

Part 15: Trusting in Righteousness

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February 7, 2021

Is there anything that can make us more indignant, angry and frustrated than realizing we've been scammed? Just this week at our Community Group one of our members had just been, in his own words, "digitally punked" and bought a product which was linked to stolen shipment ID which he never received.

We'll look at how our passage in the book of Proverbs opens today: **Proverbs 11:1-3**.

Right off the bat Solomon is opening up this chapter by talking about scams. He's talking about those who deal in deceitful business practices.

When you go to fill up your car with gas if you look at the gas pump each of them has a sticker on it indicating that it has been examined by the State Department for Weights and Measurements. What does that mean?

It means that someone from the state came to that gas station to make sure that when the pump says you filled up a gallon of gas, that you are actually getting the whole gallon. Unless you show up with your own scale, you are taking the gas station's word that they are giving you what you paid for. So to protect the consumer there are checks and balances in place.

This practice of integrity was something that God demanded from his people in his law. In the book of Leviticus God says you shall give no wrong judgment in measures of weight, length or quantity.

Now here's the thing. I bet you that most of us have been scammed or skimmed by some shady business practice in ways that we didn't even catch. Yet, here we are today generally unaffected by it. But if we ever find out that we've been duped, we are immediately filled with a sense of indignation.

We are livid. Why? Because it is unjust. This is a cultural phenomenon, this is what drives our demands not only for checks and balances in business and in government but for justice and equality in society in general. We know the abomination of a false balance, prideful arrogance, and crooked business practices.

But Solomon shows us today that behind this injustice is also the theme of integrity, uprightness, and a word the Bible often uses: righteousness. All of our cultural outrage over issues of justice are ultimately touch points on the biblical issue of righteousness. A false scale is unrighteous, it isn't right and it is an abomination.

But did you see how this text starts out. It didn't start out with our emotions. It started with God's emotions: false balances are an abomination to the Lord, but a just weight is his delight. That is to say a righteous scale, a scale which is morally true, pleases God in his soul.

We don't always see the skewed scales in our lives, but the God who sees all things is aware of every infraction of integrity and he abhors it. God is far more righteous against deceitful practices than we

ever will be. And on the flip side, God is more please, delighted, and honored when just and right business practices are upheld.

God cares more about righteousness and justice than you.

But did you notice what Solomon did here? He first establishes that God cares about right scales. God hates unrighteous, unjust, deceitful scales. We applaud this! But as Solomon goes on, he begins not talking about righteous and upright scales, but about upright and righteous hearts.

Let's finish reading our passage today: **Proverbs 11:3-8**. The word translated "crookedness" in our text today is only used twice in the whole Old Testament. The sense behind the word is that of duplicity and deceit.

In other words this is what Solomon is saying in verse 3: the upright are of singular integrity, they are upfront and righteous. But the wicked are deceitful, duplicitous and two faced in their faith.

Do you see what Solomon is doing here: He shows us God's own affection towards impersonal scales and weights and then goes on to say: "If God cares about righteous scales, how much more does he care about righteous and upright hearts."

Six times in our eight verses today Solomon uses words related to uprightness and righteousness contrasted with the seven uses of crookedness, treacherous and wicked. In other words if we love to cheer the God who hates false scales and delights in just weights, then we need to come to grips with a God who loathes unrighteous hearts but who delights in those who are righteous.

But here's the beauty of our passage today: While this passage starts with God's delight, it ends with ours. In other words wrapped up in the God who loves righteousness is some of the most practically applicable ideas in the whole book of Proverbs, and yet also some of the most deeply comforting truths for the Christian heart.

What we are going to see today is this: **Walking in righteousness pleases God and satisfies the Christian**. We are going to look at this in two ways: First, we are going to put ourselves to **Understanding Righteousness** the word is in here a lot, so we should know what is meant by it. Then we are going to look at **Trusting in Righteousness**.

But first, let's define refine righteousness as we look at our first point today: **Understanding Righteousness**.

Righteousness is a big word which carries a lot of religious weight and for many of us it either seems too lofty for us to understand or we hear it so often that it is white noise to us.

In fact John Calvin who wrote thousands of passages on the Christian faith who ultimately boiled down the Christian life to two parts: **"The first is that a love of righteousness—to which we are not naturally prone—must be implanted and poured into our hearts. The second is that we need some model that will keep us from losing our way in our pursuit of righteousness."**

Understanding righteousness is not only the key to much of the book of Proverbs (where it is mentioned nearly 100x), but it's key to understanding the comfort and task of the Christian life.

The Hebrew word for righteousness carries with it two senses it is both moral (ethical), and it is secondly relational in that it expresses loyalty towards something.

The reason why all of us are universally outraged when we are scammed is because we understand the ***moral or ethical aspects of righteousness***.

As Proverbs 11:1 shows this universal moral code is actually rooted in the righteousness of God himself. God is righteous. Leviticus 19 ends with God's call for Israel to not be deceitful in scales or business, but the chapter begins with the reason why Israel should care about this: **Leviticus 19:1-2**.

Righteousness is related to our understanding of holiness. To be holy simply means to be set apart. We are to be set apart as God himself is set apart. But what sets God apart? Why is God holy? Righteousness. Look at how Isaiah puts this in **Isaiah 5:16**. Why is God distinct from everything else? Because he is righteous, he is exalted in justice.

Righteousness is not rooted in an ever changing cultural morality, it is rooted in the God who was and is and is to come.

If I had to put this in the most academic way possible I would use the illustration of the typical surfer who says something like this: "That's a righteous wave, bro."

In other words what is being said is that this wave is so incredibly perfect, it lacks nothing, it is so infinitely superior to any other wave that the only way to describe it is "righteous."

Why do we all have that hair trigger in our hearts for justice and righteousness? Because we are created in the image of this God. We have a honing beacon wired into our hearts in the imago dei.

We want to understand perfection and peace and justice because Paul says in Romans chapter 1 that rolling in the back of the minds of even the unbeliever is the inkling that something as perfect and as wonderful as the God of the Bible does actually exist.

So yes righteousness does have moral and ethical obligations. To be righteous is to do what is right and not what is wrong. But behind the obligation of righteousness is not a set of rules, but a God who rules.

That's why if we want to understand righteousness fully, we cannot forget that righteousness is also relational (***The Relational Aspect of Righteousness***). This is what Calvin was hinting at when he said that it must be implanted and poured into our hearts.

Why does God want us to be righteous? Well as we will see in Proverbs 11 there are lots of benefits. But more importantly we must go back to **Leviticus 19:2**. Why does God want his people to be set apart in righteousness? Because he wants them to be with him.

Look at what David says in **Psalms 7:11**. Because God is righteous, he feels the indignation of those who are unrighteous. This is not only what we see in Proverbs 11:1, but Paul echoes this in **1 Corinthians 6:9** when he says, "Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God."

Because God is righteous, because God creates us in his image, we as image bearers have a responsibility to live our lives in relational union with God. This is what Adam and Eve were meant to do in the garden: to mirror the wonderful reality of this righteous God to the whole world.

But sin broke that. Sin disrupted our ability to reflect righteousness which means we are now unrighteous. We are not morally pure, we are not full of integrity. Therefore there is this huge problem we face, we cannot stand before God. If God is righteous and pure, his holy indignation burns against those who are not like him.

Just like our indignation is justified against the scammer, God's indignation is justified against the sinner. You might think yourself to be pretty righteous in that you're not scamming the poor. But to not see God for the true value and beauty he is, is to actually scam God of what he is due. Not only is it untrue to find other things in this world as worthy of greater worship than God, it is actually unjust. It is as Proverbs 11:2 says, a pride which will lead to disgrace.

We need righteousness to experience the wonderful joy of knowing this God but we don't have it.

So now we have two choices.

You can try the self-righteousness option, and try to do enough righteous things in accordance with God's commands in hopes that he might ultimately see you as righteous and therefore bring you into this wonderful relationship with him.

The problem of this is two-fold, it is exhausting and it is impossible. You can't make yourself righteous. You might be able to be more righteous than the guy sitting next to you in church, but you cannot be as righteous as the God who is enthroned in righteousness.

But there's another option. Where the first option seeks to rely on self-righteousness, the second option accepts God's own righteousness by grace.

Now this is so important to understand when we read the Bible because the Bible rightly identifies our responsibility to be righteous, that is our responsibility to act in faithfulness to the God who is righteous.

So as you see in scripture there are commands all over the place for you to pursue righteousness, live in righteousness, walk in righteousness and love righteousness. But look at where righteousness starts even in the book of Proverbs.

In chapter 8 Lady Wisdom, who is the representative of God himself says this, **Proverbs 8:17-21**. Lady Wisdom has righteousness and she gives it as an inheritance to those who love her. Look also at **Psalms 24:3-5**.

So even in the Old Testament the call for Israel to walk in righteousness (that is to obey God's law and his character) is a gift that starts by receiving God's own righteousness from himself.

Look at this astounding contrast in **Proverbs 11:4**. Riches and the labor of your hands will not deliver you from death, but righteousness, this righteousness from God delivers!

Where do we see this provision of righteousness: **1 Corinthians 1:30-31**!

Jesus Christ, who is God himself and therefore shares in God's moral and radiant beauty allows us to be declared righteous by our relationship to him. He gives us not our righteousness, but God's own righteousness. We are delivered from the debt of sin and the relational absence of God we are declared righteous!

This is as Paul says in Romans 3: the righteousness of God which comes by faith.

This might sound abstract still at this point, why does this matter? Well look at what we see in our second point in Proverbs: **Trusting in Righteousness**.

Read with me Proverbs 11:4-8 and I want you to notice how the upright, the blameless, and the wise trust in righteousness: **Proverbs 11:4-8**

This passage assumes two choices, as Proverbs often does: the path of righteousness or the path of wickedness. Daily we are confronted with the decisions of each path and the reality of life in a broken world is that righteousness is naturally foreign to us all.

Choosing to walk in righteousness is at first a fearful and difficult decision. When it comes to saying no to the sin that lurks in your heart, righteousness seems like a fearful choice. You worry that if you chose to say no to it that you are saying no to joy.

More than that, righteousness in the external world is often more fearful. Making the righteous decision in the workplace might lead to your supervisor being upset with you. It might mean that your friends are frustrated with you. It might mean the whole world might stand against you.

But, don't you see the wonderful reality of this text? Why would we need to skew the scales of life by sin and unrighteousness if we see how God always provides for the righteous?

It is the hope of the wicked which takes them captive, it is their hope which perishes, the expectation of their plans which fail. Look at **Proverbs 11:7**.

But the wise learn not to trust simply in their righteous actions, but they actually learn to trust in the righteous God who stands faithful behind all of our actions.

Look again at what Calvin says about this: **"And truly, unless we are devoted—even addicted to—righteousness, we will faithlessly abandon our Creator and disown him as our Savior."**

Behind our ability to live righteously is ultimately our trust in Jesus's salvation is actually sufficient for us.

In other words God is calling us to trust in the reward of righteousness. This reward cannot be trusted unless you see the inverse of verse eight. Verse 8 gives us hope that all who have acted unjustly in this world will ultimately be the ones who suffer. But in the gospel, it is Jesus, the only one who is righteous and yet who walked into our trouble as our substitute.

He took our place to give us his righteousness. He has solved our biggest problem.

Now here's the thing, from a human perspective we generally think that if someone grants us a big request, it's disrespectful to ask of them smaller things. In other words if you are indebted to someone for two million dollars and you ask that person to forgive that loan and they do, you are ecstatic!

But wouldn't it feel silly to then go to him with a \$12 parking ticket and ask him to forgive it? It's like, come on, he's already done the big thing I'm not going to worry him with the small things.

But this is why God's righteousness in Jesus is so much better than anything we can ever encounter on this earth because even though Jesus' righteousness is enough to deliver you from the ultimate category of death in your sins, he actually wants you to come and draw again from his righteousness in the smallest decisions in life.

Jesus wants you not only to experience the reward of righteousness on judgment day, he wants you to experience it today.

Where our false hopes take us captive, hope in righteousness brings us peace.

Look at what David says in **Psalms 34:15-18**. If you are righteous in God's eyes, you can trust that God hears you even when you feel crushed and brokenhearted.

What we see in Proverbs is that world is a dangerous place for a broken soul. On every side are false voices calling you to dead ends, men calling out in violence, schemes seeking to destroy and on top of that there is the constant weight of physical weakness, disease, relational pain and turmoil on every side.

But when David himself had foreign kings war against him, his own friends betray him, his sinful choices haunt him, and the pain of life visit him do you know what he took refuge in? Righteousness.

If you could sit at the feet of King David and gain counsel from his insight and experience what would he say to you? Think of the difficult decisions you have to make in your life this week? How would he direct you?

Look at **Psalms 37:25-29**.

Brothers and sisters, if I may open up to you my own devotional life, I will tell you that in the chaos of the last year God has pressed this truth so deeply into my soul. That truth is that walking in righteousness by the power of Jesus is the only restful option in an anxious and busy world.

In a season of life where we are met with unknown and difficult choices at every minute, God holds out righteousness as a guide. What does that mean? It looks like obeying God, and living in light of his character even when it seems costly to your own joy and your own comfort.

You know what trusting in righteousness looked like in the Old Testament? It looked like trusting in the God who was righteous and perfect even when conditions were not.

It looks like Abraham being moved out of his comfortable life and following God to a blessing he hadn't yet seen and to a land he wasn't yet in.

It looked like Moses going to the world's most physically dominating superpower and saying, "The God whom you cannot see says let my people go."

It looks like the people of Israel felling the fortress of Jericho not with the might of the sword but the sound an obedient walk and a trumpet blast.

It look like Gideon getting his armed force of 32,000 pared down to a mere three hundred men armed with clearance items from Bed Bath and Beyond defeating Midianites.

You know what, just about each of these examples at one point looked reasonably out at their surroundings and said: "This might not be the best idea," and yet despite what they saw ahead of them, they looked back at what they had seen God do in their review mirror and they said, "He hasn't failed me yet."

Why would we need to tip the scales of life in our favor when we have the favor of God through Jesus Christ? We have the privilege not of looking back at the Exodus, or at the Law, or at the Mountain of God, or at Solomon's temple, we have the privilege of looking back on Jesus the lamb who was slain but who rose again in our place!

We have seen the fruit of righteousness, a righteousness which death itself couldn't hold.

What is Solomon's point here? His point is that when we learn to trust in righteousness, we learn how to navigate this world with wisdom.

I've noticed something interesting about people who have been in significant car crashes. Most of them, if they made it through the accident safely have committed in their minds to never by another brand of car than the one they were in.

Why? Because in the crucible of the crash it proved to deliver them.

This is the righteousness of Jesus Christ if only you would trust it.

Why would we choose to act with integrity in our business? Because we trust in the pleasure of God over the profit of man.

Why would we say not to sin? Because we realize the righteous walk freely are not taken captive.

Why would we choose to make difficult decisions in life to pursue discipleship, repent of sin, live for the glory of the Lord, love others, take stands for Christ, give our lives to mission, and worship the Lord without ceasing?

Because we trust that his righteousness is better than life, and in humbling accepting that we receive wisdom.