

Proverbs 22-09-21a

Good Wednesday evening. Welcome to Bible study here at Grace and Truth Bible Church. We're in the book of Proverbs.

We're looking at chapter two. There is a fascinating structure here that we're going to examine tonight because it is more than structure for structure's sake. It is helpful in emphasizing for us the truth of God that is communicated here in such an effective and important way.

Let's ask God's blessing on our fellowship and study and we'll begin. Father, it is a great privilege to spend this time together to be granted wonderful access to your word and the truth that it contains to have the ongoing ministry of your Holy Spirit to help us understand it, remember it, and apply it. We pray that as we look together at these things that they will be apparent to us in terms of their meaning and application in our personal lives and in our corporate life that we can adequately and effectively represent the Lord Jesus as his body on this earth in the time that remains to us.

We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. The first nine verses of this chapter we looked at in some detail last time.

I would like to take one step back and point out the structure of this very unique chapter. Chapter two has 22 verses. This is the same as the number of letters in the Hebrew alphabet.

And there are markers here in the text that indicate to us that while this is not an acrostic, it is very carefully structured. It is done with purpose. It is done with intent.

And we begin by noting that this is denoted at first by the letter Aleph. If you know how to make an Aleph, I would encourage you to put it in the margin of your Bible next to the verses that I will soon designate. If you don't know how to make an Aleph, it is basically a forward slash with little crooked ends on it.

And then there is an opening single apostrophe to the upper left, and there is something that looks like an extended comma on the right. It looks a bit like an X broken with the northwest-southeast stroke. You can just say Aleph, or you can look at Bibles that have an acrostic somewhere else and see what an Aleph looks like.

Any way you can do it, you can just put a big capital Roman A out there. But once the introduction is given, my son, the next word, which is Ben-ee, of course, you put the Y on the end to make it possessive, and Ben is his son. So my son, if, and the word if is the word Eem, I-M or I-Y-M, but it begins with an Aleph.

It creates a bit of a guttural at the beginning of the word that is difficult for us to reproduce with our Western language foundation. But Eem, it is the letter Aleph. It opens

verse one immediately after my son.

My son sort of introduces the whole thing, and then if, the letter Aleph. This starting letter Aleph also begins verse four, where once again, you have if, Eem. That is an opening part of the introduction.

This same letter also begins verse five, where you have the word then, and verse nine, where you have the word then. Verse five and verse nine, the word then is Oze, O-Z, Oze, Eem, Oze, if, then. We have many if-then structures in English.

It works exactly the same, if, then. So this entire 22-line chapter is one sentence. It is a single sentence, 22 lines long.

And not only is it a sentence, but it is a conditional sentence. My son, if, if, then, then. This structure was pointed out in detail by a commentator named Skehan, S-K-E-H-A-N.

I can't take credit for it, but I appreciate it, and I think it is spot on. So that is the approach that we're going to take, is to observe this structure. Now, out beside, in your margin, right next to verse one, put A or Aleph, if.

Next to verse four, put A or Aleph, if. Verse five, A or Aleph, then. This is Eem and Oze, then.

Next to verse nine in the margin, put A for Aleph, then. You can put if, dot, dot, dot, if you like, because this is conditions and results. Very highly structured.

Every one of these is marked off with Aleph, the first, most important letter in the Hebrew alphabet. It is the head of the alphabet. It is the Rosh in that sense.

It is the, you know, the letter A, the letter Aleph. All of these originated as the pictogram of the head of an ox. It's the beginning.

It's the most important thing. If, then. Now, when you get to verse 12, we have Lamed, Lamed, L-A-M-E-D.

It's the letter L in Hebrew. This is the mark of an infinitive, L, to or for, to do something, to do this or to do that. It's at least an infinitive idea.

It expresses purpose. So, if, as a condition, then, as a result, and Lamed now expresses purpose. So, next to verse 12 in the margin, put Lamed or L, and in our parlance, it means in order to, for the purpose of, in order to.

That's the mark of Lamed. When you get to verse 16, put a Lamed, an L, in order to. So, now, let's look at this and see how it, how it pans out.

If you were to just read your marginal notes, you would have, if, if, then, then, in order

to, in order to. So, let's look at this and see how it pans out. My son, we've seen these, these verbs talking about the importance of treasuring, of inclining, and so on.

We're not going to review that in much detail. It is to receive, to treasure up, to hide. Remember, TSAPHAN, T-S-A-P-H-A-N, was used earlier of the evil youths who want to hide and lie in wait.

And it actually, the root meaning of it is to press together. These guys are sort of crowding together out of sight, hiding, hidden and pressed together out of sight. And that's what we want to do with God's words.

Press them together and hide them inside, in ourselves, inside. Not just letting them flow over the outside, grab them, pack them in, treasure them. To incline the ear and to apply the heart.

The word incline, the root meaning of it is to stiffen, to stiffen the ear. And it has the idea of these people in an agricultural society had cows, donkeys, horses. And if you've ever seen these movable ear domestic animals, when there's an important sound, their ears perk up.

They stiffen toward the sound. We have deer out here and you can be inside behind glass. They can't see you.

You make the slightest noise. They're tens of yards away, 30, 40, 50, 60 yards away. You say, hey, Patty, and their ears swing around and stiffen in your direction.

It's like radar. That's what this means. It's not just, maybe I'll just tilt my head a little bit and see if I can catch it a little more clearly.

This is rapt attention. You stiffen your ear in that direction. You keep it pointed right at the source.

So these are the conditions. If you receive, if you treasure and pack away inside you, if you point your ears directly at it and keep that focus, if you apply your heart to ascertaining the meaning and the application, if you lift up your voice, if you cry out, now you are appealing to God more of this, please. Give me understanding.

Give me insight. Help me to see past my own blindness. Help me to overcome my deceitful heart, Jeremiah 17, 9. Help me to get past my confirmation bias, my unwillingness to absorb constructive criticism.

Help me get past my pride. Search me and know my heart. Try me and see if there be any wicked way in me.

Purge me with hyssop so that I can be clean. Wash me. Make me whiter than snow.

We can ask for that and God cannot fail to answer that prayer. Can you imagine someone crying out for wisdom, lifting up their voice for understanding, and God saying, no, sorry. There are so few of us that even think to ask, that are that hungry and that thirsty to ask Him for more, for seconds, for dessert, for another course.

Lay another meal when you prepare that table for my soul. Lift up the voice. Seek for it.

Search for it. This is now my preoccupation. Instead of making a living and getting paid in silver, instead of mining silver and going through the refining and melting down process and turning it into coins or ingots or whatever pieces of silver, we've seen 30 pieces just this past Sunday.

You've got the Lord of glory. You get up and leave to go get 30 pieces of silver. How does that compute? How does that compare? You're going after something you can't keep instead of gaining something you could never lose.

But we do it all the time. Because remember that word parodidomy isn't so much betray as exchange one thing for another. Give something away.

It's used of handing over prisoners, of having them transferred into the custody of someone else. And we can fool away our inheritance. We can fool away opportunities.

We can fool away the privileges of service, both now and in the kingdoms to come. We can parodidomy them away. Instead, we should be seeking and searching out this wisdom.

Why? We put these markers out in the margin for a reason. These are the conditions. If we do this, it is a choice.

And we emphasized that last time. You choose. You can choose.

There are women in Proverbs that are going to be presented. Depending on how you count them, there are either three or four women who appear repeatedly in Proverbs. We have already seen wisdom personified in verse 20 of the previous chapter.

Wisdom calls aloud outside. She raises her voice. This is Lady Wisdom.

We have seen the seductress. And we're going to see her coming up again in chapter two. You also have the wife of your youth.

You have the woman of Proverbs 34 that is a worthy woman that is more than wisdom calling out. This is a relationship woman, a permanent relationship woman, in contrast to seductress passing fancy soon to lead you down the ways of death woman. So, my son, if you receive my words, this doesn't happen automatically.

I think there was a strand of conservative Christianity for a while that thought, well, if I

just listen to the word of God, it will get inside me and do its thing. That's a great start. If you receive the words, if you remember them, if you incline your ear toward them and make a priority out of hearing them and apply your heart.

And this application is where a lot of people, I think, began to fall down. And it's an easy thing to do. There are periods in our life where we can go through the motions.

We say, well, I went to church. I went to Bible class. I heard a devotional.

I read Streams in the Desert or some other devotional that comes in my daily mailbox. And OK, good to go. I heard it.

It's probably doing some invisible work within me. No, God demands an active participation from us. It is not enough to hear.

People see, but seeing, they do not perceive. They hear, but hearing, they do not understand. And what is the result of seeing without perceiving and hearing without understanding? What is the result? The heart of this people has done what? Gotten hard and cold.

The heart of this people has calloused over. If you see without perceiving and you hear without understanding, it has the opposite effect. You become inured to its power.

You become insensible to its penetrating effect. It would almost be better to not listen than to listen without hearing. It would almost be better to not see than to see without perceiving, because that superficial contact can callous us over, and it becomes more and more difficult to hear and to perceive.

And to see the application for ourselves, it bounces off of us, and we're constantly thinking, well, that person ought to hear this. I'm going to send this to so-and-so. He can sure use that.

I want to print out of this. I'm going to make sure somebody reads this. They really need it.

That's not always a bad thing, but if you ever find yourself in that mode, this would be great for so-and-so. Look for the bouncing effect. Have I finished internalizing this? Have I gotten everything out of it? Have I squeezed it and wrung every bit of benefit out of it for myself before I recommend it to someone else? If it's as good as I think it is, I probably ought to get the benefit of it first.

So if you receive and treasure and incline and apply and cry out and lift up the voice, and if you seek her as silver and search for as for hid treasures, notice that if is repeated in verse four, because we're getting to the changeover, the conditional part of this is bracketed with if. Verse one through verse four. Only then, then and only then, you will

understand the fear of the Lord and find the knowledge of God.

Look at your notes now. Where is the first then? I just read it. Verse five.

Where is the second then? It's down in verse nine. Now, so there are two ifs and there are two thens, right? Well, we're looking at one and four. Well, it doesn't start the line.

It's purposely indented. So that you get that bracket. Yes, you're right.

Technically, there are three ifs, but we have that special little indentation, the cough in verse three. But you have all of this conditions, but primarily we're looking now at the thens. Do you notice anything? I'm going to give you 10 or 15 seconds to look at the content of verse five, six, seven, and eight.

What does the first then result in? What is the subject? If we fulfill these conditions in verses one through four, then what is the result? Let me put it this way. Are we looking at effects in life? Or are we looking at appreciation for a person? What do you see in verse five through eight? You won't just have the fear of the Lord, you will understand the fear of the Lord. There was an old song when I was a tiny child, to know, know, know Him is to love, love, love Him.

To under, not just, then you will fear the Lord. That would be a different statement, wouldn't it? You will understand the fear of the Lord. You will see its origins and its roots, its cause, its meaning.

What does Proverbs say is the beginning of wisdom? Do you remember verse seven, chapter one? The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. So if you understand the fear of the Lord, you are beginning to enter that realm of wisdom. And you understand why God is appreciated, why it is so wonderful to be related to Him, and so useful to be attuned to His plan and purpose.

You will understand the fear of the Lord and find the knowledge, not of how to live a great life, how to be blessed, how to avoid temptation, how to avoid, I mean, there are many wonderful concomitants, but the then in verse five leads us into everything about the person of God. You will understand the fear of the Lord. You will find the knowledge of God because He does things that we can understand and appreciate.

He gives wisdom and from His mouth comes knowledge and understanding. This relates the wisdom and understanding to the person of God Himself. Many times we hear people saying, oh, Christianity is not a religion, it's a relationship.

This is true. If you say, all right, so if I'm not going to fall victim to the atheistic caricature that I've got an invisible friend who I never hear an audible voice, I never see a visible face, but I have a relationship with an invisible, inaudible being, how does that work? If Christianity is a relationship of what form and nature is that relationship? This is what we

are being told in the Bible. This passage, right? You will understand the fear of the Lord.

You will find the knowledge of God. That awe and respect, that understanding and insight is what creates our love for God, what feeds it, what nourishes it, what fleshes it out and gives it audibility and visibility and substance. God becomes real to us when we understand the fear, the awe.

When we find the knowledge of God, we find it. It becomes real and substantial to us. This is the first great result.

This is the first then. And why does this become real and substantial and meaningful to us? Because the Lord gives wisdom. It's not just an abstraction.

It's not a set of values. It's not a list of ethical propositions. Wisdom is an expression of God's own mind and heart and character.

It isn't just wisdom in the abstract. It is the expression of God. This is what John is getting at in chapter one.

The word is God, the logos. You come to know God by understanding his thoughts, his purposes, his heart, his objective, his character, his personality. You can't separate the wisdom from God himself because he is the one who gives it.

It comes from him and it is conditioned and colored and defined by the source. This is godly wisdom. This is why people say, know the truth, the truth will set you free.

Any truth I learn is gonna help set me free. No, Jesus said, I am the truth. 14.6 of John, I am the truth.

When you know that truth, you will have freedom in Christ. You will have liberty in God. Not all truth is God's truth.

Not all truth confers power for change, for improvement, for growth, for function, for laying hold of eternal life with all of its benefits and privileges and opportunities. So fulfilling these conditions in verse one and in verse three and in verse four, these if clauses, these alephs, this is where you begin. You have to begin by fulfilling these conditions.

It leads to the purpose, the destination, the point. The outworking is to understand the fear of the Lord and find the knowledge of God, to lay hold of this sound wisdom that he stores up for the upright, to enjoy the protection that he affords to those who walk uprightly in verse seven. To be walking just paths.

You don't need somebody creating a social movement. You don't need someone flying an ethical banner or creating a slogan and agitating and rioting and tearing down in order to make way for something new. God guards the paths of justice.

God preserves the way of his saints. Then we have another then in verse nine. As we go to the break, you can take a few minutes to look at what follows in verse nine, see how it compares and contrasts to the purpose that is expressed in verses five, six, seven, and eight.

See if you can deduce our next point. Fulfilling the conditions, the first purpose, the first goal, the first opportunity, the first great fulfillment is to come to understand God himself. What is the second great purpose that fulfilling these conditions will accomplish? We'll see it when we come back from the break.