

Proverbs
Proverbial Abominations II

Sunday, June 20, 2010

Introduction

The way of the wicked is an abomination to the LORD,
but he loves him who pursues righteousness (15:9)

Here we find the antithesis stated as vividly and succinctly as it's possible to state it. You do remember what we mean by "the antithesis," don't you: the irreconcilable differences between those who follow God, and those who do not follow him.

The antithesis was first stated, you'll remember, at the time of the fall when the Lord said to the serpent, "I will put enmity [hostility, antagonism, animosity] between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring" (Gen. 3:15).

If you want to know what all of history is all about, here it is. This is the history of the world in a nutshell. Every historian selects and organizes his material according to some grand narrative, some overarching plotline. This normally involves the idea of progress of some sort, with the idea of progress itself being determined by the historian's own value system. Historical events are deemed to be good if they move toward the idealized goal. They are bad if they move away from it.

The communist, for instance, sees all of history in terms of the principle of dialectical materialism; or as it relates more specifically to human history, the principle of class warfare. For the communist, the movement of history is

toward a classless society. People and events that bear in a significant way upon this movement are considered worthy of inclusion in the telling of history. Other people and events that don't bear in any significant way upon this epic struggle can be bypassed. They are merely distractions to the main story. And of course, in a communist telling of history, historical currents that tend toward a classless society are presented in a positive light; and those that tend to maintain the status quo, or even go in the opposite direction, are presented negatively.

The feminist sees history in terms of woman's struggle for emancipation from male domination. It is only as people and events bear upon this struggle and make significant contributions one way or the other that they are deemed worthy of being discussed in history.

The most popular overarching narrative in American culture today seems to be that of the inevitable triumph of democracy. Democracy is the ideal toward which all of history is moving.

Whatever is foremost in the historian's value-system will determine what people and events are discussed and how they are discussed.

Sometimes the historian makes this explicit; more often it lies in the background and is only revealed as the underlying assumptions that inform the story are uncovered. The telling of history is never a simple recording of dates, facts, and figures

But this is what we need to understand: the true historical narrative is found in the antithesis as stated in Genesis 3:15. "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring"

This is the epic struggle. This is the cosmic battle. It involves two kingdoms in conflict: the rule of God and his covenanted people versus the rule of the devil and those in league with him. This is the grand narrative, the meta-narrative, the overarching story of history. It's anticipated in Genesis 3:15. It's described in Proverbs in 15:9.

The way of the wicked is an abomination to the LORD,
but he loves him who pursues righteousness.

We have been using this verse as a spring board to discuss what Proverbs has to say about things that are an abomination to the Lord.

You might remember that we consulted Old Testament scholar Bruce Waltke to help us understand the meaning of the word.

In usage *tô'ēbâ* [abomination] denotes those persons, things, or practices that offend another's sensibilities.

Normally we're talking about that which offends the *moral* sensibility, so that it is most often used in an *ethical* sense.

Waltke goes on to say,

Hence, that which is "abominable" is relative to the character, values, or culture of an individual. One displays his own character or values by that which repulses him. (B. K. Waltke, in ISBE, vol. 1, p. 13)

A careful reading of the Scriptures reveals that God finds many things abominable. And by considering what these things are, we can learn a great deal about him and about his character. And we can more thoroughly train our moral sensibilities to match his.

Last week we made a good beginning toward understanding Proverbs 6:15-19.

There are six things that the LORD hates,
seven that are an abomination to him:
haughty eyes, a lying tongue,
and hands that shed innocent blood,
a heart that devises wicked plans,
feet that make haste to run to evil,
a false witness who breathes out lies,
and one who sows discord among brothers (6:15-19)

As I mentioned last week, despite what Solomon says here, this is not an exhaustive list of what God finds to be abominable. There are other things mentioned in Proverbs, as well as in the rest of the Bible that are not mentioned here. Solomon simply selects items that serve the specific purpose he has for the instruction of his sons in this particular passage.

Last week we considered the first three items on this list:

- (1) Haughty Eyes
- (2) A Lying Tongue
- (3) Hands that Shed Innocent Blood

Today we will look at the rest of the list, and consider the other items that Proverbs says are an abomination to the Lord.

- (4) God Hates those who Devise Wicked Plans

This is not the only place this is mentioned.

The devious person is an abomination to the LORD,
but the upright are in his confidence (3:32)

We should also consider 15:26.

The thoughts [intentions, plans] of the wicked are an abomination to
the LORD,
but gracious words are pure (15:26)

It is one thing to stumble and fall into sin because in an unguarded moment you are surprised by a sudden and powerful temptation. It catches you off-guard. It's quite another thing to devise wicked plans; to premeditate the doing of evil. This reveals a wicked heart.

Those of crooked heart are an abomination to the LORD,
but those of blameless ways are his delight (11:20)

Consider what David says about the wicked man in **Psalms 36:1-4**. He lies awake at night planning his nefarious deeds and how to get away with them.

What do you think about when you're waiting to fall asleep? May I recommend something? It's an excellent time to work on Scripture memorization; or to think through the day ahead and the particular temptations you are likely to encounter—that co-worker that always seems to provoke you, for instance—and practice ahead of time how to handle it; or think through a potential opportunity for evangelism...

But this is not what the wicked man does! "He plots trouble while on his bed."

For they cannot sleep unless they have done wrong;
they are robbed of sleep unless they have made someone
stumble (4:16)

For God's people it's just the opposite. They cannot sleep when they *have* done wrong. Their conscience troubles them and they're unable to sleep until they set things right.

Micah 2:1-2

And this sets us up for the next item in Solomon's list.

(5) God Hates Feet that Make Haste to Run to Evil

They are not drawn into it reluctantly. They're in a hurry.

Scripture makes a distinction between sinning inadvertently, and sinning with a high hand, that is, intentionally, in open defiance of God's law. And this is what Solomon seems to have in mind here: feet that make haste to run to evil. They premeditate it, and then they are eager to do it. Or someone comes to them and says,

"I got an idea."

"Yeah? What's your idea?"

"Let's do something evil."

"Yeah, let's!"

"What do you wanna do?"

"I don't know. What do *you* wanna do?"

"I don't know, either, but whatever it is, let's do it!"

The wicked take a kind of perverse delight in breaking rules...

(6) God Hates those Who Pervert Justice

The perversion of justice may take several different forms. Proverbs six speaks specifically of those who give false testimony in a court of law. Listed among the six things the Lord hates, even seven that are an abomination to him, is "a false witness who breathes out lies." In fact, so important is this that it makes the Lord's top Ten Commandments. Do you remember the ninth commandment is? "You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor" (Ex. 20:16). God is very concerned about the integrity of the justice system. The administration of justice is central to a godly community, and it depends upon truth being told. The facts of the case have to be made known. This is why the Bible teaches that if you have information that is relevant to a case and you do not come forward with it, it is a sin (**Lev. 5:1**). Someone who has information relevant to a case has a responsibility to testify, and to testify truly, even if the testimony runs against his own self-interest.

To give false witness, either to harm the innocent, or to clear the guilty, is a very grave sin. It subverts the cause of justice. This is why there is a swearing in of witnesses. "Do you swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help you God?" This is a very solemn oath. He who takes it is calling upon God to punish him if he should tell a lie while testifying.

Lying lips are an abomination to the LORD,
but those who act faithfully are his delight (12:22)

This is true regardless of the venue of the lie, but how much more so in a court of law. To lie in court before the judge who is acting as God's representative, when justice is on the line, is to ask God to kill you, especially after taking an oath. I mean this seriously. It's like asking God to kill you. "Lying lips are an abomination to the LORD" how much more "a false witness who breathes out lies."

I tend to be patient with people about a great many things, with a great variety of personal failings; but if I find out that you have lied to me, that's pretty much going to be the end of our relationship, especially if there has been a *pattern* of dishonesty. How can two people have any kind of meaningful relationship if one of them (or both!) is dishonest? Meaningful relationships can only exist where there is trust. And trust can only exist where people are being honest with each other.

O LORD, who shall sojourn in your tent?
Who shall dwell on your holy mountain?
He who walks blamelessly and does what is right
and speaks truth in his heart (Ps. 15:1-2)

He speaks truth in his heart. Jesus said of Nathanael, "Behold, an Israelite indeed in whom is no deceit!" (Jn. 1:47) We should make it our aim to be able to say what wisdom says in chapter eight:

My mouth will utter truth;
wickedness is an abomination to my lips (8:7)

Now, it is not only by means of false witness that justice might be perverted. It might also be perverted because the ministers of justice are on the take.

The wicked accepts a bribe in secret
to pervert the ways of justice (17:23)

A bribe might be given to a witness in order to persuade him not to testify, or to testify falsely. A bribe might be given to a judge in order to persuade him to render a false decision. A bribe might be given to those responsible for safeguarding the evidence so as to persuade them to tamper with it. But in any and every case, the acceptance of a bribe is something that God hates.

You shall not pervert justice. You shall not show partiality, and you shall not accept a bribe, for a bribe blinds the eyes of the wise and subverts the cause of the righteous. Justice, and only justice, you shall follow... (Deut. 16:19-20a)

Whoever is greedy for unjust gain troubles his own household,
but he who hates bribes will live (15:27)

The inevitable result of the perversion of justice, whether through false witness or the taking of bribes, is the clearing of the guilty or the condemnation of the innocent. Listen to Proverbs 17:15.

He who justifies the wicked and he who condemns the righteous
are both alike an abomination to the LORD (17:15)

He who justifies the wicked—that is, he who says the guilty are *not* guilty—is an abomination to the Lord. He who knowingly exonerates the guilty is detestable in the Lord’s eyes.

The Lord says of himself that he “will by no means clear the guilty” (Ex. 34:7).

Ahab and Jezebel (1 Ki. 21:1-19)

Conclusion...