

Monday Evening Bible Reading Group: 25 March-15 April

Monday 25 March: Ecclesiasticus 7: 1-36: Host Andy, Lead David: Warnings regarding moral and social life. Worth reminding ourselves that we are reading what a grandson wrote in a foreign country, trying to be faithful to his grandfather's traditional teaching, while having his own ideas and dealing with changing ways of thinking and behaving. Individually and collectively, we face the same challenges. What are "For Ever" truths; what are ideas that pass? "It says it in the Bible" doesn't automatically mean we have to run with it. For people of faith, what the law allows and social norms are not all we need to have regard to in making personal decisions. But neither can we rely on Bible heroes to show us the way: "wise" Solomon was hardly a model for male/female relationships!

"Don't do evil, and you won't suffer evil":really?? On the other hand, the advice not to let one slip up make you a permanent slipper up sounds good! A bad mistake does not have to become a bad habit. Religious observance and good/wise behaviour run together: praying well and behaving badly are not compatible. (Though experience suggests that non-praying people can be very good citizens.) NEVER lie? Jewish culture did respect manual work. That wasn't true of all classes in all cultures. I think of Winston Churchill: public school boy, writer, artist, politician statesman, and bricklayer. Adam was a gardener. Slavery taken for granted; but loving your slave is something else. Norms for family discipline and marriage of daughters and divorce (a male prerogative then) have changed enormously, *in some parts of the world.*

The best advice you were ever given?

Monday 8 April: Ecclesiasticus 8: 1-19. Host Andy, Lead Peta. Wrong attitudes to others. Ecclesiasticus is rather prone to label people – that can establish an attitude towards them, and the attitude shapes the behaviour. Even a sort of neutral label such as "ex-offender" tells only one part of the story; and suggests "not to be trusted". Imagine labelling everyone as "Not yet detected offender"! There are a lot of "Illegal Immigrants" who came for very good reasons, have become legal, and are now self-supporting model citizens. There seems to be a slightly unhealthy emphasis on the damage you do to yourself by wrong attitudes to others: both Jewish and Egyptian virtue teaching did tend to emphasise self-interest. Maybe self-interest is not the most important aspect of human relationships? There is a sort of in-between approach, along the lines of "How would you feel if.....?"

Any of the tips given here that you want to high-light.....or challenge?

Monday 15 April: Ecclesiasticus 9.1-10.3: Host Andy, Lead Miranda. Dangerous women, other men, politicians. Oh dear, so like the situation in the extreme Islamist states in 2024: hide women under a sack and keep them in the kitchen, and men will get on just fine. To which my reaction is blindfold men, and shackle them, and women will get on just fine. There are perhaps areas of mutual responsibility: I remember my female boss saying to

some of her younger female staff: "This is the office, not the beach". Have we de-genderised employment, including top jobs enough? Why is it that what the top male wears is of relatively little interest; while what the top female wears almost inevitably attracts comment?

Advice on choosing your friends again seems a little stuck in the self-interest area of concern – partly perhaps because it taps into Egyptian civil service training.

If you were a Prime Minister choosing a Cabinet, what would you be looking for?