

## PASTOR DOUG'S FAVORITE BIBLE VERSES

### Proverbs 16:33

As you have likely already heard, today is Ruth's and my 40-year anniversary. Wow! How the years have gone by! I so well recall when we had been married about 6 months attending a church event for younger couples. There we met a couple who had been married for 5 years. At the time Ruth and I were both taken back by the very idea: 5 years. We couldn't even grasp what that would be like!

Well, in light of this being our 40-year anniversary, this is as good a time as any to speak on a verse that became one of my favorites (and one of my more often quoted verses): Proverbs 16:33. So let's read it and then I will tell you a story about a chair that almost ended our marriage...

### Proverbs 16:33

Following our wedding and reception, Ruth and I headed north in our little Honda Civic. This was back during what was called the "Arab Oil Embargo." Because of a shortage of gasoline, the government had imposed a rationing program whereby people could purchase gasoline only every other day – as based upon your license plate. This was back in 1979 before the advent of vanity plates...or at least before they became popular. So if your plate ended with an even number, you could purchase gas on an even numbered date, but if it ended with an odd number, then you could purchase gas only on an odd numbered date. Somehow, in spite of that, over the next nine days we made it into upper state New York, and then into New Hampshire, before returning to southeast Pennsylvania where Ruth's parents lived. Ruth's dad was, at that time, a pastor in the United Methodist Church and as that was the case he and his wife lived in a parsonage. In the basement of that parsonage Ruth and I had stored our things and the few pieces of furniture that we had already purchased, including this circa 1860 balloon back rocking chair (that I had purchased from an antique shop while in seminary for \$125).

At Ruth's parents' parsonage we finally opened the various wedding gifts we had received and then I went and rented a Ryder rental truck. With Ruth's brother's help we loaded the truck and then he was kind enough to follow us to the Stenton mansion property, in northwest Philadelphia (lower Germantown) where I was to begin my work as the manager of that museum. On the property of the museum was a circa 1790 2.5 story log house that Ruth and I would be moving into. Ruth's brother, named Wess, helped me unload a piano and a bedroom set (including a mattress) and a number of other items before leaving. That left just Ruth and me to finish the job. Sometime the next day I was to return the Ryder truck.

And so Ruth and I continued to unload the truck. Having previously seen the log house we were going to be moving into Ruth and I had discussed, albeit briefly, how we envisioned using the house. There were 2 bedrooms on the second floor and we had already decided which would be our bedroom. The first floor had a kitchen and then one large room with a fireplace near the end, on the left side, of the room. We would put our dining table at the near end and the couple chairs and an old church pew that I had refinished down at the fireplace end of the room. Against the one wall I had agreed to build a bookcase for the many books we already had acquired.

You have all done this sort of thing before: moving...noting what boxes go to the kitchen or to a bedroom or to the living room. And so we unloaded, back and forth to the truck and then into the house. When we got to the rocking chair (what I called MY rocking chair) I carried it in and placed it

by the fireplace. I envisioned myself sitting next to the fire on some snowy day when no one might be visiting the museum, reading one of my many theology books. Ah...what a delight that would be!

Going back out to the truck I brought in some boxes that went here or there. And so I worked until I had an item that was to go in the living room. Walking into the living room I saw that the rocking chair...MY rocking chair...had been moved. No longer was it next to the fireplace but now it was on the other side of the room. The room was not huge so when I say the other side I'm talking only about 10' at most. After putting down the items I had just brought into the room I picked up the chair and put it back where I had first placed it. And then I headed out to the truck for more stuff.

As we were nearing the end of emptying the truck I again ended up in the living room, and to my surprise...there again...my rocking chair had been moved. I wasn't sure what to make of that so I called Ruth into the room.

"Ruth."

"Yes, Doug."

"Ruth, could you come into the living room please?"

Ruth came in and I began to explain that I had put the chair by the fireplace for that is where I thought it should go. I explained my thoughts of sitting by the fireplace on a snowy day reading Berkhoff or Spurgeon, or some other writer that I liked.

Ruth said that she understood what I was saying but as I had said I was going to build a bookcase that went on the other side of the room it made sense to her that my rocking chair should be placed by the books and that the needle-point chair (an antique chair with needle-point upholstery) should be placed by the fireplace.

I said that I understood her thinking but that I wanted the chair by the fireplace. She said that she understood my thinking but that she wanted the rocking chair on the other side of the room.

"I don't think you are hearing me," I said. To which she responded,

"I don't think you are hearing me!"

Now, this was 40 years ago...less the nine-day honeymoon that we had enjoyed immensely. So I cannot fully remember or convey all that took place. But this much I can tell you and that is that as this conversation went along it was getting increasingly heated, louder and more contentious.

"Fine," she said. Then what if we put the rocking chair over at the **other end of the room** and put the pew on this end?

"I don't want my chair at the **other end** of the room," I replied. "And I don't want my chair on **other side** of the room. I want my chair right here!"

It was ugly. This argument...and it was **not** just a heated discussion...this **argument** went on for probably a full 10 minutes until Ruth finally, in a huff, turned away and walked out of the room.

"Great," I thought. "We've been married 9 days and it looks like we're now ready for divorce. I don't think you can even get a divorce after just nine days. That's probably where annulments come in." (I

later would learn that I was wrong and that indeed if we were to permanently separate we would need to get a divorce...even if we had only been married 9 days).

I thought about our situation. My parents were now back in Illinois and I couldn't imagine Ruth going back to her parents (a solid hour or more away). So here we are, finally back from our honeymoon, and it seems like our marriage is over...done...finished...and all over whether a chair goes on one side of the room or the other.

The truck was finished, but we were not in the same room of the house. What was going to happen? I couldn't believe she was being so bull-headed.

What was I to do? I had envisioned us having a happy home – a Christ-centered home...the kind of home that other couples would long to have. And now look at us!

And so time went by...

And then I remembered Proverbs 16:33. I had learned Proverbs 16:33 while in seminary. I liked that verse. It suggested that God was over the smallest of details...even the flipping of a coin (comparable to the lot – or die – being cast into the lap). Maybe God could sort this out for us.

And so I called again for Ruth...

"Ruth...could you come here please?"

Ruth came into the room. And I said something like, "This is not good that we're having this argument. The Bible says, "The lot is cast into the lap but its every decision is from the Lord." I would be willing, if you would be willing, to **flip a coin** over which place we put the rocking chair. I'll flip the coin but you can call it. If you call it correctly we'll put the chair over by the bookcase. If you call it incorrectly, the chair would go by the fireplace. What do you say?"

Ruth hesitated a moment and then said, "Okay."

"Alright then...I'll flip the coin and you'll call it. I'll flip it so as to let it fall on the ground, and you'll call it...okay?"

"Okay."

And then it struck me that we should probably pray about this first. But prayers are tricky and sometimes people can use prayers to sort of remake their case...so as to ask God to side with them. But still I said, "Maybe we should pray first." And then I prayed something like, "Dear Lord...you know we need your direction...and you need to decide this for us...and WHATEVER you decide we'll live with...because it's up to you and not up to us...so...please...WHATEVER YOU WANT TO DO...please help us. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

And with that I flipped the coin, Ruth called out her choice of heads or tails (I don't recall which she called, and I don't recall how the coin landed). What I do recall is that she called it...incorrectly.

And with that the chair went by the fireplace, where it stayed for the next 3 plus years that we lived there. And...catch this now...Ruth never brought up the incident again...never.

So here's that chair...and that's the story.

But let's now deal with the text.

Proverbs 16:33 is clearly teaching that God is over the casting of the die or the flipping of a coin. And this teaching is not without a **strong biblical basis...**

- When Israel was defeated at the battle of Ai, God told Joshua that the reason for the defeat was that "sin was in the camp." Then God told Joshua to **find out** who the sinner was. The process used to find the sinner was the lot. **The lot was cast** to first figure out which of the 12 tribes had the sinner, then which clan and then which household. This was followed until the lot fell on Achan, who under pressure, admitted his theft of things that were not to be taken at the battle of Jericho. Once Achan's sin was confirmed, the Bible says "All Israel stoned him with stones" (Joshua 7:25).
- Or how about the case of Jonah who was found to be the culprit that God was after when the men aboard the ship going to Tarshish **cast lots**, in the midst of a storm, to learn who may have angered the gods (Jonah 1:7)
- And then, following Judas Iscariot's suicide, the apostles believed that it was important that a 12<sup>th</sup> new apostle take Judas' place. And so, following prayer, the early apostles **cast lots** to choose between two men which would become the replacement for Judas. "And the lot fell on Matthias" it says in Acts 1:26.

Now, as I have used this whole story about Ruth and myself to help young couples AVOID the same sort of problem that Ruth and I had, I have, through the years taught on this under the heading of "How to Resolve Conflicts." And here is what I have said...

1. **You can resolve conflicts by CONQUERING the other person.** In modern terms we call this "spousal abuse." A husband beating his wife, maybe...or a wife, verbally tearing into her husband. This is NOT a good way to resolve a problem, but it can work. Again, I'm not advocating this as a way to resolve a conflict but it historically has been used and it is still practiced in some parts of the world. The old B.C. comics would often portray, for example, some big, burly woman, carrying a club under her arm and dragging her knocked out husband, signifying by what means she got her way in an argument with him.

I was not about to hit Ruth, nor was she going to hit me. And neither of us wanted a shouting match. So this first option...this first C...CONQUER...was not and is not the best.

2. **CONVINCE. This is a great option to resolve a conflict...**if it works. Sometimes it doesn't work because our reasoning is faulty. At other times it may not work because the other person is simply being belligerent...obstinate...difficult.

But if by reason one can convince the other that the way of thinking being presented is best, that is a great way to resolve a conflict. I was trying to do that with Ruth...talking about the fireplace and all. She, conversely, was trying to convince me...talking about the location of the bookcase.

When one reads what went on at the church council in Jerusalem, as recorded in Acts chapter 15, this is EXACTLY what was going on... People were trying to reason with one another...to

convince one another of a particular point of view. This kind of dialogue is always the best method and means for resolving conflicts. But once in awhile it simply doesn't work.

- 3. COMPROMISE.** When Ruth suggested a third option...putting the chair at the other end of the living space and moving the pew...she was attempting a compromise. This is what often takes place between management and labor in large companies. Labor has made it known what they want and Management has come back with what they are willing to give. And from that point on there are various compromises proposed.

When I was a real estate agent compromise was a great means to getting sales through and to settlement.

The seller wanted \$185,000 and the people had offered \$170,000. The seller came back at \$182,000 and the people said they would go \$178,000 if the seller would include the appliances.

Compromise is what takes place on the streets of Tijuana, Mexico when the fellow tries to sell you a watch for \$15 and you offer him \$8. Eventually you may end up with the watch for \$9. It's all about negotiating...trying to find a place where everyone walks away satisfied.

But a compromise didn't work for me because I wanted MY chair beside the fireplace. That was my "bottom line" and I wasn't interested in budging.

And so things for Ruth and me were at a standstill. And the same can happen between management and labor. And it is at that point, in the business world, that a third party ARBITRATOR is often brought in. Indeed, sometimes, courts will MANDATE that an arbitrator be brought in to settle a dispute...

Now, I have sat on a couple different arbitration committees in the past. Such committees are usually three people: one chosen by the one side; a second chosen by the other side; and the third person being selected by the two arbitrators.

Both sides, in the dispute, will make their case before the arbitrators (the arbitration committee), and then, behind closed doors the three arbitrators will make a judgment. But here's the catch: **the judgment of the arbitrators is BINDING.** And the two parties are in agreement, even before the arbitrators hear the case, that **they will abide by what is decided.**

Ruth and I could have used an arbitrator that night at the log house. But no one was around. Thinking about it through the years I have thought,

I could see an arbitrator having come in that night and saying, "You two... Stop your bickering! Why don't you put the rocking chair by the fireplace from Thanksgiving until Easter (the season when you might be using the fireplace and then put it on the other side of the room the other six months?"

That would have likely appealed to both Ruth and me and settled our problem. But we didn't have an arbitrator...or did we?

#### 4. COIN

And that is where Proverbs 16:33 comes in: the lot, or a coin. It is a problem solver, an arbitrator, a dispute settler. And, what is more, the Bible suggests it isn't just any old person off the street. Rather it is GOD.

Ruth won my heart that night that she – as one might say – lost the coin toss. Because she never brought the issue up again. If I had been the one guessing the coin toss and it had gone against me I'm afraid the first words out of my mouth might have been "best two out of three!" I'm not sure I would have accepted my sense of defeat as well as she did.

Now, these 40 years later, I can tell you we have flipped a coin over a decision **only a handful of times** through those years.

One time was over the color of trim to paint in a bedroom. Ruth wanted yellow and I wanted tan. Tan won out. And today that trim is painted blue.

Another time was the naming of Esther. Ruth wanted Esther and I wanted Anna. The coin toss went against me that time. But that name selection wasn't made until AFTER the baby was born and the nurse at the hospital asked, "So what is the name of your new baby girl?"

I don't think anyone should casually use of a coin in this way. Again, the early church decided on Matthias to replace Judas, but that was only after lengthy discussion and prayer.

But if by the flip of a coin a marriage can be helped...which is exactly what God did for us 40 years ago...then it makes sense to me that God is truly interested, at least in those kind of cases, in even the flip of a coin.

Many years ago I visited with a woman who was intent upon leaving her husband. She was very angry with her husband and as he had reached out to me for help I was surprised that she would even meet with me. As we talked about their many problems I brought up the whole idea of flipping a coin to resolve a conflict. With great sarcasm in her voice she said, "Are you telling me God cares about the flip of a coin?" "No," I said, "I don't think God cares about the flip of a coin. But if by the flip of a coin a marital conflict can be resolved then I think God infinitely cares about the flip of a coin."

And that is how I see it.

It has now been probably 15 years since Ruth and I last flipped a coin to resolve a conflict. The truth is, the longer we have been married, the less frequent our conflicts have arisen. And also, to be honest, some of the things that we were in conflict over years ago, I don't think either of us would care about that much today.

"I'd like to paint the trim work yellow, Doug."

"Oh, really? Wouldn't be my first choice. But whatever..."

Some things are simply not worth fighting over.

And maybe the whole issue of the Lordship of Jesus over our lives and over our marriage has been having its intended effect more and more. For we both know and agree that the Lord Jesus doesn't want us to fight, or argue, or hold a grudge against each other. He died to save us, to cleanse us, and to make us right with himself and with each other.

But if come up to yet another decision someday in the future that we simply cannot resolve. I can tell you that we'll be open...even as we were 40 years ago...to the casting of the lot into the lap "for its every decision is from the Lord."