

Proverbs 15

Sunday 3/6/2016

I always preach better when I'm high. I never take up an offering without thinking back to a buddy of mine years ago. They were having a missions conference, and the missionaries came in preaching about taking the Word of God to the lost. So they took up a special missionary offering. They had this one guy at the church, and the plate went by him, he didn't put anything in. The guy that picked up the plate put it back and said, "Hey, why don't you take something out? After all, this offering is for the heathen." I never have an offering that I don't think about that guy doing that.

All right, Proverbs chapter 15. Today we're going to start chapter 15 in the book of Proverbs. We are almost halfway through this great book. We have seen the natural division of the book of Proverbs, which is really the key to understanding it. I've told you when we started this, and we've talked about it many times, that the book of Proverbs, which seems like a very complicated book, when you break it down, it's very, very easy to understand.

- Proverbs 1-7: Instructions to his son about how to get wisdom, understanding, and knowledge.
- Every chapter starts out with "my son" or "my child." It's very clear that he's giving some very good stuff to his boy before he even gets to the Proverbs.
- Proverbs 8-30: The individual Proverbs themselves.
- You can see how well they really unfold themselves, and we'll be talking about four or five more today.
- Proverbs 31: The end result.
- This is really what the book of Proverbs is about. The book of Proverbs, and you're going to see this today, is that first of all, you and I as God's people, He's our Heavenly Father, we're His children, taking instructions from the Father. You understand what you get from doing that, then you get the instructions themselves. That'll be the main part of the book of Proverbs. Proverbs 31 shows you the end result of you listening to God and taking His instructions, doing something with them in your life. The end result, of course, is probably the greatest chapter in the Bible on the virtuous woman.

I know that the virtuous woman is always a favorite subject on Mother's Day, and that's fine. But in truth, the virtuous woman there is a picture of every child of God who is God's bride and has a relationship with Him. The parallels in that are absolutely incredible. We will have a good time when we get to chapter 31.

I've shown you how the natural divisions of the books of the Bible are so absolutely key. We talked Thursday night about, I brought you through that concept of learning the Bible based on the building of Solomon's Temple. I showed you how that the website 10 years ago, maybe longer than that, we took on Sunday morning, and I actually gave every outline of the Bible. We're putting them in lesson form right now for the few folks that are going through that. I did that knowing that as the church would progress and the church would grow, that it would come to the point where you would need that. So long before there was a need for it, I prepared the way, knowing fully that this church would go and grow by the hand of God, and there would be young men and young ladies, moms and dads, just like you who really had a desire to learn the Bible. It's already in place.

I. Building Your Christian Life

Isaiah 28:9-10 has always been one of the staples in my life of helping me understand how to learn the Bible. We talk about the seven years, and I put it into the curriculum of seven classes and all of that.

Whom shall he teach knowledge? and whom shall he make to understand doctrine? them that are weaned from the milk, and drawn from the breasts.

For precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little:

Once you get saved, obviously you have to go through a process where we call it discipleship. Discipleship is nothing more than the entry level to the Bible and your relationship with God. I encourage everybody that gets saved to be discipled. Many times there will be people who come into our church from other churches that want to learn the Bible, and they don't have a fundamental understanding of it. I encourage them to be discipled. Many people have a good understanding of it.

Once you get discipled, and discipleship is the milk of the Word of God, he says here that there comes a time in your life when you get weaned off the milk of the Word of God. Then he says you build. The example of building here is putting cinder blocks or bricks on a foundation. We know the Bible says that the foundation is the day you got saved, and then you build on that. These doctrines here that he talks about, "whom shall we get to make to understand doctrine, who shall we teach knowledge," it's the individual principles of the Word of God. You build them one at a time.

You will build your Christian life. You will build your Christian faith. You will get to the place in your life with a sound heart, sound doctrine, sound mind, sound faith simply by building your Christian life one building block at a time, one doctrine at a time. I look across this room, and I love all of you and know most of you. I look at my people today and I realize that every one of you are in a building program fundamentally. I also know that some of you are on different levels. Some have been around for a while, and you're fairly well on your way. You're really on your way. Some of you are kind of in the middle, and you're trying to move toward that. Some of you just got started.

You're like any church in any ministry. This is certainly not a criticism, it's just the truth. You'll find some of God's people who have quit building. They're like it is back in Haggai where they started to build the temple, and then for 15 years they did nothing, and it's overgrown with weeds and nothing's getting done. You just find that when you find people.

So today let's add some more principles. Today I want to begin to give you some more building blocks on your foundation. I want you to go out of here every week. I want you to leave Thursday night. I want you to, when you come over and we go through things together one on one, I always want you to leave with a truckload of new building blocks to lay on that foundation. You know when you build a wall, I don't have an illustration here, but you know when you see any wall, you don't just sit the bricks on top of each other. You tie them in. You put a course and then you put another course and you tie them in. That's what you do with the principles, the building blocks, the line upon line, the precept upon precepts. You tie them into each other, and you tie them into the foundation that you built.

II. Proverbs 15:1-5 and the Power of Words

Now we're going to read Proverbs chapter 15 today, verses 1 through 5, and we're going to make some comments on it.

A soft answer turneth away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger.

The tongue of the wise useth knowledge aright: but the mouth of fools poureth out foolishness.

The eyes of the LORD are in every place, beholding the evil and the good.

A wholesome tongue is a tree of life: but perverseness therein is a breach in the spirit.

A fool despiseth his father's instruction: but he that regardeth reproof is prudent.

[Prayer by Paul Jones]

Thank you, Paul. Now, again, we see in these first five verses, five verses that will deal with the things that come out of our mouth, the things that we say. I think that you'll find if you would kind of lay out the book of Proverbs and really do a chapter by chapter breakdown in the church, that there's so much in this book about what we say, not only what we say, but how we say it. The key to anything in life is communication. In a marriage, it's communication. In nations, it's communication. In relationships, it's communication. With your children, it's communication. This is a really good practical set of verses that we want to look at.

It says, starting with verse one, "A soft answer turneth away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger." That is an absolute truth. We as God's people, and I know that most of God's people don't think this way, I understand. I have said it many, many times. Many of God's people, most of God's people, are way out of reality with the Word of God. But most of God's people should always be problem solvers and not problem-causers whenever you can. I know it's not always easy to do, but I also know that the longer that you let something go, the worse it's going to get and the harder it's going to be to fix it. It's true in everything in life.

A good example will be in marriage, in the New Testament. I've said it many, many times. The standard teaching with divorce today in the churches is the fact that the only grounds for divorce would be adultery. They base that on the Old Testament book of Matthew, which I know it's in your New Testament, but technically speaking, it's still in the Old Testament written to Israel. The church is not even in effect yet. Of course, if you want the New Testament teaching for the church on marriage and divorce and remarriage, it's 1 Corinthians 7, what Paul wrote. We've got a book on it in the bookstore.

I teach contrary to that based on the Bible, because I will tell you that in the Old Testament there were grounds for putting your wife away or your divorce. But in the New Testament there are no grounds. But you're going to find that people get divorces all the time. There's no grounds for divorce in the New Testament, but there's a reason for a divorce in the New Testament. That reason is simply either one or both of them will simply not do what the Bible says. You see, the Bible takes the position that once you're a Christian, you do what the Bible says. Jesus Himself said, "Why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?" The Bible takes the position that once you become a child of God, you're going to do what the Bible says you're supposed to do. It just makes that assumption.

The bottom line is between two saved people, whether it's a husband and wife or two people in a church, there should be nothing that two children of God cannot work out together through the Word of God. The reason why it doesn't get worked out, and the reason why there is a reason for divorce, even though in the New Testament there's no grounds for divorce, is because one, sometimes both, simply won't do what the Bible says. That's the issue that you're faced with today. They just won't follow it.

In marriage or in anything, really, real spiritual maturity is having the wisdom and the understanding and the discernment and the perception and the discretion that will always put you ahead of any situation. It's what husbands and wives using simply what they know. It's about you and me as God's people, faced with situations every day. But we don't use what we know. We never apply and use what we've been taught.

You realize as a spiritual leader, whether it's a family or a pastor or just someone who takes responsibility in a church as a mature Christian, you realize that as a spiritual leader that you learn to end conflict, not inflame conflict as best you can. If or when you know the Bible and you operate under its biblical principles, then will you use what you know to restore, not to destroy. Restoration is the number one key in the Bible. When God came down and died on the cross, it was for one fundamental basic reason. You know what it was? Restoration. It was to restore the image that we once had in Adam, but lost through disobedience. When God came down and died on the cross, He came down to restore what was lost.

If we're going to be Christ-like, if we're going to do what God wants us to do, the job of you and me is, could you imagine what the ministry would be like? Could you imagine what churches would be like if every child of God, when they were faced with an issue, faced with something they saw, something that they heard, or something that they were involved in or a part of, instead

of inflaming the situation and getting it completely out of control, following the biblical principles, to resolve it and to stop it and to deal with it?

In Proverbs 6:16, we've talked about it many, many times. It talks about the six things that God hates. Then it adds a seventh one that kind of is like the capstone that the Bible says makes it an abomination before the Lord. The seventh one is simply sowing discord among the brethren. The worst thing the devil does to destroy churches, ministries, preachers, Christians, is to sow discord through the tongue and the mouth of what people say, and he does it every time through God's own people, simply because they do not get the mindset that our job as a mature child of God is to solve problems, not cause problems. You deal with it all the time.

As a spiritual leader, if you're a father here and you have children, the Bible says in Ephesians 6:4, "Fathers, provoke not your children to wrath." It says in Colossians 3:21, "Fathers, provoke not your children to anger." Many fathers do. Many fathers, many parents actually take out their own frustrations on their own children. In a family, mom and dad, you're supposed to be the adult, not one of the children. As the adult, you're supposed to understand the principles, understand your responsibility and obligation, and come to the place where you realize that you cannot blame your children for where they're at and what they do because 99.9% of the time they were provoked into that situation because of the parents. The frustration of not being right with God will always in our lives be taken out on somebody else. It always happens.

Colossians 3:19, talking about the husband and their wives. The Bible says, "Husbands, love your wives, and be not bitter against them." Now I've dealt with a lot of marriage scenarios where the husband is upset with a wife because she did this or whatever, vice versa many times, but many times that verse simply says, "Husbands, be not bitter against your wives." The reason why a husband has no right to be bitter against his wife is because as the spiritual leader, he has made her exactly what she is, either through his leadership or through the lack of his leadership.

I have husbands all the time, they always get upset because of the fact that in a marriage scenario they want to blame the wife and to blame this, and I always tell them, "You know what, you may go to your therapist and say that, you may go to your psychiatrist or some Billy Bob counselor out there at Billy Bob Baptist Church, but that won't work with me because the Bible simply says, whatever your family is, Father, you are to be the spiritual leader that guides them the right way." Somebody in a family has to take the leadership role. Good, bad or whatever, your family, my family will be exactly what the spiritual leadership was. We're supposed to be the spiritual leader, and as such, you are to be smarter than the problem because you see it and you understand it, not through your emotions, but through the principles of the Word of God. You know that as the spiritual leader, it's true of a pastor, there's things that I have to deal with, hey, I'd just as soon squash it like a bug, but I know that I can't because as the spiritual leader of this church, I have to solve problems even when I don't want to. I don't allow my emotions to get in it. My emotions can't get in it. It has to be overridden by the principles of the Word of God because the job, my job and the job of this church, is to restore and fix things that are broken. The job of every spiritual leader, the job of every dad, the job of every leader in any church anywhere who claims to be a leader and a spiritual mature person, your job is to fix things that are broken, not to break them farther.

The Bible says, "A soft answer turneth away wrath." That's such a great verse. That's such a great verse because it's so powerfully true. We have within our vocabulary, the way God made us, we have within our ability to speak, to use the power of words to make things better or to make things worse. When you were sick as a child and you're laying in bed with 102 temperature and you're about six or seven, eight or nine years old, there was nothing anybody could do to take away your illness. Oh, you might take aspirin or something to break the fever, but that sickness had to run its course. But even though you were sick and even though you were going through a tough time as a little child, the real comfort is when your mother came in, put her arm around you and told you how much she loved you and comforted you with what you were going through. When she brought, she would check on you. "Would you like some orange juice? Would you like some crackers? Would you like some water?" And you responded to that. Even though you were sick, it made you feel better. Personally, I think it's probably part of the healing process just to have somebody there who cares.

If that same mom would have come in, looked at you in bed, threw you a bottle of water, dumped some crackers on the bed and said what my mom would have said, "You didn't listen to me, Bobby, so that's why you're sick." Ain't no comfort in that. Maybe a lot of truth, but there isn't any comfort in it. The power of words, the ability to make somebody. I even hate to say this. When we have a gathering together like volleyball, I care nothing about playing volleyball. I'm terrible at it. See you out there on the court. I'm terrible at it. I don't go there to play. But when we go over to Jason's Deli, I'm in my element. I go around, not because we get the heat, you know what, if you want to preach this, go ahead brother, I'll just let you take over. I just like being with you. I'll go around to every one of you and I'll tell you how much you mean to me. Now you may be a jerk. You may have done some really stupid things in your world, but I will not do to you what my mother did to me. I will not say to you, "I'm glad you're here, but you're a real jerk. You know, you're really messed up because," no, no, no, you don't need that. You need encouragement. You need a soft word. You need somebody in your heart and your spirit to know somebody really cares and loves you. That's what God's people need. There's enough of the negative stuff. My God, folks, we are not the Republican Party. But we act like it so many times.

This is such a great verse because it's so powerfully true. When somebody says something to you and you react backward, back to them, there's always another defense for that. Somebody says something to you that just kind of hits you the wrong way. So you should say something back that on purpose is going to hit them the wrong way. But now you've got a conflict because it's going to be a back and forth. It's going to be a defense. But I want to tell you something. There's absolutely no negative response to a soft answer. There's not.

I mean, come on, guys. You come home from work some day, every day, and immediately, you know, walk in the house, you know something's wrong with your wife. You say, "Honey, is everybody okay?" And you get no answer. So you know it's not. Or she says, "Yeah, I'm fine." You know that she's not. And you work it for a while. And finally, she says, "Okay, I am sick and tired of you not cleaning up after yourself. I just spent two hours cleaning the bathroom that you keep messing up. You won't flush the toilet. You don't wipe out your toothpaste out of the sink.

You don't put the seat down. Towels all over the floor. It's a mess. I'm sick of it. You're not 12 years old anymore. Or are you?"

Now I've never understood this toilet seat business. What's the point? Like if you put it down, it disappears, and nobody knows you have a toilet in your house. A woman went and said to me one time, "Well, when you put the seat down, it just looks better." Oh, well, then if you're ugly, just wear a hat and you'll look better. Is that how it works? I don't get it. I get the towels on the floor. Not that I do it. I get those things. I get the toothpaste in the sink. I get it. But this toilet seat business, I mean, you got to raise it up at some point. Whatever happened to being a ready Eddie? I mean, it's ready to go.

Or it's this one. You come home again. You know something's wrong. "What's wrong, honey?" "I am sick and tired of you not putting your clothes away. Instead, you just put a ball over the bedroom. Can your mother teach you anything? We look like trailer trash." I don't know what trailer trash is. I don't have a trailer. But I want to tell you this, guys. At this point in your marriage, you are at a crossroads. Whether you know it or not, and most people do not know, this is a serious thing. Most people do not know how much power you have as a Christian in every scenario you're faced with if you stay with the principles. Even though the two scenarios that I've given you, and all of you can identify with that in one form or the other, the bottom line is when you're on the short end of the stick and you know, and you get clobbered by it, you know what? You still have control to take the situation and make it 100 times worse, or take the same situation and deal with it.

You can react and blow it up and escalate it out of control. You can get into a yelling match, which many times unfortunately even in God's people turn into a cussing match. Or you can fix it. It's all up to you as the spiritual leader. You're either going to react to it or you're going to respond to it. If you say, following the proverb, "Hey honey, you're right. I do. I'm sorry. You know, with all you do, I know I cause you a lot of work. You know, it was not my intention. Sometimes I'm so sorry. I get so insensitive to you and all that you do. I take you for granted. And honey, the problem is not you. It's me. I can be such a jerk sometimes. And sometimes I, you know, I just, I really, really need to work on it."

Now, at this point, you're going to see her response start to soften. She'll say, "Well, you're not a jerk. And you are good to me, but I just need your help. I need you to help me. I'm sorry I blew up. I'm sorry I lost control. I know you have a lot going on and you do so much for us." You see, a soft answer turns away that wrath because there's no defense to it. Your ability in any scenario, not just your marriage, in any circumstance or scenario to diffuse a volatile situation. But now when you get to this point, you got to fix it.

I can see where the next question on Bible study is going to come. "What if I do all those things and she just keeps clobbering me?" Well, I preached last week about the point of no return. I mean, I don't know what to tell you. No, I'm just kidding you. Probably you have been here too many times when she's not seen any change. You stay with what is right. You start doing what is right as a real spiritual leader and it will work out in any issue, whether it's marriage, dealing

with people in a church. There needs to be somebody that will play the man for the Lord and be the leader.

Years ago when I was in the army, this was back in the late 60s, and I've never forgotten this. I was a Christian back then, but I wasn't a very good Christian. I hadn't been to church for a long time, cared really nothing about it, but I understood that I was a long way from the Lord. It wasn't like some secret that I didn't know. We had a guy in our company that was a really good Christian. I've always thought and wished that I could find this guy to tell him what a testimony it was to me and how his testimony for the Lord was really instrumental many years later.

I was stationed at Fort Devens, Massachusetts, and years after that I got an opportunity to preach in Ayer, Massachusetts, which is a little town right outside the gate of Fort Devens, Massachusetts. I told this story that night, and there was a number of young men that were in the military that went to that church. They went back and told their friends, the next service we must have had 50 to 60 servicemen to come to hear me preach, and a bunch of them got saved. I will go back and think about that young man, can't even remember his name anymore.

Every night, and you know, if you've never been in the military in the barracks at nighttime, it's a world unto itself. There's card games going on, there's music playing. It's a world unto itself. Every night he would be over at his bunk and he'd be reading his Bible. Everybody tried to make everybody turn the lights out by 10 o'clock, especially if he had to get up early in the morning, so it all kind of quieted down. But every night, that boy knelt down by his bunk with his open Bible and you could hear him ask the Lord and pray to the Lord. The rest of the guys in the barracks, they gave him a tough time. They'd laugh at him. They'd call him all kinds of names. There were three or four of them that were really pretty rowdy, and they would throw their combat boots at him while he was praying. Everybody would roll asleep and go to sleep and the lights would go out the next morning. When they woke up, they would find that those very same combat boots that they threw at him, he had polished and shined and put them back at their bunks. In time, he became one of the most loved guys in that platoon. You know why? Because a soft answer turneth away wrath. He was smart enough to know that he was in a situation. But looking back on it now with what I know about God and the Bible, I understand that he never lost control of that situation. Where the rowdy guys thought they were giving it to him, he was allowing it to happen so he could give it back to them in the right way.

III. The Tongue of the Wise vs. The Mouth of Fools

Verse two says, "The tongue of the wise useth knowledge aright: but the mouth of fools poureth out foolishness." That's a great verse. In dealing with disastrous situations, whether it be marriages or just people with real problems, do you know that the start of every long-term problem, and I don't care what it is, but the start of every long-term problem, if you would trace it back, you would go back to one or both not using the knowledge of God and the Bible that they had in every case or that they claim to have.

The verse says, "the tongue of the wise useth knowledge aright." That's an old English phrase. It means the right way, the right way of using what God has given them. You see, it's not enough

just to know the Bible, and everybody wants to know the Bible today, and that's good. I encourage that. I think that's admirable. But the real key is not only to learn it, but then to apply it. And after apply it, the real key is to use it, and most of God's people will never do that.

I just finished the book on seven pillars of marriage, a complete breakdown from the Bible on every aspect of a New Testament marriage. It started out to be what I wanted as a premarital guide for people who were going to get married, and we'll use it for that, but as I went through it, it's probably one of the best handbooks that you could ever use in dealing with somebody in a marriage, because in it, it talks about definitely the role of the man, and it defines his role, talks about the role of the woman, and defines her role. Then it defines, among a lot of other things, the role of both of them together. It's the difference between a wise man who uses what he knows and a fool who just knows nothing and keeps pouring out his foolishness.

I like the word here, "pouring out his foolishness," because a fool, when he pours it out, it goes everywhere and affects everybody. Years and years and years ago, Meredith over here, Brittany, Meredith's grandmother, Brittany's great-grandmother, her name is Myrtle Gallop. Myrtle Gallop was an incredible woman. She was a class act all the way. I never saw her that she didn't look like a million bucks. She was married to a guy, and I'll just throw this in, she was married to a guy by the name of Steve Gallop. He's passed away now. Steve Gallop was one of the greatest heroes of my life. Steve Gallop was a fighter pilot in World War II. Flew P-38s. Steve Gallop was an incredible guy. He's probably one of the greatest pilots that ever lived. I remember talking to a pastor one time that Steve used to fly for in taking places when he would preach, and I asked him, I said, "Is Steve really a good pilot?" And he says, "Steve is a great pilot. He says, when you fly with Steve, for him to file a flight plan is an insult. He gets in the plane, he knows where he's going, and he gets there." He says, "I've never felt safer flying with anybody." He could fly anything. He was in the military right up for 20 years, and he flew everything. He knew all the great guys. He knew Richard Bong. He knew all of the great fighter pilots. He flew some of the fastest, hottest stuff. He actually was on the raid when they sent out the 12 P-38s to shoot down General Yamamoto during World War II. He was an incredible pilot.

Myrtle, we all called her Murt. Murt was just a piece of work. She's still alive, by the way, isn't she? She's still alive? Yeah. How old is she now? 94. And she's as feisty at 94 as she was at 64. Well, anyway, pouring out foolishness. Not her, me. Years ago, we had a mother-daughter banquet at the church, and all of the pastors were to serve at it. So I'm one of the pastors, so I'm serving. My job was to keep their iced tea glasses filled. So I go into the kitchen. They give me a pitcher. It was one of those pitchers that's plastic, and the lid goes down in it, and then you turn it to line the hole up with it. Well, I didn't know that. So I had the pitcher, and the lid was blocking where it comes out. So first I come out of there, I see Myrtle. And I love Murt. Her husband gave me a picture. I still have it. Most cherished picture I have. It was a picture of him standing by his P-38 on Guam. The name of his plane was Double Trouble, because the P-38 had two engines on it. And he wrote on that picture to Bob Alexander, "the man who should have been my son." That was the greatest thing anybody ever gave me. And I loved it.

Anyway, I always wanted to impress Murt, because I like Murt. And I love Steve. So I'm out there coming out, and I got my black pants on and my white shirt, towel on my arm, and I'm

looking good. The first table I see is Anita, Murt. You were just a baby then. But I think Jennifer was there. So I go over there, and I said, "Murt, Myrtle, would you like some more iced tea?" She says, "Well, Bob," big smile, beautiful woman. Yes, diamonds everywhere. I mean, she made Donald Trump's wife look like a beggar. So I said, so I'm pouring it in, and it's not coming out. So I tilt a little more. It doesn't come out. Turn a little more. The whole top comes off. The whole thing of iced tea went all over Myrtle. I say that to say this. That was me pouring out my foolishness. It went everywhere. She still liked me. But that's a great verse. That's a great verse. Somebody said one time, a good answer comes from a godly nature that is relegated by a good common sense based on biblical principles and good communication. He said a good answer is like a bullet because a good answer goes faster and farther when it's smooth. And that's so true.

IV. The Omnipresence, Omniscience, and Omnipotence of God

Look at verse 3. "The eyes of the LORD are in every place, beholding the evil and the good." Now from a doctrinal perspective, this verse will be one of the three great aspects that you'll want to learn about God. If you have your wide margin Bible here and one of those little roplitograph pens, I would encourage you right here to put these in there. You got to remember, folks, you cannot go to heaven without a red pencil. You know, a good Christian will wear out a Bible about every 10 years. A halfway good Christian about every 5 years, and a worthless Christian will have the same Bible all his life. Because when you go to Bible and you take the Bible for what it is, it'll become a workhorse for you. You open up most people's Bibles, you'll find notes scribbled in there. A lot of times you'll find dried, wrinkled pages where the tears fell in it over praying over something. And you open somebody else's and it's sterile, nothing in it at all.

Now the first thing it says here, according to verse 3, it says that God sees everything. That's because God is everywhere and every place. In tech talk, technical talk about God, that'll be called omnipresent. God is everywhere and He sees everything.

The second aspect of God is that God is all knowing. He knows everything. The tech talk for that will be omniscient.

The third aspect of God, and God is in all of these, and this is theological class 101, God is all powerful, and that'll be God as omnipotent.

Along with that, verse 3 says, "The eyes of the LORD are in every place, beholding the evil and the good."

For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.

Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do.

Bible says that book discerns the thoughts and intents of our heart. That's why I tell you, when you start reading the Bible, it starts reading you. That's why people don't read it. They'll read everything else out there but the Bible. You can read Life Magazine, you can read Field and Stream, you can read all the theological books you want and you can read them but they won't read you. You start reading this one, it'll flay you. He sees it all. You bet He does.

You know, one of the greatest little unknown studies in the Bible is the study of the eyes of God. The fact that God never loses sight of man. It's actually part of the great concept of eternal security of the believer. God never takes His eye off of you.

Behold, the eye of the LORD is upon them that fear him, upon them that hope in his mercy.

The LORD is in his holy temple, the LORD'S throne is in heaven: his eyes behold, his eyelids try, the children of men.

I took a study one time, years ago. I thought there had to be something to that. And I found some of the most amazing stuff I ever found in my life about God's eyes, seeing everywhere, looking at everything. First of all, I came to the point that God never loses sight of man because God never closes His eyes. God never sleeps. In fact, when it comes to the eyes of God, God doesn't even blink. You know, a blink is 100, according to the blink experts, a blink is 100th millionth of a second. In other words, God doesn't take His eyes off of us for a millisecond.

Now once I came to that, I got a little deeper in it. I found out God doesn't blink, but God winks.

And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent:

So God sees everything, never takes His eye off us. He doesn't blink, but He winks. Now that's an incredible thought. God always sees me. He never takes His eyes off of me. He never closes His eyes. He doesn't even blink, but He will wink. But when He winks, He still has one eye on me.

Now I've studied, I saw that, I said, "Oh, I got to get into this." So I studied wink through the Bible. In the book of Psalms chapter 35 and Proverbs chapter 6 and again in Proverbs chapter 10, the wink is associated with a secret agreement. You know, you got a problem at work someplace and you're covering for somebody. The boss brings you in and the person you're covering for is sitting there and you're in the boss and he's grilling you and you say, "I don't know a thing. I just don't know a thing." And the guy out here is sweating it. You're going to say something that's going to get him fired and you don't, you protect him and you say, "Boss, I don't know." He says, "All right, get out of here." So you walk out and close the door. He's sitting there and you go. A little thing going on there.

Now, when the rapture takes place in 1 Corinthians 15:52, the Bible says it takes place in a twinkling of an eye, not a twinkling of his eyes, a twinkling of an eye, single. Now, I don't have to tell you that have any shape or knowledge at all about the Bible that the rapture of the church is a mystery. It's one of the seven mysteries given to the church and it's a mystery between God and His people. This is why people outside don't get it. It's the way a lot of God's people that are

way out of touch with God, they don't get it. It's why so many churches are denying the rapture now. You've lost the concept of any kind of real personal secret one-on-one relationship with God and it's gone. You know what God's going to do? That wink is a picture of that secret agreement between you and Him. When that rapture takes place, God's going to look down, He's going to wink. And when He winks, brother, that secret mystery revealed to the church for you and me, the rapture's going to take place and up we go. You know what? Not only does God's people don't know that, but God's people don't even know when He does wink at the rapture of the church what eye He closes and what eye He keeps open. Work on that for about 20 years.

V. The Wholesome Tongue and God's Guidance

Verse 4 says, "A wholesome tongue is a tree of life: but perverseness therein is a breach in the spirit." Now a wholesome tongue is a person who uses all he knows to declare God's glory and God's righteousness. He bears fruit with what he talks about.

The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life; and he that winneth souls is wise.

It's not just soul winning. It's you people who teach discipleship one or two. You people who go up to Lincoln or to go down to Clinton or go to Wichita. It's you people who shut down and help people and teach them the Bible. That's a wholesome tongue declaring God's glory. It's a tongue that uses the knowledge and the wisdom and the understanding that you have to show people the salvation of the Lord or show them the truth of God's word.

Everybody understands that God uses men and God uses women. In Acts chapter 8 when that Ethiopian eunuch was out there in the backside of the desert and he couldn't find the answers he was looking for, God sent him a man and that man came up and he says, "Understandest thou what thou readeest?" And he says, "How can I, except some man should guide me?" People all the time will tell you, "Well you go to that old path Baptist church, you're just following a man." Everybody follows somebody. The very guy that shows you're following a man is following somebody. Your job is to make sure you're following the right man. That's all. Everybody follows somebody. Timothy followed Paul. I mean it's all through the Bible.

A mature child of God will not force, provoke, push, shove, trick people into getting saved. He uses what he knows. A mature Christian will, with understanding of the Bible and knowing how to use it, will guide people. When I sit down with people and deal with them and they may have some horrendous problems and I understand how to fix their problem in a heartbeat because it's really so simple. But I never tell a person what to do. That's not my job because I'm not the person who has to do it. My honest way to do it and the only honest way to do it is to lay out their biblical options and let them decide which one they want to go. Lay them out, explain it, show them the pros and the cons of each one, show them what is good, better, best, so to speak. And they have to decide. They have to decide. I mean that's just the way it works. It's a simple process.

In John 16:13, John chapter 16 by the way is the definitive passage in the Bible on the Holy Spirit of God. It tells you seven things that the Holy Spirit of God does.

Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come.

See that's you applying what you learn, letting the Holy Spirit of God lead and guide you. He doesn't force you. He doesn't make you. He leads and He guides you to all truth. All right. You take what He gives you and when you work with people based on the leading and the guiding of the Holy Spirit of God and the truth that He gave you, you lead and guide them the same way. That's how it works.

VI. Despising Instruction and the Potter's House

Verse five says, "A fool despiseth his father's instruction: but he that regardeth reproof is prudent." Now here again, this is a really good doctrine and practical verse.

- Historically, we know it's Solomon's son, Rehoboam.
- Doctrinally, we know it's Exodus chapter four, the nation of Israel is God's son.
- Inspirationally, we know you and I are God's son.

Today God's instructions of learning will be through the New Testament local church. When you get into the book of Acts and you see the church formulating and being established, you'll find that everybody in the book of Acts, once the church gets revealed, does three things.

1. When they get saved, they identified with the New Testament church.
2. They got baptized in that New Testament local church.
3. They went to work in that New Testament local church.

God intended the church to be everything you need to get you what God wants you to have for what He's called you to do. For a New Testament Christian, this is where the instructions of the father came in. And yet in any ministry, any church, you will find people who come in and want to learn and then reject it and turn against not only the instruction but against the instructor. The main reason will be that they can't take reproof. They can't take reproof. God through His instructions through a New Testament local church will make you look and face some things about yourself. There is no transforming yourself as Romans chapter 12 says into the image of Christ without changing yourself.

In the Bible, human beings are likened to clay. God wants to take that clay and mold us into a vessel of honor for Him. In the book of Jeremiah chapter 18 is one of the greatest sermons that I ever heard. I heard it my first time when I was just a young guy at camp, Dr. Ruckman preached the message and draw down, going down to the potter's house. I'll never forget it because Jeremiah chapter 18 verses 1 through 4 says this:

The word which came to Jeremiah from the LORD, saying,

Arise, and go down to the potter's house, and there I will cause thee to hear my words.

Then I went down to the potter's house, and, behold, he wrought a work on the wheels.

And the vessel that he made of clay was marred in the hand of the potter: so he made it again another vessel, as seemed good to the potter to make it.

Now I want you to notice that in the passage here, and if you don't have the note in here, you might want to put this in, the passage here is the molding of the nation of Israel. But inspirationally it's the molding of you and me as this old worthless lump of clay made out of the dust of the ground in Genesis chapter 1 and 2 that is worth absolutely nothing. The holy mighty God takes and puts on that wheel and molds and shapes us into a working vessel for Him.

But in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and of silver, but also of wood and of earth; and some to honour, and some to dishonour.

If a man therefore purge himself from these, he shall be a vessel unto honour, sanctified, and meet for the master's use, and prepared unto every good work.

I want you to know, and here's where the real key of change in your life to get where God wants you to go. This is the real illustration here. He says I went down to the potter's house and there the potter put a lump of clay on a wheel. But I want you to know that just God taking you and me and putting us on the potter wheel doesn't make a vessel. It takes the hands of God that pressure you, the hands of God that squeeze you, the hand of God that molds you and makes you and fashions you and forms you. But it doesn't happen because you just go around in a stupid circle. It happens because the hands of God take you, molds you, make you, pressure of squeezing you into that perfect vessel fit for the master's use. That's how it happens. The potter applies the pressure. He shapes it. He molds it. The vessel to his pleasure. That pressure, that squeezing, that molding will be the things that we are faced with when we get into the Bible that we have to change to go any further.

Hey, the Christian life is nothing more than like any set of stairs going up any high rise building. You'll go up so many stairs and there'll be a landing. Then you'll go up some more stairs and there'll be another landing. If it's a hundred story building or an 80 story building, there'll probably be 70 different landings, every one higher than the last. That's the Christian life. You'll go up the first set of steps and when you get to the first landing, there'll be something there that you have to deal with. You went as far up those steps as you can go. And if you'll notice, not only is there a landing, but there is an exit that you can get off the stairs. That's the Christian life. You will come to the point where you go up to the first landing and then God will say, "We're not going any farther till you deal with this right here." And if you deal with it, guess what? You go up to the next landing. But when you get to the next landing, there will be something else that you have to face. And when you get to the next landing, there'll be something else. Your whole Christian life is going up the stairs to the landings and at those landings, you have to face and deal things that perfect you and get you where God wants you to go. But at any time, you can take the exit and stay on that floor. And a lot of God's people have taken the exits. They won't allow the things to change them. So they go to church. They want to learn the Bible. But through

the instructions comes change and that change comes through reproof. God's saying, "You can't do that anymore. You got to change that. You can't think that way." And the cost of learning and the cost of going up those stairs is simply too great.

I want you to notice in Jeremiah 18:4, not every vessel will yield to the pressure and he'd discard it and starts another. Let me give you some good advice. Probably the best advice you'll ever get outside of getting saved. My advice to you is this, when it comes to God molding you into His image and being His vessel, don't get discarded.

VII. Consistency in Ministry and the Local Church

In my own life, when I started this thing, I took the instruction of God very seriously. I would say if there was one word that defines me in my ministry and you've got people in here that have known me and been in my ministry for 30, sometimes 40 years, and they'll tell you this. If there's one word that defines who I am and what I am in my ministry, it will be the word consistency. I've not changed one thing I believe about that Bible in 45 years of ministry, almost half a century. My book back there, *How to Study the Bible*, which has sold well under a million copies, was written 35 years ago. Nothing has changed. You could go back to the 70s and the 80s and find my early tapes if you can find a cassette player, and you will see that I believe and teach exactly today as I did back then. I may have learned more and there's certainly a lot of things about me I had to change, but when it came to that book, there's nothing I've changed about that Bible.

Most pastors in churches today, Christians too, they're looking for some new thing to make their church exciting. They want their church to be spectacular, so they get in a competition with other churches. They bring in the big screens where you can put up all of the hymns up there, so you don't have to open your hymn book anymore. They'll put the Bible verses up on the screen. I would never do that because I know human nature. The moment I start putting the Bible scriptures up on the wall, you'll quit bringing your Bible. I know human nature, it's too heavy. My backpack's full. Everybody's looking for the fast track in ministry, the fast track of learning the Bible. So they get all of the things going. They get rock bands now and bring them in. They have light shows, the smoke coming up under. They'll dim the lights when the pastor walk out like he's something special.

Let me tell you something. If this book, this one right here, if this book isn't spectacular enough for you, if this book is not as exciting enough for you, if this book doesn't motivate you and turn you loose, you're in the wrong place. There'll be no big screens. There'll be no smoke coming up out of here. There'll be no great light show. The only thing you're going to get is that book right there. This is not a cafeteria where you can pick what you want to eat. You come, you get one meal. They want better programs. They want better worship experiences. So they'll take Baptist off their name so somebody else will think, "Oh, they're different now. They're new now." They'll call their church new beginnings. Like there was something wrong with the old beginning. Every new gimmick and trick ought to jumpstart a dead church.

I remember back when Jerry Falwell, he's dead now, that he had the Thomas Road Baptist Church in Lynchburg, Virginia. And back then, this was back in the late 70s, Jerry was the top dog with the Baptist churches. He was well known and one of the most popular figures. His Moral Majority had cast him into the light. I mean, it was the Moral Majority, probably more immoral than it was moral. He was a shining star. He was on television. So every big Baptist church had to be on television. Didn't care what it cost. Didn't care for the millions and hundreds of thousands of dollars. We had to be like Jerry Falwell. That's how you reach people. He had a pulpit, beautiful pulpit. Big white pulpit, beautiful pulpit. Every Baptist church in this country had to have a pulpit like that. Like it was the pulpit that brought in the people. Like it was television. You know, when you go on television, all you do is encourage people to stay home so they don't come to church. That's all there is to it. But everybody fell into it. Oh, everybody wanted to be like it.

Listen, the success of any ministry or any pastor or any church or any Christian for that matter will simply be to follow, listen to me, follow the instructions of the Father. The ministry is just one thing. It's a work, a lifelong work, a work through the good times and through the bad times, a work through the lean times and the fruitful times. I don't have a lot of pastor friends, maybe two or three, because most of them are worthless. All they do is go around and whine and complain about their people, what they don't have, what isn't happening, and they're looking for some shoulder to cry on that they all could go, need to go to a bar someplace and get in a corner and just cry on each other's beer.

You are the most exciting thing in my life. You are the lifeblood of this church. I've learned, just stay with the things that got you where you're at, the instructions from the Father. Know that the work of God takes time. It takes patience. I think old Jim Lake up there, Montpelier, Vermont, he labored for 30 years and Montpelier has got to be one of the hardest places in America to build a church. It ain't like Kansas City or Denver or St. Louis. Man, it is a desert and he's carved out a church that believes the book with men and women who are saying to love God. Why? Because he understood and he was willing to realize that a work of God is a work that you invest your life in.

Where do you ever get the idea that a pastor retires? Retires to what? To the old pastor's home? What do you do, sit around and exchange sermon notes? You don't retire when you're in the ministry. You fairly just, when you get 60, 65 or 70, you've just learned a lot of things. Now you're going to go out with the pastor? You don't retire. You re-fire and just keep on what God has called you to do. You know the work takes time. It takes patience. It takes long suffering. It takes commitment to a book and a commitment to the models and the patterns of the Word of God. A lifelong commitment to the people that God gives you. Understanding, fully knowing that people are frail. People make mistakes. People do dumb things. They make bad choices. People fail and people fall. We are so easy to throw somebody on the trash heap and forget that that's the exact same trash heap that God took us from.

In doing all that, know this. You will have some and come who say, "Oh, I want to learn the Bible." But at some point, they'll suddenly become the experts of the Christian life and find fault with you. They'll find fault with your teaching. They'll find fault with your preaching. They'll

find fault with what you give them in the Word of God. And they'll wind up despising instructions that you have for them. And yet, just part of the ministry, you'll get a host of young men and young ladies who really love the Word of God and will do whatever it takes to learn it. And God builds you by going down to the potter's house. He'll mold us and shape us into a team for Him to do the work of the ministry.

You've heard me say it many times and I can't say it enough. The job of the New Testament church in the book of Ephesians is simply three things in Ephesians 4:11-12.

And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers;

For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ:

But I want you to notice something. Before you can do the work of the ministry or edifying the body of Christ, you first have to perfect yourself. That's going down to the potter's house, getting on the wheel and letting them squeeze you. And that means you'll have to change some things through the instructions of the Father and the reproof.

I told you the third night when I started to learn the Bible, I dumped everything. I told God I don't care what I believe, I don't care what I've learned, I don't care what anybody's taught me. I'll throw it all away. All I want is there's not one thing I have to hang on to. I'll throw it all away. Just give me the truth. I'll change whatever I've been taught. I'll change whatever I believe. I'll change whatever I have taught to somebody. I want nothing but Your word. And brother, there were some areas in my life I had to change. That book just didn't come to me. There were some things on those levels, boy, that I had to deal with, that I had to face up and I had to simply say to God, God said to me, "Look pal, I love you, but you ain't going any farther till you fix what you got right here."

You'll never learn the truth of God's word about life until you learn the truth of God's word about yourself. You never major on the minors. You never emphasize something more than God does. You never underimpose something that God does. You stay between the white lines, scripturally, biblically, and doctrinally.

Except the LORD build the house, they labour in vain that build it: except the LORD keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain.

When it comes to your temple, either you'll build it your way or God will build it His way through His instructions to you as His children. Your job and my job is simply to take those instructions, read it, apply it, and use it. The Bible of chapter 15 is going to be a great chapter. Let's hold up. We'll pray right here. Father, we thank you and praise you for the Lord Jesus, and we do too love you.