

# Proverbs 5:21-23

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/prov/prov-5/proverbs-521-23/>

*The Lord watches over the choices of mankind. When we choose wickedness, it becomes our own personal prison.*

In the previous section, Solomon wrote about the two paths set before us. The first option is the path of life, represented by “the wife of your youth” and the second is the path of destruction, represented by “the adulteress.” In these verses, Solomon tells us how and why these paths end up where they do.

First, *the ways of a man are before the eyes of the Lord*. God is watching over the choices we make. The two paths (or *ways*) are set before us and we are given agency to choose to which path we will align. God does not force us one direction or the other. He sets before us life and the enemy sets before us death. These are the only two *paths* we can choose from. God *watches all* man’s *paths*. He observes. Like an affectionate father, He is paying attention, influencing, but allowing the child to make their own decisions.

Other scriptures indicate that not only is God watching all we do, He is measuring the “why.” The New Testament book of Hebrews speaks of God’s discerning eye, in this case speaking of God’s eyes watching the deeds of His people:

“For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do.”  
(Hebrews 4:11-13)

Further, it seems every deed is recorded. In Revelation, we read this:

“And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened; and another book was opened, which is the book of life; and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds.”  
(Revelation 20:12)

Solomon goes on to talk about what the Lord sees when He gazes on a *wicked* man who has embraced the temptations of the adulteress, and how that man will be judged. *His own iniquities will capture the wicked*. His sin boomerangs back onto him.

This seems to be the typical way God judges sin—to turn the one choosing sin over to its natural consequences. The Apostle Paul notes this explicitly in Romans 1:24,26, and 28 where Paul repeatedly uses the phrase “gave them over” in three progressions of adverse consequence for sin. God gave the sinners over to lust, then to degrading passions, then to a debased mind. Being consumed by lust leads to addiction, which leads to a rewiring of the way we think.

In the previous section ([see our commentary on Proverbs 5:15-20](#)), Solomon warned against forfeiting one's life to the forces of evil. The natural order of things is for us to experience the consequences of our choices. If we give ourselves to our *iniquities*, they will *capture* us. Our sin becomes our shackle. Solomon adds, *and he will be held with the cords of his sin*. Choosing the path of the *wicked* will leave us entangled. Paul notes this principle in Romans, asking the question to believers: "Having been freed from the slavery of sin, why in the world would you go back into it? Don't you want to be free?" (Paraphrase of Romans 6:15-18).

Like a python, sin's consequences eventually choke the life out of a person—*he will die for lack of instruction*. It is not the wickedness or the *sin* itself at the root of destruction, but the influence of his *iniquity* that blots out his ability to receive *instruction*. If we give ourselves over to sin, we lose our ability to even recognize how to escape. This might explain why relapsing is so high for rehab programs. Often used in Proverbs as a synonym to wisdom, *instruction* is how one learns, improves, and receives guidance. The tangled mess of sin makes *instruction* harder to receive. Sin dulls our ability to recognize its benefit.

Solomon ends this chapter with the sorrowful statement—*in the greatness of his folly he will go astray*. The sinner gets lost in the forest of *iniquity*. He strays to a path that is not best for him and not in alignment with the true purpose for which he was created. His *folly* becomes so great he can no longer see the true way.

Remember that God is watching over this. He is observing, with the heartbreak of a father, the poor choices and the tragic entanglements of sin. In all this, Solomon emphasizes the agency of humans to make their own choices. It is a sobering and exhilarating responsibility with immense consequences for ourselves, in this life as well as the next.

### **Biblical Text**

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And He watches all his paths.**

**22 His own iniquities will capture the wicked,  
And he will be held with the cords of his sin.**

**23 He will die for lack of instruction,  
And in the greatness of his folly he will go astray.**