

Mocking Equals Reproaching

Proverbs 17:5

“Whoso mocks the poor reproaches his Maker: and he that is glad at calamities shall not be unpunished” Proverbs 17:5 (Cf. 14:20, 31).

This is another of Solomon’s “He who...” statements found fairly abundantly throughout the Book. They go pretty much just like the one in this verse. Whoever _____ is doing _____ to God. In this case both sides of the equation are clearly negative and wholly undesirable, not to mention absolutely unBiblical for a believer. Often, the essence of the statement is most often one that makes complete and obvious sense as well. It also seems that the action of mocking is one of Solomon’s particular dislikes. And, of course, anything that either dishonors or brings reproach upon His reputation among men likewise earns Solomon’s active disdain.

“Whoso”, as it is translated in some version is the older English way of simply saying “The one who...” (as it might actually say in your version). It points to the perpetrator of the act in view as well as providing the implication that we are not talking about a single target, but rather, a generalized statement that applies to absolutely everyone who performs the act under scrutiny. In this case it is English word “mock”. Everyone, in general, who “mocks the poor” is actually and actively doing what Solomon refers to in a moment. Mock is not a very widely used word in the OT. It comes from a 15th century French word, “marquee” meaning to “treat with contempt or ridicule”. It can also mean “to disappoint the hopes on the one (or ones) in view; here...the poor. It is only used 18 times in the OT, rendered mock 8 times, scorn 3x, laugh at 3x, to “hold in derision 2x, as well as a couple other forms depending on the particular translation in mind. Inherent in the word is the idea of scorn or derision in the mind that prompts the action.

The stated object of this “mocking” (or other uses) is said to be “the poor”. Poor, of course, refers to the one who has little or no wealth. It can also refer to the condition of lack, not speaking of monetary lack, but the lacking of whatever objective situation is in perspective. One can be “poor” in influence, for instance. It is also interesting that this “poor” quality can be something that is the result of ones’ own actions (or lack of action). The poor quality or neediness is just as valid, but the cause is different.

It is not the condition of poorness or poverty that Solomon is mainly commenting on in this verse. Rather, it is the matter of “mocking” those who are in that condition. As Wes noted, Solomon, by using this term in speaking of how Someone speaks of or treats those “poor” that he is drawing our attention toward. It has to do, not so much with the idea of walking around verbally make fun of them; butt rather of the inner attitude that one holds toward them.

Actually, in much of the Bible mockery implies an attitude of arrogance, exalting self and our own worth. By “worth”, I am not speaking of monetary or any other physical standard. I’m speaking of a standard that we have established

for ourselves and by which, in turn then, we measure ourselves. Obviously, with that in mind, we do not often fall much short of reaching it!

Another truth about mockery as the Bible uses the term is that it is most often directed against individuals, with the purpose of humiliating them. With all this in mind we can readily see why the Scripture is sure in its' condemnation of it as arrogant, unrighteousness and even foolish.

There are a number of targets given of mockery is God's word:

- Interestingly Isaiah tells us that God has been the target of mockery by the leaders of the Assyrian empire when they came to take Israel:

*Now therefore, what have I here," says the Lord,
"That My people are taken away for nothing?
Those who rule over them
Make them wail," says the Lord,
"And My name is blasphemed continually every day. (Isa. 52:5)*

"Blasphemed" is the same word we have been thinking about. The form of the word is a bit different but you can see why Solomon says that one who mocks the poor reproaches his Maker. The two ideas, Mockery and Reproach are closely related.

David spoke of the issue a couple times. In Psalm 74:10 (cf. 18, 22) he said:

*O God, how long will the adversary reproach?
Will the enemy blaspheme Your name forever?*

Reproach and blaspheme are the same basic word in Hebrew; the word we are considering. David is lamenting the mocking the mockery that God's enemy, Satan, seeks to pile of the Name of God. David was lamenting what God's enemies sought to do re: His Name. Of course, we're familiar with Job 17:2 (cf. 21:3, 30:9)

² *"Surely mockers are with me,
And my eye gazes on their provocation.*

If you've read the Book of Job, then you now of the really hard time that his three so-called friends gave him as a part of their "comforting" of him. "mockers" is our word and speaks of what we can only see as sarcasm directed his way as they made their comments.

There are quite a number of times that the servant of God are mocked and made fun of. In 2 Chronicles 36:16, speaking of the time during the reign of Zedekiah, we read:

¹⁶ *but they continually mocked the messengers of God, despised
His words and scoffed at His prophets, until the wrath of the LORD
arose against His people, until there was no remedy.*

(Cf. Ne 2:19; Ps 22:7; 35:15-16; 69:12; 80:6; 89:50-51; 119:51; Jer 20:7; La 3:14,63; Christians mocked: Ac 2:13; 17:32; 26:24)

One of the best examples, and most heinous, is the mockery that was received by our Lord Jesus during His ministry on earth:

¹⁷ As Jesus was about to go up to Jerusalem, He took the twelve disciples aside by themselves, and on the way He said to them,

¹⁸ “Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem; and the Son of Man will be delivered to the chief priests and scribes, and they will condemn Him to death,

¹⁹ and will hand Him over to the Gentiles to mock and scourge and crucify Him, and on the third day He will be raised up.”
(Matthew 20:17–19)

As a part of His Passion, one of thing that happened to Him was the mocking that came His way, done by His own people.

It seems that there are some characteristics of Mockery that the Bible is clearer about. Solomon, for instance, tells us that mockers are Proud and arrogant in the thinking about and view of themselves. In Proverbs 21:24, contrasting mockery with a wise man, he said:

*A proud and haughty man—“Scoffer” is his name;
He acts with arrogant pride.*

Obviously, those are not qualities that the believer has as a part of his ongoing repertoire. Just a bit later he mentions that the instigate strife as a part of their effect on the relationships with others.

*Cast out the scoffer, and contention will leave;
Yes, strife and reproach will cease. (Prov. 22:10)*

He further brings forth the truth that do not easily respond to correction, but tend to remain as they are:

*A scoffer does not love one who corrects him,
Nor will he go to the wise. (Prov. 15:12)*

We readily see why the Bible condemns, not only the act of mocking but the mockers themselves. Solomon, in fact, began the Proverbs with this very idea:

*Blessed is the man
Who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly,
Nor stands in the path of sinners,
Nor sits in the seat of the scornful; (Prov. 1:1)*

When speaking rather harshly about Israel's idolatry that led them precisely nowhere and was utterly futile, Isaiah said:

*Whom do you ridicule?
Against whom do you make a wide mouth
And stick out the tongue?
Are you not children of transgression,
Offspring of falsehood, (Isaiah 57:4)*

Just to conclude, it is clear that those who are mockers will indeed be punished:

*"How long, you simple ones, will you love simplicity?
For scorers delight in their scorning,
And fools hate knowledge.*

*Turn at my rebuke;
Surely I will pour out my spirit on you;
I will make my words known to you.
Because I have called and you refused,
I have stretched out my hand and no one regarded,
Because you disdained all my counsel,
And would have none of my rebuke,
I also will laugh at your calamity; (Prov. 1:22-26)*

Solomon was fairly direct about the large number of counsel he gave to his readers concerning the various ungodly and foolish behaviors in which men indulge. Rebuke is only one of them.

*He who mocks the poor reproaches his Maker;
He who is glad at calamity will not go unpunished.*

The key here is to recognize that the indulgence of self in the mockery of the poor is a reproach to the "Maker" of the poor, or the Lord God Himself. That is right understanding of the phrasing of the first section of the verse. It is particularly focusing in on the idea of not giving or helping to provide for the needy. It seems to be more concerned with a couple of more self-oriented ideas:

1. Some think that those who are needy are that way because of reasons of their creation.
2. In a related line, some think that if they were really concerned with getting out of poverty, they would work hard enough to get the job done.
3. There are also some who have the idea that it is God's doing to either place them or allow them to be in the condition that they are in. It is perhaps something that is there to demonstrate what God really thinks of them and their relationships to or pursuit of Him.

4. There are some who think that if the poor one in view only had enough faith or would only confess God with that faith by giving a “tithes”, then God would show Himself to be a faithful God and rewarded of those who trust Him.

It seems that anyone of these ideas (and the numerous others that are “out there”) directly contrary to what Solomon has put forth for us in the verse in question.

Just to summarize our interpretation we have to say that the first clause is a variation of 14:31:

*He who oppresses the poor reproaches his Maker,
But he who honors Him has mercy on the needy.*

The mockery, perhaps, being supposed to accompany oppression, or to take its place where the power to oppress is wanting. Pleasure in another’s calamities, even those of an enemy, is a grievous sin, of which Job was careful to protest his innocence (Job 31:29). It will “not be unpunished,” although a sin which may be known to God only. The law of retribution will not seldom overtake such a sinner, or, at least, in some way, his hardness of heart will be visited upon him (Ezek. 25:6, 7).

By way of illustration we can note:

- A terrible retribution came upon the Philistines while they made sport of Samson in his poverty and blindness, exulting over his calamities.
- James protests against such mock-charity as saying to the naked and hungry, “Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled,” without giving them food or clothing (Jas. 2:15, 16).
- Shimei’s vulgar rejoicing over his fallen monarch met with just and appropriate punishment in due time;
- and We have to note that they who have scorned and pierced the Man of sorrows will wail because of Him.

Just by way of application we should ponder the idea that if to “oppress” the poor is to reproach their Maker, much more to “mock” them. For no man is born to a poor estate by chance, but in the ordering of Providence. And it is by the same a man falls into poverty, even though it be the consequence of his own folly. But as it is a feature of divine greatness to regard poverty, so is it of human littleness to despise it. Moreover, it is treason against the Great King to trample upon even the humblest coin stamped with His image, as my poorest brother is, equally with myself. God made him poor that his fellow-men should exercise sympathy and compassion towards him. Or, if his poverty has overtaken him or any other calamity, can I as his brother rejoice? Nay, if it be the fruit of his own misdoings, ought I not, then, rather to be sorry for him? If he be my enemy, ought I not for that very reason to relieve him (Rom. 12:20, etc.)? If he be a friend, shall I allow the truth as to myself, however it may be true of

corrupt human nature in general, of that odious sentiment of a French philosopher: “In the adversities of our best friends, we find always something which does not displease us.” God forbid! Every motive of Christianity makes such a sentiment impossible to a Christian. Even if the love of Christ constrain me not, the fear of consequences must. For surely such a spirit shall not go unpunished. It tempts God (so to speak) to put the same cup of calamity into the hand of the exultant one. It must exclude from heaven.