

## 7. Dealing with Issues (1Q 2015—Proverbs)

**Biblical material:** Proverbs 17, 1 Cor. 13:5–7, John 8:1–11, Proverbs 18, Proverbs 19, Deut. 24:10–22.

### Quotes

- A typical vice of American politics is the avoidance of saying anything real on real issues. *Theodore Roosevelt*
- In matters of truth and justice, there is no difference between large and small problems, for issues concerning the treatment of people are all the same. *Albert Einstein*
- It is the characteristic excellence of the strong man that he can bring momentous issues to the fore and make a decision about them. The weak are always forced to decide between alternatives they have not chosen themselves. *Dietrich Bonhoeffer*
- Within any important issue, there are always aspects no one wishes to discuss. *George Orwell*
- The critical issues here concern what is right, what is just—not the balancing of benefits. *Carl Cohen*
- A central lesson of science is that to understand complex issues (or even simple ones), we must try to free our minds of dogma and to guarantee the freedom to publish, to contradict, and to experiment. Arguments from authority are unacceptable. *Carl Sagan*

### Questions

Why is it helpful to think of issues before they occur? How do these Proverbs summarize best advice? Is this a manual for behavior or a philosophical attitude? Why are these Proverbs so enduring? What does this say about society through the ages? In terms of our spiritual relationship with God, how do these Proverbs help?

### Bible summary

Proverbs 17-19 again deal with a variety of issues, including disputes, bribery, deception, arrogance, retaliation, wealth, evil-speaking, family matters, selfishness, shame, violence, laziness, protection, pride, humility, sickness, lawsuits, marriage, mercy, friendship, poverty, patience, anger, charity, discipline, planning, love, happiness—all human life is here! If you want some good “one-liners” on these subjects that have a depth of wisdom to them, read Proverbs carefully! 1 Cor. 13:5–7 summarizes the essence of the principle of love. Jesus’ encounter with the woman taken in adultery (John 8:1–11) is a great example of how Jesus dealt with issues. Deut. 24:10–22 adds to the advice with counsel on how to care for others, particularly in a work situation.

### Comment

We’re always dealing with “issues.” The TV news shows are not just some random reports—they are touching issues that matter to us (or otherwise it wouldn’t be news!). Behind the stories are ethical, moral, financial, even theological concerns.

Even within the church. Whether it’s ordination of women pastors or perfectionism or works of righteousness or Christ’s nature or leadership failings or

political campaigns—it's all there. Along with jewelry and dress and church standards and vegetarianism and appropriate music and movies and...

Some are more important than others, to be sure. But they are issues none-the-less. So how to deal with issues? Proverbs here gives us some good ways to think about these important questions in life. Most importantly we have to come to issues with a Christian perspective—not just theoretically or doctrinally, but with the Christian virtues of love, kindness, mercy and so on.

Then there's the issue (!) that we don't agree over issues... So when it comes to issues, and how they are considered and implemented, we need not only to establish basic principles but also to accept others who follow the same principles but relate to the issues differently.

So what is the Christian response to differences? When it comes down to it, much depends on what kind of God do you believe in. It affects the way you view every aspect of belief and practice—life itself. If God is seen as hostile and exclusive, you feel you have to make him accept you, bargain your way into heaven, and focus on works/behavior. But if God is understood to be friendly and inclusive, who only excludes those who have chosen to reject him and who have refused his offer of healing salvation—then what a different picture!

### **Ellen White Comments**

The whole spiritual life is molded by our conceptions of God, and if we cherish erroneous views of His character, our souls will sustain injury. We should see in God one who yearns toward the children of men, longing to do them good. . . . All through the Scriptures, God is represented as one who calls, woos by His tender love, the hearts of His erring children. No earthly parent could be as patient with the faults and mistakes of their children as is God with those He seeks to save. No one could plead more tenderly with the transgressor. No human lips ever poured out more tender entreaty to the wanderer than does He. O shall we not love God, and show our love by humble obedience? Let us have a care for our thoughts, our experiences, our attitude toward God, for all His promises are but the breathings of unutterable love. {TMK 263}

There are many who have but an imperfect understanding of the character of God. They think of Him as stern and arbitrary, and when the fact is presented that God is love, it is a difficult matter for these souls to lay aside their false conceptions of God. But if they do not let the word of truth in, rooting out the thorns, the briars will start up afresh, and choke out the good word of God; their religious experience will be dwarfed, for the evil of their hearts will overtop the tender plant of truth, and shut away the spiritual atmosphere. {RH June 21 1892}

Christ came to reveal to the world the knowledge of the character of God, of which the world was destitute. This knowledge was the chief treasure which He committed to His disciples to be communicated to men. The truth of God had been hidden beneath a mass of tradition and error.

Jesus came to change the order of things that then existed, and reveal to them the character of the Father. He drew aside the veil which concealed His glory from the eyes of mortals, and made manifest to the world the only true and living God, whom to know aright is life eternal. {RH November 1, 1892}