

Proverbs
Proverbial Abominations III

Sunday, July 4, 2010

Introduction

We have been working our way through the book of Proverbs, one of five books in the Bible (along with Job, Psalms, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Solomon) that collectively are often referred to under the general heading of Wisdom Literature. These books fall under this heading for obvious reasons. They give us wisdom for life.

Job gives us wisdom in helping us to understand suffering. And the interesting thing about the book is that it never answers the question of why God's people sometimes suffer, except to say that God is God and we are not. And this means that we are to be humble and simply trust him to work out his purpose in us and through us.

The book of Psalms is a treasure for God's people. It's a book of prayers and praises that deal with just about every conceivable human experience and every conceivable human emotion. It gives us wisdom by instructing us how to pray and sing.

Ecclesiastes could be thought of as the first recorded treatise in existential philosophy: the apparent meaninglessness of life in light of the finality of death. As the book points out, death is no respecter of persons. It comes to everyone. Rich and poor alike die. So do kings

and slaves. So do the righteous and the wicked. What then is the point of living? Your life is full of pleasure and you end up dying. Your life is full of pain and sorrow and you end up dying. Whether you pursue wisdom or folly you still come to the grave. It doesn't matter what dreams you chase, what pleasures you find, what evils you avoid, you're going to die. The author concludes by saying, in essence, "I don't have all the answers, but this I know: we should fear God and keep his commandments."

The Song of Solomon is a love poem. A man and his wife are singing each other's praises and delighting in one another. The book shows us that a deep-seated, passionate love for one's spouse is not an unspiritual thing. God has created us for this, though not *only* for this. This is where so many people have gone wrong—living as if sexual pleasure is the ultimate goal in life, the center around which the rest of life should turn. But just because some people abuse the thing doesn't mean the thing itself is bad. The Song of Solomon shows us that it's okay for a godly husband and wife to be wild about each other and to be passionate in their desire for each other.

Finally, Proverbs is the go-to book for wisdom. It, more than any of the others, is filled with nuggets of practical wisdom for life. I emphasize *practical*. You're not going to find your head in the clouds while you're reading Proverbs. Proverbs is *very* down to earth. It speaks very directly to where we live.

We examined the first nine chapters of Proverbs section by section. When we got to chapter 10, we discovered that from that point forward each individual verse is capable of standing on its own. Each individual verse, for

the most part, is a self-contained literary unit that deals with a different theme. These themes are visited and revisited at different points in the book. So we have been collecting different verses throughout the book that deal with the same theme and we have examined each theme by looking at all the verses that deal with it.

Proverbial Abominations, Take Three

We are now in our third message on what the Lord finds to be abominable, and we have been using Proverbs 15:9 as the springboard to talk about it.

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

As we have seen, something that is abominable is something that is hateful, something that is detestable and repulsive. And here Solomon says that the way of the wicked, that is, his manner of life—the way he lives—is hateful to the Lord. It's an abomination to him. On the other hand, the Lord *loves* him who pursues righteousness.

This is something that is vitally important for us to understand.

There is a rather pernicious teaching about that says that God loves everyone just the same; that he makes no distinctions between people; that everyone is equally an object of God's love, and *that* to an equal degree.

Now, in saying this, people think they are magnifying, extolling the love God. But they're doing nothing of the sort. They are demeaning his love. And I mean this literally. They are making his love void of any meaning.

To say that God loves everyone just the same is like giving an award to every child who competes regardless of where they place in the competition so those who place last don't have their feelings hurt by not getting an award. So everyone gets a ribbon. Everyone gets a medal. But if everyone receives an award, then the guy who places first, the guy who really is the best, his achievement is rendered meaningless. His skill, his ability, his effort is recognized no more than those who are simply mediocre—those who put in the bare minimum of effort. "Everyone is special" is another way of saying "no one is special."

Furthermore, to say that God loves everyone just the same is to say that he loves evil just as much as he loves good. It is all the same to him. But this is unbecoming of God—to say that good and evil are the same to God, or to say that God loves the righteous and the wicked in the same way and in the same degree.

What does Scripture say?

The LORD loves the righteous (Ps. 146:8)

That is, he loves those who do what is right. He loves those who keep his commandments. The implied antithesis is, "he does not love the wicked."

Consider what Jesus said in the fourteenth chapter of John.

Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me. [Keeping his commandments is an expression of our love for Christ.] And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him (Jn. 14:21)

Do you see how in at least some sense God loves us *because* our ways are pleasing to him? "He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him.

The Father himself loves you [Jesus tells the disciples], because you have loved me and have believed that I came from God (Jn. 16:27)

Now we must be careful here to make a very important distinction. The Bible uses this word *love* in several different ways, just like we do. Sometimes it uses the word to mean simply benevolence or good will.

David describes the Lord's benevolence in Psalm 145.

The LORD is good to all,
and his mercy is over all that he has made (v. 9)

"He is good to all." He is kind, benevolent, compassionate, toward all his creatures.

Psalm 104:10-18, 27-28

He is benevolent toward all his creatures, even his sinful ones. Remember that our Lord Jesus Christ said of our Father in heaven,

He makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust (Matt. 5:45b)

And for us sinful creatures God even sent his Son to die as an atonement, that we might be reconciled to him.

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life (Jn. 3:16).

This act of God in sending his Son stems from his benevolence, his good will, his compassion for sinners.

But there is another kind of love, a special kind of love that he has for the upright, for those who obey him. We may call it the love of *delight*. The Lord delights in the upright. He loves the righteous, not only with a general kind of benevolence that he has toward everyone, but with a love of delight.

Those of blameless ways are his delight (Prov. 11:20)

Those who act faithfully are his delight (Prov. 12:22)

David speaks of this when he says in Psalm 147, "The LORD takes pleasure in those who fear him" (v. 11).

The Lord is benevolent toward all, even toward the wicked. But he delights in the righteous.

This being so, it must be the case that he takes no pleasure in the wicked. He does not delight in them. Or, to put it in the language of Scripture, he hates the wicked.

The LORD tests the righteous,
but his soul hates the wicked and the one who loves violence
(Ps. 11:5)

When it says that "his soul hates the wicked" we are not to think that he is malevolent, malicious, or mean-spirited. No. "He makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust." He offers them mercy through Jesus our Messiah and stands ready to forgive

them if they should repent. He takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his evil way and live (Ezek. 33:11). This is his love of benevolence, his good will, which he has for all men, because all men are made in his image after his likeness. All men are the work of his hands, and in that sense he loves them and has compassion for them. But in terms of what the wicked have made of themselves, he hates them. Considered as men—as human beings made in his image—he is benevolent toward them. Considered as wicked they are hateful to him.

You are not a God who delights in wickedness;
evil may not dwell with you.
The boastful shall not stand before your eyes;
you hate all evildoers (Ps. 5:5)

Do you see? *This* is what Solomon is talking about when he says, “The way of the wicked is an abomination to the LORD, but he loves him who pursues righteousness.”

The way of the wicked is hateful to the Lord. But the Lord loves him who pursues righteousness. Ponder this. The Lord loves him who pursues righteousness. Doesn't this make you want to pursue righteousness? What greater motivation can you possibly have to aspire to be righteous than to know that the Lord loves those who obey him? The Lord sets his affection on those who keep his commandments. He delights in them. He takes pleasure in them.

Now, if this is so, and if we desire the Lord to delight in us, then we must learn what he delights in and also what he finds to be hateful, so that we can pursue the one and avoid the other.

In our last two messages we have been considering what God finds to be hateful or abominable. Remember our working definition.

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

We have spent some time considering 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 before this is not an exhaustive list of what God finds to be hateful. There are other things mentioned both 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.

We have already considered the first six items on this list:

(1) Haughty Eyes

- (2) A Lying Tongue
- (3) Hands that Shed Innocent Blood
- (4) Those who Devise Wicked Plans
- (5) Feet that Make Haste to Run to Evil
- (6) False Witnesses who Breathe out Lies

Today we will take a look at the last item on the list, as well as some other things in Proverbs not mentioned in this passage.

Note how the literary form of the passage places the emphasis on this seventh item. Normally the last item in any series is the climactic element. Normally we save the best for last—the most important, the weightiest matter comes last. But there is even greater emphasis placed here, given the way the passage is structured: “There are *six* things that the Lord hates, *seven* that are an abomination to him.”

We find a similar structure in **Amos 1:3, 6, 9, 11**, etc.

In Proverbs 6 we have the same sort of structure, which places the emphasis on the last item, but the emphasis is *heightened* because of the prominence of the number seven. It’s not, “There are three things that the Lord hates, four that are an abomination to him,” but “There are six things that the LORD hates, *seven* that are an abomination to him.” Seven, of course, is a very important number in Scripture. It is often used to represent the idea of fullness or completeness.

The last item here, the seventh abomination, the climactic element, is...well it’s not what you might think. It’s “one who sows discord among brothers.” Who’d have guessed?

God Hates those who Sow Discord among Brothers

It is a bit surprising perhaps to see this as the climax of the passage. But as we dig into it, it may not seem so surprising after all.

It may be that Solomon is thinking at several different levels. In the first place, remember that he is addressing his sons.

Hear, O sons, a father's instruction,
and be attentive, that you may gain insight (4:1)

And now, O sons, listen to me,
and do not depart from the words of my mouth (5:7)

And now, O sons, listen to me,
and be attentive to the words of my mouth (7:24)

And now, O sons, listen to me:
blessed are those who keep my ways (8:32)

Now, let me ask you: what relation do Solomon's sons bear to each other? They are brothers! Solomon tells them that the Lord hates those who sow discord among brothers. Can't you just see them hanging their heads and looking at each other out of the corners of their eyes, as they recall various ways in which they have sinned against each other? How they have fought with each other, maybe lied about each other to their father? How they had done all the things that siblings—all the things that *brothers*—do to each other growing up that cause resentment and hard feelings? And now they're saying, "How'd he know? Who told him? Is he talking about me?"

So, what about boys? How do you treat your brothers?

If it was an evil thing when the boys were little, how much more so when they were old enough to cause real trouble? If there is discord among the sons of the king when they're toddlers, that's one thing. But when they're full grown men, princes in Israel, well now that's quite another.

Now, it's probably the case that Solomon intends for us to make a much wider application than this. He means not only, and probably not even principally, immediate brothers in the same family, but any who have or ought to have a close relationship: (1) members of the same family, (2) members of an extended family, (3) the members of the same church, and even (4) Christians generally.

Strive to maintain unity and peace and good will in your immediate, as well as in your extended family. Do this *as much as it depends upon you*.

This is not to say that the unity of the family is the most important thing. It's not. Faithfulness to God is the most important thing. Sometimes the unity of the family will be broken by those who are unfaithful, and their unfaithfulness has to be confronted and resisted. And when you do this you may be accused of being the one who has broken the unity of the family. "Can't we just all get along?" they will say to you. We can all get along only as we are faithful to the Lord. But as much as depends upon you, strive to maintain the unity and peace and good will of the family.

We must do the same in the church.

Acts 6:1-7

1 Corinthians 1:10-13

Ephesians 4:1-6

Strive for this as much as possible in the work place also.

Listen to what David says in the 133rd Psalm.

More Abominations

I mentioned earlier that Proverbs 6 does not give us an exhaustive list of things that are an abomination to the Lord. There are other things in Proverbs and in the rest of the Bible. Let's just look at a couple more things mentioned in Proverbs.

God Hates the Cheating Ways of the Wicked

A false balance is an abomination to the LORD,
but a just weight is his delight (11:1)

Unequal weights and unequal measures
are both alike an abomination to the LORD (20:10)

Unequal weights are an abomination to the LORD,
and false scales are not good (20:23)

These proverbs are all rooted in the law.

¹³ "You shall not have in your bag two kinds of weights, a large and a small. ¹⁴ You shall not have in your house two kinds of measures, a large and a small. ¹⁵ A full and fair weight you shall have, a full and fair measure you shall have, that your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you. ¹⁶ For all who do such things, all

who act dishonestly, are an abomination to the LORD your God (Deut. 25:13-16)

Examples

Gas pumps not calibrated properly
Intentionally mismarked items at the supermarket
Misleading advertising of a product

God Hates the Worship of the Wicked

The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the LORD,
but the prayer of the upright is acceptable to him (15:8)

The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination;
how much more when he brings it with evil intent (21:27)

If one turns away his ear from hearing the law,
even his prayer is an abomination (28:9)

More on Training our Moral Sensibility to be Like God's

Ps. 15:1-5