

The Weekly Word
July 30-August 5, 2018

August comes this week. Time never stands still and God's Word is never empty. Happy reading...

Grace and Peace, Bill

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

Monday, July 30: Proverbs 23- Beware envy...

I appreciate the 30 sayings, because they offer a little more meat on the bones of the basic thought. It was saying 15 that sparked my desire to ponder.

Do not let your heart envy sinners, but always be zealous for the fear of the LORD. There is surely a future hope for you, and your hope will not be cut off (17-18).

Like most I observe life and there are things in life that I like, that I think about and even long for. I am not convinced this is bad; dreams can bring life. But, and this is an important, if I allow my dreams to grow so that they encompass me or if I become so fixated on them that I envy people who have the things I dream for, then I have boarded a run-a-way train that can lead to my destruction. Envy can grab the heart and squeeze the life out of it!

The proverb points to this when it speaks to envying sinners. (Personally I believe that when we envy good people who have things it can be equally dangerous.)

The proverb doesn't end with the destructive behavior, it moves on to describe a counteracting good behavior... *always be zealous for the fear of the LORD*. Seeking God cannot occupy a human life if we are envying something else. Good and evil cannot share the same space.

Before pushing on I lingered on the idea of being *zealous for the fear of the LORD*. Given other proverbs on the fear of the Lord, this injunction suggests we are zealous or committed to gaining God's knowledge and wisdom. Being zealous suggests we give our life and being to these pursuits.

At this point the proverb offers positive future of hope for those who can manage life and keep their heart and mind zealous for the fear of the Lord. Hope is a great gift. Hope can carry us through the darkest trials. Hope is a beautiful attribute.

Having spent time listening to this proverb, now comes my opportunity to internalize it. I have hopes and dreams, do I keep them manageable and positive by being *zealous for the fear of the LORD*? Flipping the thought on its head, do I allow my zeal for the Lord to inspire my hopes and dreams? Is God, getting to know the Lord, and living in a manner that delights Him my highest aim and fuel for my hopes and dreams? These are questions that drive to the heart and teaching of this proverb.

Am I living this way? Are you? What a deep and powerful thought to carry with me throughout the day.

Lord, may knowing You and living with and for You be my deepest hope and my greatest dream. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

Tuesday, July 31: Proverbs 24- How do I treat enemies?...

Saying Number 28, verses 17-18, *Do not gloat when your enemy falls; when they stumble, do not let your heart rejoice, or the LORD will see and disapprove and turn his wrath away from them* (17-18), reminded me of one of Jesus' words.

Can you guess what word of Jesus I was thinking about?

Matthew 5:44: *But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you...* (see also Luke 6:27 and 35).

The sentiments are not quite the same, Jesus definitely amps up God's expectations of our response to enemies.

God is certainly interested and instructive in how we are to treat enemies. And it seems clear that God believes we can control our responses, that we are rational beings who can will to do good.

Gracious in victory; humble in defeat.

Here's the rub. All of these words are so contrary to the way general culture would have me live.

Lord, everywhere I turn I am embroiled in a war; to live Your way or to live as people and culture would have me live. I cannot rest. I cannot slumber, I must remain vigilant and on guard always. I must constantly be orienting my life to your world like a ship's captain uses a sextant of old or GPS today. Without constant monitoring it is so easy to get off target and out of line with You and Your revealed will.

*Guide me, O thou great Jehovah, pilgrim through this barren land...
In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.*

Wednesday, August 1: Proverbs 25- Don't exalt self...

Again today one of the proverbs launched me to a word from Jesus.

Verses 6&7: *Do not exalt yourself in the king's presence, and do not claim a place among his great men; it is better for him to say to you, "Come up here," than for him to humiliate you before his nobles...*

Compare this to Jesus: *"When someone invites you to a wedding feast, do not take the place of honor, for a person more distinguished than you may have been invited. If so, the host who invited both of you will come and say to you, 'Give this person your seat.' Then, humiliated, you will have to take the least important place. But when you are invited, take the lowest place, so that when your host comes, he will say to you, 'Friend, move up to a better place.' Then you will be honored in the presence of all the other guests. For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted"* (Luke 14:8-11).

So much of life is posturing, straining for the 'best seats in the house.' I don't think I am unusual saying, it feels good to be honored and it hurts to be humiliated.

Both Solomon and Jesus make the point don't exalt yourself. If other people exalt you and honor you, accept the honor graciously but when we try to bestow honor upon ourselves, it can often backfire. I have read biographies of Da Vinci, Ben Franklin, Albert Einstein and other greats. I don't recall any of these noted figures bragging about how smart or ingenious they were. Certainly their accomplishments gave them acclaim, but they didn't have a need to exalt themselves.

As I ponder this I sense a connection with the phrase 'actions speak louder than words.' I don't need to 'toot my own horn' rather allow my life and my actions to speak for themselves. If they deserve honor, let others raise that point. And if the honor doesn't come, live in obscurity and continue to do good. After all, the Lord is watching and His appraisal is what ultimately counts.

Lord God, Solomon and Jesus both seem to be talking about humility... serving others rather than exalting self. Lord, this is an easier subject to write about than life. Please help me to live more and more in the manner of Jesus, my Lord and my Savior. Amen.

Thursday, August 2: Proverbs 26- The fool...

The opening 12 verses expound upon the fool. A few proverbs...

Like snow in summer or rain in harvest, honor is not fitting for a fool (1).

Sending a message by the hands of a fool is like cutting off one's feet or drinking poison (6).

As a dog returns to its vomit, so fools repeat their folly (11).

The writer of proverbs uses some of his strongest word pictures for fools

It is a sad time when a fool has the microphone...

It is too easy to point fingers at leaders and prominent people who I believe are acting like fools as a way to deflect my gaze from myself. The proverbs, however, are meant to be a training tool for me and my life... so, Lord, what are you speaking to me through these words?!

I am reminded of a proverb from chapter 17:24: *A discerning person keeps wisdom in view, but a fool's eyes wander to the ends of the earth.* Living with wisdom is the antithesis of a fool. And wisdom is found through the fear of the Lord.

Thus I find myself pondering yet again what it means practically to 'fear the Lord'... to venerate my Lord, to tremble before Him, to be in awe of Him and to seek to live with Him, in Him and for Him. This will save me from folly and playing the fool.

O God, O God, shudder me with glimpses of You that I may quake and delight in You, Lord Savior, and God of the Universe. I pray in Jesus' name. Amen and amen.

Friday, August 3: Proverbs 27- The Testing of Praise...

Initially I was surprised by verse 21. *The crucible for silver and the furnace for gold, but people are tested by their praise.* As I was reading the proverb I anticipated the final word to be 'trials.' I was not expecting praise. But there it was. So I regrouped and re-read the proverb again, this time pondering its actual ending.

The crucible for silver and the furnace for gold, but people are tested by their praise.

As I sat and thought, the truth and power of the statement seeped into my bones. Praise does test us...

Praise goes straight to our heads, inflating ego, which among other side effects, causes us to depend on self more and God or others less. Big mistake.

Praise can become like a drug we crave, so we begin living for praise rather than living for righteousness.

I am reminded of Romans 12:3: *For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment...*

Too much praise or praise taken in too deeply can cause us to puff up our view of self. The sober judgment Paul mentions is an honest appraisal of self.

Honesty, integrity... these can help us handle praise appropriately.

Praise is a testing of fire for the soul, the person... the writer of this proverb is correct.

It has been helpful to dwell on this proverb today.

Thank you, Lord God, for supplying my needs through Your Word. Continue to teach and instruct me. And Lord, create in me a learner's pliable heart. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

Saturday, August 4: Proverbs 28- God isn't some genie...

I read verse 9 as if it were a word directly from the Lord. *If anyone turns a deaf ear to my instruction, even their prayers are detestable.*

That is one strong word and a tremendous reminder that the Lord desires consistency and relationship in His dealing with human beings... me!

God isn't some genie in a bottle... I rub 'His' side and then He grants me whatever wishes I want! NO. God offers us the opportunity to live in relationship with Him. Living in relationship means we can be in regular connection and communication with the Lord. We speak to and listen to the Lord. He listens to and speaks with us. WOW! Is that amazing or what? We get to live in true relationship with the God of the Universe!!!

This proverb reminds me that it is a relationship of unequals. I, a mere human, am invited into relationship with the Lord God Almighty. Because the Lord is God when He speaks I need to pay attention. To turn a deaf ear to the Lord's instruction is to step out of relationship and into rebellion. And when I am in rebellion I should not presume God will answer my prayers. The proverb even calls the prayer of the rebellious detestable! That's a strong word.

And that is not something I want to hear. So my response to this word is to check my relationship with the Lord. Am I listening to and obeying His instructions? Do I attend to His Word when I read the Scriptures? Do I attend to His Word as I converse with Him throughout the day?

How about you???

Lord, I want to live in communion and relationship with You. I want to hear Your voice and live accordingly. Forgive me when I do less. When I yawn rather than pay attention to Your voice. Forgive me when I am too busy to do what You ask. Forgive me when I am less of the man You desire and have made me to be. I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Sunday, August 5, 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.