

Dealing With Fights

Memory Text: “Better *is* a dry morsel with quietness, than a house full of feasting *with* strife.” (Proverbs 17:1)

Setting The Stage: When you think of the McCoy’s and Hatfield’s what comes to your mind? The names have become synonymous with bitterly feuding rival parties. For nearly thirty years (1863-1891) these two families of the West Virginia-Kentucky area along the Tug Fork of the Big Sandy River strove, fought, and even killed to settle the score.

Interestingly, it is said that the ongoing struggle was over a pig, or at least who owned a certain pig. It was claimed by the McCoy’s that the notchings on the pigs ears was theirs not Hatfield markings. The matter was taken to a local Justice of the Peace who was a Hatfield, and curiously enough he ruled in favor of the Hatfield’s based on the testimony of a relative of both families. Two McCoy brothers killed the testifier and were later acquitted on the grounds of self-defense.

How much trouble comes to relationships when possessions are put before people! According to a booklet entitled "Making Marriage Last", which is published by the American Academy of Matrimonial Lawyers, problems relating to financial matters are a major reason why marriages break down. When parents die and an inheritance is left, watch the children vie for the biggest piece of the pie.

Consider our memory text for a moment. Proverbs 17 comes in couplets composed of two verses. In each couplet the first verse mirrors the thoughts contained in the second verse. Prov. 17:2 talks about a servant potentially inheriting the wealth of a family, which mirrors the thought of a discordant household. The point could possibly be that the stranger (possibly a lawyer) could end up with much of the wealth if siblings in a family continue to fight over the inheritance.

What we learn in this weeks' lesson is that peaceful friendships are more important than wealth. What truly matters in the end is not how much we have, but who we are in Christ. This lesson is about priorities and the effect good priorities have on our relationships.

Overview: Proverbs 17 can be divided into three sections - 1) good words that build relationships (v. 1-10), 2) evil words that destroy relationships (v.11-22); and 3) the cause of evil words (v. 23-28). Chapter 18 can basically be divided into two sections - 1) a description of the lives of the wise and foolish (v. 1-9); and 2) the secret of finding true wealth. Chapter 19 contrasts the behavior of the wise with the foolish with the goal of encouraging us to seek true wisdom.

Sunday – Sin & Friends

Proverbs 17:9; 19:11; 1 Corinthians 13:5-7

Read Prov. 17:9; 19:11. What important point is being made in these texts? Don't hurt a person by telling others about their faults, failings, shortcomings, or sin/s. It's a sure way to ruin relationships.

Gossip: "casual or unconstrained conversation or reports about other people, typically involving details that are not confirmed as being true: he became the subject of much local gossip." A gossip: "chiefly derogatory, a person who likes talking about other people's private lives."

Etymology: "The word is from Old English *godsibb*, from *god* and *sibb*, the term for the godparents of one's child, generally very close friends. In the 16th century, the word assumed the meaning of a person, mostly a woman, one who delighted in idle talk, a newsmonger, or a tattler. In the early 19th century, the term was extended from the talker to the conversation of such persons.

The verb *to gossip*, meaning "to be a gossip", first appeared in Shakespeare. The term originates from the bedroom at the time of childbirth. Giving birth used to be a social (ladies only) event, in which a pregnant woman's female relatives and neighbours would gather. As with any social gathering there was chattering and this is where the term gossip came to mean talk of others. The word gossip takes on a negative connotation."

The Bible doesn't speak well of the type of talking of others that is done to belittle, demoralize, cause pain, tarnish one's reputation, etc. Even if it's not intentional, we need to be careful about what we allow to come out of our mouth.

Proverbs 16:28: "A perverse man sows strife, and a whisperer separates the best of friends."

1 Timothy 5:13: "And besides they learn *to be* idle, wandering about from house to house, and not only idle but also gossips and busybodies, saying things which they ought not."

Proverbs 18:8: "The words of a talebearer are as wounds, and they go down into the innermost parts of the belly." "Gossip is the most deadly microbe. It has neither legs nor wings. It is composed entirely of tales, and most of them have stings."
Morris Mandel

Proverbs 10:12: "Hatred stirs up strife, but love covers all sins." – Lucifer was the author of stirring up strife with his words (see Ezek. 28:18 – "by the iniquity of thy traffic..."). See also Rom. 1:29, 2 Cor. 12:20, & 3 John 10.

The basis of gossiping is empowering one person while (in order to) disempowering another. Social media has made it easier to spread gossip. Gossiping and bullying often go together. However, the wise/righteous follow another course of action. They don't listen to gossip. It stops with them. They will also not share the

faults/failings of a friend. **Read James 5:20; 1 Peter 4:8.** We love others, not because they're perfect. We love in spite of a person's faults. Friends deal kindly and carefully with those who have fallen, just a like a parent who cares for and treats their child who has grazed their knee or scratched their elbow.

What is the difference between saying something negative about someone to others that hurts their reputation and what Jesus did when he told His disciples to stay away from the Pharisees because of their hypocrisy? Didn't His preaching hurt their reputation? Wasn't Jesus gossiping?

The difference is in the motivation and the matter. Jesus didn't say what He said in order to do harm or to belittle, but in order to help and save. These were issues of life and death. If I tell you not to get in the car with "Fred" because "Fred" isn't a safe driver, I'm not gossiping about "Fred" I'm warning you because I'm concerned about your wellbeing. This is what Jesus did when He warned people about the attitudes and practices of the Pharisees.

Monday - Be Just

Proverbs 17:10; 19:25; Hebrews 12:5-7

Is love blind? Because love "covers" someone's sin does that mean it pretends the sin doesn't exist? Love never negates the practice of justice. Interestingly, the word "justice" in Hebrew ("zedeq") also means charity or love. One cannot rightly love without justice, and one cannot be truly just unless they love.

Although God commands that we care for the poor, we are not called to show partiality toward the poor (Ex. 23:3). Love leads us to help the poor, but it would be unjust if we were to favor them when they are in the wrong. The blending of love and justice is seen all throughout scripture, including Proverbs.

Love never pretends a wrong doesn't exist especially when that wrong is going to hurt the perpetrator or others. What type of parent would I be if I never corrected my children? **Read Proverbs 17:10** (cp. v. 9 – mentioning both together puts love in the right perspective); **19:25**.

Proverbs 27:5: “Open rebuke *is* better than love carefully concealed.” (cp. v. 6)

Proverbs 29:15: “The rod and rebuke give wisdom, but a child left *to himself* brings shame to his mother.”

Hebrews 12:5-7: “And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to sons: ‘My son, do not despise the chastening of the LORD, nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him; for whom the LORD loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives.’ If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten?” (cp. 2 Tim. 3:16)

Do we have a biblical example of the proper blending of love and justice? Yes. Jesus and the woman caught in adultery. **Read John 8:1-11** (cp. Ps. 32:1; Prov. 28:13).

“In His act of pardoning this woman and encouraging her to live a better life, the character of Jesus shines forth in the beauty of perfect righteousness. While He does not palliate sin, nor lessen the sense of guilt, He seeks not to condemn, but to save. The world had for this erring woman only contempt and scorn; but Jesus speaks words of comfort and hope. The Sinless One pities the weakness of the sinner, and reaches to her a helping hand. While the hypocritical Pharisees denounce, Jesus bids her, ‘Go, and sin no more.’” (Desire of Ages, p. 462)

Tuesday – Words, Again

Proverbs 18:4, 21; James 3:17

The mouth is the outlet of the mind. The book of Proverbs is concerned with what comes out of it. "Mouth" is mentioned 50 times, "lips" 41 times, and "tongue" 19 times. Proverbs 18 refers to our words 10 times (v. 2, 4, 6-8, 13, 17, 20, 21, 23). While stick and stones don't break our bones, names actually do hurt us; and more than we think.

Unlike most animals whose brains are cast at birth, human brains continue to develop after birth. By comparison it could be said that our brains are undeveloped. It takes us months to start walking. Personality, cognitive abilities, and skills take years to develop. Our brains continue to "take shape." Environment can have a positive or negative affect on the brain. Ridicule, disdain, humiliation, and taunting, all cause injury, and when it is delivered in childhood from a child's peers, verbal abuse causes more than emotional trauma, it inflicts lasting physical effects on brain structure.

Verbal tongue "lashings" actually create scarring on the brain according to researchers, and this "scarring" is underdeveloped connections between the left and right sides of the brain through the massive bundle of connecting fibers called the corpus callosum. But we don't need science to tell us how certain words affect us. Look at what Proverbs 18 tells us about our words, both good and bad:

Proverbs 18:2: "A fool has no delight in understanding, but in expressing his own heart."

Proverbs 18:4: "The words of a man's mouth *are* deep waters; the wellspring of wisdom *is* a flowing brook." (cp. James 3:17)

Proverbs 18:6: "A fool's lips enter into contention, and his mouth calls for blows."

Proverbs 18:13: "He who answers a matter before he hears *it*, *it is* folly and shame to him."

Proverbs 18:21: “Death and life *are* in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruit.” – think before you speak.

The test: T--Is it true? H--Is it helpful? I--Is it inspiring? N--Is it necessary? K--Is it kind? If what I am about to say does not pass those tests, we need to keep our mouths shut!

Wednesday – Two Sides Of A Story

Proverbs 18:2, 17

Two sides of a coin. There are usually two sides to every story, but is that what we’re focused on when we’re in the midst of a heated argument? Probably not - not if the rational part of the brain has skipped town, leaving the emotional part in charge. True, we’re emotional beings, but our emotional brain without the input of our rational brain is like an unsupervised 3-year-old kid. Things get out of hand pretty quickly. Let’s hear from two people who are absolutely convinced that *they* are the ones who are right.

“My husband is so controlling. Things have to be done his way. Half the time he doesn’t even know what he’s talking about. Yet he acts as if he knows it all and I know nothing. I tell him how selfish he is. He doesn’t even refute me anymore. He just dismisses what I say and goes about doing his thing - even if I expressly ask him not to.”

Sounds like the guy has some growing up to do, doesn’t it? What century is he living in? Doesn’t he understand how he’s undermining his wife? However, listen to the other side of the story and things seem to be a bit different:

“My wife is forever telling me what to do. She reads an article, talks with her friends, watches Oprah and that makes her an expert. She treats me like I’m an idiot who knows nothing. I know I can’t win an argument with her so I stay quiet and do

as I please. She thinks I'm controlling but she's the one who can't tolerate if anything isn't done the 'right' way — which just happens to always be *her* way."

Sounds like the woman has some problems. Who put *her* in charge of the universe? Doesn't she understand how she's emasculating her man? If you listen to the other side of the story (when it's not your story), your perspective readily changes. But that's harder to do when the story is yours. And it's practically impossible to do when your emotions are electrified. Here's how to come to a mutually satisfying resolution:

Calm down. If you're steaming mad or deeply hurt you won't be able to hear another's perspective with an open mind or a caring heart. Don't be like the person mentioned in Proverbs 18:2.

Take time to pray. Remember Proverbs 18:17. Then when you're ready, see if you can listen non-defensively. Own up to things you do that may be irksome. Squash your "yes, but" comeback. Concede a point or two. Stop repeating your story. Soften your position. Recognize some merit in your partner's viewpoint (e.g., "I understand how you can see it that way"). Sprinkle in some humor.

Attempt to understand each other. Aim to develop a workable resolution. Pray through it. If you find that no matter how hard you try, you may have to seek professional help. You can't resolve every issue on your own.

Thursday - Be Truthful

Proverbs 19

Proverbs 19 presents some thoughts about lying (among other things) – **Read v. 1, 5, 9, 22.** What do they say about lying? It's better to be poor (or lose a promotion) than to lie and lose your integrity. It's always better to tell the truth. It was

Abraham Lincoln who said, “No man has a good enough memory to make a successful liar. “

What if telling the truth puts your life or other lives at risk? Jesus is our example. There were times He told it like it was and times when He couched His language in symbolism and story. His most scathing rebukes came toward the end of His ministry, while His parables dominated His teaching ministry. In moments like these we are to “wise and serpents and harmless as doves.”

Appeal: Human relationships are built on words. The words we speak to one another reveal how healthy a relationship we have with each other. Angry words, contention, and lies indicate a broken relationship. Gracious words of truth and encouragement indicate a growing relationship.