

Good and Evil
The Book of Proverbs
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Bible Text: Proverbs 14:20-35
Preached On: Sunday, February 24, 2019

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Well, let's take our Bibles once again and look at Proverbs 14 as we work our way through the book of Proverbs and today I want to speak with you about good and evil.

There is a great amount of debate today in the world as to what is good and what is evil and it seems that as time goes on and particularly natural-minded men debate what is good and what is evil, it is ever changing. That's because there's no absolute in men's minds and such the depravity of men's hearts. It really goes all the way back to the garden where the Lord told Adam and Eve, "Of every tree of the garden you may eat except for the tree of the knowledge of good and evil." Men today run around worrying about keeping 10 Commandments when from the beginning Adam was not even able to keep one, and ever since the fall, every one of his seed coming into this world has come in with a fallen nature, and yet men still with that fallen nature blindly try to determine what's good and what's evil, and I liken that tree of good and evil to the religion of the day. People get tired of living on this branch and so they jump over to another one, they change religions, but it's still just a different aspect of what they call good and evil, and we know as objects of God's grace, that the only good is God. In fact, that's what that word "good" means. It's the English version of the word God. And the only way we know what is good because it pertains to God, is because of the Spirit of God being in us, opening our eyes to see that anything pertaining to us is evil.

You see, that's where the debate is because you've got people today that say, "Well, no, it's not, man isn't all that bad." Well, in essence what they're doing is as it says in Isaiah 5:20, "Woe unto them that call good evil and evil good." When they call evil good, they're doing that when they say of man, "Well, he's not all that bad." So you're taking something that God declares to be evil and saying something good, trying to make something good. But it's still, I don't care if an apple is rotten on certain parts of it or not, it's still rotten. Now we're not as bad as we could be because of God's restraining hand but nonetheless, in our nature it's as evil as ever could be.

So Solomon here is taking up this subject from verse 20 right down to verse 35. God granted Solomon this wisdom, the very Spirit of Christ being in him, to ponder these things and to put together these Proverbs that I liken to pearls on a chain of a necklace, and you can study each one of these pearls in and of itself or put together and you can see

the whole of it, and that's what he is describing here for us, for our learning, for our understanding. How good is good? Well, it has to be just as good as God is or it's not good. How evil is evil? Well, any part of our nature that you look at, no matter how you cut it, you're gonna find evil, and it portrays itself in how we live and how we act toward one another and how we view even God. So I pray that the Lord would grant us his Spirit as we read down through here.

Let's have a word of prayer and then we'll begin with verse 20.

Gracious Father, I thank you for your mercy and grace. I thank you for bringing us together here today, how we need this time apart. We live in this world and we encounter so many different situations that but for your grace we could not go on. I'm thankful that you are pleased by your grace and mercy to love such sinners like as we are and that that love is in the Lord Jesus Christ, and that so great was that sin that he came into this world and took all of it upon himself for those that you gave him, and therein we stand holy and righteous before you, not in ourselves but in him. So I pray that as we study your word, you would grant us eyes to see and ears to hear and hearts to receive all that you have for us today and we give you thanks and praise and honor and glory in our dear Savior's name. Amen.

Here it says in Proverbs 14:20,

20 The poor is hated even of his own neighbour: but the rich hath many friends.

You stop and think about what it is to be poor and the world is full of poor people. In fact, Christ said you have the poor always with you. So in that poverty, who considers his neighbor? But it says, "the rich hath many friends." That rich person, that one who has wealth, has his friends among the rich, not among the poor. Our Lord told the Pharisees, "Don't consider yourselves righteous because you invite your friends to supper. Why don't you go out in the highways and byways and invite in the halt and the lame and the maimed and sit them down for supper?" And he was saying that because these were ones who thought themselves to be righteous, in fact, thought themselves to be blessed by God because they had all these riches.

That kind of carries over today, doesn't it? You've seen those late model vehicles and on the front it has on the license plate spot there, "Blessed." That's what the world considers to be a blessing, that I don't have to deal with the poor anymore. But here's the amazing thing about the Gospel is that the Lord Jesus Christ came to seek and to save that which was lost, the poor, and while the world may not consider the poor, the Lord Jesus Christ does. In fact, it is those, in fact, in Matthew 5 the Lord said, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of God." Whether a person has wealth or not, whether this world ever considers one in this state or not, we know from Scripture that the grace of God is upon those who have nothing. And we're not talking about just physically but we're talking about spiritually, "Blessed are the poor in spirit."

And there are many today that think themselves to be rich and yet in reality have nothing. Their richness in their minds is based upon supposed good works and just like the Pharisees, they love to sound a trumpet as they are going to worship and gather people around and just throw a few little dollars here and there and say that they're caring for the poor, but all of that is self-serving. They do it to be heard and seen of men and in the end that's no riches at all. In fact, they're in a worst state than those that they appear to be helping.

But think about what it is to be poor spiritually, hated even of his own neighbor. When I consider how the Lord has taught me, because I was once of that number, thought myself to be rich and yet in reality was poor, had nothing, the Lord had to show me that everything that I thought to be riches was nothing but filthy rags just like it says in Isaiah. He stripped me of all of that and showed me that one righteousness that the Lord Jesus Christ came in this world to earn and establish and God imputed there at the cross upon Christ who completed the work, and I had to be brought to that point by the Spirit of God to lay me low and to show me that any sort of righteousness that I thought I had was absolutely nothing and that the only true righteousness that God has ever approved and accepted is that of his Son the Lord Jesus Christ.

So I'm thankful but here's the amazing thing, when you are established before the world as that poor one, you're even hated of your own neighbor. It's amazing to me that when it pleased God to reveal Christ in me and stop me in my tracks, I thought everybody would be joyous and excited about the work of grace that the Lord had done in my heart, but I found just the opposite because those who considered themselves to be rich, and it says there in verse 20, have many friends, when I look around in places of worship, parking lot is packed and people all rushing and going and they all have their programs and they have their friends and they have everything, they don't have time to sit down and to consider a poor one such as I hope some of us sitting here that declare that apart from the Lord Jesus Christ and God's righteousness imputed alone in him, I have nothing. I have nothing of which to boast. I will tell you, you're not gonna have many friends. That's why where the Gospel is preached in truth, Christ exalted, where how he is in all his glory, you're not gonna find big crowds but I'll tell you who you'll find is the poor because that's who the Lord Jesus Christ came to seek and to save, to draw unto himself, sinners such as we are.

Now in verse 21, so you can see good and evil, the religious world, the self-righteous world calls the poor in spirit evil. They see no good in a message that does nothing but abase man. They want to go where they're exalted and where they're lifted up. You have the same thing today even with regard to disciplining children. They say, "Well, don't discipline your children. What we want to do is build up their self-esteem." As if that's a problem. Children by nature have a huge self-esteem. They don't want to hear that they're sinners. They don't want to hear that God is just and holy and that unless the Lord Jesus Christ has paid their sin debt they'll be cast into utter darkness. People push back on that. They say, "No, no, these are good children. We just have to raise them right and then they'll be alright." They want to build their self-esteem when the Scriptures and there it is, calling good evil and evil good. The Scriptures declare there is none righteous, no, not

one. David said he came forth from the womb speaking lies and that we sin because we're sinners. We're not sinners because we sin. But still there's that view that somehow we can avoid this if we just build up the good in man, flame the fire, it's there, we just have to flame it. You see, all of that is turning everything on its head, what God says.

Verse 21 says,

21 He that despiseth his neighbour sinneth: but he that hath mercy on the poor, happy is he.

Think about when our Lord said of the Pharisee over in Luke 18, if you look there with me. There were two men that went into the temple to pray and here in Luke 18 our Lord describes these to whom he directs this parable. Notice what it says, "he spake this parable unto certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and," what? "Despised others." That's what a works message, works religion does. It causes men to think of themselves more highly than they ought to think and they look down their noses at those that don't match up, don't compare with who they are.

First of all, the first error is they trust in themselves that they were righteous. You don't have to teach anybody to trust in themselves. That's how we're all born in this world. Left to ourselves, we will trust in ourselves that somehow we are righteous and you'll hear this message being preached all over, "God is love. God loves you. Has a wonderful plan for your life." And you talk about building up self-esteem, is when preachers say to sinners, "If you'll just accept God's gift. That's all he's doing, he's just waiting for you to accept the gift then you can be saved." What does that do? It puts power in the hand of the sinner that, "Oh really? God's waiting for me to do it? I made my decision. I have decided to follow Jesus." All of that is trusting in yourself that you're righteous; that I have the ability or the capability of deciding my own fate.

And the second part goes with it, despising others, despising those that don't meet up to your standard, and that's what you see also in works religion. You've got people preaching against others in society that they consider to be evil, thinking themselves to be better, and looking down their nose at such as this man here.

And notice they both went to worship. Here it says, "Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus," but here's an important part of this verse not to miss, "with himself." A lot of what people call praying isn't praying. All they're doing is expressing their own thoughts.

And I find this interesting as well, the fact, the way that he generically addresses God. Not, "Our Father which art in heaven, hallowed be thy name." To pray, the Spirit of God gives that spirit to know God in truth as the Father and whose name is to be hallowed, all the glory going to him. Here, "The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God." We hear a lot of those generic prayers today. We don't want to offend anybody so, God, or the Mighty One, you'll hear these sorts of ways.

And notice, "I thank thee," so you say, well, he started off right. No, he didn't. Look what's underneath, "I thank thee that I am not as other men are." How many times do you hear preachers preaching as if they're righteous and everybody else isn't, and so I'm addressing this word at you and if you don't make yourself right with God, then this is what's gonna happen to you. You. You. You.

"Thankful that I'm not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican." What is he doing but despising others, considering himself to be better than? The next time you hear somebody talking that way, down at others, "Isn't society so evil and isn't it terrible what So-and-so does and how So-and-so's living or what So-and-so is doing," you just stop and say, "Let me just ask you one thing. Turn that light on yourself. Are you any better? Are you any different?" People will halt at that. "Well, you know." They kind of shrug it off. "I know we're all sinners but not like that." You see, there again it's a matter of calling evil good and good evil because they consider themselves to be good when in reality they're just as evil as the one's they're pointing their finger at.

Now stop and think about, when you think about even our private conversations, this is in our nature to be this way, despise others and speak well of ourselves. In reality that's what you're doing. When you put somebody else down, what you're thinking is, "I'm better. I've figured this out." When in reality that thought alone shows that you've never really seen yourself as you are in truth.

And what a difference, I mean, he continues in verse 12, "I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess." You can't be in front of such religious people very long before they continue to talk about their works, what they do, and they're boasting in themselves. They don't see that as an evil.

But here it says, "He that despiseth his neighbour sinneth." You don't even have to go out and be a bank robber, you don't even have to go out and run the gamut of the brothels or kill somebody, just despise your neighbor, and that alone is enough to condemn the soul. I know when you hear that, you say, "Well, then who can be saved?" Exactly. It's not in ourselves, it's in the Lord Jesus Christ. He alone is the one who perfectly satisfied God's law and justice in every respect, not just in word and deed but thought.

You think about all those that came at the Lord Jesus Christ in every way possible and yet says, "He opened not his mouth." He didn't even have an evil thought toward them. The writer to the Hebrews said, "He endured the contradiction of sinners against himself."

Now ask yourself, if my sins nailed Christ to the cross, then even this is what he bore because we can get just like these who despise their neighbor with regard to those that crucified our Lord Jesus Christ and say, "Oh, look what they did to him. If I would've been there, I wouldn't have done that." Oh, yes you would. In fact, unless the Lord Jesus paid your sin debt, even for that, then that debt remains upon you throughout eternity.

And here's what I love about verse 13, here's the fool. The publican, in the first century the publicans were despised and, in fact, they were very rich just like the Pharisees. The Pharisees considered their richness based upon their working out that righteousness but they looked down their nose at the publicans. The publicans were the tax collectors. Who likes a tax collector? And especially the publicans were Jews who were collecting taxes on behalf of the Roman government, so that was doubly hateful. "How can you collect taxes from us and offer these to the Roman government?" Well, what they did, they double taxed because they had to live off this themselves.

They were despised and yet here's one that although despised by his neighbor, yet was an object of mercy because like it says back here in verse 21, "but he that hath mercy on the poor, happy is he." Stop and think about that word "happy" means "blessed is he." Stop and think about who it is that God has purposed to save. Sinners. Who is it that Christ ate with and drew the ire and the condemnation of these others over here who considered themselves to be righteous? He ate with publicans and sinners, thankfully so, else how could there be any hope for such a one as I? We just sang that, "Amazing grace, how sweet the sound, that," what? "Saved a wretch like me."

That's not just a word put in there but that describes such as we are and it's like this publican who had wealth and yet in this instant considered himself to have nothing because it says there, "He stood afar off." That's what poor people do. They don't want to be in close. Shoo them off. He stood afar off and "would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner." I know you might look at that and say, "Well, the Pharisee said God and here the publican said God." But the way this publican was led by the Spirit to address God, that word means absolute Sovereign. It means that it is in your hands to be merciful or not.

And the fact that he dare not even as much as set his eyes toward heaven but smote his breast, what we have here is a sinner that the Spirit of God had brought and laid low, and when he said, "God, be merciful," that word "merciful" is the same word used of the mercy seat. Here's one crying out unto God, his sovereign judge, he has the right to make alive or to kill, but begging for mercy not for anything in himself but looking toward that mercy seat because here they are in the temple, what was in that temple but the mercy seat. Who was there but the priests that went in with those sacrifices, at this time Christ had not yet died, offering up those sacrifices. He saw himself as that poor and needy one and that without this mercy of God through the mercy seat upon which the blood was sprinkled and put once a year, he had no hope, and therefore he said, "God, be merciful to me a sinner." That's all he had to say about himself is that he was a sinner and yet in that hope for mercy.

That's what verse 21 is all about in Proverbs 14, coming back. You've got the Pharisee described, the self-righteous one, looking down his nose at others, despising them, and then you've got this poor one. When it says, "he that hath mercy on the poor," stop and think if you're the Lord's, you know that that mercy came from God himself and therefore, "blessed is he." That's what the word "happy" is. It's not talking about us going around and doing some good deeds. You hear people say, "Well, I did my good deed for

the day. I saw a homeless man down there in the corner and I opened my wallet and I gave everything that I had in my wallet." You say, "Well, how much did you have in your wallet?" They say, "Well, I've been around. I had \$3 so I gave it."

That is the kind of sounding of the trumpet and the giving of the alms that describes the Pharisees. It's not what we do when it says here, "he that hath mercy on the poor, happy is he," he is worthy to be blessed. He being God in the Lord Jesus Christ and who am I that he should be merciful to me, the sinner? I'll tell you, when the Lord teaches you in that way, you from that point forward never ever, first of all, will have anything good to say about yourself because he's opened your eyes, and you'll never have anything evil to say about anybody else because you know yourself to be the greatest.

That's why Paul even as a regenerated sinner, redeemed by Christ, chosen of God, yet at the end of his ministry when he was writing to Timothy, what did he say? "This is a faithful saying worthy of all acceptation that Jesus Christ who came into this world to save sinners," now what did he say at the end? Not of whom I was chief. You see there are a lot of people running around today that feel like, "Well, I know I used to be pretty evil but then I've turned over a new page and I dedicated my life to Jesus and now I'm not what I once was. I thank God I'm not what I once was." What a deception. We never stop being sinners. Paul said, "of whom I am chief," present tense. He never stopped being that sinner in need of mercy.

Oh, how blessed are the poor because that's what a poor is. Spiritually speaking, we talked about being so poor we can't rub two nickels together. Spiritually we have nothing. Nothing. Even now when the God by his Spirit causes me to look within, there's nothing in here that could ever commend me to a holy God for which God would look upon me and say, "Well, Ken, you've dedicated your life to preaching the Gospel, you went over to Africa and preached for years over there, you're continuing to do my work and my will, so for that reason, well done, faithful servant." No. There was a day when I used to think that to my shame, but now I say over and over again, my only hope, my only plea, is that when Christ died, he died for me. That's what it required to save a wretch like me, the very death of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul said, "If righteousness come by law, in other words by my keeping it or my observing it or my thinking I'm doing it, Christ is dead, you make the death of Christ of none affect by so doing." That's not how those think, that's not how those reason, and even there I say, that's where many are calling good evil and evil good. They call what God declares to be good actually is evil when they say, "Well, it's what Christ did plus what I do." What you're doing is taking what is precious to God the Father and that is the perfect righteousness of his Son and his blood shed, and you're saying it's not sufficient, that it requires me doing something to fulfill it. He and me. That's the modern day religion but that's the depravity and it's calling evil good.

You say, "How is it calling evil good?" When men think that somehow they even have the ability or the power to reason or to make a decision. That's why you won't find in the Scripture and this shocks a lot of people but I challenge you to go and look it up in your

concordance. Put in the word "responsibility" in Scripture. Go ahead and do it. Just run in there, you won't find it one time and yet that is the big message of the day. God's done all he can do, now you are responsible to make it effectual. That's calling evil good because in the word "responsibility" you hear "responsible, response, able to respond." None of us is able in any way to come to Christ, to come to God and to seek him other than the Spirit of God and Christ told that big crowd that that day, he said, "None come to me except it be given of the Father, unless the Father draw him." And for that reason many were offended and went their way and turned away.

You wonder why those that actually the Lord has taught means such small numbers. It's not a popular message. Men want to be exalted. They consider themselves to be good when they're evil and they're calling evil that which the Scriptures declare to be good. It's good. Do you know what the Gospel, the word "Gospel" means? Good news. It's not good news telling sinners God's done all he can do and now the rest is up to you. There's no good news there. That's like going out to a graveyard and telling those that are dead, "If you'll just make the first move, then God will do the rest." That's not how the Lord addressed Lazarus. He said, "Lazarus, come forth!" How many dead people came forth that way? One. How many other dead people were all around there? Lots. It was a graveyard. But one came forth. Why? Because that was the one that the Lord came to deliver. All the rest remained where they were.

So we live in a world where by left to ourselves we're always gonna call what's good evil. Men will continue to contest the truth that God is sovereign and that he saves whom he will. Boy, they find that as evil. If you don't believe it, just put that out there in this religious world. Those that call themselves Christian, they don't know God. In fact, when you address them as to who God is and his right to save whom he will and condemn whom he will, oh, that's evil, and they'll go through the Bible and try to prove it's otherwise.

If you really want to find people calling good evil, declare what the Scriptures declare that there's no such thing as free will. You talk about a big message today, "Boy, whoa, wait a minute, you're telling me that man doesn't have the power to decide?" Nope, because we're born in this world dead in sin. A dead sinner has nothing to say or to do, he lays there dead until such time as it pleases God to reveal Christ in him. That's why our Lord told Nicodemus, "You must be born again, born from above." And the Spirit is like the wind, it blows where he wills but you can't tell where it comes or where it goes. So it is, Christ said, of those that are the children of God. You talk about people getting angry and upset. They're going to find fault with that. You just hit their idol. But I'm telling you to say in any way that man has within himself the power to decide and choose, what you're doing is calling evil good because all that's in here is evil but you're saying, "Oh no, there's some good in it, we just have to flame the fire."

But again, if you want to see where people are in their darkness, preach that Christ didn't shed his blood for every single person in the world. Oh man, they will hate you. They will say you're a false preacher. They'll say unto you that you're doing a lot of harm by preaching that, and yet that's exactly what the Scriptures say. Christ didn't come to. In

fact, in his high priestly prayer in John 17:9, it's right there so plain as day it just smacks you in the face when the Lord opens your eyes to see it. Christ said, "I pray not for the world but for those that thou hast given me." And there's an outcry. People say, "Oh no, he must not have meant that." They start trying to pervert the Scriptures.

Such is that nature and when it says here in Proverbs 14:21, "He that despiseth his neighbour sinneth," we're talking about people despising the Lord Jesus Christ. They despise this Christ. They despise this God all the while saying they're believers. They will not have him to reign over them. But oh, the joy of knowing that he has mercy on the poor, to say, "I have nothing," and that if God has not done the saving, I'll not know salvation. If Christ has not paid the debt, I'll not know salvation.

Verse 22 says,

22 Do they not err that devise evil?

That's what it is. The word "devise" to devise evil there means to plow a field, they continue to plow it and plow it and dig it and delve it, and yet all it is is just dirt. Nothing comes of it. In other words, all their life that's all it is. That would be our case but for the grace of God.

But it says again,

but mercy and truth shall be to them that devise good.

How can any devise good but by the Spirit of God, looking to Christ alone and his finished work alone, and the salvation only in him? And therein mercy and truth. Do you see those two words together? Where are they met? God's a holy God, he can't just look the other way when it comes to our being sinners? Well, that's truth. How can God show mercy? How can God be just and justified without lowering his standard? Well, the answer's in the cross, that the wrath that God's people that he purposed to save was put upon the Son, and that righteousness that he obtained, he earned it, he merited it, he worked it out, now is put to the account of those for whom God shows mercy.

Therein is the salvation of the Lord and I'm thankful that the Lord has been pleased to teach any one of us of this, but if we know what good is, it's only by the Spirit of God. None good but God. That's it. And thank God I know what evil is but be careful, don't go out there and say, "Well, that neighbor across the street or that group of people downtown, that's them over there." That sort of reasoning shows automatically you don't know what evil is because if I were to ask you, "What is evil?" and your eyes would be in here right here. Who can know it. The heart is deceitful above all things, who can know it? Our mouths should be stopped, completely shut. When you hear people starting to talk about others, "Aren't they horrible? And did you hear what they did?" But for the grace of God, there go I. I know that I have but one righteousness and I can only call one good and that is my Lord Jesus Christ. Apart from that, I'm nothing but evil.

So I pray the Lord would grant us that spirit and, Lord willing, we'll continue on in this chapter next time. We'll meet back here in just a few minutes.