Money Talks: The NRA, Gun Manufacturers, and Gun Reform (Proverbs 17:23)

Scripture: Proverbs 17:23

On Wednesday, February 14th, a lone gunman walked into his old high school (from which he'd been expelled a year earlier), took an AR-15 rifle manufactured in the State of Florida by the Colt Corporation (the same company behind the Colt 45 gun), and shot 17 people and injured 14 others. 17 died in the mass shooting, and the shooter is now behind bars. The AR-15 he used was an assault weapon, a rifle designed to shoot up to 600 rounds of ammo in a minute though he used it to fire off 150 rounds in 6-7 minutes. And the survivors of the Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida have taken their campaign to Washington to send a message that something must be done about these weapons used for mass destruction in our country. I've said it before, that those who shoot up schools, movie theaters, and other places in the US are "domestic terrorists" and should be treated as such.

And yet, the survivors, mere teenagers (some as young as 14 were killed in the shooting), have had to fight a battle that should've been fought before them. For the last year, Republicans have been in control of Congress and Donald Trump, the Republican candidate who became the 45th President of the United States, have been in control of the House of Representatives and the Senate, both components of Congress, and have had time to enact laws to respond to mass school shootings. But they did not. Now some would say that they refused to do so, like President Obama, because it wouldn't have the backing of Congress. Well, it didn't have the backing of Congress because many congressmen don't want to tamper with gun laws and gun rights. A number of Americans prize owning guns for the purposes of self-protection, and some see any gun law tampering as an underhanded attempt to take gun rights away from Americans (and thus, violate every American's Second Amendment right to bear arms).

And yet, Republicans have been very hesitant to push for gun reform not only because of the Second Amendment, but because of lobbying agreements. You may not know it, Americans, but the NRA, the National Rifle Association, a corporation committed to gun rights, is an exclusive club for gun owners. A group that was once devoted to sportsmanship in hunting animals and being responsible with guns is now working as a briber with regard to our congressmen. A New York Times article has shown that Florida Senator Marco Rubio, for example, received $3.3 million in campaign donations from the NRA back in 2017. Senator Richard Burr of North Carolina, another example, received $6.9 million (nearly $7 million).
And the NRA pays congressmen by throwing their money around so that these congressmen, once in place in Washington at the Capitol, can make laws that benefit gun owners and gun manufacturers. Yes, the NRA gets a lot of dirt thrown on it, and the corporation should, but behind the NRA are gun manufacturers who want to enact policies that increase their profits.

But at some point, one must choose between profits and people. As with the recent Parkland shooting, we've been awakened from our political slumber (I've been awakened from my political slumber) to see that guns are not toys; guns kill people. One bullet fired from a gun can take out anyone in its path, and guns are not safe by any definition. Guns can go off accidentally, killing innocent bystanders. Guns contain bullets, and bullets are what I call "Equal Opportunity Killers": they don't discriminate between good people on one hand and bad people on the other. No, bullets penetrate bodies and kill humans, whether criminal or not, which makes guns a life risk for humanity. Robberies are on the rise in the US because robbers realize that many Americans are afraid of them, don't want to be near them, don't pull them out, and don't use them for sport. Most Americans see them as a life risk, as a symbol of death, as a means of manipulation by which the evil people of the US and the world can get anything they want. "Just threaten the lives of innocent people with a gun, and they'll take all the money out the cash register," a criminal would say. "Put a gun on a person at work, and you may be able to keep your job," another says. "Point a gun at a bad guy, and he'll cower down," others believe.

But the Parkland shooting on Valentine's Day, the shooting that was designed to spread and enact fear and hate on a day of love, reminds us that guns kill. And in this time in which the country is debating how to move forward, one thing on the mind of every American is school safety and the safety of our children in American schools. Sure, we all agree that our schools can have better protection such as bulletproof, Kevlar-designed windows and Kevlar vests as well as more armed security guards, but our Republican congress has yet to provide it. When President Trump spoke at the State of the Union recently, he spent more time talking about the need to build his $25 billion wall to keep Mexicans out and stressed how gang members took the lives of innocent black girls. Yes, for the first time since Donald Trump declared his candidacy for the Office of the President, he finally got around to mentioning or acknowledging Blacks --- except, Blacks were only used in the context of manipulation, to push for his wall and the ridiculous expenditure needed to get it. Nothing was mentioned then about the safety of our schools, despite the fact that school shootings had happened before 2018. And, to be factually accurate, 18 school shootings have already happened this year in the first 45 days of the new year. And yet, our President, up until Parkland, had said next to nothing about the need for increased school security.
Donald Trump's silence on guns, regulations, and gun reform matches that of his Republican colleagues: there are quite a few paid with NRA money on the list, and Donald Trump is one of them. The NRA put $30 million towards Trump's campaign, with campaign donations for Trump and campaign donations to oppose Hillary Clinton in campaign advertising. So, Donald Trump, being paid by the NRA, has turned a blind eye to what the NRA is doing because, well, as the old saying goes, "You don't bite the hand that feeds you." When you're getting $30 million like Trump, Senator Richard Burr, Senator Thom Tillis, and even Senator Marco Rubio and others, you don't fight against the one compensating you. When you work a job, you don't oppose your boss. When you're hired by a client for business, you aim to keep the client happy because out of that happiness comes money. And, similarly, when the National Rifle Association is paying you to continue to allow unregulated access to guns of all kinds, including assault weapons such as AR-15s and AK-47s, you don't oppose the NRA cause; you simply say, "Yes, sir," and do as you're told. Money talks, and when you allow yourself to be bribed by it, money talks louder than you.

And this explains the recent behavior with Republican congressmen. The survivors of the Parkland shooting went to the Florida capital of Tallahassee this week to voice their views on gun violence and the need for gun reform. They even took to the Capitol in Washington to meet with Republican congressmen, but they were opposed at every turn. Few congressmen even met with the survivors and students. In one particular case, I read, a congressman who’s normally had 3 meetings by lunch was "still asleep" and couldn't find the energy to get up to talk to the future constituents. Isn't that something? Our congressmen, elected to serve the people, had no time for the future, soon-to-be voters because "they were too busy" to serve the people. It makes you wonder why we even voted them in at all. But it doesn't stop with the evasion of personal interaction.

This past week, CNN held a Town Hall Meeting with the Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School survivors and parents of the victims. Of the Florida congressmen who you would expect to come, only three came: Democratic Senator Bill Douglas, Florida representative Ted Deutsch, and Republican Senator Marco Rubio. He was the only Republican Senator who appeared. Not even Florida's Republican Governor Rick Scott made an appearance, which I find to be nothing short of pathetic. Here are the victims of the school shooting, those who are still traumatized and have PTSD after all the carnage they witnessed, and Governor Rick Scott couldn't even come to show his support for their healing. Once again, I wonder, why did Floridians even elect these officials?
But what it shows is that Republican congressmen don't want to discuss gun regulation, gun reform, the further limiting of gun rights because, well, they don't want to talk about it. They're in too deep in the political gains of gun manufacturers and gun lobbyists that they won't entertain anything that would take all that money away. And when the time comes to talk about it, they'll simply just not show up because, if they have to appear, then they have to look silly when they struggle to answer questions about their taking money from the NRA. Governor Rick Scott didn't appear at the CNN Town Hall Meeting. The reason? He's a card-carrying member of the NRA. Why talk against the NRA when they're funding your position and giving you money to protect their interests? Governor Rick Scott didn't want to commit political suicide, so he didn't show up.

Proverbs 17:23, the verse of the day, tells us, "A wicked man accepts a bribe behind the back to pervert the ways of justice." First, it says that "a wicked man," a reference to an evil person, a person that goes against the good, that goes against the righteous and godly. This is not an action of a righteous person, but an evil person. Republicans are people of faith, those who love God and country, and they wouldn't call themselves wicked. And yet, they're guilty of what Proverbs 17:23 warns against: accepting bribes.

What is a bribe? This is a good question. The word for bribe here in Proverbs 17:23 is "gift," a word that seems neutral on the surface. And yet, we're talking about a wicked man here receiving gifts, an unrighteous and ungodly man. A "bribe" is that which persuades someone to act in one's favor. In other words, the person given the bribe is a person that can do something significant, or has the power to do something for a person, and the briber, the one who gives this "gift," is someone who wants the "bribed" to do something.

Context tells us that this "gift" is given to him, as the verse says, "from the bosom," the Greek word "kolpOs." This Greek word means that the wicked person pulls the gift from his bosom as though he's keeping it close to his chest, then hides it behind his back. The King James trumps the New King James here because the KJV renders the verse as "a wicked man taketh a gift out of the bosom to pervert the ways of judgment." It's kept close to his heart because he loves it and cherishes it, but he then hides it. Why would the wicked person hide such a treasured gift unless the gift itself was evil and wicked? The wicked man doesn't want it known that he's wicked. Robbers who rob homes hope to flee before they're caught by the police because they don't want to get caught. And wicked people do evil things and "hide their hands" because they don't want anyone to know their actions. No wicked person says, "Come get me, I did it, I'm a bad guy." As 2 Corinthians 11:14 says, Satan, who is the most evil creature in existence, "transforms himself into an angel of light." Satan wants to appear to be good because the deception is part
of the strategy, and the wicked man takes the bribe from his bosom and hides it because he didn't get the gift for Christmas. He didn't get the gift due to a good promotion, or as a volunteer gift from a friend. He does what he does because the gift is an unrighteous one, and the gift is given to him to sway his decisions. As the verse we read today says, the bribe is accepted "to pervert the ways of justice." The word "pervert" here is the Greek word "ekklinei" which means "to deviate" or "turn aside." The word ekklinei is one of the Greek words from which we get the word "recline," which means to "lay back" or "bend."

So, the person who accepts a bribe here is someone who "reclines" or "relaxes" the ways of justice. The bribed, the one who accepts the gift of the briber, is one who wants to undo justice, who wants to relax the moral laws, someone who wants to bend the truth to incorporate falsehood or lies. Again, "money talks," money tells the bribed what to believe, how to believe, and what to do to see to it that the deck is stacked in the interests of the briber. "Just relax the laws a little," they say. "Who's going to know?" Sometimes, the briber tells the bribed to do it "for the good of" whatever view or position or agenda they hold, so the bribed takes the money and does whatever the deed is thinking that some good will come of it. When Judas betrayed Jesus, he believed he was doing something morally good and getting paid at the same time. What could be better than that? Some would ask. In the end, though, he realized that he was simply used by the Pharisees, all while putting Jesus, an innocent man to death. His exact words were "I have betrayed innocent blood." After Jesus is arrested and sentenced, he realizes that Jesus is innocent -- which tells you that, prior to this realization, he believed Jesus was guilty. That's what the briber(s) tell the bribed: that the other group opposing them is guilty of doing something, that the other group is sinister and evil and that they're doing a good deed by taking a bribe and doing something "good" with it. If they can plant in the mind of the ungodly person, who doesn't know truth from error, to "take one for the team," then they can get their agenda accomplished.

What Proverbs 17:23 is saying, in few words, is that the gift given to the ungodly or the wicked man is given for dishonest reasons: "to pervert the ways of justice," the text says. The gift is not given to ensure justice; if it was given for good, I think we could all go along and see something praiseworthy about it. If the gift was given to ensure that we have more armed security guards, or that the poor have rising wages and increasing job opportunities, if the gift was given to see to it that bad guys are punished and that the good and innocent are protected, then we could see it. If the money was given for AIDS research, cancer research, protections for human life, we could go along with it. But the gift is used for evil means, to bend truth to such an extent that truth doesn't really look like truth anymore. There is a phrase in the Greek Old Testament, the Septuagint, that is abandoned in the New King James Version from which I read the verse. What is the phrase in the Greek Old Testament? The phrase is "does not bring down or destroy the paths of ungodliness." That is, the bribed person does not bring down that which is false but instead, perverts the righteous and good. We could applaud the bribed person for bringing down the bad or destroying the paths of unrighteousness or ungodliness (or wickedness), but this bribed person instead bends and stretches
righteous judgment. "Good" becomes "bad" and "bad" becomes "good," all for a few thousand dollars or influential swing votes, for example.

Now, some would say, "What does that have to do with the NRA?" Well, I'm glad you asked. The NRA finds itself in the position of which this verse warns us. The NRA is a lobbyist organization, one in which people go to Washington and campaign for gun rights. But they are being fueled and funded by gun manufacturers such as Colt Corporation. According to Democratic Senator Bill Nelson at the CNN Town Hall Meeting, the Republican majority in Congress in both the House and the Senate gave financial incentives to gun maker Colt to go to Florida and build a gun manufacturing in the area. The AR-15 that was used to kill 17 people in Parkland was manufactured down in Florida. Yep, the Republican congressmen who put these financial incentives through could've never seen in advance the effects of what such a lucrative decision would do, but do they not bear blame for entertaining killing machine makers in order to bring more money into the state? I'm all for business coming into the state to help the economy, but must we engage gun makers in order to make profit? Is Florida's economy THAT bad, that we have to sacrifice our children, watch them get gunned down in cold blood, for some cold, green cash?

Gun makers would throw up their hands and say, "We're innocent; we only make the guns, we don't tell people to use them." And yet, why do these gun makers craft guns? Do they not make them with the goal of selling them, that people would buy those guns and use them? No one makes something and then says, "Oh, we don't want you to use it." That makes little sense whatsoever. Gun makers can't make money if no one buys their guns, so they want people, they ENCOURAGE people, to buy their guns. And they want people to use their guns, which is why the AR-15s that Colt makes can shoot as much as 600 rounds of ammo per minute, one article has said. They want you to have explosive capabilities with these guns that transcend your experiences with other guns (and thus, makes them attractive to purchase from in the future). It's all done for the purposes of capitalism: making money, getting ahead of the competition.

Do we need guns to shoot 600 rounds of ammo per minute? Do we need Republicans funding gun makers to come into the state of Florida (or anywhere else, for that matter) and set up shop? Funding gun makers to come into the US is the equivalent of saying, "Let's give money to bet on who can make the most lethal gun that kills the most people the fastest," or, "Let's see who can make the most deadly weapon that can do the most harm." Do we really want to compensate gun makers for harming our nation's citizens when the Republicans, the same ones who are so pro-birth and pro-life, claim that they want to save life instead of harm it? Guns are not all of the problem, but AR-15s and AK-47s are symbols of what has gone wrong in
our world. Their capabilities are beyond the needs of most civilians, which is why many, myself included, are calling for an assault weapons ban nationwide here in the US. Sadly, the Republicans, the same ones who are so opposed to killing life in the womb, are the same ones who don't mind killing life outside of the womb. If guns with above-average capabilities are allowed to roam free, then at some point, they will be purchased by criminals and unrighteous people. And Republicans know that. In the same way that the Parkland shooter went to a Subway and purchased a meal post-shooting, and criminals purchase food, they will most definitely purchase guns. Gun makers can't determine how far those guns will travel and whose hands they'll end up in. Perhaps this is the reason why Republican congressmen and legislators in general in the US should put limits on what kind of devices gun makers can craft. 600 rounds of ammo is too much capability in a gun for a normal civilian. The shooter fired off 150 rounds in 6-7 minutes, and that was far too much.

And yet, gun capabilities could be limited if Republicans would push the measures forward. They control both the House and the Senate, and their President is one of their own. And yet, they do not. They treat the issue of gun reform as the "elephant in the room" they can't speak of, can't think about, can't talk about. NRA spokeswoman Dana Loesch testified at the CNN Town Hall Meeting that the FBI failed to follow up on the reports about the shooter. Yes, the shooter even went on YouTube and said that he wanted to be "a professional school shooter" one year before Parkland. Loesch blamed these entities, as well as the state's failure to report mental health cases (only 38 states report mental health cases to the Federal Government), and so on. Yes, it was everyone's fault but the gun makers and the NRA that has become a lobbyist funding organization for Republican politicians who'll say and do anything to smokescreen the American public from considering the ills of gun capabilities and their unrestricted access to children and civilian adults.

I want to end the service today by reading the letter I've written to Senator Marco Rubio. I thought this would delay the service too long, and it might, but I want you all to hear the letter I've written in the event that you don't get to see the document or read it. I will share it on this webpage for those who want to read it as a document, but I'll read it audibly for those who'd prefer to hear it instead of read it. (Read Letter)