

Studies in the Book of Proverbs by [John T Polk II](#)  
For [The Fellowship Room](#)

## (#42) The Proverbs of Solomon 11:17- What Helps: Goodness or Cruelty?

Since God Created humans, only God can provide specific understanding of human behavior. God gave Solomon Divine Wisdom (**1 Kings Chapters 3 and 10**) to explain what and why behavior is as it is, and **Proverbs 10:1 - 24:34** are randomly written, as if they were Judgments Solomon made about individual cases brought to him for Divine Wisdom (**1 Kings Chapters 3 and 10**), or simply God-given explanations about life. New Testament passages may help see the continuation of Wisdom offered through Jesus Christ.

### **Proverbs 11:17:**

The merciful man does good for his own soul, but he who is cruel troubles his own flesh.

The common sense appeal for “doing good” is that it will come back to you. The world uses the term “pay it forward,” referring to initiating good deeds for others. Good always deserves its “payback.” But the best reason for “doing good” is that it is a quality of God that makes us all better. No clearer statements on this subject are found than Jesus Christ:

Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.  
(**Matthew 5:7**)

And just as you want men to do to you, you also do to them likewise. But if you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. And if you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. And if you lend to those from whom you hope to receive back, what credit is that to you? For even sinners lend to sinners to receive as much back. But love your enemies, do good, and lend, hoping for nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High. For He is kind to the unthankful and evil. Therefore be merciful, just as your Father also is merciful. (**Luke 6:31-36**)

This Christian goodness is contrasted with all others who “love those who love you,” “do good to those who do good to you,” “lend” hoping to “receive as much back.” In other words, sinners will “do good” from the selfish motive that it’ll come back to them, but Christians will “do good” to people before they do good to the Christians.

*All Scriptures and comments are based on the New King James Version, unless otherwise noted.*



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Christians are those who initiate, instigate, and originate good deeds and good feelings in this world. Jesus stated the purpose for His disciples' actions: "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven" ([Matthew 5:16](#)).

There are many people who point to misdeeds and divisions among those who profess to be following Jesus Christ (most of these falsely claiming so!), when they totally ignore all the good deeds done because of this unique, startling, and exceptional teaching of Jesus, and the quiet multitudes who keep originating the good in this world ([Matthew 25:34-36](#))!

The contrast with the other part of the proverb calls attention to the fact that there are people in the world who are "cruel," who will have that even come back on themselves! God delivered the Israelites in Egypt who were under "cruel bondage" ([Exodus 6:9](#)); David saw his enemies hate him with "cruel hatred" ([Psalm 25:19](#)); God returned Israelites to their land after their 70- year exile, and gave the cruel nations who had held them their own cruelty ([Jeremiah 30:10-17](#)). Other proverbs teach this principle:

- [Proverbs 17:11](#): An evil *man* seeks only rebellion; Therefore a cruel messenger will be sent against him;
- [Proverbs 28:10](#): Whoever causes the upright to go astray in an evil way, He himself will fall into his own pit; But the blameless will inherit good.

Solomon repeated this in his later teaching in [Ecclesiastes 10:8](#). Cruelty is its own "reward," and has its own "payback." Those who spread evil, wickedness, and cruelty in this life will have it "pay backward," both in this life and the one to come.

James stated God's principle of judgment for Christians who serve Jesus Christ, and sinners: "So speak and so do as those who will be judged by the law of liberty. For judgment is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment" ([James 2:12-13](#)). Mercy is shown by "good works" and forgiveness, while mercilessness is shown by their lack!

Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent, because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead.  
([Acts 17:30-31](#))