, 2011**, is from **Proverbs 15:21-33**. Five **Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further** follow the [Bible Lesson Commentary](#) below. **Study Hints for Thinking Further** will aid teachers in conducting class discussion and are also available on the [Bible Lesson Forum](#).

Proverbs 15:21-33

(Proverbs 15:21) Folly is a joy to one who has no sense, but a person of understanding walks straight ahead.

The word “folly” means “lack of good sense or normal prudence and foresight.” Folly can result from lack of commonsense, lack of a proper education, lack of self-discipline, and from ignoring wise advice. Without commonsense, a person may not comprehend the eventual consequences of refusing to do what is right, and instead seek happiness in the forbidden pleasures of the moment. A person who comprehends truth and understands reality will walk according to what they know is right and wise.

(Proverbs 15:22) Without counsel, plans go wrong, but with many advisers they succeed.

In general, a person should take the time to seek the advice of godly and wise people they respect before making major decisions. Sometimes, others can see the unintended or hidden consequences or dangers of a person’s choice because they have the education and experience others may lack. Usually, the more experienced people who have God’s interests and your interests at heart will provide the best advice and encourage you to obey God and prayerfully seek God’s will and plans before making a final decision.

(Proverbs 15:23) To make an apt answer is a joy to anyone, and a word in season, how good it is!

An apt answer is timely and directly to the point of the question. An apt answer will bring joy to the one seeking guidance and/or information. Some try to give answers to questions even before the questions are asked or understood by the one trying to give advice: these answers may not be timely or wise. A believer should pray for the right time, for God’s timing, before giving an answer and for the answer that God wants given to a question. Those preparing a lesson, sermon, or speech should pray that God will give them a “word in season” for their listeners.

(Proverbs 15:24) For the wise the path of life leads upward, in order to avoid Sheol below.

Before God revealed more about the afterlife, judgment, and salvation through faith in Jesus Christ in the New Testament, Sheol was the name for the abode of the dead. The wise and upward path may be the more difficult path in the short term. However, the unwise and downward path will lead to sorrow and eventual death. In the moral realm, the easiest way of succumbing to temptation or taking unjustified and unwise shortcuts to success can lead to eternal misery and regret. Following the moral standards and way of salvation revealed in the Bible, though perhaps not the easiest way in this world, will lead to happiness. Jesus declared: "Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the road is easy that leads to destruction, and there are many who take it" (Matthew 7:13).

(Proverbs 15:25) The LORD tears down the house of the proud, but maintains the widow's boundaries.

The proud person points to himself and congratulates himself with regard to what he has achieved. His "house" may be what he has proudly built to impress others with his success. On the other hand, the believing widow trusts in the LORD as the One who will support and protect her (often through the law of God and the love of God's people). God's care for her may not mean an easy life, but God will meet her needs. She can renew her confidence in God through Bible study, prayer, obedience to God, and seeking to serve others in God's name.

(Proverbs 15:26) Evil plans are an abomination to the LORD, but gracious words are pure.

Some people set lofty or unwise goals and then devise evil plans to achieve them. They believe that any means, just or unjust, can be used if their plan seems "good" to them. But using evil means to achieve a "good" end are an abomination (something disgusting and hated) to the LORD. Only good (pleasing to God) plans should be used to achieve good purposes. Plans and speeches to achieve good goals, if motivated by love for God and others according to the Bible's moral teachings, are pure and in the best interests of all concerned.

(Proverbs 15:27) Those who are greedy for unjust gain make trouble for their households, but those who hate bribes will live.

The Bible does not condemn striving for personal "gain," but strongly warns those who are greedy (or selfish, self-centered and self-consumed), unjust, unfair, and dishonest. Such people not only make trouble for those they abuse and cheat, but also for themselves and their households (including family members who may not be guilty of wrongdoing). Some who seek unjust profits or power will sometimes try to bribe business leaders and politicians. Those who lobby for special interests sometimes try to bribe politicians and even the general public. Those who refuse to give or receive bribes will live. God also hates bribery.

(Proverbs 15:28) The mind of the righteous ponders how to answer, but the mouth of the wicked pours out evil.

A righteous person wants to give a right, true, and honest answer, and he wants to do this with the right tone of voice and spirit, and in the right context so he can communicate clearly what he intends to say. Listeners must also learn to exercise patience with a righteous person who wants to give the best answer possible and who takes his time to prayerfully and wisely answer a question. A wicked person does not guard what he says, but says whatever he wants to say in any situation. Sometimes he will use carefully chosen words and tone of voice to manipulate someone or group. They will sometimes give speeches as though they cannot say enough to achieve their evil purposes.

(Proverbs 15:29) The LORD is far from the wicked, but he hears the prayer of the righteous.

The LORD is far from the wicked on a personal basis, and the LORD is also far from the wicked when they are leaders or try to lead others to achieve their wicked and unwise ends. The wicked can lead and the righteous can suffer under their leadership, but God is not with them and they do not want God near them. God is near the righteous and the LORD helps them pray and hears their prayers.

(Proverbs 15:30) The light of the eyes rejoices the heart, and good news refreshes the body.

When we see that which is good and right; when we see people loving, obeying, and worshiping the LORD, this brings joy to our hearts. God gives believers the light or the ability to see and appreciate His good and life-giving work in the world no matter how gloomy and dark the world may seem. When we hear or see the good news of Jesus Christ in the Bible and in the world today, it refreshes our minds and bodies no matter how much we might otherwise suffer in this world.

(Proverbs 15:31) The ear that heeds wholesome admonition will lodge among the wise.

When someone admonishes us, they want us to correct some behavior that might be bad, evil, unwise, or simply inappropriate. Wholesome correction comes from someone who truly cares about us and others near us, rather than just criticizing us for some other purpose unrelated to promoting what is best. To heed such admonition will open the door to fellowship with God and the godly who think and act wisely.

(Proverbs 15:32) Those who ignore instruction despise themselves, but those who heed admonition gain understanding.

The dictionary defines “admonition” as “gentle or friendly reproof, counsel or warning against fault or oversight.” Some ignore the teaching of the Bible, either the Bible as written or the Bible as taught by godly and wise teachers. To ignore the Bible as “God’s Owner’s Manual” (suited to our existence as God created us in His image and given to us by God) is to do harm to ourselves and others, to refuse

to do what is best for God and all creation. Those who study the Bible do gain understanding about the ways of God, human nature and society, and themselves. As they live according to this understanding, God will give them new understanding from His Word, through prayer, and the world around them.

(Proverbs 15:33) The fear of the LORD is instruction in wisdom, and humility goes before honor.

Fear of the LORD, reverence and respect for God, understanding that our actions, beliefs, choices, and lifestyles make a difference in our relationship with God, knowing that if we choose wickedness that He will withdraw from us, and knowing that if we choose righteousness that He will hear our prayers—all these truths are instruction in wisdom (all from the study of the Proverbs and the Bible) that lead to righteous and truthful living. Knowing that we depend on the leading, power, and wisdom of God to do anything well or worthwhile is the kind of humility that can lead to God honoring our lives or giving us honor even in this life as well as in heaven.

Five Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further

1. What actions or characteristics do you see today in a person “who has no sense”? What do you think influenced them to lose or not acquire commonsense?
2. What actions or characteristics would you look for in a person before you would seek advice from them?
3. In what variety of ways may bribes be offered today? Why do you think God and His followers hate bribes?
4. Why might someone need to exercise patience if they ask a question of or seek an answer from a wise person?
5. Why and where should a wise person seek both admonition and instruction? List more than one person or place?

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