

Monday Evening Bible Reading Notes: July 1, 8, 15

July 1: Ecclesiasticus 21.1-22.5: Host Andy, Lead Miriam: Controlling sin – Unintelligent people – 3 kinds of immoral behaviour. You don't have to keep on sinning: it is not an addiction; and repentance and a fresh start are always possible. However, bad habits can become just that, and are not easy to get away from – especially if they give you some sort of "reward" (like being in with others who are doing the same thing). I may have quoted before the boy, who when the conversation turned dirty, just walked away. He was actually respected by the dirty talkers. It is sometimes difficult for others to welcome the repentant sinner – not all firms will give someone with a criminal record the second chance they need. Being constrained by the Law is good; but being constrained by self-respect is even better.

Bad behaviour can bring down the rich as well as the poor (though the rich have better lawyers). You and God know yourself better than anyone else – only be honest with yourself about yourself!

The advice not to build a house on borrowed money sounds a little odd in the days of mortgages and parents having to help with down-payments.

The idea of controlling thought to control actions makes sense: you can think yourself into bad things. Prayer

"Unintelligent" is more about deliberate stupidity –not wanting to learn - than about folk with intellectual limitations. People with intellectual limitations can and do learn, and can indeed be wise. Think first and then speak is always good advice, though not always what we actually do.

Tale-telling, Idleness, Uncontrolled Anger, and Ingratitude would be on most of our not-to-do lists. Is there an evil force/power, or not? And does it actually matter, since having a devil does not take away our personal responsibility?

Interesting that the bad sons and the bad daughters get equal space, though maybe not equal treatment.

July 8: Ecclesiasticus 22.6 to 23.6. Host David, Lead Evan. More on deliberately stupid people. Friendship. A prayer for self-discipline. Important not to label as stupid people who simply don't share your prejudices. The emphasis is on sound common sense, which means thinking about motivation, thinking about consequences – for other people and for self; and thinking long-term and short-term. Don't be swayed by social media: focus as far as possible on what you really know. Beware the crowd – which is quite tricky where "democracy" means the vocal majority.

A strong, clear, consistent view is great in many ways; but how to combine this with willingness to listen and learn?

Good friendships and good friends are important. Reconciliation is an important word in the context of friendship: each recognising the realities of the other. Self interest can creep in: making and keeping friends who might be useful to you.

I like 22.27: mouth discipline. The warning against taking up an “I’m better than you” approach to others is timely; though it is quite hard to do the virtue/vice contrast without adopting a superiority stance. There is an interesting question about the relationship between religious morality and secular morality – between which the writer shifts. I’m not sure that the two things are all that different, though the secular approach maybe has a greater tendency to highlight self-interest?

Avoid unhealthy desire, gluttony, and dangerous passion. Sounds good.

July 15: Ecclesiasticus 23.7 – 27: Host David, Lead Toyin. Speech. Discipline. Adultery. Bad language sounds a relatively minor issue, and some folk use blasphemous or sexual bad language without even recognising the connection. A teacher friend asked a swearing student to explain what his swear words meant; and he didn’t have a clue. Keeping your word makes moral sense – except in relation to a promise which should never have been made in the first place. Mis-naming God is more sensitive for some believers than for others; but not taking God’s Name in vain is good practice even for non-believers. Why hurt someone un-necessarily?

The advice to think about your family when being yourself is good advice. Most of us don’t live in isolation. The other side of the coin is of course that when you want to do or say the right thing, should you be put off by the risk to your family of doing the unpopular right things.

Adultery has seldom been smiled on: King David was condemned for it, at a time when top people could have as many wives as they could support. Today’s “open relationships” school of thought has the excuse of being consensual – a sort of modern equivalent of polygamy or polyandry. In most cases, the obvious objections to adultery are betrayal of trust, breach of contract, undermining of family stability. In Jewish society, adultery was, at least in theory, punishable by death until AD 40. Obviously, the possible outcome of adultery is the birth of a child - for whom the consequences are on-going.

This is the end of the first third of the Book.