

July 26, 2015 by Steve Brandon



Wisdom from Proverbs (Part 2)

Proverbs 18:1,17,19

1. Proverbs 18:1

2. Proverbs 18:17

3. Proverbs 18:19

Like last week, we are going to look at three Proverbs this morning. And rather than look at them in a single message, I plan on breaking them up into three mini-sermons. All three of my Proverbs this morning will come from chapter 18. And all three of them are things that I have observed during my years of pastoring that I would like to pass on to you. I invite you to open your Bibles to the book of Proverbs, chapter 18.

The first verse that we are going to look at this morning is found in verse 1.

1. Proverbs 18:1

Proverbs 18:1

Whoever isolates himself seeks his own desire;
he breaks out against all sound judgment.

Do you know the story of Bobby Fischer? Many consider him to be the greatest chess player of all time. He was born in 1943 and quickly took to the game of chess. By age 20, he was the United States Chess Champion. And nine years later, in 1972, he beat the great Russian player, Boris Spassky and to became the world chess champion Everything that he had ever wanted was in his hand. He had it all at age 29.

When it came time to defend his title in 1975, Fischer made his own demands for the match, essentially changing the rules for how a champion defends his title. But, when his demands were not met, he refused to play. In fact, he refused to play in any organized chess event for the next 20 years! Instead, he kept aloof from the public eye and became increasingly anti-Semitic, anti-Israel, and even anti-American. He was very paranoid and thought the world was out to get him.

No counsel could bring him back to play chess again. No counsel could persuade him that his political views were wrong either. He was convinced in his own mind that he knew best. He surfaced one last time in 1992 to play a re-match with Boris Spassky in 1992, some 20 years after their championship match. However, because the match was played in Yugoslavia, which was under a United Nations embargo, he was in trouble with the United States.

Never again did he step foot in America. He spent time living in Hungary, Germany, the Philippines, Japan, and finally, Iceland, where he died in 2008. Bobby Fischer is the epitome of Proverbs 18:1.

Proverbs 18:1

Whoever isolates himself seeks his own desire;
he breaks out against all sound judgment.

And many in the chess world lament what was lost. They had lost the opportunity to watch Bobby Fischer play in his prime.

This is similar to Michael Jordan calling it quits after the first Bulls championship in 1991, never to step on the basketball court again. The great thrills that he gave his fans, with the six championships, would never have happened. Who knows, with the talent that Bobby Fischer had, he could very well have been world champion for 20 years!

It's because Bobby Fischer pursued his own desires and isolated himself away from the world. And nobody was going to change his mind.

This is an illustration of Proverbs 18:1 on the grand scale. But, the same thing can happen on a smaller scale. Picture with me a teenage boy, sitting on a couch, in a dark basement, with headphones on his ears, and joystick in his hand, with all attention focused upon the video display. He has separated himself from his family, gone into a dark place, into his own little world, away from family and friends. He is all alone with his toy.

And why has he done so? I don't know. Perhaps it is his drug. Perhaps it's his way of escape. Perhaps he is running from responsibility. Perhaps he's neglecting his household chores. Perhaps his motives are commendable. He just finished his final exams and just got home from school and is taking a much-needed 30 minute break before he gets at mowing the lawn and raking the leaves and cleaning the garage. I don't know why he is here. But, I do know why he is here.

According to this Proverb, he seeks his own desire. That is, he's not serving others. He's not helping others. He's choosing the course of action that he wants to do. In other words, his isolation is a demonstration of his self-centered desires.

And in reality, this is the reason why any of us would isolate ourselves. There is something more important to us than our community.

Now, this desire may be a good desire. Like the desire of Jesus, who would often slip away to pray (Luke 5:16). Or like the desire of the student, who leaves the social life of the dorm to the seclusion of the library to study for the test tomorrow. Or like the mother of small children, who seeks the sanctuary of her bedroom for a much needed nap.

In these cases, it is prayer and it is study and it is rest that would lead us to isolate ourselves. And these are all good things. And I commend you to seek "alone-time" when it is appropriate. Seek the face of the LORD daily.

But, this verse is talking about those "alone-times" when it is not appropriate. We see that in the second half of the verse: "He breaks out against all sound judgment." That is, someone separates themselves from others, because they feel that they are right. And they feel that the judgments of others are wrong. At least, this is what they are saying. They say things like, "You don't understand." They say things like, "It's not like that." Or, they make up some sort of excuse for themselves. In reality, there's always something deeper going on. And that something else is their desire for something else.

It's much like the reality of all fighting and quarrelling. In James 4:1 the question is asked, "What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you?" And here's the answer: "Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you?" (James 4:1b). And then the explanation: "You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel" (James 4:2).

In other words, the fighting and the quarrelling are really the symptoms of something going on deeper in our hearts. What's going on is a desire not realized. And so ensues the fight, each trying to get what they want.

Children fight over toys, because they want the toy that their sister has in their possession. Couples fight over future plans, because each spouse wants something different. Parents fight with coaches, because they want their child to play in the game. Employees fight with bosses, because they want more pay. And on and on it goes.

And this same phenomenon works when people isolate themselves. There is something that they seek. And, they can't get support from their community. And so they separate themselves, so that they can do their own thing without being bothered.

Isn't this the reality of sin? If you can't get the support of those around you, you go where nobody knows. And you sin in isolation. Or at least away from your parents.

This is often the reality of divorce. When God created marriage, it was for the sake of companionship. He said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him" (Genesis 2:18). And when husband and wife come together, they come together as "one flesh" (Genesis 2:24). They come together united.

And in divorce, one (or both) parties, wants something else. Say, another girl. Or someone who won't boss them around. Or someone who can bring in more money. Or someone who can better satisfy their needs.

And, despite the counsel of their parents and their friends, they separate themselves and leave their marriage. And they find themselves alone.

This is the reality of church discipline. When a member begins to stray, another member comes alongside, and urges them to repent and return. But, they continue in their wayward ways. So, along come another two or three, who call the sinning member to return. But, they refuse their counsel. Finally, the entire church is told about it, and many of them go and plead with the individual calling him (or her) to come back. But, the heart is hard to everyone and they go into isolation.

Such an individual is seeking his own desire, and going against all counsel. Instead of remaining with the church, who is in agreement in counseling a wayward member to repent, it's easier to sin away from the group. Because the group won't allow it.

Proverbs 18:1 is calling us to recognize the value of community, and to be accountable to others. Be accountable, rather than simply seeking our own desires and departing from the group. And I say this: there are plenty of Christians who live in practical isolation. Oh, sure, they attend a church. But, there is little engagement in the community. There is little involvement in the lives of fellow believers. For all intents and purposes, they live as an island unto themselves.

But, listen. When God saves a soul, he saves him into a community called "the church." Our salvation isn't simply vertical with God. It is vertical. We have a sin problem before God, which much be solved. And it is solved at the cross of Christ. But there is also a horizontal element to our salvation. Because, left to ourselves, we don't relate very well with other people. Our sin has caused offense and difficulty with each other.

But, the cross of Christ reconciles us "into one new man," called the church (Ephesians 2:14-16). Ephesians speaks of the great reconciliation that takes place between believers. Over and over and over again, the Bible speaks of "faith and love." Faith toward God. Love toward His people. Faith is the vertical component. Love is the horizontal component. This is the Christian life.

And the horizontal component is where we really show our vertical component. And on the horizontal plain, we help and encourage each other.

The church is here for our help. The church is here for our good. And when we isolate ourselves from the church, it is only for our hurt. And, according to Proverbs 18:1, it is against "all sound judgment."

The exhortation from Hebrews 10:24 and 25 is this, ...

Hebrews 10:24-25

And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.

Now, here's the good news: by and large, this is happening at Rock Valley Bible Church. There is a great stimulus going on here at church. All you need to do is hang around a bit.

Our service may end at 11:30ish. But really, for all practical purposes, it's more like 12:30 for many of you. You show love toward each other on Sunday morning, and extend it through the week. And so, I encourage you to reflect upon your involvement at Rock Valley Bible Church. Are you an isolated island? Or, are you an integral part of the church?

2. Proverbs 18:17

Open your Bibles again to Proverbs, chapter 18. In this mini message, we are going to look at verse 17. Let me read it for you now.

Proverbs 18:17

The one who states his case first seem right,
Until the other comes and examines him.

I remember the first time that I read the claim that the United States didn't land on the moon. Instead, it was all a big hoax. I was putzing around on the internet and ran across an article that seemed convincing.

Remember what was going on in history, I read. We were at the height of the cold war with Russia. And it was important for us to show our dominance. And what better way than to put people on the moon.

The problem was that this was impossible. So, the United States pulled off this giant hoax. Instead of landing on the moon, NASA staged all of the photos in a studio. The thought is this: If Russia hears that the United States landed on the moon, it would be a great point of propaganda, which would all work together to intimidate the Russian people. This is exactly what we needed during the cold war.

And so, evidence was produced to show how this is the case. [\[1\]](#) I mean, look at the flag that was planted on the moon. It ripples in the wind. But, we all know that there is no wind on the moon.

Or, how about this picture? NASA staunchly claims that there were never more than two astronauts on the moon at any given time. So, how do you explain this picture with the lunar lander reflected in Buzz Aldrin's visor? Sure looks like there are three people in this picture: (1) Buzz, (2) the photographer, and (3) the other astronaut in the background.

Or, how do you explain that there are no stars in the background of this picture? You would sure expect stars to fill the night sky, wouldn't you? And on and on and on the evidence rises. Until finally, I was thinking, "Did we really go to the moon or not?"

And then, do you know what happened? I went to another website that gave explanation to all of these things. The reason the flag ripples is because of the astronaut just placed it there. And his shaking caused the ripples, not the wind. Regarding the missing photographer, actually, the astronauts wore cameras on their chests. And the other astronaut took the picture. His hands were at his chest, just like you would expect if he were shooting. Regarding the stars in the sky, there was simply too much light on the moon to see stars, much like in the daytime on the earth.

And reading the second website convinced me (and I remain convinced to this day) that we indeed landed on the moon. But, I want for you to think about the process that I went through. At first, I heard the story of how we didn't land on the moon. And it sounded reasonable. And then, another perspective came along to explain the apparent problems. And I was set straight.

This is exactly what Proverbs 18:17 is saying.

Proverbs 18:17

The one who states his case first seem right,
Until the other comes and examines him.

I have seen this many times. I speak with one person who has their own slant on things. And I come to take their perspective. And then, another comes along and I begin to see things more clearly. I have seen this at home with my children. I have seen this at church when disputes arise. I have seen this when dealing with others outside the church.

You hear the story from one, and you are convinced that an injustice has taken place. But, along comes another, and you see that the truth was shaded just a bit. Or, certain facts weren't shared with me that helped to clarify everything.

That's why (in part), the Lord has required two witnesses of an event before a judgment takes place. Deuteronomy 19:15 says, "A single witness shall not suffice against a person for any crime or for any wrong in connection with any offense that he has committed. Only on the evidence of two witnesses or of three witnesses shall a charge be established." The law goes on to explain how if there is a dispute, both parties are to appear before the authorities to explain their case. Because, you can't trust the testimony of only one person. They will slant things to their perspective!

And this is only natural. We are sinners. And we want to put ourselves in the best light possible.

This is what Adam did. "The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate" (Genesis 3:11). This is what Eve did. "The serpent deceived me, and I ate" (Genesis 3:13).

Have you ever considered how we would take the account of the fall if we didn't have the narrative explaining what happened? What if all we had was Adam and Eve's testimony? How would this shape our perspective on what happened in the garden?

From Eve's perspective, she was the total victim. "The serpent deceived me, and I ate" (Genesis 3:13). From her testimony, we picture the serpent bringing a fruit to Eve to try, not telling her that it was from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (from which the LORD had said they should not eat). And she ate, in ignorance, because she was deceived into thinking it was permissible to eat of the fruit. Only afterwards did she realize that it was from the forbidden tree. At least that's what Eve's testimony might lead us to believe.

And for Adam, the same thing. Except, that he didn't even mention the "being deceived" thing. He simply said that the fruit was given to him by the woman, and so he ate. The picture we get is that he didn't even question anything, because, of course, Eve wouldn't give him anything bad to eat. Adam's testimony leans to the side of no-fault on his part.

And yet, the Lord, who knows all things, was able to discern between right and wrong. But, Adam and Eve's testimony is most helpful for us. Because, we will do this! We will slant the truth in our perspective, to obtain the outcome that we want!

Isn't this what Aaron did when Moses came down from the mountain to find them worshiping the golden calf?

Exodus 32:22-24

And Aaron said, "Let not the anger of my lord burn hot. You know the people, that they are set on evil. For they said to me, 'Make us gods who shall go before us. As for this Moses, the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him.' So I said to them, 'Let any who have gold take it off.' So they gave it to me, and I threw it into the fire, and out came this calf."

The facts are mostly right, but they are slanted quite a bit. They are shaded in Aaron's favor.

This is what Saul did when Samuel came to confront him about his disobedience to the LORD? Initially, he maintained his innocence, saying, ...

1 Samuel 15:20-21

"I have obeyed the voice of the Lord. I have gone on the mission on which the Lord sent me. I have brought Agag the king of Amalek, and I have devoted the Amalekites to destruction. But the people took of the spoil, sheep and oxen, the best of the things devoted to destruction, to sacrifice to the Lord your God in Gilgal."

You can feel his self-justification shining through his confession. Only after Samuel prodded a bit further did Saul confess his sins, saying ...

1 Samuel 15:24

"I have sinned, for I have transgressed the commandment of the Lord and your words, because I feared the people and obeyed their voice."

This is how our hearts work. We shade the truth.

If you are looking for application this morning, it's this. Realize that someday, you are going to be standing before the LORD, who knows all facts. In fact, Jesus said that "Nothing is hidden that will not be made manifest, nor is anything secret that will not be known and come to light" (Luke 8:17).

When it comes to your standing before the LORD, please know that you are just like Adam and Eve and Aaron and Saul. You will paint things in such a way that you will seem righteous in your own eyes until the LORD comes and examines you.

Proverbs 18:17

The one who states his case first seem right,
Until the other comes and examines him.

And in that day, the LORD won't have to work too hard to expose your sin. It will be pretty easy to show how you have sinned against the LORD.

And my question to you is this: will you confess your sin now, in the time of mercy. Or, will you wait until judgment day -- when the LORD will expose every secret of the heart -- to confess your sin. There is no mercy in that day. But, there is mercy today, if you but confess your sins. 1 John 1 says, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). But, if you deny your sin, you are simply self-deceived. "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. ... If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us" (1 John 1:8, 10).

And so, I call you to confess your sin, and lean on Christ who alone will forgive. Don't try to justify yourself before the Lord. It won't work. So, I call you this morning to confession. Confess your sins to the LORD before he needs to come and examine you.

Now, besides confession, I have another application for you. I call you to discernment. I'm calling for you to reserve judgment. I'm calling for you to get the facts before you judge.

I remember one time in church a woman heard a story about me (which was entirely untrue). And what she heard was so appalling to her that she canceled a meeting with Yvonne. She simply couldn't step foot in our house, knowing what she knew to be true (from what she had heard). Hearing these things affected her so badly. Her husband called me and arranged a meeting with me. And so, husband and wife came over to explain how wrong I was in dealing with a situation.

They spoke, at first, in obscure terms (not using names, speaking in generalities). But, when I wasn't getting it, they continued with a few more specifics (names and places). And soon, it became evident that I knew very little about what they were talking about. In fact, they knew far more than I did about this situation, that's for sure. And so, since they were so riled up about my lack of engagement in the situation, I encouraged them to go back to the people involved to seek to make it right. Sadly, I'm not sure that they did.

All this to say, ...

Proverbs 18:17

The one who states his case first seem right,
Until the other comes and examines him.

And what they heard was "right." Until they brought it to me and discovered that their facts weren't even close. They left my office a bit embarrassed and apologetic. For them, Proverbs 18:13 was most definitely true:

Proverbs 18:13

If one gives an answer before he hears, it is his folly and shame.

They were hasty in their judgment and it proved to be all wrong. That's but one example of many that could be given.

I could also tell you of the time that I found myself in the middle of a marital spat (not with people of our church). I was talking with the husband. Then I was talking with the wife. Then I was talking with the husband. Then I was talking with the wife. Trying desperately to reconcile them together.

And I remember being caught right in the middle, trying to figure out what was going on. Because one of them would talk and bring up some wrongdoing of the other, and it sounded right. Then, I would get on the phone and try to confront the other, but the facts were refuted. And then, they came up with other accusations of their own, which I brought back to the other.

And back and forth it went. And I'm not sure that I fully know the truth what what's taking place.

And so, I want to encourage you to reserve your judgment until you have heard enough facts in the case. Because, hearing only one side is often not enough.

3. Proverbs 18:19

My third mini-sermon this morning comes from Proverbs 18:19. So, open there in your Bible.

Proverbs 18:19

A brother offended is more unyielding than a strong city,
And quarreling is like the bars of a castle.

This message will obviously be shorter than the other two. In fact, I'm going to use this Proverb as a communion meditation before we celebrate the Lords' Supper together.

Proverbs 18:19 speaks about the deep hurt that our sin can cause in others. If you sin against another, that sin can often drive a deep wedge

between you and that person. A wedge that is so deep and immovable, that Solomon compares it to a strong city that defies capture.

Now, in Solomon's day, strong cities were surrounded by walls that were 10, 15, 20, 30 feet tall and 10, 15, 20, 30 feet thick. Cities were often on a hill, so that without helicopters or airplanes, the ascent up to the city wall was even more daunting. And then, on top of the wall sat those who defended the city with arrows in hand and with large boulders ready to drop. Taking over a city in ancient days was not an easy task. And so also is making things right with a "brother offended" difficult.

Note that this Proverb isn't speaking about "those out there." No, it's talking about a close relative, "a brother." Certainly, this is metaphorical for any close relationship you have. A physical brother (or sister) or one within a close community, such as a church. And I have experienced this. I have experienced this on many occasions.

I remember about ten years ago offended my sister-in-law. I got hold of an mp3 player of her teenage son. I just randomly listened to a song, and was shocked by what I heard. I'm not too up on the current hits. But, this was clearly and obviously not healthy to listen to.

And so, about an hour later, it came up in the course of conversation at our family gathering. Wanting to help my sister-in-law to shepherd her children, I said, "This music would never be allowed in our home."

Well, that statement offended her greatly. She took my words to mean that she was a terrible parent. She took it to mean that I'm the only righteous one. Certainly, I was wrong in how I approached the subject. Certainly, I was being very judgmental.

I quickly saw my error and confessed my sin before I left that day. Well, had I offended her. And although our relationship remained cordial, in many ways it was cold. And it took many years of my effort to build her up, for progress to be made in our relationship. See, it took many years for her to realize that I was for her and not against her.

I could tell you story after story of people who I have offended over the years. Some are here in the church, having endured with me and my sin. Others have taken the easy path, and left the church. Going through these sorts of things have really shown me the truth of Proverbs 18:19:

Proverbs 18:19

A brother offended is more unyielding than a strong city,
And quarreling is like the bars of a castle.

I have seen and experienced the unyielding ways of those who are offended. And I have seen how quarreling accomplished nothing. That's the idea of the second half of the verse, "quarreling is like the bars of a castle" -- again, the picture of something strong you can't overcome. Once you begin to quarrel, the focus shifts from reconciliation to being right.

I remember the conflict between two families of the church who were quarreling. I first heard about their quarrel when one husband called me up and told me a bit of what was going on. He said that we should bring the other family under church discipline, such was the feeling of wrong.

So, I called the other family, and the husband said the same thing. That this other family should be disciplined by the church as wrong and in sin. I found myself in the middle of a mess.

So, I sought to reconcile these two families. I found it well-nigh impossible. At one point, one of the parties gave to me a print-out of all of the emails that had gone back and forth regarding these things. It was probably 50 pages thick of bickering back and forth.

There is only one way that their quarrel could ever be reconciled: if both parties would humble themselves before Christ. Because, as believers in Christ, we are called to forgive others. Do you remember the story in Matthew 18 of the unforgiving servant? A man was in debt to his owner millions of dollars. When he pleaded for patience, it was all forgiven.

But then, when he encountered a servant who owed him a few hundred dollars, he refused to forgive the debt. Instead, he threw him into prison until the debt would be paid. And the point of the story is that this is so inconsistent. How can one who has been forgiven so much hold a little against another?

And yet, this happens all the time. 1 Corinthians 13 tells us that Love bears all things. Love overlooks a transgression. Proverbs 19:11 says, "Good sense makes one slow to anger, and it is his glory to overlook an offense."

Truly, you have offended the Lord in your sin. He is more unyielding than a strong city.

Proverbs 18:19

A brother offended is more unyielding than a strong city,
And quarreling is like the bars of a castle.

Yet, Christ is the way to break down that wall.

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on July 26, 2015 by Steve Brandon.
For more information see www.rvbc.cc.

[1] <http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2009/07/photogalleries/apollo-moon-landing-hoax-pictures/index.html>