

The Weekly Word
July 23-29, 2018

July will soon be history. How time flies. God's Word is true forever. Happy reading...
Grace and Peace, Bill

To hear the Bible read click this link... <http://www.biblegateway.com/resources/audio/>.

Monday, July 23: Proverbs 17- Sound advice...

Reading through the proverbs, I am often surprised by the proverbs that garner my attention. Today two caught me and drew me in. The first was verse 5. *Whoever mocks the poor shows contempt for their Maker; whoever gloats over disaster will not go unpunished.*

Social media rants and some ideological radio talk show hosts often speak despairingly about the poor. Many of the things said or written are ignorant of facts and seem to stem from internal bigotries. It bothers me so I usually jump past the post or switch the dial. People can be so vicious and condescending in their language toward others. I find it powerful that Proverbs names this for the wrong behavior that it is. It even amps up its judgment, saying to mock the poor shows contempt for the Lord Himself.

The proverb doubles down in its second half speaking to those who gloat over disasters. When disasters happen and lives are lost and ruined, it seems to me that we should weep for our fellow humans who are suffering. Every once in a while I hear people say things like, "they must deserve it." I am often flabbergasted that people say such things, especially when they are spoken in the wake of some natural disaster? Are we so heartless that we cannot feel pain for others in pain?

Problem is even as I think about these things; I know I have had heartless thoughts and words. I am not exonerated as I read this proverb. The Lord scolds me.

The second proverb of interest was verse 14: *Starting a quarrel is like breaching a dam; so drop the matter before a dispute breaks out.* The imagery of this proverb is striking. I thought of an earthen dam, first a trickle breaks through, then the power of water begins to tear away the sediment and the trickle grows to a rivulet. The breach compounds until the dam gives way and disaster ensues. Quarrels can do that. They can divide families and friends, even nations. Proverbs says *drop the matter before a dispute breaks out.* Let it go. Be the bigger person and bury the issue before things escalate. Good advice.

Today God gave me some sound advice and a scolding...

Thank you, Lord. Time in Your Word always adds to my life and guides me toward maturity. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

Tuesday, July 24: Proverbs 18- An appearance of truth...

Proverbs 18:17 offers advice that has saved me more than once from an error. It reads, *In a lawsuit the first to speak seems right, until someone comes forward and cross-examines.* I have found this to be true in many contexts beyond the courtroom, in which I have never been.

It is so easy to be convinced when you hear only one side of an issue or dispute. Taking time to hear both sides and probing as necessary has saved me from many impulsive actions which, if executed, might have led to deep embarrassment and potentially false accusations.

I have also found this to be helpful in meetings where I spend a great deal of time. When a presentation is made allowing both for and against voices speak their piece it leads to better decisions, in my opinion. The dynamics of a meeting are that some people (usually extroverts) speak first and there is a subtle temptation to side with the first voice. Sometimes as moderator I have to tease out quieter folk who may agree or disagree with what has been already spoken. Generally listening to all voices proves to be wise. They might agree and thus strengthen the argument for the proposed action or they might expose a facet that has yet to be considered. Either way the final decision is generally stronger.

The wisdom of this proverb has application in many arena...

Oh, God, may I build into my general life-operating manual the wisdom to listen to and weigh all sides of an issue before making up my mind. I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen

Wednesday, July 25: Proverbs 19- A gentle reminder...

Verse 23: *The fear of the LORD leads to life; then one rests content, untouched by trouble.*

Over and over the 'fear of the Lord' pops up in Proverbs. Generally it is describes as bringing wisdom or understanding. Verse 23 is a twist on the usual, which is probably why it caught my attention.

Living wisely, living with understanding of God's way does bring life. The author is correct. When you live within the law of God there is no looking over one's shoulder to see if someone is out to catch you in some wrong you have committed. Your conscience is clear because you actions are pure. Living like this, a person can rest at night and live during the day.

Sitting here I realize how far I am from living this way. Often my anxieties in life stem from occasions when I have not lived with the appropriate fear of the Lord. Instead I allowed my motivations come from other pressures and influences. I hate to admit this to myself...

This proverb is a reminder I have many areas of growth remaining...

Lord, it is good to realize that there are benefits to living Your way. My world tells me otherwise and tells me otherwise constantly. Thank You for this word from Your heart, a healthy reminder that living according to Your will and way has blessings and benefits in this life as well as the next. I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen

Thursday, July 26: Proverbs 20- Musings on forgiveness...

Even though the verse 9 & 12 are not side-by-side, my thoughts connected them as I read.

Who can say, "I have kept my heart pure; I am clean and without sin"?

Ears that hear and eyes that see— the LORD has made them both (9 & 12).

When I read that first proverb I said, "Yeah, that's me." I know I cannot say I have kept my heart pure. I know too well my faults, sins and failings. I am so thankful for forgiveness offered in Jesus. What a gift! What a blessing God's forgiveness is through Jesus Christ, the Lord!

There are times when I am tempted to take God's gift of forgiveness for granted. I think that is the thought that connected verses 9 and 12. Verse 12 reminded me that God is always watching. Yes, God forgives, but He also sees and hears and that is a warning to me. God sees and hears. I can hide nothing from Him. And sometimes when I am tempted to get away with something... this reminder is enough to straighten me out!

Now this doesn't always work, temptations to do things my way rather than God's way can be strong. Still reminding myself that God sees and hears does elevate the 'fear of the Lord' in me and that is always a good thing.

Proverbs can be so practical. No wonder Billy Graham credited reading one chapter of proverbs per day as one of the factors that helped him maintain his integrity throughout his long life.

Good advice, Dr. Graham...

Lord, may I hide your Word in my heart, that I might not sin against You. Lord, may I pay attention to Your Word. May the theology keep me from dogmatic error in my teaching, my preaching and the practical. May it keep me as a humble child before You, Lord. I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Friday, July 27: Proverbs 21- My mixed thinking...

Each day I read proverbs there are many stopping points to pause and ponder. One of the beauties of proverbs is the random scroll of topics addressed. Each chapter is a tapestry of wise counsel. And while there are clearly dominant threads that weave multiple times in multiple chapters the breadth of any one chapter is a trove of practical wisdom.

Today out of the woof and weave of the chapter, verse 2 drew me to meditate. *A person may think their own ways are right, but the LORD weighs the heart.*

This proverb caused me to recognize how much a product of my environment and culture I am. What I believe is true, while personal, is also deeply affected and influenced by the culture in which I live and the people I regularly associate with. Having spent time in Africa I was shocked on my early trips with differences in how life is perceived. My natural impulse was that in many of these areas of difference my way was 'right' and theirs 'wrong.' Setting aside the rightness or wrongness or even the better or worse-ness of our cultural differences, living in a different culture for an "extended period of time helped me see how much influence my culture has upon me without me generally recognizing so.

Building upon this I look back at the proverb, *A person may think their own ways are right, but the LORD weighs the heart.* I can think I am right, and I generally do think this, but God sees perfectly and by weighing the heart God can tell when we are off-kilter from His will and way and thus wrong. My heart is partially formed by my life milieu rather than being fully formed by God's will and way. Thus without realizing it I can think I am right but be off course from the Lord.

Yikes...

Lord, give me Your eyes to see where I am misled by my culture. Help me to see these divergent beliefs in me and to find the power in Your Holy Spirit to combat them within me. I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Saturday, July 28: Proverbs 22- To care with God's heart...

Reading through Proverbs this time, verses that speak about the divide between rich and poor and how the rich should treat the poor, seem to catch my attention. Today it came in the second of 30 wise sayings, verses 22-23: *Do not exploit the poor because they are poor and do not crush the needy in court, for the LORD will take up their case and will exact life for life.*

There seems to be much talk these days about the divide –the growing divide –in my country between rich and poor. It pops up in immigration debates and reports on healthcare. Maybe I am tuned into this topic because of some of the reading I have been doing lately and some experiences I have had...

- Monthly trips for years to the World Vision Storehouse in the South Bronx that services the underprivileged in that community.

- Attending a ‘green card’ party for friends, one of whom just got his green card, a great relief for friends and family.
- Books, Trevor Noah, *Born a Crime*; Cristina Henriquez, *The Book of Unknown Americans –A Novel*; Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*.

Whatever my internal impulse, verses like 22&23 grab me. *Do not exploit the poor because they are poor and do not crush the needy in court, for the LORD will take up their case and will exact life for life.*

It is all too easy to exploit people simply because one can. *Do not exploit the poor because they are poor...*

I try not to, but I can’t help wondering if I am clueless to exploitation around me. In fact I am wondering right now if the privileges I enjoy as a highly educated, white, upper middle class person aren’t born on the back of the less fortunate, thus causing me to be complicit in exploitation. I don’t know but my soul is wondering out loud through my fingers on the keyboard.

My reading of Scripture tells me that God has His eye on the poor and God cares how I (we) treat people who have less of this world’s wealth and advantages. And I am wondering if I honestly understand this???

Do you?

Lord, teach me to care, to care with Your heart. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.

Sunday, July 29, 2018, Sunday Worship

If any of my thoughts or the Bible readings spark questions send an email reply and I will do my best to answer all questions from people on the list... I will answer personal questions privately; general questions will be answered in a subsequent email installment.

If you are reading along with me from the PCOG website you can send questions or request being placed on the weekly email list by emailing Lisa at office@pcogonline.org.

Click here for a link to my sermons on the web. Sermons are generally posted within 2 days.