

Proverbs 22:17-21

Sunday 4/26/2009

We have a lot left to do in Romans 8, and I want to get back into that. However, I felt that we really needed to take this section out and focus on it, since it fit in with what we were doing in Romans 8 anyhow. I didn't want to have to come back and do it later.

Now you have a good foundation on how to use biblical principles. I think it's probably one of the best studies that we have ever taken, especially the one we talked about last week. Yet, how do you make one better than the other? It's really helping you understand how the whole thing works together in your life.

You always want to remember that biblical principles are the key to making the right decisions in your life. There are many influences in our lives. You are going to find that people get other people in their lives, or they get circumstances in their lives, and with those relationships or circumstances come attitudes and influences. Before you know it, it pulls you from where you need to be to where you don't need to be.

Bible principles are the key to keeping you making the right decisions. You always focus on what the Bible says and stay with it in that aspect of your life. We have now seen that the right decisions really are the key to fulfilling God's will and God's plan for your life. We now know in a better way that if you are saved this morning, God has something that He wants you to be able to accomplish in your life. Of course, that is the key to the judgment seat of Christ, to getting to the point where you have everything that God wants you to have.

Today, in our study, I want to end it in a way that I thought would be appropriate. I want to talk to you about, maybe 25 or 30, or maybe more than that, basic principles that I use in my own personal life and certainly in what I do. I always try not only to make my own personal decisions by biblical principles, but also those concerning the ministry of this church.

Leadership, and that's what I'm always striving to build. I think any pastor who does not see and understand that his main function and his main job is to look through his congregation for any young man or any young lady that even has a minuscule amount of leadership ability, and then fan that fire, stoke that fire, and bring out of them everything that you can do to make that person profitable for the ministry that you are trying to accomplish.

You find that's what Paul did. In the churches that he ministered to, in the churches that he had written to, you find him dealing with certain people, naming them by name, and really pouring himself into those people because he saw in them the great ability to do something for the Lord.

But in leadership, you have to lead from the top down. In the military, it's called the chain of command. You have to lead not only by example, but also by example. Now, that's what separates Bible leadership in churches from any other area of leadership. If you're in the military, you really don't care what the guy who's your platoon sergeant or maybe your company commander does in his own private life. You don't care if he's an alcoholic. You don't care if he's a gambler. You really don't care about what he does with his life as long as he knows how to

keep you alive when everything hits the fan, and he knows how to get you home safely because he leads by example. In the military, they lead by example, chain of command.

Leadership in the military is taking men and women who people are willing to follow. You could read many, many biographies down through the history of any war where there were men who followers would follow anywhere simply because they had proven themselves as leaders. Men knew that even though many times they were in perilous situations, that the man they were following was the best hope for them to get back home in any given situation.

But in Christianity, we can't do just that. Christianity is a different chain of command. It's different in leadership in churches than it is in any other aspect because not only does leadership have to lead by example, that's what you do, but it also has to lead by "in-sample." The difference between example and in-sample is simply that an example is something that you do, but an in-sample is something that you are. That's the difference between the world's kind of leadership and God's kind of leadership.

It isn't enough that you're just a good leader, and you do what a leader should do. It's more than that in God's church because in God's church, you have to live the principles as much as lead by the principles. This is where it fails many, many times in dealing with people. Yet, I say to you that nobody is perfect. You've heard me say this over and over again because you're not going to find anybody in any role of leadership, or any pastor in any leadership in any ministry, that's perfect. Perfection is not what you look for, but rather consistency. Consistency with the biblical principles, consistency in your life and my life of the in-samples and the examples, bring about what every leader needs, and that's credibility.

You're not a leader because you say, "I am a leader." You're not a leader because you have a little piece of paper that says you're a leader. You're not a leader because you have a name tag that says, "I'm a leader." You're a leader because people have credibility with the people that you try to lead. Bible principles in your life are the way to do that. It's not enough simply to be able to lay out the Bible. You have to also be able to live out the Bible. That's really the key, and you do that through the principles. The greatest influence you'll have for Christ will not be what you say or even what you do, but rather how you live your personal life in accordance with biblical principles.

I. The Principle of Being Watched

I want to start today by giving you two great principles. We're going to start with this and we're going to end with this, and then it'll be like a sandwich; in between, we'll put the meat in. This is the bread.

Romans 14:7-8

For none of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself.

For whether we live, we live unto the Lord; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord: whether we live therefore, or die, we are the Lord's.

That's one of the greatest single principles that you'll ever commit in your heart. That's a principle that as a child of God, you never want to forget because that principle simply says there's always somebody watching your life. Once you take Christ as your personal Savior, from that point on, the Bible says you're not your own. You're now bought with a price. Whether you like it or not, whether I like it or not, once you declare yourself to be a child of God, people are now watching your life. You don't have a private life anymore. You now come to the point where you are to be an ambassador for Christ. You're to be a showcase for Christ. You're to be an example of the principles because there's always somebody going to be watching your life. That is the very thing that God will do and take in your life to reach somebody else for Christ. It won't be necessarily what you say. It won't be necessarily what ministry you're involved in, but it will simply be what people see in your life when you don't know they're watching. That is the number one thing that you want to always look out for and always remember.

Along with 1 Peter 3:15, which is another great verse.

1 Peter 3:15

But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear:

I want you to see that verse. That verse tells you very clearly and plainly that nobody is going out telling anybody they're a Christian. That verse says that somebody sees in your life the reason why you are the way you are and sees the difference in your life. I've told you before that one of the great areas in your life that God teaches you the Bible is the area of contrast: things that are here versus things that are over here, light versus darkness, Heaven versus hell, good versus evil. Contrast is one of the absolutely greatest ways that God teaches you the Bible. It's also one of the greatest ways that God uses your life as an influence in other people's lives.

We are under the false assumption, and I know many of you witness, and I commend you for that. Many of you carry your Bibles to work, and many of you during your lunch hour study your Bible, and people see all of that, and I appreciate that. I really do. I think that's good. What I'm about to say is not an indictment on anybody because I don't know for the most part what people look at you and what they think. But I want to tell you this: it's not those times that people will say, "That person's a Christian." It'll be the times when you're faced with something that studying your Bible at lunch really pays off in the crunch someplace over here. It'll be the time when you don't think anybody's watching your life, and you're faced with some issue that your response or your reaction to it is going to speak volumes much more than anything that you did by sitting down at a lunch table and opening up your Bible or witnessing to somebody.

Credibility is something that doesn't come because you just open up a Bible or even carry one. We believe the King James Bible is the Word of God. Yes, we do, and I believe it's the absolute, infallible Word of God. Yes, I do. But you know what? I've seen some of the biggest doofuses that you ever saw in your life do more harm and more damage to Christianity and the cause of Christ, who believe everything that I believe about the Bible and walked around carrying a 25-pound King James Bible. The problem was, they could lay out the Bible, but they could not live out the Bible. The one without the other is a waste of time. Why? Because there's always

somebody watching your life, and what you want to do, you always want to be ready. You want to be ready to give an answer to every man that's going to ask you the reason why you are the way you are in relationship to a world that is totally opposite. Contrast.

Just as the Bible principles make decisions easy, we talked about that before. It shows you the bottom line: no smoke, no confusion, no emotion. It shows you clearly what you have to do based on the Bible. It also clearly shows you, once you know how to use them in Christianity, what's real and what isn't real. These today would be great, and I don't know how far we'll get. I'm going to have to jump through here and try to get all these done, but some of them I want to spend more time on than others. These would be great on three by five cards. We gave you the ninety that John and Joe put together, and those would be great on three by five cards, and these would be great too. Some of you will find these things will work for you. Some of you will say, "Well, maybe that's not what I'm wrapped in right now." All I can tell you is this: these are the things that these are some of the ones that I go by most in my life.

I use these in areas of ministry, in my own personal life, and in dealing with people. In fact, I've broken them down into those sections. I've broken them down into three categories. I did it for the ease of remembering them and for laying them out. I've fought all these and used these. If you would ever go through my Bible, you would find that every principle that I found that I use, I have taken one of those little red grease pens we have back there, and I've marked every one with a little square. When I go through my Bible and I see that square, I know that's a principle. If you look in my Bible, there are probably more marked with red squares in the book of Proverbs than there are not. It's all through the Bible.

Now, these are powerful one-liners. I told you when we started that principles come in the form of whole books. I gave you some examples of that. Chapters, I gave you some examples of that. Passages of three or four verses, I gave you some examples of that. Then I said, stand-alone verses. Most of them come from my favorite book in the Bible, and that would be the book of Proverbs.

II. The Book of Proverbs: Discernment and Discretion

For me, and you've heard me say this before, the book of Proverbs is without a doubt my greatest book in the Bible for me and my greatest challenge. If there was ever one book that I could have complete total recall on, that I would have everything at my fingertips, that I could just remember, it would be the book of Proverbs. I think one of the greatest things that I've ever seen in the Bible, and we talked about this Thursday night, is found in 1 Kings 4:32.

1 Kings 4:32

And he spake three thousand proverbs: and his songs were a thousand and five.

It says there that Solomon wrote three thousand Proverbs. Three thousand Proverbs. I told you Thursday night, the best I can count them up, and I may be off on this because it's hard to say what I would consider a proverb and what somebody else would, but the best I could come up with is seven hundred in the book of Proverbs. That means that you didn't get all of that. I'll tell

you something else. We went through the Song of Solomon on New Year's Eve, remember that? Well, the Bible says in the same passage that he had a thousand and five songs. You didn't get all of that in the book of Song of Solomon. You know what that tells me? That tells me that God handpicked out of everything that Solomon said—and Solomon was the wisest man that ever lived—God handpicked out of that the Proverbs that He gave me and the Song of Solomon that He gave me, the songs that He gave me, to give me everything that I needed.

Proverbs 4:23 is your next principle, and this is something you want to remember forever in connection with the book of Proverbs.

Proverbs 4:23

Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life.

You see, the book of Proverbs is aimed at a man's heart, for it's in our heart that's the key to our relationship with God. The book of Proverbs shows us how to keep your heart right with God because out of it is going to come every issue in life that you and I are going to have to deal with. Every issue that we face in our lives will start in our heart. The Bible says, "As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he." The Bible talks about that when an issue comes into my life, in my heart, I think about it. I think how I'm going to deal with it. Then I decide in my heart if I'm going to apply the Bible principles or I'm not going to apply the Bible principles. Life goes on, up or down, based on that concept. It's just that simple. The issues of our lives, the things that we deal with, will always start in our heart.

The categories I put these in are simply:

- People
- Life in General
- The World I Live In

I also told you Thursday night, we talked about that. Somebody asked a great question out of the book of Proverbs, and we got into that early part of that book, and I showed you what your goal in your life should be out of the book of Proverbs. I showed you that if you're ever going to be used of God, you're kidding yourself and you're never going to get there if you don't have the process by which God shows you in the book of Proverbs. I told you that the two things that come from understanding the book of Proverbs are discernment and discretion.

Discernment is being able to see the situation as it really is, not as it appears. That's what discernment is. When you can see something that everybody else sees this way, and you discern it from the Bible standpoint, you have discernment. I can't tell you how important that is in dealing with people. I can't tell you how important that is in building relationships in your life because you're going to find in Christianity, just like the world, there are going to be God's people that are going to lead you astray and are going to get you messed up. You've got to be able to have the discernment to know who you're going to be with or who you're going to hang out with, or whatever the point may be. You're going to have to use discernment in that. We get the idea that because somebody says they're a Christian, that just makes them great, and that's obviously not true if you've been around in the world as a saved person for any length of time.

That is simply not true. Discernment is the ability to see through God's wisdom and knowledge and understanding. Discernment is the ability to see any circumstance as it really is.

Then discretion. Discretion is the ability to take the wisdom that you have and apply it to that circumstance in the right format. That is the key to everything that you and I have to do, and the answer to that is the principles. We're going to look at it.

III. Principles for Dealing with People

Let's start with people. One of the greatest principles on why God's people struggle in their walk with God. All my life as a Christian, and I'm going to give a little personal thing on some of these, all my life as a pastor, I should say, once I started dealing with people, I'd watch people get saved, and I'd watch people come to the place where they'd come to church for a while, they'd get involved for just a little bit, and then they would be gone, and you'd never see them again.

Now, I understand that much of that today has to do with the fact that in the day and age that we live in, most people probably today don't really get saved. I think personally, I was talking to a guy last week, and he was looking for all these examples that are going on in the world today, how the devil would mask the rapture of the church, how you're going to explain hundreds of millions of people disappearing just like that. He was looking at some of the theories that the world's putting out, and thinking, and he went on and talking about how he thought that maybe this would mask the rapture. I looked back at him and I said, "You know what my personal position is? I don't think when the rapture took place this morning, there'd be that many people that go that would ever be missed." That's my stand on it. I'm sorry, I'm just where I'm at.

I believe there's so much phoniness going on in Christianity today, and I believe there are so many people who make emotional decisions that are not based on the pure principles of the Word of God that they can grasp at that point in their life. I think that people who win people to Christ are so inept at it, so at a disadvantage at it, that they don't know what to look for. They don't know what to talk about. They don't know how to ask the right questions. I believe as sure as I'm standing here that most people that get saved probably don't really get saved. I tell you that's why I'm so careful with the people that I teach how to win somebody to Christ.

I think that after a person does get saved, the thing that happens in their life that destroys them, let's face it, we know two things for sure. One, the devil doesn't want you to get saved; he wants to get you in hell. So you get saved, that plan goes out the window. The second plan then is, now that he knows you'll never go to hell, he does know that if he can keep you from ever plugging in and being everything that God wants you to be, you may never go to hell yourself, but a lot of other people will go to hell because you won't get on board and do what God wants you to do. So he plays the odds. He's not stupid with the thing.

That's why this next principle found in Proverbs 13:20 is the answer to many times why people don't make it, and it's through association.

Proverbs 13:20

He that walketh with wise men shall be wise: but a companion of fools shall be destroyed.

That is so simple, but it's absolutely profound. You are this morning who you hang out with. I don't know what else to tell you. If you hang out with wise men, and last Thursday night for those of you that bothered to come, we defined what a wise man is in the book of Proverbs, didn't we? We gave you nine things. Somebody says, "Well, I hang out with wise people." Do you? I didn't say wise guys, I said a wise man. You say, "Well, I hang out with wise people." Do you? Do you even know the nine principles that the Bible says make a wise man? How do you hang out with somebody and think they're wise when you don't even know what the Bible defines a wise man as?

The Bible simply says, "He that walketh with wise men shall be wise: but a companion of fools shall be destroyed." You will be who you hang out with. People will either lift you up or people will drag you down. The problem is, many times when a man or a woman gets saved, they don't make the cut with the ties of the people that were dragging them down. Many times it's for a good reason. It won't work, but it's a good reason. Many times they feel, "Well, I want to win that person to Christ," or "I want to have an influence in that person for Christ." I guarantee you, when you first get saved, you won't have any influence in anybody's life, but everybody will have an influence in your life. There is a process if you find yourself in that place to win those people to Christ, but it isn't you hanging out with them still so you can still run with them, so you think in your mind that if I just stay with them, in time I'll bring them to church. No, just the opposite will happen. In time, you'll quit coming to church. Why? The principle.

My suggestion to you, if you really want to do something for God in your life and you're just a young Christian, find the men and women in this church that are doing it cleaner and better and by the biblical principles, and line yourself up with them. You say, "Now, why would you say that?" Oh, I'm sorry. The Bible clearly says that "he that walketh with wise men shall be wise: but a companion of fools shall be destroyed." Don't you think for a moment that there aren't fools that are saved people, just like there are fools that are unsaved people? People will lift you up and people will drag you down, and you have to break that cycle in your life when you get saved, and you have to make new friends.

I would give any young Christian this advice: if you just got saved and you really want a fair shot at this thing, here's what I'd tell you to do, and I'd say this to anybody in any church, any time. It has nothing to do with this church. Here's the verse that goes with the principle. You know what I'd do? Find out. Take the time. Find out where the biblical action is going on in that church. Find out where the ministry is, where the rubber meets the road. I'm not talking about the people who talk it but don't live it. I'm talking about, find out where the action is. Find out where the bullets are zinging over the heads. Find out where the real combat is going on, and then dig a foxhole right in that perimeter and dig in with them. That's the way you do it. It's just that simple.

When I first got saved in my life, God gave me that principle very early in life. I saw in the church back home with my father in the Lord, Mel Sabaka, just like any church, he had a college and career class of three or four hundred people in that church that were just like people I talked about last week: people who were ministering, people who wanted to learn to minister—that would be me—and the people who cared nothing about ministry. I had a choice, just like you. I wanted to minister, and God saved me, I am sure, from making a bigger mess out of my life than

I have. He let me have that verse to show me that, you know what, you want to get where God wants you to be? Then find out the people in that college class that were doing the job, that were living it in every aspect, and hook yourself up to them. That's what I did. Right now, I don't have the time this morning, but I could list you four, five, six, seven, eight names of young men in my life back then who knew more about it than I ever did, who took me under their wing and helped me establish myself. "He that walketh with wise men shall be wise: but a companion of fools shall be destroyed."

Now, here's another good one. In the course of time, as you get plugged in, in the course of time, let me tell you something, dealing in ministry, you're going to make enemies. There are no Mr. Cleans in the ministry. If you do it right, there might be Mr. Clean in the aspect of between you and God, but every time you're going to have truth. I told you, when you start coming down in Genesis chapter 1, you don't read three or four verses before you find that God divides. I'm telling you right now, if you're going to... now, you may be a spineless jellyfish all your life in Christianity, and you may get through life and not have any enemies at all. But let me tell you something, you know it and I know it, if you know anything about the Bible, if you're going to stand for the truth, if you're going to take a stand for the truth, and you're going to let God have your life, show me one man in the Bible that wasn't hated because he took a stand. Just give me one. I mean, you cannot go anywhere. They hated Paul. They hated John. They hated Moses. They hated David. They hated Abraham. There isn't a man in the Bible who did not decide to dig a hole and hold the line and stay with truth and the principles that didn't have problems. That's just the way it works.

In the course of time, you're going to make enemies in ministry because God divides, and you will find yourself in the predicament where people will trash you behind your back. You will find people who will say one thing to your face and say something else behind your back. It just goes with the territory. It just goes with the territory. You're going to find that the way you deal with it... I have to tell you, years ago, when I was just a young guy, and I was watching what my father in the Lord did, here's a guy who had been in trouble so much for standing for the truth that he had gotten hard-boiled. He was just tough as nails. It always bothered me that when somebody said something about him or somebody tried to hurt him in some way, shape, or form, I always wanted to defend him because he was my daddy in the Lord. I never understood why he never retaliated. I never understood. I mean, the bottom line was, somebody says something out there behind your back, don't you think that this is a bigger forum than that? You have publicly every Sunday. You can say whatever you want to say. You could justify yourself. You could clear yourself. You could get up and you could defend yourself. You have the ultimate media to be able to do that. But he never did that. He never did that.

This great principle is found in Proverbs 15:28.

Proverbs 15:28

The heart of the righteous studieth to answer: but the mouth of the wicked poureth out evil things.

You know what he told me, and I learned this? He says, "You never defend yourself publicly." He says, "There may be some time you have to, but in a general sense of things, you never, never, never defend yourself." I asked him, I saw him go through something one time, and I asked him, I said, "Why is that?" He said, "Don't you remember reading the book of Job? Job was a righteous man. Job was a man who loved God and eschewed evil. When did Job sin?" You know when Job's sin came? His three friends showed up and began to accuse him of something that he didn't do, and Job got so busy defending himself that that's where he sinned. You want to know what the sin of Job was? The sin of Job was he was so busy defending himself before the three guys, he wound up becoming self-righteous himself.

The old man that taught me said, "You never defend yourself." He said, "You know why that is?" He said, "Because the greatest defense against slander is the truth." He told me Proverbs 10:11.

Proverbs 10:11

The mouth of a righteous man is a well of life: but violence covereth the mouth of the wicked.

He gave me Proverbs 25:28.

Proverbs 25:28

He that hath no rule over his own spirit is like a city that is broken down, and without walls.

Boy, I began to look at that, and I began to see. He told me, he said, "What you do," he says, "you just stay with teaching the truth. You stay with teaching the truth. You stay with what... don't get hasty. Don't get caught up. Don't get your emotions in it. Don't take it personal." He says, "You study the answer. You stay in that book. You keep preaching the truth, and what will happen is, the wicked will identify himself to everybody who's paying attention because his life will go against the principles." I thought to myself, "Man, I have to tell you, that's probably the hardest thing to do, but what an incredible concept." When you're faced with an issue, just as he was faced with an issue, let me give you some good advice. Here's what he told me, and I asked him, I said, "Why don't you get up and clobber these guys? These guys are saying all this stuff. They're calling you a cult. They're calling you this. It's over the Bible. It's over. They're attacking your character. Why don't you get up? You are a junkyard dog with a long chain. Why don't you get up and deal with that issue?"

You know what he told me? He said, "I'll tell you why I don't." And remember this, he said, "You know what? You never make the issue between you and them because the moment you make the issue between you and them, now it's a personal thing." He says, "What you always want to do is never make the issue between you and them, but make the issue between them and the Bible. That's why you don't say anything. You just keep preaching the book. You keep laying out the principles. You keep doing what you've done all your life, and let the issue be between them and the book. They attack you, you don't attack them. That would make you just like them. The Bible already told you that that's not what the righteous does. He's quiet, and he keeps preaching what the principles say in truth, and the rest of it takes care of itself."

You know, there's a great principle in 1 Corinthians 11:19. He also gave me this.

1 Corinthians 11:19

For there must also heresies among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest among you.

He showed me, he said, "You know, when that verse says, 'we think heresies are a bad thing,' because heresy confuses people, and we think heretics are bad people." He says, "The truth of the matter is what Paul said there, he says that they're necessary." You know why heresy and heretics are necessary? Because they show anybody who's using the Bible and Bible principles who's approved of God and who's not. In other words, you have to have something phony to be able to identify the real thing.

I talked to a guy one time that I had met through some aspect, and he was with the Treasury Department. I've always wondered this, I always asked him, because I've always wondered this, because we don't hear a lot about it anymore, but counterfeiting of money is an incredible thing. Our government is doing it all the time now, but counterfeiting money is an incredible thing, and there are some guys out there who make some really good engravings of plates. I asked this Treasury agent, I said, "You know what? I've always wanted to ask this. How do you guys keep up with this stuff?" He says, "How?" I said, "How in the world do you keep up? We're talking right here, there are probably a hundred guys out here that are designing plates that look out..." I don't know if you know it, but when they first came out with color copiers, the digital stuff, there were guys that were running dollar bills and twenty-dollar bills through their copiers, and you could come out, and if you looked at it, but at a glance in a convenience store or someplace, you couldn't tell it from the real thing. But there are some guys who really take painstaking time to cut those dies. They get the right paper. They get everything the way it's supposed to be. I said, "How do you stay up? How do you know that tomorrow somebody isn't going to make something that you've never seen before? How do you guys do that?" He said, "Well, that's not the way we approach it. We don't study all the bad ones. We just know what a good one looks like." When you really know what a good dollar bill or twenty-dollar bill looks like, the phony sticks out like anything. That's the principle. Let the truth of God defend you. Let what you teach defend you. You have to have heresies and you have to have heretics, otherwise you'd never know the real deal because it would all be confused. If you know the principle, then just watch who's doing what and saying what, and ask yourself the question in any given situation, "Who's doing what Jesus would do? Is that what Jesus would do?" You always let them expose themselves by putting you up against the book, but don't ever let them put you up against them. That's the way you deal with it. That was one of the greatest pieces of advice I've ever gotten.

Then there's another reason, and this principle is Proverbs 17:13, and this is called the law of recompense. This is why you never want to get involved in something like this. You let God defend you. Let the book defend you because at the end of the day, you know, like somebody said one time, "When nothing else tells, when nobody else tells about any given situation, when nothing tells or nobody tells, in time, time will tell."

Proverbs 17:13

Whoso rewardeth evil for good, evil shall not depart from his house.

Wow, that's called the law of recompense. That's called the law, the fact that you want to bring evil into somebody else's life, the evil is in your own house, and it won't depart. That's an incredible thing that answers a lot of questions why people's lives and their families and their children are so screwed up when the people themselves claim to be so right with God. It shows you that the law of recompense is nothing that you ever want to play with. Never want to play with. It's something that you understand that the biblical principles, you stay with them. You stay with them. The heart of the righteous studieth to answer, but it's the mouth of the wicked that poureth out evil things. You don't make it between you and them. You make it between them and God and the Word of God, and that's the way you have to do it.

Now, here's a really good one, and this is something that you want to use all the time, and this will be in Proverbs 18:13, and Proverbs 25:8-9, and also Proverbs 14:15.

Proverbs 18:13

He that answereth a matter before he heareth it, it is folly and shame unto him.

Proverbs 25:8-9

Go not forth hastily to strive, lest thou know not what to do in the end thereof, when thy neighbour hath put thee to shame.

Debate thy cause with thy neighbour himself; and discover not a secret to another:

Proverbs 14:15

The simple believeth every word: but the prudent man looketh well to his going.

You know what the concept is here? There are two sides to every story. When you start dealing with people, especially marital relationships or people in relationships, maybe if they're not married, you're going to find that there's always two sides to every story. You never come to the place where somebody comes in and tells you, "Well, this is the way it is." There's always two sides to every story, and the Bible principles here tell you that "he that answereth a matter before he heareth it," making up your mind before you get all the facts, is a tragic thing. You're going to wind up looking like an idiot.

I don't know how many times over the years these principles have saved me because somebody would come in and say, "Well, so and so did this," or "so and so is here," "so and so is that," and I would go and try to deal with that issue only to come to find out that that wasn't even a circumstance to begin with. You never, never deal with an issue before you have all your facts. Never. You never do. "Go not forth hastily to strive, lest thou know not what to do in the end thereof when thy neighbour hath put thee to shame," because it says right there, "debate thy cause with thy neighbour himself." You deal with the person straight up, face on. You never make decisions or deal with circumstances about somebody else's life without having all the facts and having all the information at your disposal. Of course, it's an incredible principle that you have to follow when you start dealing with people.

I've seen counselors get into a situation where when a husband and a wife come in, they'll immediately... and this has been a thing all my life. I've heard people talk about different counselors. They'll come up and they'll say, "Well, this counselor is a woman, so she's going to be more sympathetic toward the woman." The guy says, "Well, this counselor is a man, so he'll be..." his wife said, "Well, she'll be more... he'll be more sympathetic toward the man." So, "We're not going to get a fair shot." Bottom line is this: the principles of the Word of God will be fair to both of you, and it'll lay out, when you use them, exactly what you're dealing with and exactly the way that you have to deal with it. That's a great principle.

Now, let me give you another one. I'm sure that most of you have found yourself in this scenario at some point or the other. Really, there are two here, and this has to do with the thing that causes more problems between God's people, and that is verbal agreements, that is making deals, co-signing for somebody, or some other agreement that you make that winds up causing problems. I don't know how many times I've seen two Christians come in, and they have an issue, and that issue is because this guy thought that because this guy was a Christian, or this woman was a Christian, that their word was their bond.

There was a time back in the middle of the 1800s when you went into a bank and you had to get maybe a loan for your farm or a loan for this or that, and the guy said, "Well, what kind of collateral do you have to put up?" And the guy would say, "Well, I'm a member of the Methodist Church." And the guy would say, "That's good enough for me," and you got your loan based on that because they knew what that church stood for, or Baptist church or whatever, and they knew what that church stood for. So therefore, you got it based on the credibility you had because people who weren't real weren't involved in those kind of scenarios. Try going to the bank today and getting a house loan or a car loan, and they say, "What collateral?" "Yeah, well, I'm a member of Old Paths Baptist Church." They'll run you out the door so fast, everyone would hit you, or any other church. It doesn't work that way anymore.

Proverbs 6:1-5

My son, if thou be surety for thy friend, if thou hast stricken thy hand with a stranger,

Thou art snared with the words of thy mouth, thou art taken with the words of thy mouth.

Do this now, my son, and deliver thyself, when thou art come into the hand of thy friend; go, humble thyself, and make sure thy friend.

Give not sleep to thine eyes, nor slumber to thine eyelids.

Deliver thyself as a roe from the hand of the hunter, and as a bird from the hand of the fowler.

My son, "if thou be surety for thy friend, if thou hast stricken thy hand with a stranger." Stricken your hand means shake hands. "For thou art snared with the words of thy mouth, thou art taken with the words of thy mouth. Do this now, my son, and deliver thyself, when thou art come into the hand of thy friend; go, humble thyself, and make sure of thy friend." You know what he's saying there? Before you do something like that, you better make sure the guy that you're doing

it for is your real friend, and what he's saying is going to really come to pass. You better humble yourself, and you better make sure that this deal is the real deal.

Proverbs 11:15

He that is surety for a stranger shall smart for it: and he that hateth suretiship is sure.

You say, "Well, I knew the guy." No, no, no. You thought you knew the guy. You thought he was one thing or she was one thing, but in reality, it was something else. Let me give you probably the greatest thing I'm going to ever give you today. Maybe this is the greatest thing I've ever given you in our lives together. You want to write this down. I'm going to stop. Get your last note because I want nobody to miss this. Write this down: the word "crook" starts with 'C', and the word "Christian" starts with 'C'. You're laughing. Write that down.

Years ago, we had a guy come to our church office, and he had four or five big cartons of some kind of books. He brought them in, and I said, "Can I help you?" He said, "Yeah, we want to deliver these off. We want you to pass these out in the congregation." I said, "Well, what are they?" He said, "Well, they're Christian phone books for businesses." In other words, "We banded together, and the only people that are in this phone book are Christians because we feel like that you only have to do business with Christians, and everybody in here is a Christian, so you can be safe that if somebody needs a car worked on or somebody needs this or somebody needs that, that you could get into this phone book, and everybody in here is a Christian." Like that. You know, that's right up there with the Bible.

Well, I refused to take them, and he was mad at me. He said, "Well, why wouldn't you want these?" I said, "Well, two reasons. First of all," I said, "if the people in our church only go to Christians, how are they ever going to win anybody to Christ?" I said, "But that's not the real reason. The real reason is, the greatest hosings I ever got in my life, I got from Christians. I don't want them." I'm not sure he was mad because I didn't take them or mad because he had to load them all back up in his truck, but either way, we didn't take them.

I'm going to tell you something now. Let me give you some principles here. My philosophy is, and I tell you this all the time, if you're in a church, any church, I'm just saying any church, if there are people that do this or do that, for your own sake, for peace of mind, and so the devil won't get into details, you know what it says down here? Notice Proverbs 11:15: "He that is surety for a stranger shall smart for it: and he that hateth suretiship is sure." You don't know the way to be sure you don't get caught in a trap like that. Don't do business with somebody that you're associated with. I don't care what church you're in. I don't care. Now, there are exceptions to that, but not very many. The bottom line is, if you do do business with somebody, get it in writing. Get it in writing.

I've had people come in before when somebody said, "Well, so and so owes me this, and he doesn't..." and I said, "Well, that's fine. How much did she owe you or he owe you?" "Well, they owe me for three months' rent." "Okay. And you had a house?" "Yeah." "And they needed a place to stay?" "Yes." "And so you let them move in?" "Yes." "And it could go that way. They were Christians, and I thought that I really have Christians in my house." "Well, that's the first mistake

you made. Christians and crooks both start with 'C.'" I said, "Well, that's fine. Let me see your written agreement." "Well, we didn't do one." "What do you mean you didn't do one?" "Well, we were Christians." "Really? Let me see your written agreement." "Well, we didn't write it down, but I want you, Pastor, to fix this." "Really? I want you to hold this person accountable." "Really? This person owes me three months' rent." "Really? What was the rent?" "Well, the rent was \$600 a month." "Really? Can I see it in writing?" "Well, they owe me three months' rent." "Really?"

The bottom line is this: if you don't have it in writing, you don't have anything. Don't you watch Judge Judy? You go to small claims court, you know what they do? You've got a judge there, but guys who can't work it out, you know what he wants to see? He doesn't want to hear your story. He wants to see your paperwork. He wants to see legally who wrote what down and signed it. Now, if you've got a problem with somebody in a church, any church, and you've got it documented, and you can't get it resolved, take it to the leadership of the church. If you don't have a document, that says it all.

But you know why we don't do that? We think that that would be... that would be... he might be... she might be offended if I asked them to sign a paper because we're Christians. Really? How does it feel when you smart? And I don't mean smart like IQ. I mean smart like you're stupid because you made a bad mistake. Write it down. You've got a problem with somebody, you write it down. Take it into the pastor. There's nothing to say. What do you say? I'll tell you what you say: "Crook and Christian start with the same letter, 'C'." There's nothing to say. You never take for granted. You know why you don't? Because human nature inherently will always find, and the devil always gets in the details. You think the devil is going to miss any little opportunity he gets to try to bring discord into any church, problems between two people? I mean, you financially take advantage of somebody, and then you say, "Well, follow me because I'm in charge of this ministry," and they're going to say, "Yeah, right. I'm going to follow you." How about every time my little grandkids come over, I walk in there, and they always look at me, and they smile and look at me. I say, "Well, you look at that. I don't owe you any money." The devil always gets into details. Your job and my job is to work by principles. These principles, and following them, cut out the confusion. I don't have to sit and listen to two people tell "he says, she says." Just show me the paper. Show me the paper. Then show me the money, like they say. Show me the paper, show me the money. It's just that simple. It's nothing that nobody has to argue about back and forth. It's done. It's protected, and it's very... it's just the devil will get in every detail.

IV. Principles for Life in General

Now let's talk about some principles in general, and these will be issues you face in general. I deal with them all the time, and some of these you probably already know, but some of them I want to go... I want to help you and maybe establish them again for some of you new ones. This is a good one for new Christians. This is what I call the principle of Lot's wife. This was not a proverb, but this is a good one.

Genesis 19:20-26

Behold now, this city is near to flee unto, and it is a little one: Oh, let me escape thither, (is it not a little one?) and my soul shall live.

And he said unto him, See, I have accepted thee concerning this thing also, that I will not overthrow this city, for the which thou hast spoken.

Haste thee, escape thither; for I cannot do any thing till thou be come thither. Therefore the name of the city was called Zoar.

The sun was risen upon the earth when Lot entered into Zoar.

Then the LORD rained upon Sodom and upon Gomorrah brimstone and fire from the LORD out of heaven;

And he overthrew those cities, and all the plain, and all the inhabitants of the cities, and that which grew upon the ground.

But his wife looked back from behind him, and she became a pillar of salt.

You know the story here. Sodom and Gomorrah, and God has brought Lot and his family out because He wants to deliver them. Verse 25: "And he overthrew those cities, and all the plain, and all the inhabitants of the cities, and that which grew upon the ground. But his wife looked back from behind him, and she became a pillar of salt." Now, there's what I call the principle of Lot's wife, and this is the great principle when you start to deal with situations in your own life. This goes along with the companion one that we talked about first, either the companion of fools or the fool. This one goes along with that because this brings up the great principle that when you start to deal with people, no matter what their circumstances are, the bottom line is this: the thing you want to remember in this particular case is the principle that the problem here wasn't Lot and his wife and his family down in Sodom. That wasn't the problem. That appears to be the problem, doesn't it? Because Sodom was a wicked place. But when you read this story and you get the principle involved, the principle here is not that the problem was that Lot and his family were down in Sodom. The problem was that Sodom was down in Lot and his family. In other words, changing geographical locations will never solve your problems. Never will. Never will.

If you've got a problem in your life, and you think that... and this is what we hear, "We need to get... I need to get away from it all." That's what every bank robber says right after he runs out of the bank. Does that change the situation? No, he's still a bank robber. That's what everybody says when he finds out he gets a letter from the IRS and he owes them \$60,000 in back taxes. "I've got to get away from it all." Running from place to place, from town to town, does that solve your problem? No. Just like it doesn't solve those problems. When you have a problem in your life, you have something you have to deal with. You can go anywhere you want in life. You can run wherever you want to run, and that problem's going to go with you because changing geographical locations will never solve your problem. The problem was not getting Lot out of Sodom, but rather the problem was getting Sodom out of Lot. That's exactly what you've got to understand.

Of course, we saw what happened. We saw what happened just another chapter, end of this chapter. They get out of Sodom. They get out of Sodom. His wife turns around and turns into a pillar of salt. I was teaching Sunday school one time, a bunch of fourth graders, and I was telling the story about Lot and his wife, and I said, "Now, here's a good story, boys and girls. Lot... when they were all fleeing from Sodom and Gomorrah, and Lot's wife, she looked behind and turned into a pillar of salt." A little kid raised his hand. He says, "Yeah, I know. My mom was driving down the street, she looked behind and turned into a telephone pole last week." Not the same thing, but I understand where you're coming from.

Do you ever read that passage? It says, "and Lot's wife looked back from behind him." They're up ahead. She's lingering behind. She's lingering behind. Read it. It says, "But his wife looked back from behind him." They're up here saying, "Come on, let's go!" She's about 50 yards back saying, "Oh, I'm coming. Oh, man, my house! It was everything I wanted. Oh, I just got the new this in it. I had the women's garden party. Oh, it's just a lot. Oh, why we got..." And she looks around, and bang! The problem wasn't the geographical relation she lived in. The problem was Sodom was inside her. You've got to change what's inside you. Running from your problems, going from church to church to church, or place to place to place, it sounds convenient, but it just doesn't work.

I told somebody this last week, I forget who it was, and I don't think it was anybody in this church. I said, "You know what? You know what you've got to do at some point in your life?" I said, "You've got to dig a hole, and you've got to sandbag that position, and you've got to wait till Jesus comes back, and you've got to hold the line from right there. You can't be running all over the place and doing everything, and in essence, doing nothing." That's the whole point. Of course, that's exactly what that great principle says.

Now let's look at another one, and this is one you're dealing with. This is the principle concerning anger. Everybody is around somebody who has an anger problem, or knows somebody that's angry all the time. You know, you have to walk on eggshells because you get up in the morning, and I'm not talking about just not being a morning person. Everybody has little quirks. Some people are good night people, some people are good morning people, some people aren't worth anything all day long. They're just... it's where you're at. I'm not talking about that. I'm talking about somebody that if you just say the wrong thing, it's like Hiroshima going off: disruptive anger.

Anger by itself is not a bad thing. Obviously, it's one of the emotions that God gave us and built into us. But anger out of control is a very bad thing, and the principles on it are many in the book of Proverbs and throughout the Bible. Biblical anger always has a biblical cause or a biblical reason for the anger, and you'll find it defined for you in Matthew 5:22.

Matthew 5:22

But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire.

It says there under the law that "he that is angry with his brother without a cause" is guilty before the law, and you have to have a cause, a biblical cause. Road rage is not a cause, though I understand. There are some whack people. I'll tell you one. Last night, we're sleeping. It's hot in the house. The windows are open. We didn't put the ceiling fan on because the big fan up there in the stairs, it sucks the kids up the radiator. We didn't put that on. We were afraid it was going to be a tornado, and we didn't want to get killed. But we're sleeping, and right in the middle of the dream, this horn honks right across the street, and I'm coming out of my sleep. I'm laying there, and I thought it was a dream, and then about two minutes later, I'm laying there, and Barb's cussing a storm at this point. She gets up, and she looks out the window, and she says, "Well, the neighbors across the street, there's a car parked there with his lights on, and he is too lazy to get out to go get somebody, so he's sitting out there at quarter to four honking the horn for them to come out." About that time, she said that, I get up, and I'm thinking to myself, I looked out the window, there sure enough was a car sitting there with his lights on right in front of that house, honking that horn for somebody to come. There isn't any light on in that house. Now, here's where, I'm just telling you, that's anger with a cause. Now, here's where, if you have one of them really neat lasers that goes on a gun, you can really have some fun. Road rage is not an anger reason, and I'm not even sure that would have been last night, but we'll never know because right after we fired over their heads, they left right away.

Explosive anger, that's your spouse. Somebody says something, and it erupts. People in general or situations in general, it's totally unacceptable. Now, let me give you some great principles on anger, and if you have an anger problem, this is where I would start. I'd put these on a three by five card. Let me show you what the Bible says about anger.

Proverbs 14:17

He that is soon angry dealeth foolishly: and a man of wicked devices is hated.

The reason why a man that dealeth foolishly or is soon angry dealeth foolishly is because he really looks, maybe not to himself, but to everybody else, he looks stupid. There's nothing more ridiculous to me than a little boy in a big man's body. There's nothing more ridiculous to me than somebody that is six foot seven, and the epitome of what a man ought to be, but his emotional demeanor is about a four-year-old, and when they don't get what they want, they go off the deep end. They have anger built up inside of them, and there's always a reason for it, but I'm showing you the verses here that are cause and effect. And women too, it's not just men, women too.

Proverbs 14:29

He that is slow to wrath is of great understanding: but he that is hasty of spirit exalteth folly.

Now we begin to see the parallel. You see, the one says, "He that is soon angry dealeth foolishly," and then it gives you the counter to it, "He that is slow to wrath is of great understanding." See how he changed the word from anger to wrath? It shows you how the thing is great. Now, here's the best part: "but he that is hasty of spirit exalteth folly."

Proverbs 16:32

He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city.

You see, that's a great verse. It says, "He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty." You know why that is? Because real strength, listen to me, real strength isn't how much you can bench press. Real strength isn't that you can put a chain on the front of a semi and put it in your teeth and pull it down the road. Real strength isn't how tough you are. Real strength is how much control you have over your emotions. That's real strength. Real biblical strength, anyhow. That's the restraint, restraining yourself. That's why he says in Proverbs 25:28 that "he that hath no rule over his own spirit is like a city that is broken down, and without walls," because real strength is control of your emotions as you rule your spirit. Your spirit doesn't rule you.

Look at Proverbs 19:11, another great one.

Proverbs 19:11

The discretion of a man deferreth his anger; and it is his glory to pass over a transgression.

Wow, look at that. I love that. Two good words there. There's our word discretion. You see, "the discretion of a man deferreth his anger." In other words, understanding the situation you're in and how to apply the Word to go into it. I think when we've talked about this before, this is called either react or respond. Remember that little thing where when you're faced with something with your wife or you're faced with something with your husband, and it's an issue, you have two choices to go. You can either respond or you can react. If your wife has a bad day and she says something that kind of rubs you the wrong way because you're having a bad day, if you have discretion, then you... look what it says. I mean, I love it. "It is his glory to pass over a transgression." You know what the difference between transgression and sin is? Sin, if you go back in the book of Leviticus, you'll have offerings against sin offerings and offerings against transgression offerings. The difference between sin and transgression is sin offerings are always against God. Trespasses are always against man. In this place here, the transgression gets passed over. It's to the man's glory to go over it, to pass over it. He doesn't make a fight about it.

Proverbs 21:23

Whoso keepeth his mouth and his tongue keepeth his soul from troubles.

The key, of course, is having rule over your own spirit. The key is discretion. Discretion is knowing when what to say, attitude versus action, responding versus reacting. It's the application of biblical principles, knowing when it's our right to get angry with a cause, a biblical cause, and when it's not.

Now, since we're talking about anger, let's move into the next one because from time to time, when you start dealing with people, you're going to come up against anger, uncontrolled anger. Anger is an incredible thing. It's a powerful emotion, and when it's not kept in check by biblical principles, what happens is something in your life you get angry about that you don't handle the biblical way. You build those things up, and in time, it leads to the next stage under anger. Somebody raise your hand, after anger, what is the next stage? What is it? Bitterness.

Now we're going to step outside of Proverbs, and I want you to see this one. Turn over to Hebrews 12. Uncontrolled anger leads to bitterness. Let me say something to you, when you see what the Bible says about it, don't ever let yourself go here. The principles are put into your life, giving you into the Word of God, that you construct yourself the way God wants you to be constructed, not the way that most of God's people go.

Look at Hebrews 12:15. This is a great verse.

Hebrews 12:15

Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled;

Now, I'm going to ask you another question. Why does it say "root of bitterness"? It says "root of bitterness" because in the Bible, Ezekiel chapter 31, the devil is likened to a tree, a giant tree, and it shows you that from that tree, which is a picture of Satan, is where bitterness comes into, and then it roots in you.

I'm going to show you nine principles of bitterness that are based on the roots of this tree.

1. It grows under the surface. Roots are always under the surface. You'll find people who pretend everything's okay when it's not. That's the first problem that you get into. I don't know how to impress this upon you, no matter where you're at in life, pretending you don't have any problems when we all do have problems is your first big mistake in life. I've seen people over the years that were people who were, I thought, good leaders, that had the potential to be good leaders, but they came to the point where they think it almost becomes a thing where they think that if you're a leader and you have problems, that that's some kind of weakness in your leadership. The truth of the matter is, we all have problems. You want to know what a weakness in your leadership is? Having weaknesses but trying to hide them so nobody thinks you do. That's the problem because we already know we have them. Where bitterness begins to take root is when somebody will not deal with the problem. They won't deal with the issue that they've got to deal with. I told you many, many times, when you have a problem and you know it's a problem, the thing you have to do is you have to identify the problem. We talked about this Thursday night. You have to identify the problem. Once you identify the problem, then you isolate the problem. What does that mean? It means, "Okay, I've got a problem. I've got a problem in my life, and I want to fix that problem." You know what we all like to do? We all say, "Well, I've got this problem," but we don't want to do what we've got to do to fix that problem. We kid ourselves, thinking, "I'm going to learn this," or "I want to study this," or "I'm going to study that," and that's going to help me. But the truth of the matter is, if you've got a problem, the first thing you've got to do is identify that problem. The second thing you've got to do? You've got to isolate that problem. You've got to realize that if you've got a problem with drinking, studying the 70 weeks of Daniel is not going to solve your problem. If you've got a problem with cigarettes, or you've got a problem with marijuana, or you've got a problem with whatever in your life, going over and laying out the book of Revelation is not going to fix your issue. Once you identify the problem, you have to isolate the problem. You have to say, "This is my problem. I have now isolated it." Once you

identify it, once you isolate it, then you annihilate it. You go after that problem, whatever it may, how long it takes, whatever you've got to do, get whatever help you have to get, but you annihilate that problem instead of ignoring that problem and just going on like, "Oh, I've got it," and "Oh, I'll get..." No, no. You have to identify it, you have to isolate it, and then you have to annihilate it, and nothing else will work.

2. Roots grow best in darkness. No Bible applied to it. You apply Bible everywhere but where you need to. You'll study the Bible for everything except what your problem in particular is.
3. They grow best in dirt. Picture your flesh.
4. They grow swiftly and silently. You never hear a tree grow. Most people come to the point where there's a tree, and they plant it in the backyard when the kid's little, an Arbor Day or something like that, and everybody goes on with life, and nobody thinks about it, and one day, 20 years later, you come out in the backyard, and there's a tree. A tree doesn't announce its growth.
5. Each day, it grows stronger. When you have a problem or an issue in your life, and I don't care what it is, but when you have an issue in your life that you're not willing to take care of, don't you think for a second—this is where a lot of people make a mistake—don't you think for a second that your problem just stays where it's at. Every day, it gets worse. You may not see it. You may not understand it. You may not know it. Every day, it will get worse and a little more embedded than it was the day before.
6. It keeps growing deeper every day. There's never a place that roots of a tree stop growing. As long as something doesn't intervene, it keeps growing deeper, and it keeps getting stronger, and it keeps growing swiftly.
7. The more contaminated the dirt, other issues in your life that you're not willing to deal with, it will just fertilize the ground and make the root of bitterness grow even more and even deeper.
8. In time, it will attach itself to everything in its path. If you've got an older house, we lived in Ohio. We had an old house that I was born in, basically, and my parents lived there from around the war. When we lived there in the 70s, twice a year I could count on calling out Roto-Rooter. He'd do one thing: he'd run that big old snake down that sewer thing. The toilet would back up, nothing would work, and you could always tell it because the sewer downstairs would start talking to you. It'd start "bloop, bloop, bloop, bloop, bloop," time to get the Roto-Rooter man out. He'd run that snake down there, run it all the way out to the street, and bring it back. You know what he brought back every time? Tree roots. Tree roots. You know why? Those tree roots penetrate right into that pipe. I've seen them move rocks. I've seen them get around rocks. I've seen them break through a person's foundation on their house. Let me tell you something. In time, the roots of bitterness will attach itself to everything in its path and everything in your life. Your life will completely be just taken over by the concept of the roots of that bitterness, and it will affect every aspect of your life.
9. The longer you wait to fix your problem, the more impossible it becomes to fix it. You plant a new tree? A year later, two years later, you've got to pull it out. You plant a tree and let it grow for 20 years? Just try to get it out. The longer you wait to fix your problem, the more impossible it becomes to fix it. You know why? Because the root of bitterness, which comes from a gigantic tree, Ezekiel chapter 31, that all the birds of the air love to lodge in, because

that tree and the roots that come from that tree get down so deep and so far and get in everything in your world, in everything in your life, that it affects everything you do.

I want you to see the last part of Hebrews 12:15. I'm going to read the whole verse again. "Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled." It just doesn't affect you. It'll affect your family. It'll affect your children. It'll affect everything. It'll affect the people you work with. It'll affect the entire people, in every aspect of your life.

We all know the great movie, Forrest Gump. What a hoot that is to watch. We all know the famous line that we've heard many, many times, "Life is like a box of chocolates." Profound that is. Because when you get those big boxes of chocolate, you never know what you're getting. The great line on that thing was, "Life is like a box of chocolates, you just never know what you're going to get." I've always thought about that and thought to myself, even more than that, life is a box of 88 crayons. Remember those big boxes of crayons your kids used to get, used to have? They had a crayon sharpener in the back. Flipped it up, 88 colors. Really, that's what life really is. Because you go through life and you color life. You color the blues and the reds and the pinks and the whites and the yellows and the greens and all of the things, and you take that box of crayons, and that box of crayons is really what you make life to be. Your life is as joyful and as happy as many crayons as you're using to color it today.

But you know what bitterness does? With bitterness, you only have... it takes all the 87 away, and you only have one crayon, and it's a dark black charcoal, and you color everything in life in time with that one color, everything you see. Every circumstance you find yourself in, you'll go through your life for five years and 10 years and 15 years and 20 years, something that happened 35 years ago in your mind, when everybody else has forgotten about it, will be as fresh as tomorrow's newspaper. Every circumstance you see and everything you find yourself in, you will color it with that crayon because it's a root, and a root, that's why he chose the word root, because it's a root, and that root comes from a tree. It's going to trouble you, and thereby many be defiled.

Now, what's the answer? "Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God." You know what? We all have things we could be bitter about in life. I have things I could be bitter about in life. I have things that were, that in my life, all through my life, injustices, things that were done wrong, things that I could look at and be bitter. But you know what? We all have those. Nobody is here this morning that doesn't have them through some trials in life. We've all been through them. We've all went through issues. But you know what I've learned? The Bible says in Ephesians 4:26.

Ephesians 4:26

Be ye angry, and sin not: let not the sun go down upon your wrath:

This is about the greatest advice anybody will ever give you. It simply says, "Let not the sun go down on your wrath." Don't carry something around forever and ever and ever and ever and ever. You know what bitterness starts with? Bitterness starts with you thinking somebody did an

injustice to you. Maybe they did. Maybe what happened to you or what somebody did to you, maybe it was absolutely not your fault. Maybe it was half your fault. Maybe it was all your fault. Maybe it was none of your fault. Maybe you were a total victim in the thing, and it was absolutely none of your fault. But the truth of the matter is, the verse says, "the failure of the grace of God." She said it, the failure of the grace of God for a child of God is you not exercising the same grace that God gave you to the person who hurt you.

You know how I deal with keeping from being bitter about things in life, anybody in life? You know why I could never be bitter? I could never let... I mean, I'm the kind of guy that, you know what, you could... well, you couldn't shoot my dog. That'd be a little problem, but we'd have to talk about that. But I don't know of anything in my life, other than maybe hurting one of my family or hurting somebody in my family close to me, I don't know anything in my life that I couldn't just walk away from and in 15 minutes, we'll go out to eat together and be done with it. You know why? I'll tell you why. Because I know how many times in my life I've screwed God. That's our problem. We think it's all right for us to give God the shaft, don't we? You know the old sharp stick right in the eye? We think it's okay for us to do that. We think it's okay for us to just turn our back on God. We think it's all right for us to shame God. We think it's all right to hurt... you know what it means really from a biblical sense, to grieve the Holy Spirit of God? You know how badly sometimes we hurt God? Do you know how desperately God wants you and me to be what He wants us to be, and how it hurts Him and crushes Him and grieves Him? Can you grasp the concept of God being grieved? Have you ever been grieved? Do you know what that means when you lose a loved one and you grieve, and you feel like an empty hole in your stomach, and you don't want to eat, you don't want to do anything? You just sit around and grieve? Can you imagine God doing that because you and I caused His grief? But what does God do? Forgive you, no heartbeat.

Is there anybody here? Anybody at all? Anybody here that God shouldn't have killed us before we got saved? Anybody? I don't think you heard my question. I said, is there anybody that God should not have killed? We all should be dead. Is there anybody who deserved not to be in hell burning, screaming your lungs out this morning? Anybody? Is there anybody here in this room or across this city, if it's a saved person, is there anybody that shouldn't be just down there with a rich man in hell, worrying about your family going to come to hell, and worrying about all the things that people out there, your mom and your dad and your kids are all going to come sliding down that big chute? I don't know how to get into hell, but sliding down that big chute, landing in a lake of fire, hitting the fire, screaming and rolling, and begging for all. Is there anybody here that should not, that should not be our end? You know why it's not? It's because grace. It's because when God looked at us in our unholiness, and we were so unholy, and all the things that we did that were despicable for God, do you realize what God killed people for in the Old Testament? Let me tell you something. It was a lot less than some of us have done.

I remember one time they were walking down there with the ox cart, and it was just on the thing, and the thing began to shake, and Uzzah, good man as he was, put his hand up there, and God killed him. Whoa. I'm going to stay in bed in the morning. God killed him for something like that. What will He do to you and me? The failure of the grace of God. You have to get the proper

perspective of your situation. In other words, you need to get over it. You need to realize that just as somebody has wronged you, oh come on, and you've never wronged God? And God forgave you? My goodness, what is this Christianity thing about anyhow? You get over it. You get the proper perspective on the situation. You learn not to take it personal. If you can't shake it off, then get the help that you need. Get the principles, isolate the problem, get it down. In time, you'll view everything the way that it's supposed to be. In other words, you'll quit viewing everything with that one crayon.

V. Principles for World Events

Now I want to move in quickly here in the last five, 10 minutes to world events. The third section. This is how I deal with life. Never in the history of man has the world so rapidly changed as it has in the last five years. I just can't believe it myself. People are afraid. People are angry. You can see the tea parties that people have all across the country. People are uncertain. People are confused. People feel betrayed. It seems our whole system is just falling down around our shoulders. You know what? Let me put it into perspective for you.

I read a book about 25 years ago, and it really put the thing in perspective for me. It was called, as best I can remember, "Our Country in Perspective: The Death of Our Nation." That was the name of the book. It was based on two principles found in the Bible. In that book, to me, even though the world was nowhere then as it is now, I've never forgotten that book. I've never forgotten the notes I took of that book. I still have them in my Bible. It is the thing that puts the world events in perspective for me, that I don't have to be afraid. I don't have to be confused. I don't have to feel betrayed. I don't have to be uncertain. I don't have to attend a tea party, unless it's one where you have a little stuffy to eat with it. I don't have to be afraid, and I don't have to be angry.

The two principles he talked about:

- Psalms 9:17
The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God.
- Proverbs 14:34
Righteousness exalteth a nation: but sin is a reproach to any people.

You know, in the Bible, your Bible is likened to salt. The reason why it's likened to salt is because salt is what we use to preserve things. Salt is a preservative. When you begin to look and understand, he stated this, and it was an incredible statement. He stated that no nation in the history of man, no nation on planet Earth, has ever survived 200 years of history past the point where they dumped the Word of God. It was one of the most incredible, fascinating books I have ever read in my life. I have never forgotten that. Then he listed the nations. He just didn't make the statement. He showed how that when Israel, when God, when Israel turned its back on God, and God began to... that they did not last 200 years before God split those nations. He showed how that in Europe, every country on the continent of Europe except two, and there's a reason why those two nations never got the Bible, but every nation on the continent of Europe except

two had the Word of God, and in less than 200 years after they dumped the Word of God, everyone was on a trash heap.

He showed the perspective of America, the death of a nation, based on the fact that when you have the Bible, the Bible is the salt that preserves your country. When you dump the Bible, God dumps you. Where righteousness exalteth a nation, it is sin that is a reproach to any people. America, my friend, American Christianity rejected the Bible officially in 1888. We have now been 120 years without a Bible. You see the fulfillment of Psalms 9:17 and Proverbs 14:34 coming to pass along with many other principles. But it's the bottom line. Once the church, once this country lost the salt, the Bible, once it did, there was a time when the Bible was taught in school. There was a time in court when you put your hand on it. There was a time when everybody in this country, saved and lost, realized there was a God and revered the Bible as a supernatural spiritual book. Now even God's people today don't even believe that about it anymore.

You wonder what's wrong with this country? I'll tell you in a heartbeat what's wrong with it. "Righteousness exalteth a nation: but sin is a reproach to any people." We've lost the salt that preserved this country. Because of that, we're living in a world today where Isaiah 59:14 says:

Isaiah 59:14

And judgment is turned away backward, and justice standeth afar off: for truth is fallen in the street, and equity cannot enter.

We're living in a world that is completely backwards. Isaiah 5:20-21 says:

Isaiah 5:20-21

Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!

Woe unto them that are wise in their own eyes, and prudent in their own sight!

That's where we're at. That's exactly where we're at. How did we get there? We lost the preserving salt of the Word of God which exalted any nation. Now we have no value system. Right is wrong and wrong is right. Truth is fallen in the streets. There's a famine in this nation, and there's a famine in Christianity.

Amos 8:11

Behold, the days come, saith the Lord GOD, that I will send a famine in the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the LORD:

I want you to know, we're in the middle of a famine today, but I also want you to know, it wasn't the fact that the Bible wasn't here, it's the fact that he says "the hearing of the word of God." Nobody hears it anymore. Nobody hears it anymore. You say, "What's wrong with our country? What's wrong with our leaders? How in the world can we get... how in the world does a country stand that if you don't pay your income taxes, you go to jail, but if you're a senator or a congressman or somebody in a high official and you forget to pay yours, it's just an oversight?"

You know how those things happen? You know how you can be slippery on both sides and do everything in the world and get away with it? I'll tell you why, because Psalms 12:8 says:

Psalms 12:8

The wicked walk on every side, when the vilest men are exalted.

That's the problem in our country. How did that happen? How did that come to pass? It came to pass because righteousness exalted the nation. Now when salt has lost its savor, there is no preserving this country.

Proverbs 27:5

Evil men understand not judgment: but they that seek the LORD understand all things.

Oh my God, what a great truth. No concept of God's judgment today. No hell, no hell. I was watching a thing last night. I've heard it from World War II. I was watching a thing last night on the History Channel, this Military Channel on Korea, the forgotten war. What a great concept that was. Don't find much to worry about. But they said the same thing. Some old vet on there, and I heard a guy from Iwo Jima say it one time. He said, "You know what, when I die, I'll never have to worry about going to hell." He said, "On Iwo Jima, as in Korea, it was the worst time that anybody could ever have. It was literally hell on earth. And I'll never have to worry about going to a place called hell because when I get to heaven, to Saint Peter I will tell, 'Another Marine reporting, sir, I've earned my time in hell.'" It sounds really cute, and it probably looks good on the back of a jacket. It just isn't right biblically.

Let me tell you something. Hell is God's judgment for sinners and the world in the afterlife. War is God's judgment for sin and ungodliness in this present life. You better get it down. Somebody said, "What about all the global warming, and what about this, what about that, what about all the stuff that's happened?" Don't you know this world's got a curse on it? It ain't going anywhere but down. It's righteousness that exalteth the nation. All the natural disasters that take place. I remember when 9/11, some bold preacher got on the radio and made a statement that it was God's judgment for America dumping the Word of God. They wanted to run him out of town on a rail. How shortly we forget that in the Old Testament, God brought natural disasters. He had the whole earth open up and 100,000 of them fall down. He brought plagues on them. He brought diseases on them. He sent other nations over to whack the fire out of them. That's what he did to his people. Boy, we sure fall short from where it was then from where it is now. You know why that is? Because "evil men understand not judgment." That's why.

When American Christianity dumped the Bible, this country lost its preserving salt of God's Word that exalts any nation. Now we have no value system. Right is wrong and wrong is right. Truth is fallen in the streets. There's a famine in this nation, and there's a famine in Christianity. I'll tell you what, you want to pick at somebody? Don't go down to Jeff City. You want to pick at somebody? Don't get a tea party to the government. You know how this thing started? It started not for the government. It started because God's men and God's pulpits across this country quit preaching the book. Pick at churches. That's where you better go. Now I'm angry with a cause now. I love it.

Proverbs 16:25

There is a way that seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death.

Proverbs 19:21

There are many devices in a man's heart; nevertheless the counsel of the LORD, that shall stand.

You know how stupid God's people are today? We actually think that if you're a liberal, like Obama or Nancy Pelosi or Dianne Feinstein or Barney Frank, that that's a terrible person. But if you're a conservative like George Bush, Rush Limbaugh or Bill O'Reilly or Glenn Beck or Fox News, that you're a good person. We think that Democrats are demon possessed and God's a Republican. Well, I've got news for you. When Jesus rode into Jerusalem, he didn't do it on the back of an elephant. You figured that one out. But that don't make him a Democrat either. We get the idea that the liberals are bad and the conservatives are good. Listen to me. Let me tell you something. God's form of government is not a democracy. God's form is not capitalism. What don't you know about the Bible? Don't you know in the book of Ecclesiastes, that he lays it out? He talks about capitalism in Ecclesiastes 5:13. He talks about socialism in 6:2. He talks about communism in 4:1. He talks about the progressive modern movement in 9:7 and liberalism in 11:9. You know what he says about them? They're all vanity.

God's program isn't a conservative program. God's program isn't a liberal program. God's program is a theocracy where God is King and runs righteousness. We get caught up in that. Listen, conservative principles without God and the Word of God are just as bad as liberals without God, without the Word of God. It's not about your position. It's not because you make some good quality choices that look good. What's the end of the day for you? Where are you at with the Bible and God? Is the Bible supreme in your life? God's form of government is a theocracy where God is King.

You ever figure out the difference between the first coming of Christ and the second coming? You know why God's not going to come back the second time the way He came the first time? Put yourself in that position. Let's say Jesus came back and showed up in the UN. Let's say Jesus showed up in Washington. Let's say that the second coming of Christ comes when, and God said, "Well, I'll come the second time just like I came the first time." Now these people are modern now. They've grown up. They've got science on their side, and they've come a long way, and they've got the three theological studies. I'm going to show up, and He shows up in Washington. Now let me tell you something. He showed up in Washington. He walked into the White House. Showed up in Russia, went into the Kremlin. Showed up anywhere in the world. Let's take America. That's a Christian nation. Walked into the Senate and the Congress and said, "You're all fired now. I'm here, and I'm going to run it." Think they'd be happy? You think He'd be happy? How about if He walked into the President's office and says, "On your way, bud, I'm taking over now. I'm going to run the world." Think he'd be happy? You think they're all just waiting for Jesus to come back and run this thing and just kind of holding the store together till He gets here?

How about if He went to His first churches? He went to them. Think that Jehovah Witness would like Him because He'd have to tell them they weren't part of the 144,000 anymore? How a charismatic wouldn't like Him because Jesus never spoke in tongues, now did He? The Catholics wouldn't like Him. He wouldn't give Mary her due. Hey, don't get high and mighty about it. Baptist churches wouldn't like Him either because they don't even use the Bible that was His. You know what they'd do? If Jesus came the second time like He came the first time, it would be the same result. They'd crucify Him in 15 minutes. They'd drag Him outside of Washington. They'd drag Him outside of Moscow. You think the Jews are going to accept Him if He went back over there right now and said, "Here I am"? Hey, it's all a religious, political, hotchpotch and gobbledygook that everybody who's running this world wants to pretend we're going to do what's right. They don't care about you or me or anybody except themselves.

There's only one Man, one Man who cares about you. He's the one that cares about you right now, who lives inside you right now, who wants to give you the best right now, and is going to give you the best right then when He comes back. If Jesus Christ came back now this time like He did the first time, they would throw Him out of the city. They would crucify Him. They would label Him everything that they label you, and they would kill Him. So you know what? He ain't coming back the second time that way. When He comes this time, He's coming with the eyes of a flame of a fire and a vesture dipped in blood, and His name is called the Word of God, and He's going to kick the fire out of everybody on planet Earth. You better find out what side you're on. That's what's wrong with this country.

Proverbs 27:5

Evil men understand not judgment: but they that seek the LORD understand all things.

That great principle says we should. You see, the principles of God give you understanding in all things: people, life, and the country you live in.

Proverbs 20:18

Every purpose is established by counsel: and with good advice make war.

VI. The Foundational Principle: Knowing and Answering Truth

I'm going to leave you with one last principle, and this is my principle. This is my favorite principle for life. I read this every day of my life. This is the deal for me, and maybe it'll mean something to you. But let this be the foundational passage in your life in Bible principles.

Proverbs 22:17-21

Bow down thine ear, and hear the words of the wise, and apply thine heart unto my knowledge.

For it is a pleasant thing if thou keep them within thee; they shall withal be fitted in thy lips.

That thy trust may be in the LORD. I have made known to thee this day, even to thee.

Have not I written to thee excellent things in counsels and knowledge,

That I might make thee know the certainty of the words of truth; that thou mightest answer the words of truth to them that send unto thee?

Now, this is my prayer for you. This is what you ought to be doing. You ought to be looking at everything that this church is involved in through one purpose: how much in these last moments of this last time, whether it's volleyball or softball or whatever we're doing or whatever's going on, you ought to be looking at it from the aspect, "We've got to get everybody in and get as many saved and the lost as we can because our time is running out, no matter what means we must do it by." Here is the key. The key is principles.

"Bow down thine ear, and hear the words of the wise, and apply thine heart unto my knowledge. For it is a pleasant thing if thou keep them within thee; they shall withal be fitted in thy lips. That thy trust may be in the LORD. I have made known to thee this day, even to thee. Have not I written to thee excellent things in counsels and knowledge?" Yes, you have, Lord. Verse 21: "Why? That I might make thee know the certainty of the words of truth; that thou mightest answer the words of truth to them that send unto thee?"

You know what he just told you? He gave you that book. He gave you those principles. He gave you this church. He gave you a pastor that has one goal in his life for you, even though you may have other goals in life for yourself. You know what that is? My job is one-fold: it is to help you know of a certainty the words of truth in a world where there is no truth, and to get you ready. It goes right back to where we started, right back to 1 Peter 3:15.

1 Peter 3:15

But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear:

He says in Proverbs 22:21, "That I might make thee know the certainty of the words of truth; that thou mightest answer the words of truth to them that send unto thee?" He says, "If there's somebody out there that wants the truth, I want to be able to send you to them. When there's a man that wants an answer for why you are the way you are, he sees the contrast in your life from the world, I want to send that man to you."

But notice the four points you've got to have for that to happen:

10. Sanctify the Lord. First thing is sanctify. You've got to get set apart from the world. You've got to get the Bible in your life, and you better get your career straightened out. Your career is not about what you want to do in life. That's the means by which you make your money to feed your face, that you can fulfill God's plan for your life. You better get that straight. The only way you get that straight is to sanctify the Lord God in your heart. Why are you here today? What's the point? What's the purpose? Why did you bother to come here this morning? To listen to this verbal rant and rage, for this abuse that so adversely affects your spirit this morning? Why are you here? The only reason you should be here is because you

have a desire to learn the certainty of truth, and you want to start by sanctifying the Lord in your heart, getting everything else aside.

11. Be ready. You're here to get ready. You're here on Thursday night to get ready. You used to come to the institute so you could be ready. You have one goal in your life in the days that we live, only one: it's to be ready. It's to sanctify the Lord God in your heart and be ready.
12. Ready for what? Ready to give an answer. Not by what you say. Not even by what you do. But what you are when nobody's looking. You can't have your guard up all the time, and the Bible says that "no man liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself." There's somebody always watching your life.
13. That a man will ask. This great verse is that God wants to make you know the certainty of the words of truth, that you might answer the words of truth. The reason why He won't put people in your life that you can give the certainty of the words to, very frankly, is you're not sure of them yourself. Not by what you say academically, intellectually, but how you live it. You see, you do what you say, but you live what you are, and that's what people see.

The games we play, the funny little skits we put on in life, the pretend we're spiritual when you know you're not, all the little fun things you like to put out there to pretend, but the bottom line is, at the end of the day, it all comes down to what God is doing with your life. How you're letting Him use you, and is He using you? And the people that God's putting into your world. I see people all the time, talked with all my life. They go through their whole life, and today they want to really be used of God, and next week they'll get a better deal. Then they'll get back with another group over here, and they'll pull him away, and then they'll come back, and then they'll get a shock revelation, and then they'll come back and want to be used of God again, and then they'll get pulled back. That's got to be the hardest way to live a life, I could ever think of.

Isn't there anybody left on this planet? Isn't there anybody left on this planet that knows right from wrong, that knows what's right, that has any discernment or discretion or understanding, that knows what's right and is just willing to sanctify the Lord in your heart and put it all aside, and just in these last days, just take a simple stand for Him, with not only what you say and what you do, but what you are?

I may not be your best friend today, and I may not. You may not like what I say. You may take offense to it. I may not be your best friend today, but I want to tell you a dying truth. When you stand for the judgments of Christ, and you remember our sermons, our Thursday nights you don't bother to come to, all the things that you put in front of everything else you do, when you stand there with the judgments of Christ, you know what God's going to say? He said, "I am a friend that sticketh closer than a brother," and you're going to come to the realization that, "You know what? I was your best friend because I don't tell you what you want to hear. I'm not like some of your friends. Some of your friends will tell you what you want to hear because they want you to be like them. I won't tell you what you want to hear. I'll tell you what the book says because someday you're going to stand and you're going to be judged by it, and you will never, you will absolutely never point your finger at me and say, 'He didn't tell me the truth.'" I'm not your best friend today. I will be on that day.

Don't you see what's going on around this world? Don't you see that the last grains of sand are dribbling through the hourglass of God Almighty? Why do you insist on being so indifferent to the power and the majesty and the ministry that God has for you? Principles. They will make you or they will break you, but you will never live in the middle. You either live by them or you'll live against them, but you will never be in the middle that exists in your mind. Jesus said, "He that is not with me is against me." It doesn't get any simpler than that. I implore you, I'm telling you, you better realize that that great verse says, He gave you great things that you might know the certainty of the words of truth, that you might do something with them.