

#1549 - Sunday, March 25th, 2012, 10:00 a.m.

Pastor Don Horban, Cedarview Community Church, Newmarket, ON

HOW OPEN-MINDED SHOULD A GODLY LISTENER BE?

Proverbs 23:17-19, 23 - "Let not your heart *envy sinners*, but continue in the *fear of the Lord* all the day. [18] Surely *there is a future*, and your hope will not be cut off. [19] *Hear, my son*, and be wise, and *direct your heart* in the way.....23:23....*Buy truth, and do not sell it; buy wisdom, instruction, and understanding.*"

I think you can easily see that this is another *listening* text. "*Hear, my son, and be wise....*"(19). "*Wise*", of course, isn't referencing I.Q., but that quality of life - that *wisdom* - that knows God and His purpose and His way. The conclusion is plain and simple. I can't know God without *listening* to God carefully - listening with *faith*, as we saw last week.

But the verse that jumps out of this text is that twenty third verse - "*Buy truth, and do not sell it.*" The text describes *two* actions. One is urged and one is shunned. There's an *acquiring* of truth. It has to be *bought*. Which ties in neatly with what we studied last week about *paying* attention to God's Word. Listening doesn't just *happen*. Truth is *bought* with effort, time, consideration, and always the sacrifice of something else we value. Let me repeat that. Here's the life principle. *Knowing the deep things of God's Word is always paid for with the sacrifice of something else we value.*

Then our text describes another possible action and urges us away from it. "*Once you have acquired truth, do not sell it!*" So the wisdom of Solomon is *buy* the truth whatever it costs and don't *sell* the truth, whatever is offered. That's brilliant advice.

Dealing in matters of truth is a different kind of economics, for sure. In this world of commerce Solomon's rule makes no sense. People build empires knowing when to buy and when to sell. In fact, in a purely business sense, the only reason *to* buy is *to* sell. You can't go wrong selling what you've bought as long as you sell for more than you bought. That's what makes the free market work. That's the glory that is capitalism.

But Solomon isn't talking about money. He's talking about something much more precious. Yet even in the realm of listening to the truth the second part of those instructions troubles some people. "*Buy truth, and don't sell it!*" It sounds so *close-minded*, so *intolerant* to new possibilities. It sounds as though we are being urged to shut the door on other opinions that might come along and invite our consideration and claim our loyalty. It's as though we've already decided we will never even consider the possibility that we might hear something better - like we're almost afraid we might be proven wrong. "No matter what else comes along, no matter what else is offered, don't sell these truths. Don't barter or trade. Don't second guess. Buy the truth. Then never, never, never sell."

Can that be true? If so, what becomes of *open-mindedness*? Or, in the words of our title, *how open-minded should a Godly listener be?*" That's the issue we want to consider in this teaching.

1) EVERYONE - ABSOLUTELY EVERYONE - IS OPEN-MINDED TO SOME THINGS AND CLOSED-MINDED TO OTHER THINGS

Our own *opinions* about that statement can't take us very far because the very idea I just stated in this first point *might* be one of the things we are already closed-minded to. We need information about our minds and the way they function that's objective and from the outside. We need to hear what our *Creator* says about the natural condition of our minds. We need to know what our minds are naturally *open* to and what they're naturally *closed* to.

And what we learn first of all is very diminishing to our sense of pride and intellectual honesty:

1 Corinthians 2:14 - "The natural person *does not accept the things of the Spirit of God*, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned."

Romans 8:7-9 - "For the *mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God*, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot. [8] Those who are in the flesh cannot please God. [9] You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him."

There is so much in these verses, and they're certainly best read in the context of the entire chapters in which they're found. But the very basic and blunt idea in each of them is people *aren't* open-minded to God apart from the work of the Holy Spirit. And what makes this anti-God bias so damaging is it usually isn't a *perceived* bias. These bent-against-God people usually (note that word *usually*) don't *feel* biased against God. What they *feel* is open-minded and intellectually honest.

My point here is simply this. It is the job of the Holy Spirit to *create a bias for* God's revelation. And apart from the Holy Spirit's work, everyone (yes, everyone) possesses a *bias against* God's revelation. The absolutely objective, totally neutral, honest seeker of truth is a myth. It's the self-flattering way fallen humanity likes to imagine itself because it makes the guilt of our rebellion against God seem to disappear like the magician makes the lady in the magic closet disappear.

So here's the proper starting place. The plain truth is everyone is open-minded to some things and closed- minded to other things. No one is objectively, naturally neutral. That's the first basic Biblical point of understanding.

2) **NEVER ROMANTICIZE THE SCEPTICISM OF PEOPLE WHO SAY THEY CAN'T ACCEPT GOD'S WORD AS TRUE**

The Bible never praises the honesty of people who reject divine revelation. And we shouldn't either.

What I mean is, given what we studied in the first point - that our Creator analyzes all intellectual pursuit of God apart from the help of the Holy Spirit as fundamentally biased and self-centered - given **this** revelation from our Creator - never question the soundness or reasonableness of God's Word just because there are many who refuse to accept it. Their rejection isn't a measuring stick of the value of God's revelation.

Again, the Bible gives a clear picture of how outwardly **good** people, apart from submission to the Spirit of God, always respond to the genuine truth of God:

Romans 1:17-20 - "For in it [the gospel] the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, 'The righteous shall live by faith.' [18] For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness **suppress the truth**. [19] For **what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them**. [20] For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So **they are without excuse**."

Note that last sentence. If I tell someone that what they've done is **inexcusable** - "**without excuse**" - I'm certainly telling them they've made more than a mistake. There may well be an excuse for a mistake. Someone didn't **know** that what he or she was doing was wrong. Someone tried his best but couldn't quite measure up. There are excuses for mistakes.

When I tell someone that what he did was absolutely inexcusable I'm telling him he was **intentional** in his wrongdoing. I'm telling him he had a **bias** against doing what he knew was right. I'm telling him there was no way he could have missed his own guilt in what he did. That's what **inexcusable means**.

And that's the point of this Romans text. Because of what God has placed in every person as the inner witness of conscience and moral "**oughtness**," and because of the obvious wonder and greatness of the created order in which we all find ourselves, what we should see in their rejection of God's revelation is their obvious fallenness and sin. But we should never be lead to question the truth of God's revelation. They reject God, even very nice people, because they're **biased** against Him.

Remember this sentence as we move into our next point. This is the kind of biased world we are called to live in as disciples of Jesus Christ and listeners to divine truth. And here's what that implies for all of us:

3) **OUR MINDS CANNOT REMAIN OPEN TO EVERYTHING ELSE IF THEY ARE TO BE ANCHORED TO THE TRUTH OF GOD'S WORD**

As Christians, our minds are sacred property. But just because God **created** our minds doesn't mean they can't become addicted to bad ideas any more than just because God created our bodies they can't become addicted to cigarettes.

This is why God's Word doesn't just command the intake of truth. It also **forbids** the intake of error - **Psalm 1:1-2** - "**Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; [2] but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night**" [This is the sacrifice of time and effort we discussed earlier].

Note that "**blessedness**" is tied to a string of negatives. The "**blessed**" mind is tied to a string of **closures**. The Psalmist describes a mind that first **closes** against one thing so it can **open** to something else. That is **always** the way we "**buy**" the truth, as our opening text from Proverbs describes it.

No one is open to everything. The mind, like a gate, only swings in two directions. It's like those revolving doors in department stores. It is constantly opening and closing at the same time. To open up to God's Word you must close your mind to other things. To open up to everything else is to close your mind to God's gracious truth, whether that's what you **intend** or not.

Now the important point. There's a **reason** God's Word calls for this divinely appointed **closed-mindedness** to competing calls for your attention. And the reason **isn't** that the Christian faith can't stand up to intellectual examination. The reason is God's Word isn't calling on any of us merely to **know** its content. God's Word calls for our **devotion** and **worship**. And the worship of anything other than the true God is **idolatrous**. A person can **know** about many different philosophies and religions. But a Christian can only **bow** in loyalty and commitment and devotion before one God.

What the Psalmist recognized in those opening verses of Psalm one, and what Solomon recognized when he urged we **buy** truth and never **trade** or **sell** it, was the competition for God isn't in the **head**. It's in the **heart**. There is no competition in terms of **truth**. But there is competition in terms of love and time and consumption and devotion.

What's more, our fallen minds aren't objective. They are **drawn** to vanity and idolatry. What that means is the things we put into our ears

and minds don't just sit there gathering dust. Long after the TV is off, or the internet is cooled, or the movie isn't playing, those ideas - those things you gave your attention to - are sprouting seedlings in your soul.

And that leads to my closing point:

4) **IF YOU DON'T CLING TO GOD'S WORD DAILY THERE WILL COME A HOSTILE TAKE-OVER - AN AUTOMATIC BUY-OUT - OF YOUR MIND AND HEART**

If you are open-minded to everything you can't follow Christ. And when I say "**can't**" follow Christ, I'm not just making a comment about your intellectual capacity. I mean "**can't**" in the sense of not being "**allowed**." Jesus won't allow anyone to follow Him as one of several interests.

Remember this key text - **Mark 4:24-25** - "**And he said to them, "Pay attention to what you hear: with the measure you use, it will be measured to you, and still more will be added to you. [25] For to the one who has, more will be given, and from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away."**

What a thought! In the process of genuine listening it's either constant **increase** or constant **decrease**. As followers and worshipers of Christ, we actually never stop "**buying truth**." We constantly open to Christ by closing to the usurpers of His rule. There's always a price for free grace. So let your mind be **open** and **closed**. Let it be open to the truth of God's Word and let it be closed to the clamoring counsel of the ungodly. You're the temple of the Holy Spirit.