

I. Introduction to the Wisdom Books

Well, if you have your Bibles this morning, I would like to invite you again to turn once more to the book of Proverbs. Last week, we had probably one of the best studies that I have ever taught or laid out as far as the material is concerned on the power of the human spirit of man. We just finished in People Ministry yesterday, coming through the Five Wisdom Books. What I have been doing there is coming through the Bible from the beginning and showing them the life concepts that you use in dealing with people: all the examples, all the principles, the stories that unfold themselves right into the problems of the people that you deal with.

When we got to the wisdom books, I told them, "You know what? The wisdom books are five books in your Bible that are the most unique books that you are ever going to find. They are really the key and the heart of the central issues of everything in the Word of God." I told them, "You know what? The wisdom books cover every expanse of man's emotions."

➤ Psalms 1:1

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Every aspect of everything that you are going to find is found within these wisdom books. We have spent a lot of time in the book of Proverbs. Years ago, I read a book by a guy that I cannot even remember who it was now, but he had some great insight into the wisdom books. He says, "You know what? You want to really tap into the sufferings of Christ, what Christ really went through on the cross? You have to go to the book of Job." I think Job chapter 30 is probably the greatest single chapter in the Bible on the crucifixion of Christ.

He says, "If you want to really get the heart of God, getting on God's heartbeat, you have to get to the book of Psalms." Without a doubt, Psalms is the book where a man is speaking to God in his own heart, and it is an incredible book. He says, "If you want to find, in the Trinity, you have God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. If you want to find and understand the mind of the Spirit of God as far as what He is doing and how He is doing it, it will be the book of Ecclesiastes."

"If you want to find the mind of Christ," the Bible says, "Let this mind be in you, which is also in Christ Jesus," you go through the Song of Solomon. We talked about that yesterday in the People Ministry and had an incredible time of laying things out. But if you want to find the mind of

God, you want to know God's character, God's makeup, the way God thinks. Isaiah 55:8-9 talks about God's ways are not my ways, His thoughts are not my thoughts.

Isaiah 55:8-9

For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD.

For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.

If you want to capture those thoughts of God and understand what God thinks, where Ecclesiastes represents the mind of the Spirit and the Song of Solomon represents the mind of Christ, the book of Proverbs represents the mind of God. We have been two and a half years into this book, which is called the Mind of God. It will probably be another two and a half years in it, maybe a little longer, a little less. But even if we took five years, I must confess to you in my own heart, my own mind, I feel like I failed. How do you have the eternal mind of God and study it and lay it out for just five years?

I know that we are human, and I know that as human beings we can only grasp so much. I told somebody yesterday, "You know what? If we go through the book of Proverbs and we go through it in five, six years, whatever it is, and we take six, seven, eight months off, and then I decide, 'Hey, let's go through it again,' you realize that we would find more material the second time than we ever found the first time." That is the unexhaustible mind of God for you. That is the unsearchable riches of the Word of God.

So we saw last week a great study on the human spirit of man, how his spirit will sustain him through the toughest times in life, or his spirit will destroy him. The most fragile part of us as human beings will be our spirit. We saw the need last week, or at least I hope we did, we saw the need to constantly be reinforcing our spirit. Our spirit will send us down one road or the other. As a child of God, once we get saved, my soul may be sealed, my flesh never will be, but neither will my spirit. My spirit needs to be cleansed from all the filthiness of the flesh. The way that you do that is by reinforcing, shoring up that spirit of man with the Spirit of God and the things of the Word of God.

II. Proverbs 18:16 - A Man's Gift

Today we are going to move into yet another section of Proverbs chapter 18. I think today we are going to see some of the greatest principles that you are ever going to find for the Christian life. We all struggle with issues; everybody does. Really, the answer to struggling with, and I think in Christian life there are some things that we need to struggle with. But we spend most of our time struggling with things that we do not need to struggle with, and we miss all the things that God has for us.

So I want to read Proverbs chapter 18. I want to pick it up in verse 16 and come down through verse 19. It says this:

Proverbs 18:16-19

A man's gift maketh room for him, and bringeth him before great men.

He that is first in his own cause seemeth just; but his neighbour cometh and searcheth him.

The lot causeth contentions to cease, and parteth between the mighty.

A brother offended is harder to be won than a strong city: and their contentions are like the bars of a castle.

Now we are going to look at each one of these, and again, as we always do, we are taking Proverbs in sections. I try not to overload the thought into the next section; I try to keep them localized. Sometimes you can, sometimes you cannot. But I want to explore each one of these. Each one of these has its own value, and I want to look at them and kind of detail them out for you so that you can get from them as you need to apply in your own life.

Now look at verse 16. Verse 16 says:

Proverbs 18:16

A man's gift maketh room for him, and bringeth him before great men.

Like most of the Proverbs in the Bible, there are going to be at least two applications. The book of Proverbs is about a wise man and then about a foolish man. So right out of the chute, you have two applications of the book of Proverbs. Here, this particular verse, we are going to look at it first of all from an unsaved man's perspective, and then we are going to look at it from a saved man's perspective, seeing what this verse really means. I think it will give you some insight.

- Unsaved Application
- Saved/Biblical Application

III. Proverbs 18:17 - Hearing Both Sides

Look at the next verse, verse 17.

Proverbs 18:17

He that is first in his own cause seemeth just; but his neighbour cometh and searcheth him.

Now the word neighbor there, we use that a little differently today than they did in the Bible, just so you know. You find that word a lot. We think of the word neighbor as the person living across the street from here or to the left or to the right of you. In the Bible, it is somebody that is just a human being of similar beliefs that you may or may not be associated with, that you are friendly to, whether you are friends with or not. That is the concept. If you are a Christian, most of your neighbors probably are not friendly anyhow to you, so you get that.

But this is a great principle, and it will go along with what we saw last week in verse 13 about answering a matter before you hear the whole matter. I have seen this proverb work many times, and I am sure you have too. I have seen it work in a debate. I have seen it work in a courtroom. I have seen it work in a counseling scenario. It works like this: you are listening to, you have two

people and they are going to tell their story. The first guy gets up and boy, he lays that story out about a certain event, and you think that he just knocked it out of the ballpark. You are sitting there thinking, "What could this other guy say that is going to undo what this guy just said?" And then the second guy gets up and he knocks it out of the park even farther and discredits everything the first guy said. You see it all the time.

It is a thing where I remember at the national convention for the Republicans and the Democrats. The Democrats had their first, Republicans had their second. I remember listening to some of the Democrats getting up and they were talking. I thought to myself, "Wow, they really did a good job. What is a Republican going to say?" And then when I heard the Republicans come up, I am thinking, "Wow, they just completely dismantled everything that they said."

You see it in a court case. The man is on trial for killing his wife. He has a good attorney. The attorney is there to put a reasonable doubt in the jury's mind because of the fact that he can get off that way. That is what he is getting paid for. So the guy is sitting there to have the trial, and everything, and they are given their closing arguments, and the lawyer gets up and he looks at the jury and he says, "Ladies and gentlemen of the jury, I want to thank you for your service for being here today, but I must tell you this man did not kill his wife. We have victims here. Yes, his wife was a victim, but I want to tell you that this man falsely accused of killing his wife is also a victim. He is a victim of an overzealous prosecutor. He is a victim."

"This guy, he could never have killed his wife. He loved his wife. They could not find anybody that they could pin this crime on. It is a crime that is so heinous and a crime is so terrible that I have got to be honest with you. Honestly, ladies and gentlemen of the jury, the first time when you look at a wife that has been killed, obviously the husband is the first one they look to. We understand that. But I am here to tell you, he loved his wife. I have here a stack of cards for her birthdays and anniversaries. I want to read some of these, how much he loved his darling wife and how precious she was. This is not the sign of a man who would kill his wife. You go to their home and their house is filled with pictures of them together on vacation and everywhere. This man, ladies and gentlemen of the jury, did not kill his wife. His false accusations by this overzealous prosecutor has put him in a terrible mental state. He is broken. He weeps. He cannot sleep. He cannot eat. Is that the mindset of a murderer? Please, I come to you with common sense to plead with you to look at the case and this man who loved his wife, who is in such disarray, how could a man have that kind of emotion and be so cruel and callous that he could kill his wife? So I leave you, ladies and gentlemen of the jury, that this man could not have done that. This man loved his wife. He cared for his wife. This is a great injustice, and you must serve justice today. The law says within a reasonable shadow of a doubt, and I have given you that, was a man who was devastated at the loss of his wife by an overzealous prosecutor who wants to pin it on somebody so he can make a name for himself."

Now here comes the prosecutor. "Ladies and gentlemen of the jury, I am here to tell you that he did kill his wife. There is no question about it. And I am here to prove that he did. Can we have the lights please? Now I heard what the lawyer said and he did what a lawyer does, and I understand that. He is getting paid to represent him. I have no problem with it. We are here to look at the facts. We are not here to look at love letters. We are not here to write love letters in

the sand like Pat Boone is talking about. We are here to look at facts. You cannot make your basis of your determination of guilty on your emotional feelings right now that this man is in disarray because his wife was there. This man killed his wife. May I have the lights please? Here is a security camera that was across the street from the house that we never showed anybody that took place the night of the murder. This started here. Here is his wife clearly identified getting out of the car. Freeze it. This here is his wife. She is clearly identified. She is moving around the back of the car going to get the groceries out of the trunk. Notice she opened the trunk. Now notice over here from the side of the bushes comes this man. Freeze it. The man for a moment looks up in the direction of the camera. It is her husband. He comes up behind her. You can see the knife in his hand. He puts his arm around her neck, pulls her over. He stabs her in the neck. He brings her to the ground and then watch it. He repeatedly stabs her 30 more times. I am sorry that this is so graphic. I am sorry I had to show that to you today. But I could not let this case go to the jury based on a bunch of flowery cards that somebody wrote in the pretense of the reality of you just saw him taking a butcher knife and killing his wife unmercifully."

See how one did the other? That is the verse. Now here is the principle. You can never get a complete absolute accuracy on anything from one side. Last week we saw the verse that said, "Hear the whole matter."

Now you take your Bible. The greatest value of the Word of God, and you may not even think of it this way, but the greatest value of the Bible that you have in your lap today is the fact that it was not written by one man. There is no other book, no other religious book, no other writing, no other religion on a faceless planet that has that quality to it that our Bible has. The Bible was written by more than 24 different men on three different continents through the space of 1,900 years. And yet it completely goes together in every way, in every aspect, and it matches and it goes along with its common theme from Genesis to Revelation. No other book on earth, religious or secular, can claim that.

Now that is a great key to understanding the cults. We want to make a big deal about the cults and delve into everything about them. Let me tell you something. This right here is the greatest understanding thing why the cults are fake and phony. They all were put together by just one man.

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One person in each case. Now New Testament Christianity, the real deal, was not put into play by one man. No, no. The book of Acts, the beauty of the book of Acts, we talked about it Thursday night. Oh, the book of Acts and what it does for you in defining the things down through church history. When New Testament Christianity started, it did not start with one man, it started at a church in Antioch. You say, "Well, the Apostle Paul, he had the..." Yeah, he may have gotten the mandate to take it to the world, but when you first find Paul after his conversion, he is in a church already that is teaching New Testament principles. He is in Antioch. He is already there. They are going to town. This is where in Acts chapter 11, they are first called Christians. It was not some guy that said, "Hey, I found New Testament Christianity. I am going to do this." No, no, it started with a body of believers that God put into a church and it was born within the heart of a church, which is God's program for the new age.

Now here it comes. You do not want to miss this. In the book of Acts, the concept of Christianity was born in a church and then it went to men. In a cult, it starts with a man and then he starts a church. See the difference? The biblical way is for it to start in a church, God's program, and then that church takes it to men. When it is a cult, it will start with a man and then he has to start the church. It makes it so much easier. Now that is the biblical way it works. You get that out of the book of Acts.

But you never can get the full facts by just one opinion. When I studied what I studied over my life while at the Bible, I never just read one man. There may have been one man or two men that I trusted in my reading more than the others, but I never just read one man. That is a very dangerous thing. I probably spent 10 years of my life studying church history. I knew we needed to have church history down. Maybe, well, I am still studying it, so it just was an ongoing thing. But I dedicated at least 10 years to it. I probably read over 200 books on church history. I told the kids yesterday in People Ministry that history is a lucrative thing to study because you have got one man who sees history, he evaluates history, he interprets history, and then he writes about history. So in actuality, when you are getting what he is getting, you are getting based his opinion on it, which may be good, it may be right, but also, he was not there when the events took place.

I must have read 200 books on church history. I read everything I could get my hands on. When I came to the understanding of the issue of the King James Bible, I think people think sometimes that I just got this idea someplace years ago by Mel Shabak or Peter S. Ruckman, and that is when I ran with it. You are out of your mind. I read 300, maybe 400 books on the issue of the King James Bible, more of them against it than for it. I teach dispensations. I must have read 30, 40 books on dispensations. I teach Bible doctrine. I probably went through in my young life 500 different books, pamphlets, and articles on doctrine of the church in the Bible.

But I always did one thing. No matter who I read, I always understood that they were fallible. I knew that the writers of history wrote from a human perspective, and they could have error in it. I realized that every man, whatever he said about whatever he was teaching, he is human and he can make a mistake. So I read all of their material. I digested everything they had, but I always had an absolute baseline called the Word of God that I bounced it off of. When I studied history, I knew that God in the Old Testament had a nation under the Kingdom of Heaven, and in the New Testament he had a body in the Kingdom of God. I knew that there are two landmarks in the

Bible. I realized that God did everything around both landmarks, whether Old Testament or New Testament. That was my baseline. Whenever I read, whoever I read, wherever he took me, no matter how good it looked, I always had to come back to the baseline because the baseline will never lie. The baseline is absolute truth, and that is what you have to do. That is called getting understanding in the Bible.

Now we hold that the King James Bible is the Word of God. Make no apology for it. Preach on it all the time. Talk about it all the time. Teach classes all the time. But I have got to tell you, when you lay it out, the case against the King James Bible looks pretty good and convincing. There are more than 300 books out there that will try to pull you away and get you to see why the King James Bible could not be the Word of God, and I have read every one of them. The verse says that the first guy that gets up, he sounds good, but you have got to get the other guy to get the perspective, and I will tell you, the argument against the King James Bible looks really good, right up to the point when you lay out Sinaiticus and Vaticanus, the Roman Catholic Church, Westcott and Hort, and all the crowd that goes along with it, then it does not look too good. That is how you have got to do it. That is what the verse is saying. Always using the Bible as the baseline, the baseline of truth.

IV. Proverbs 18:18 - Settling Disputes by Lot

Look at verse 18.

Proverbs 18:18

The lot causeth contentions to cease, and parteth between the mighty.

Now this is a simple one. It will not take us long with this one. That simply means there is a very simple concept here: who goes first and who goes second? Who goes last and who goes first? The idea that a dispute or an issue can be settled by chance, toss of a coin. It is a Super Bowl. They both want to play. You cannot have the ref say, "Well, you get to go first." That is not going to work. You cannot take a vote in the crowd. That will never work. You take a coin and you flip the coin up in the air. One of the captains calls heads. They hit the ground, and whatever it is, solves the dispute who gets to go first.

We see it in dire situations where you are in an airplane and it is flying along and it has got engine trouble. A captain comes back and a co-pilot says, "Hey, look, we have got to ride this plane down, but here is the problem. We are going to crash. We have got five people on board. We only have four parachutes." You know what you do? You draw straws. Short straws takes the ride.

I only know one parachute story about an airplane. It is pretty good. Five people were flying on an airplane. One was a great athlete. One was a great movie star. One was President Obama. One was Billy Graham and a little 11-year-old girl. The pilot came back and said, "We are going to crash. We have got five people on board, but only have four parachutes." The athlete stood up and said, "Well, I have got to have one. Why, people pay millions of dollars to see me play. I make so many people happy." He grabbed one of the chutes and went out the door. The movie

star said, "Well, I have been to movies all the time and everybody knows who I am. I have to be part of this." So he grabs his chute and he is out the door. President Obama says, "Well, I am the leader of the free world. I have got to have a parachute. I have got to have a parachute." He said, "The whole world will fall apart without me." So he grabs one and out the door he goes.

Billy Graham looks down at the little girl and he says, "Sweetheart, I have been in the ministry all my life." He says, "I have lived a full life. You take that last parachute." He said, "We had an athlete that had to take his, and we had a movie star who had kids. Obama said he was the smartest man in the world and he had to take his because he had to save the free world. Look, I preach the gospel all my life. Honey, you take the last parachute and you go out and I will ride the plane down." She looked up and she said, "Mr. Graham, thank you for that, but we do not have to do that." He says, "Why is that, sweetheart?" She said, "The smartest man in the world had jumped out of the plane with my backpack."

Toss of a coin, draw a short straw. Pick a number from one to 10. See, that is what we do. And it makes disputes cease. You see, because most people accept the fact that there is no trickery in that. She got a two-headed coin.

V. Proverbs 18:19 - The Offended Brother

Now, look at verse 19. Here now, we are going to wind up today, and this is probably one of the most telling and profound verses in all the Bible for you and for me. Verse 19 says:

Proverbs 18:19

A brother offended is harder to be won than a strong city: and their contentions are like the bars of a castle.

Now, if there was ever a verse that will stand as the greatest issue within the church today, probably outside the Word of God, it will be the verse and will be this particular issue. Back in the book of 1 Corinthians, Paul made it very clear he is dealing with issues with them, and they are absolutely stupid issues. They are arguing over who baptized who. They are arguing over who won who to Christ. They are going through every petty little thing that God's people can go through. He says to them, "You know what?" He says, "You walk as men, but you are a bunch of spiritual babies." We have reached that same place in Bible Christianity today. God's people get offended by everything. They do. It is unbelievable. They get offended by everything.

This is why pastors do not preach anymore. He has to have a big church to get a big income. If he preaches hard, he will offend some people and they will not come back. Laodicean Christianity is made up of the most hypersensitive, selfish, neurotic, prideful, arrogant, touchy-feely people you ever met in your life. They have a judgment on everything. I know Romans 14 and 15 talks about not being a stumbling block to the weaker Christian. I get it. I know that Romans 15:1 says that you that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak. I get it. But come on, man. At some point, you have to get past some things in your life. You realize that there are some bigger issues out there than the color of choir robes. Do you realize that?

Babies do three things really well. They eat a lot. They cry a lot. And they make a mess a lot, either throwing up or the other end. You take any church in America, God's people will judge everything about what goes on in that church service.

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Somebody said to me one time, "Well, I do not get anything out of the service anymore." I said, "What did you put in?" Nothing. You know, you only get out of something what you put into it. Let me ask you a question. Back in the Old Testament, you had a woman that was poor. Remember, she needed oil, did not have any money. So she went to the prophet of God and the prophet of God said, "Here is what I want you to do. You go home and you get every pot and pan you can find." And then he says, "Not a few." "And you come over and as many pots and pans as you can bring, as many bottles, containers, whatever you have got, whatever you bring, I am going to fill up with oil. And then you can go and make your living off of what I give you."

You know what the problem with some of God's people is today? You came here this morning and you brought a thimble. You came here this morning empty handed. Some of you, I watched you roll up. You had to come in the back door because you were rolling in 55-gallon drums. You want to fill it up. You want everything that God has for you. You want everything that God wants to give you today. You are going to get out of it something because you are willing to put something into it. God's people are not willing to do that. They want to be entertained. They do not want to come to a church like this. They want to come to a church where there is a rock band. They want to come to church where afterwards you can go to the cafeteria. They go out and if you want to play racquetball, you can go there. They want to go to a church that when they get up there, everybody is singing and praising and everybody is having a great time, and they want to go there where they feel comfortable and it is nice, warm, and fuzzy. They want a pastor up there that will tell you how good you are. You do not need anybody to tell you how good you are. You do a pretty good job of that yourself.

"Well, so and so. She has not talked to me forever." You know what I do when I see somebody that I know has got an attitude against me like you? You know what I do when I know somebody is upset with me about something and they are avoiding me? I will walk right over and say, "Man, it is good to see you today. How are you?" "Good." "Do you have any money? I need to borrow five dollars to pay that." I mean, you are not, you know, I mean, come on. I have been running around here on mornings trying to get everything done and do things. I do not do much anymore because I just sit back there. Let it all run. But there have been times when I was running like a chick with my head cut off and I found somebody was upset and got a nose bent on a joint because Bob did not shake their hand. Well, if you had stuck it out, I would have shook it.

They will judge everything about what goes on. They will judge the people. They will judge the service. They will judge the choir. They will judge the special. They will judge the pastor. They

will judge the message. They will judge who prays. They will judge the people around them. They will judge the visitors. They will look around and put people where and make judgments on it. They will judge the ministry. The length of the service, the temperature. They will judge everything except themselves. That is Christianity today. Contention because of being offended.

People get offended sometimes over where you go to eat. I have had several people like this that if you went to a place that sold booze, they got offended. I had a guy one time say, "Well, I cannot believe you take people over there that goes and eats over there at that place because they have a bar there and they serve booze over there." And I said, "Well, man, nobody is drinking." And he says, "Yeah, but it is just a bad testimony." I said, "Well, you buy gas and the gas station sells beer, do not you?" A lot of tickets. I mean, what is the point? What is the point? People are weird.

I have had people get upset. Honestly, I have had people that had a contention in a church and got offended because they decided to move the piano from that side to this side and did not ask them for a church vote. I am not kidding you. In most churches, God help you if you are a visitor and you sit in Aunt Francis' seat. I have a buddy of mine that pastors a church up in Illinois. He called me one time and he said, "You know what?" He says, "I just went through the stupidest thing last week that I ever went through." He said, "We had a big church fight. Big church this. There was a mess." And I am thinking it was over doctrine of the Bible or something. You know what it was? The deacons had had their coffee cups locked away in a cabinet down there and somebody moved the coffee cup out of there and put them someplace else without asking the permission of the deacons. It was going to split the church. A church like that needs to be split. I better yet, blow it up, back a little back over it, fill it up with dirt and raise buffalo on it or something, man.

I get emails from people when they watch in, and it is all subtle stuff. We had a thing where we talk about the Halloween party, and I got a nice text email from somebody that said, "You know what? We appreciate the church. We appreciate that. But I would really like you to pray that God would reveal to you how demonic Halloween is." Is it any more demonic than Christmas? Easter? Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday are all pagan Roman gods. January, February, March, April, May, you do not have a problem crossing those out on your calendar. They are all pagan gods. Where do you draw the line? No, better yet. Where do you grow up? You think I believe in Halloween? You think I care if your little kids dress up like demons? Why not? They act like it all year long.

I have had people call me up on the phone and say, "We are thinking about coming to your church." And I said, "Whatever will be fine. You will be welcome. Do you have a Wednesday night church service?" "No." "Oh, well, we are not coming." Good. It is good that you do not come on Wednesday night because we would not be here anyhow. So it is good. It is like Wednesday night is the key to being a real church.

I have had people say, "Brother, you have a Christmas tree in your house only once a year." You ever saw our Christmas tree? You would never preach on it. Our Christmas tree looks like it has got a bad case of age. It is the ugliest tree you have ever saw in your life. I mean, the dog will not

even lift his leg on it. It is the ugliest tree. If you have been up in the upper room there for counseling, it is over in the corner all year long. You just did not recognize that you thought it was the next person coming in who had HIV or something like that. It is a mess. It is terrible.

Gone are the days when you go out and chop down a tree. Like on Christmas vacation, you are not gone all those days. Back when I was growing up, we would do that, but only last three or four days, Mom and Dad would get in a fight. I cannot remember Christmas when he did not get a knockdown drag out and one or the other took the Christmas tree and threw it out in the front yard. This is why I am the way I am. You cannot think you have it tough. No, you do. You think you have it tough. I am going to tell you something. You want to know why I am weird the way I am? When I was nine years old, 10 years old, 12 years old, and I did not get good grades, you know what my mom did? She made me. She, I came home, got a bad report card. She made me put on one of my sister's dresses while the kids were coming home from school and stand out on the front porch and let them laugh at me. Cut me some slack. No, I do not wear it anymore. I want to make that clear.

I have seen people get upset because somebody was asked to do something and did not ask them. I am not kidding you. I had, I told this story yesterday. Most of you old folks know who Harold Massey was. Remember Harold Massey, blind guy. I actually got a planet. Well, they had a group called God Country Four back when, like you guys, you are a lot better, but they were good. Harold was blind, but he played the guitar. Charlie's aunt, Dan's aunt, was a guy. He played the guitar. Penny Hansinger's sister, your aunt, sang in it. You remember who else sang in it? Because you cannot have God Country Four. We only three. Oh, they made me fourth one died.

But anyway, we were having a, I think it was a Valentine's Day thing at the church, nothing churchy. Nobody preaching, just a fun time. And they played. In that sitting there, there was one, it was a pastor from up north, who was one of the most uptight guys, legalistic guys you have ever met in your life. I mean, he was something else. He was terrible. He was something else. Anyway, they had played a little song. It was based on Johnny Cash's "I Walk the Line." Some of you remember hearing it, and it had a little line in it that, okay. I would not have you guys singing on Sunday morning, but it was not so risqué that it, you know, you lost your salvation over it. It was funny. "You know, I keep a close watch on this heart of mine, you know, okay. I will keep my what all the time. No. And the end of the thing was, if you are not mine, do not pull the twine." I mean, come on. It was no big deal. It was funny.

I am standing up there with Harold Massey at the end of the thing there. And I was laughing with him. This pastor comes up and he says, "Brother, you know, it is no, when you always start to have brother, that is your first giveaway. You are in trouble. Brother. I want you to know, brother, that that song absolutely offended me. Beyond belief. I said, I just cannot believe I am so offended at that." So I thought to myself, "You have got to be kidding me. I mean, do you, would you ever laugh about anything in life?" I mean, it is crazy. You know, and I got, and I told him yesterday, 15 or 16 years later in this legalistic mindset of being right and being offended by little things like that. You know what happened? His daughter, who was 19 years old, was so fed up with it, so fed up with that phony Christianity that she was going to leave the home and go someplace else. Get out of it. And her mom was so distraught because of the fact she could not

face dealing with it. The mom took a gun, killed the daughter and then killed herself. And they are right. And Harold was wrong. I am telling you, man, people are nuts. Just nuts.

I have seen, as I said, I have seen them, I have seen them come to a service and say, "Well, it is too long or it is too short. Preacher is too loud or he is not loud enough. Well, he stepped on too many people's toes or he does not preach or he is preaching about me." You have to answer that one for yourself, man. "Preacher tells too many jokes or he is so boring to listen to." I have seen them get offended and leave the church because they decided to get new choir robes and they got into a fight over the color. American Christianity is a mess. I have seen them complain about nothing going on in the church. "Why does not anything ever go on? We do not have any ministries." They complain about that. Then God comes down and does something. All my life I have seen this and a bunch of people get involved. They do not. You know what it is, Dan? "Oh, just a bunch of clique people getting involved in." You cannot win. You cannot win. My favorite bumper sticker is, "Kill them all. Let God sort them out."

VI. The Solution to Offense

Now the answer to this verse and the way Christianity and churches are today will be found in one great verse, and I will give it to you in a few moments we have left. It is found in Psalms 119:165. It says:

Psalms 119:165

Great peace have they which love thy law: and nothing shall offend them.

Wow. What a verse. What a defining verse for 20th, 21st century Christianity. What an eye-opening principle for a Christian who gets offended over nothing or over everything. You know, I will go back a couple of verses to verse 17. He that is first in his own cause, you being offended seems really okay and really good to yourself, right up to you hit Psalms 119:165.

Now I may say this. I have a lot of problems. I have a lot of issues. I will be the first to admit it, first to tell you, if I were you, I would not follow me across the street. I have a lot of problems. I have a lot of issues, but I am going to tell you one issue I do not have, I do not get offended by anything. I really do not. Hey, I have been in preaching services. I have been in preaching services with a guy preaching knew I was there and deliberately took a cheap shot for me from the pulpit. So what if that is all you have got, man? Good deal. Hey, I have been invited to do things. I have been uninvited to do things. I told the kids yesterday. One time that couple came to me and said, "We want you to marry us." And I said, "Okay, Mom and Dad were okay." And that is great. So we had the rehearsal that night. I did a whole rehearsal. They are going to get married the next day in the afternoon. I get a call, "Come to the office about two o'clock that day." And the dad comes in and he says, "You know what? We have decided we are not going to have you do the wedding now." Okay. I wanted to go squirrel hunting anyhow. It is all right. No problem. I am not going to get offended by that. I am just not. It is just one of those things that I have been in Bible conferences where I thought the whole thing was an absolute idiotic joke, but you know what? So what? I have heard a guy preach and thought that he was, he was a phony from head to toe and everything that he was saying. And I thought to myself, "This guy is an absolute clown,"

but you know what? I still got something from him. I mean, even a broken clock is right twice a day. What am I going to get offended about anything?

I have got guys try to undermine my ministry. Hey, let me tell you something. If anybody here, anybody in the world can undermine this ministry, it needs to be undermined. If it does not stand on what it is built on, that one person can knock it down. It needs to be knocked down. It does. I do not worry about those things. I just do not. I never take it personal and get offended. You know why? Because I have got a book that makes me bigger than that. I have got a book that puts me above the circumstances.

Psalms 119:165

Great peace have they which love thy law: and nothing shall offend them.

What a verse. I preached one time and a lady came up to me afterwards, and you know, you can see her a mile away what kind she was. She came up and she said, "Well, Brother Alexander," she said, "I want you to know that I was offended by some things you said in your message today." And I said, "Well, ma'am, I am really sorry about that. And I will be glad to try to help you. But let us lay a verse down so we can work on. Great peace have they which love thy law and nothing shall offend them. Now, what was it I said?" She had nothing to say.

A brother offended will be harder to be won than a strong city. And the contentions are like the bars of a castle. Two key words in that verse that make this and help us understand the problem. The first one is a strong city. It is a strong city, but probably Proverbs 25:28, it has no walls. The person runs on their emotions. There is no Bible reinforcement of their spirit. So they get offended over stuff that nobody else should get offended over. Hey, I want to tell you something. In Christianity, there are some things you get angry about. There is righteous retribution. And there are times that you ought to be down flat mad about some things that go on, but never be offended over something stupid. If somebody does something grievous, how did it affect me? I am not offended. You think it takes me out of my book? You think it takes the peace that God has given me, the great peace that I have? Nothing, nothing does that with me.

Bars of a castle. Personally held, prison by their own. Those little bars looking out a bar. Each one of those bars represents an issue in our lives that we cannot break out of, that hold us back emotionally, that allow us to get in a circumstance and situation that we ought to live above. My job as a pastor, I never criticize you. Some of God's people in my life and my ministry have done some of the dumbest things I could ever see in my life. You know why I never criticize them? Put their list of dumb things up against my list of dumb things. I will probably lose to them. We all do dumb things.

You come to the place where when you see somebody like that, you do not get turned against them. You do not become their enemy. That is what you do when you take it personal. That is what you do when you get offended in my job and my business. I cannot afford for you to offend me. You know why? My job is to minister to you. When I see you struggling with something, I am not going to castigate you. I am not going to come down and clobber you. You know what I am going to do when I see you stuck in that castle with those bars? I am going to bake you a cake

and put a hacksaw blade in it, and I am going to break you out of jail. My job. Take the Word of God that God has given us and reinforce our spirit. Make you better than you are. Get you higher than you are.

You know, we just went through one of the most awful elections in the history of this country. There was more mud slung during this time than ever before. I mean, it was like I got so sick of it, my head hurt. Everybody was digging up dirt on everybody. I mean, they wanted to go after Hillary. They wanted to go after Bill. They wanted to go after Trump. There were people that spent millions and millions of dollars. All the Republican candidates that were vying for the office to get elected, they hated each other. I mean, always in history, they go back and forth. Why? But they were killing each other. I mean, to imagine that some of the things that they said, some of the derogatory remarks they made. I mean, it was unbelievable. It was unprecedented. Calling Marco Rubio names, calling the other guys, John Kasich. Then they got so bent out of shape about it that some of them did not even come to the convention.

I watched that. Then I see that these guys who during that time, they just are always killing each other, slandering each other, saying the worst stuff you could ever see, when it is all over, they are all buddies again. Now Trump is up there and he is going to put Romney in here. He is going to put this guy in here. Everybody will get a spot. Everybody is lovey-dovey now. The only ones that cannot get lovey-dovey are God's people. They are the only ones that cannot. The world can do it. But God's people cannot. It is based on the principles of the Word of God. They should dictate how we deal with issues. Our ability or our inability to keep the issues of life in perspective, having the great peace that Isaiah says in Isaiah 26:3 passes all understanding that will keep your hearts and minds because your mind, there it is, is stayed on Thee.

Isaiah 26:3

Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee.

For 2 Corinthians 10:5 talks about bringing every thought into the obedience and captivity of Christ, coming to the point where the principles reinforce your spirit.

2 Corinthians 10:5

Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ;

But the Bible really doing a work. God's perfect work in our lives. And now you live and stand and minister and do the work of God far above the petty little things that are all about you. They are always going to be there. There is always going to be somebody you would like to accidentally run over with your car. I hate to say that, but you know it is true. I can lie to you and be up here and say I never feel that way. But let me tell you something. That is why God put reverses in cars. But when you fall in love with the book that God gave you, it will take you so far above and so far away from the pettiness of this world. You will begin to see the real issues. The real priorities. And you will not let yourself get taken out of the game because you get sidetracked with stuff that at the end of the day just does not really make any difference.

I told last time in the People Ministry, I told this story. It has always been a favorite of mine. Very personal. When I was about, my dad was a hunter fisherman. I am not much of a fisherman. I do not have the patience if I could fish with hand grenades. That would be good. But I used to love to hunt. My dad was a great hunter. My dad was a great shot. He grew up in Maryland and they had the axe live in a little cabin and they had to hunt for their food to survive. There were like 10 boys in a family and the dad died early and it was just a mom. It was incredible. And they all were great hunters. Great, great shots. My dad. He loved to hunt.

I remember when I got to be about 12 or 13, I wanted to go and I got old enough where I was responsible and he took me out one time and let me use one of his 22 rifles, and I actually got a rabbit. It was by accident, but I actually got the rabbit. But he said for Christmas that day, and I must have been probably 14 years old, they bought me my first shotgun. It was a single barrel 20 gauge Winchester Model 37 youth model just for little guys like me. I was little back then. I was so excited. My mom and they got me four or five boxes of shells and I wanted to shoot it so bad. My dad said, "Oh, come on, we will go out this afternoon to the dump down here. We will practice a little bit with it." So we went out there. My dad would throw cans up in the air and I would try to shoot him. He found a wheel and he put me back here and he got over here and he put the wheel in the ground that it was rolling like a rabbit, and I would shoot that. I shot that gun about six or seven times. And I just said, "Dad, I do not think I can do this." My arm was just, my arm, it had a butt pad on it that said Winchester. It was Winchester stamped in my arm. It really hurt. A little guy, 20 gauge was kicked pretty good. And I was crying, and my dad, he felt bad. He said, "Well," he says, "It will be okay. It will be okay." So, you know, I just said, "That is all I am going to do today." And my arm was black and blue for the next week.

So we went rabbit hunting about a week and a half later. It was a cold, crisp morning, and we went to a place that we always like to go. He liked to fish there in the summertime. The old guy, we would always drop him off a couple of rabbits and he let us hunt up there. We are walking through this bean field, way up there on the other side. And I have got the shotgun on my shoulder. My dad is next to me over there. All of a sudden, right in front of a big old rabbit runs out and I put up on him. I fired too fast. The first time went behind him. Bring the shell popped up, put another one in, got him the second time and just rolled him right over. My dad came up, put his arm around me. He said, "Man, that is a good shot, son, especially on the second one, because most guys would be so flustered they would not get the shell and that rabbit would be gone."

We walked over that rabbit with Dad, and my dad said something to me that I never forgot. I am looking at the rabbit and my adrenaline is really going, my first rabbit for my new shotgun. My dad says, "How is your arm feel?" And I said, "Well, you know, Dad, I did not, I did not feel anything. I did not even feel the recoil." I said, "I said, I wonder what that is. The last time we were practicing," I said, "it killed me. I said, I fired two rounds in this. I do not even know that it even, I did not remember feeling anything." He put his arm around me and he said this. He said, "Remember that this is the way it is in life. There are going to be things in life that are going to kick you. And the things in life that will kick you will always hurt you more when you are not focused on something. When you are not focused on something, you will feel the blunt force

trauma of that kick a lot more than when you are focused on that rabbit running over here. You did not even feel the kick."

How you get past being offended and getting upset about stupid stuff? Get focused. Get focused. Stay focused on the things that mean something. Stay focused on the things that are absolutely imperative to the Christian life. Stay focused on the things that will carry you through.

Psalms 119:165

Great peace have they which love thy law: and nothing shall offend them.

That is what you have got to do. I learned that lesson when as a 14-year-old boy, I have never forgot it. There are times in my life that I have given out to people. There are times in my life when I have used that in myself when I realized that something hurts a lot more when I am not focused on what God wants me to do than it does when I am focused on what God wants me to do. Because Christ absorbs the kick. If He does not, then you have to deal with it. That is where the great peace comes in. What does it matter? I mean, no matter what anybody says about you, no matter what they invite you to something or not, but they do whatever you did not like that they did. You still get to go to heaven. God still loves you. Your dog probably still does. You have everything going for you. What is the point? Great principle in Proverbs. The mind of God, the mind of God. Well, we will hold up there.