

The Bible's Importance In Our Life

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[0 : 0 0] I will return with me pleased to the book of Proverbs, we will find our text for this morning, in the book of Proverbs chapter 29 and at verse 18, Proverbs 29 verse 18, where there is no prophetic vision, the people cast off restraint, but blessed is he who keeps the law, the law there being as it is often in Proverbs, more than just the commandments of God, it really stands for the whole testimony or the word of God, so that you find here it balanced in the verse the word of God, the law of God balanced against the casting of restraint mentioned in the first part of the verse. Now we are all very aware that language changes over time and that certain words that we use today will not have the same meaning in 10 or 15 years time or whatever, and that words that are a certain meaning even 10, 15 years ago don't continue to have that same meaning today in the primary emphasis that we give to them. We sing for example in the older style Psalms the word prevent, Psalm 21, for thou with blessings him prevents, and the word prevent now means to try and stop or to stop someone doing something, to stop something taking place, whereas in the context of the Psalm it meant to go before, to lead, to go ahead of, the blessings that went ahead of as the Psalmist was saying there, it's a Psalm really about a prophecy about

Jesus and about his exaltation and so on and continuing intercession. You're very aware of the fact of James for example chapter 2 verses 2 and 3 makes a very important point that we should not judge by appearances and talks about those coming into church wearing different kinds of clothes and one of the words used there is the word gay, him that has the gay clothing you wouldn't prefer them over others that don't have, and of course the word gay has changed in its meaning so that we now have commonly that word used for something else, something to do with a particular lifestyle so that translators of the word of God are constantly in need of looking for alternative words where words have taken on a different meaning and a meaning that would give a very different impression to somebody reading it that was just using a word that was used in the common parlance of the day and that doesn't mean that we need to be blasé about how we change words or use alternative words, we have to sometimes confine ourselves to words that have traditionally been used in the Bible such as the word propitiation for example and just explain it, there's not very much you can do about that as an important theological concept. So we have to find alternative words rather than just go through a complex reasoning as to how the word has changed in its meaning. When you come to this version Proverbs verse 18 where there is no prophetic vision the people cast off restraint. It's a word in the older version in the authorized version

I have nothing against the authorized version whatsoever, I grew up with it, I love it, I still use it but in the old authorized version the verse says where there is no vision the people perish.

That has often been used in the past to refer to vision in the sense that which we nowadays would use the word vision even in a church context because you often find the word vision used like for example yourselves you need to have vision as a congregation, vision is something that comes into your planning, into your looking to the future not only in terms of praying but looking as to see what is required of us in order to prepare the way for the gospel for the next generation of people coming into the church and so on. We need vision, we need that sort of vision so that we have a strategy and that strategic planning and which assessments and conclusions and act upon those but that's not the meaning of the word in this verse and that's why it's wrong to say where there's no vision the people perish in other words if we've no evangelistic vision if we've no outreach the people perish and that's by and large that's true if we don't engage in gospel work then obviously people are going to perish if they don't hear the gospel if they don't come to value the gospel and benefit from the gospel but that's not what this verse is actually saying to us so we're going to spend a bit of time briefly just looking at how the verse has been misunderstood and misapplied and then we'll come to the meaning of the verse and what it really says. As I said it's been and thirdly we'll look at the verse as a text for our times because it is really a text for our times very much so. So as I said the verse has been misunderstood and misapplied in the way that traditionally if you like it's been thought of whether there's no vision the people perish but the word actually means vision in the sense of vision in the sense of God providing us with knowledge of himself or knowledge of ourselves in other words the word revelation which is how the NIV translates it for example there is no revelation of God that people cast off restraint or abandoned restraint so while it's important to have a vision for evangelism and outreach and so on the text is really saying where there is no revelation from God where the revelation of God does not come to the fold where it's not actually available or where it's put aside where it's set aside the people cast off restraint there's a very direct connection between the word of God and knowing the word of God and following the word of God and our behavior because when you put the Bible aside as we'll see later then obviously things follow as a result or in consequence of that in terms of people's way of life people's behavior people's conduct people's relationships there's a drastic effect upon people's relationships and personal lives when the Bible is actually taken and displaced now we read in first Samuel chapter 3 and that gives us an insight into the meaning of this word vision here which really means prophetic vision or revelation from God just to mind you of what we read there where it says now the young man Samuel was ministering to the

Lord and the Eli and the word of God was rare in those days there was no frequent division in other words there was a gap before Samuel actually became established as a prophet of the Lord there was a gap or there was certainly a rarity of the Lord communicating his will to the people Samuel was going to be the next stage or the person in whom God was again going to reveal his word frequently his his mind frequently to the people which is why you find Samuel uh for Samuel 3 describing all the things it describes about Samuel coming to know the Lord and the Lord as he revealed himself to Samuel was establishing a spokesman or a mouthpiece for himself which is essentially what a prophet is in the Old Testament and indeed in the New too the prophet is someone who communicates the will of God the word of God not just a person who has insight into the future the basic meaning of it is somebody that God has set up or appointed or established to be a means of revealing himself to the people that's what it's Samuel essentially was and it's important that you see how the Lord really confirms that that that point by the way that that chapter ends Samuel grew and the Lord was with him and let none of his words fall to the ground you can see that God was going to use

[8 : 40] Samuel now is beginning to use Samuel and the words that God speaks through Samuel are indeed God's prophetic revelation that's why it goes on and all Israel from Dan to Bershaba knew that Samuel was established as a prophet of the Lord and the Lord appeared again at Shiloh where the basic center of worship was and Samuel's day the Lord appeared again at Shiloh for the Lord revealed himself to Samuel at Shiloh by the word of the Lord it's really God but just again and again emphasizing to us this is what vision is this is what the revelation that we need is it's from God is through the likes of Samuel in those days we now have it in our bibles and where there is no vision in that sense the people cast off restraint and in fact you get a clue from this version Proverbs itself Proverbs very frequently has its verses balanced into two parts two halves and very often you'll find that the verses in Proverbs are set out by way of contrasting what's in the second part of a verse with what you find in the first part that's what you find here where there is no prophetic vision the people cast off restraint then that's balanced and you find that the converse but blessed is he who keeps the law who keeps the word of the Lord in other words keeping the law of the Lord being obedient to the word of God is the converse it's the opposite of casting off restraint and that's how the whole verse holds together where you have an absence of the word of the Lord where you have an absence of that law of the Lord the people cast off restraint but those who keep the law where you have a situation of keeping the law being obedient to the law well it's the opposite of casting off restraint it's being it's living in a way that conforms to what God himself specifies and requires and in verse 18 you find the very the very thing that happens when people actually seek to displace the word of God and put it aside and reject the word of God or remove the influence of the word of God the people cast off restraint they lose the sense of being directed properly in their lives by the word of God and that's what we're going to see in our third point which is the verse as a text for our times let's just think of what the verse is again saying where there is no prophetic vision the people cast off restraint remember that's not just having an absence of the word available to us but where the word is actually taken and deliberately put aside and something else is put in its place because you always find that where you take the word of God and displace it you find something else put in its place it's not going to be a vacuum it's not going to be a neutrality and you'll find in our own particular days you will know that the word of God is being largely by and large for the most part sadly be put aside in favour of human thinking and humanistic thinking so the third point is the verse as a text for our times and the first one under that I want to say is this explains why Christian ideals are opposed as they are in our generation let me just read to you something that is from statements from the Scottish Secular Society and also from Humanist Society Scotland

Scottish Secular Society says the Scottish Secular Society exists to challenge religious privilege in the public place that really means they're setting out to challenge the place that historically Christianity has had in forming the basic principles of our society that's really what it means doesn't appear to say that it really says well we just want equality we just want something of the humanistic or the secular way of looking at things placed on an equal footing with the Bible with the Christian viewer with a religious view and it all says that it exists to challenge religious privilege it's very obvious from many of the other things you find them saying and doing that their their gripes really with the Christian faith and with the fact that the Christian faith has historically in our country had such an important place foundational place indeed in our human thinking whether it's an education or a medicine or personal morality

Christian faith has had that basic foundational place to form the principles and the ideals and the values that we have still as a society although they're largely put aside humanist society Scotland let me just read from something that they have on their website humanists are people who trust science and rational inquiry to help explain the universe around us and who do not resort to supernatural explanations the worst they're not for anything that they see on the lexicon of the Bible which they say as a supernatural explanation that's put aside we're not we're not going to deal with that we're not going to resort to that we want science and rational inquiry to explain the universe around us and it goes on to say no belief system religious or not should have not expect privilege in the democratic process in effect we seek a secular Scotland and then they have a selection of quotes from humanist thinkers way back even as far as 1876 this is a man called Robert Green Ingersoll who wrote a famous work still read it online it's not really worth your while reading it's called the gods this is what he said reason observation and experience one of these essays in that book he says reason observation and experience and then listen to the religious language the holy trinity of science that's a deliberate reference to the christian trinity that god is but obviously in a disparaging way reason observation and experience the holy trinity of science have taught us that happiness is the only good that the time to be happy is now and that the way to be happy is to make others so and that's the secularist humanist way of thinking the greatest good is your happiness and the way to happiness is to make others happy and you know from the gospel and from knowing the gospel what a pathetically unsound and empty that statement is but it does help to explain what the truth of this text of this verse where there is no prophetic vision that people cast off restraint where you put the bible aside then the arguments are well we don't live by what the bible actually says we don't accept god we don't believe in god god is just a fantasy on the part of christians and on the part of the christian church down through the years so we put that aside instead of it we put human wisdom we put secular thinking we put humanistic thinking what do you end up with you end up people with people casting off restraint that's why you find such things as the next point is the un-christian ideals that are promoted but just think of this taking the bible out of public life taking christian principles and christian ideals out of public life has drastic consequences that's what the aim is that's why we as christians have to have to resist that that's why such movements call for the separation of church and state entirely to be separate you belong to the free church most of you at least you belong to the free church the free the free church has one as one of its foundational principles a principle called the establishment principle and part of that is that the state has the duty and responsibility of maintaining and supporting the christian faith and if you take the bible out of public life

then you're getting rid of that principle the state no longer has the obligation to support the christian faith any more than it has the obligation to support humanism and that's the aim and that's the subtle way in which the influence of the bible at least an attempt is being made and it's increasingly successful to take that influence out of public life out of public thinking as well as private it's important that this vision of god that god has given us this revelation this bible is teaching that it's maintained in public life as well as in private both both are important but that's why it explains secondly why un christian ideals are promoted because that's the aim really behind it and to cast off restraint does not necessarily mean violence that doesn't mean you engage in outright violence the casting off restraint in that sense it can go as far as that but that's not normally what you see in our own society but it always insists on not complying with christian ideals with christian principles with what the bible is saying that's why you have the views you have on abortion on euthanasia and marriage on education and relationships and holding public office because increasingly the challenge is take the bible out of all that we don't need the bible's influence anymore and you and i have a responsibility and a privilege of resisting that of living out the contrary to that of really trying to see and persuade people and it's an obvious thing for anyone as i see it and then you take the influence of the bible out of public life or out of private life the people cast off restraint there is no restraining influence anymore if you take the bible out of the heart of public life the verse is a text for our times friends and there are many things that we need to stand for and to stand up against and we need to be aware of what's happening with demands for euthanasia increasingly and the the the horrors of abortion and the infiltration of secular and humanistic ideals into our education system and the call for our primary children to be educated in things that ought really not to be before their minds at that age at all that's the world we live in that's the context in which we live out the gospel that's really where we have to look at this kind of verse and say this is exceedingly important for our times because that's what's behind everything you're seeing happening in practice the people are casting off restraint they don't have the restraint anymore of god's truth to guide their minds so some alternative has to come in instead of that and inevitably it will be ungodliness instead of what the bible itself sets out before us so it explains why christian ideals are opposed it explains why un christian ideals are promoted this text for our times it also explains where our well-being is located it's located in christ it's located in the christ of the gospels it's located in the word of god as god's revelation to us as god's vision god's own will revealed to us we need more than values we need more than even than christian values because values by themselves

don't guarantee anything you can have values which are basically christian values but what are they founded on or are they based on if we hold to christian values those that we still have in our society but then put the bible aside and think that these values are going to continue we're mistaken values have to be placed on a foundation and our christian values are based on the christian foundation of god of god in christ of god's word of god's salvation of god's will and what he reveals is righteousness of unrighteousness and all of these things that he tells us are truth or untruth when you displace that then all of these other so-called values take over even the best of science and sometimes people make this mistake conservative christians reformed christians like ourselves are really against science it's not the case at all science has a very valuable place in the thoughts of human beings so there's reason so there's human experience but they need to be directed they need to be guarded in a way that the bible itself does a way that god's truth does we need in other words this is a word that secularists and humanists truly hate we need an absolute something that does not change with the passing of time something that is not subject to manipulation when human beings think it's time to move on to something else that absolute is god's truth that absolute is what verse 18 calls the law blessed is he who keeps the law when you keep the law when you're guided by the law when you value the law itself the word of god then you have a proper basis for human life for relationships for society as well just why you've got such things as you have in verse 15 the rod and reproof give wisdom but a child left to himself brings shame to his mother you see people need the word of god we need the security that the law of god brings us children brought up without these boundaries don't have security he might think that freedom without the word of god is security it's not it's the very opposite it's no use just talking about love and love is love and let love do everything love needs something itself to guide it by love needs law love needs the word love needs an absolute and that's why you have such a precious heritage and you and i have that in our heritage under the gospel we are charged by god today to look after this gospel to the best that we can to commend it to maintain it to defend it to live it out but let me just finish by asking you as i asked myself is my life based four square on god's word on god's truth do i have christ himself foundationally to my life is that my main value is that my main principle in life to be as paul said to the philippians for me to live is christ that's his that was his aim that was his principle everything else followed from that in the days of josiah when they were repairing the temple one of his officials found a book in the temple the book of the law of the lord it's called

[25 : 53] in second chronicles and he brought it to josiah and when josiah the king actually read that book some theologians think it was the the book of judeutonomy but a second was the law of moses in some form or other that god had given to moses when josiah read it he tore his clothes he was aghast he was horrified because he realized as a people as a society they had had departed from this law of god this word of god this book of the lord so much and it gave a huge impetus to the reformation that josiah was carrying out and so it would for our age nothing is of greater importance i would say today for the church as well as for our society as a whole is to rediscover the bible to really come to realize how important the bible has been and should continue to be for us as a people and for you and for me personally well is it today the most important possession we have is your life and my life bounded by guided by based upon the truth of god as in jesus christ revealed on the scriptures are we saved are we his do we just know the bible but don't know the author of it do we know it's teaching but don't know the teacher that's a great question one that's so important for time and for eternity and today it's our privilege to hear the words of christ and to base our life and obedience on that word let's pray our god we thank you today for your word we thank you that your word is still in our possession and in our use we thank you for the conviction we have about your word that it is so foundational for human life in particularly so for this generation which we live lord help us we pray to convey this truth and we pray that you would come by the might of your spirit to intervene in our day and intervene in these times that are so uncertain for us and as we pray for our leaders and for our governments at this time and pray that you would guide and direct them to right decisions we pray especially and they would come to know and to value your word that your law might be their director and that you would give them lord especially to realize that you have given this not only times gone by for your people but that it is indeed a book for our times as well so receive our thanks now we pray continue with us throughout this day and pardon our sin for Jesus sake amen while we're concluding our worship today by singing in Psalm 119

Psalm 119 that's in the sing Psalms version page 167 versus 161 to 168 though rulers hound me without cause my heart fears nothing but your word for in your promise I rejoice like one who finds great spoil oh lord that section 21 of Psalm 119 the rulers hound me without cause i times a day

For your commands I hold in awe, For your commands I hold in awe.

It is how those who love your law, They will not stumble in the way.

I wait for your salvation, Lord, And your commands I will obey.

[30 : 56] I will host her years that you've scored, My love for them is great and true, Your laws and reasons I obey, For all my ways are known to you.

Now may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, And the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you now and evermore. Amen.