

Proverbs 22-09-28a

Greetings, welcome to the Wednesday night Bible study at Grace and Truth Bible Church. This is the 28th day of September, 2022. We're in the book of Proverbs.

We have come to chapter three. We've covered the first two chapters. We've seen some of the structure of the book and its theme.

We're going to be revisiting that theme because Proverbs itself revisits it in the seventh verse of our third chapter. It's an important subject, one that we need to understand our theme and our study tonight is the fear of the Lord. What exactly is the fear of the Lord would be helpful since it is so often mentioned in scripture to have a very good firm grip on exactly what it is and what it isn't.

Let's take a moment to ask God's blessing on our study, on our time of fellowship and we'll begin. Father, we're so grateful for the fellowship that you have created for us and entered us into. We're grateful for each one who participates in our time of study and of celebration of our status in the Lord Jesus Christ.

We thank you for our ongoing work of intercession on our behalf. His example has soon returned to take us to himself and to present us before your throne. We pray that our study tonight will prepare us for life and service both in this age and in the ages to come.

That each one will be encouraged, that the Holy Spirit will impress these truths on our hearts in a meaningful and effective way. We ask it in Jesus name. Amen.

Proverbs chapter 1 verse 7 gave us the theme, the overarching purpose statement for this collection of wisdom. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and instruction. I saw a very clever summary of this verse recently, where someone said the first half of it gives us levitation.

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of building up and drawing us closer to God. The second half is gravitation. Fools who don't appreciate and don't value God's wisdom and God's words are dragged downward.

This is a really good summary of whether we entertain the fear of the Lord or we prioritize something else. But let me begin with a pop quiz question. If you had to describe in a single sentence or short paragraph the fear of the Lord, what would you say? Respect.

Reverence. Honor. Obviously God as the object of these things.

Knowledge. It comes through knowledge. Pretty difficult to reverence and respect and be in awe of something we really don't know much about.

There is love. Great appreciation goes along with it. There is actually a very helpful biblical definition.

When I decided I was going to investigate the fear of the Lord, because I didn't feel like I had an adequate grip on exactly what it is, all of these concepts are valid. All of them are a part of it. In some ways, the fear of the Lord is like the elephant, that the men from Hindustan go and they're all blind and they're trying to figure out what it is.

Every perception that we have is valid, but we don't always draw conclusions from it that incorporate an appreciation of the entirety. But God has helpfully provided for us an exact and specific and detailed definition of what the fear of the Lord is. Now, we can already tell that there are two kinds of fear.

There is the abject fear that recognizes divine retribution and judgment are falling. We're not really talking about that. I imagine fear of the Lord fell upon those who began to drown outside the ark, those who were in Sodom and Gomorrah and the three other cities of the plain.

The Egyptians, when God sent the nine plagues and then the death of the firstborn, those enemies and opponents of the people of God as they endeavored to leave Egypt and enter the promised land. The fear of the Lord, Rahab said, had fallen on all of the people of the land when they heard of God's mighty works. This is somewhat different than what we're talking about.

And I just, in passing, want to note that there is a fear that is a genuine mortal fear of judgment and loss of all things. But we're looking at the positive aspect. But these are often conflated.

And because they are conflated, then it's misunderstood. In the modern push for progressive Christianity and the Jesus hermeneutic and peace, love, no harm, no judgment, no retribution, no execution of God's justice, no separation of people. Everybody will be happy over there.

Some people will just take longer to get there because they are currently not really getting the program. But this leads ultimately to universalism. God so loved the world, so the world through Christ is going to be saved.

And they think that's everybody. And there is no negative consequence to not responding to the call of God except that which is self-inflicted. You're just outside the fold.

You're lost. You're getting tangled up in the thorn bushes. And it's really your own fault.

But there's no active judgment, no active discipline, no active retribution on God's part to the disobedient, to the rebellious, to the wayward, to the sinners of the high hand.

And this is wrong. It is demonstrably, biblically false.

It is the devil's own lie that God has only given you commandments because he's got some agenda of his own and the first lie in the garden. God knows that if you eat this fruit, you'll be like him, knowing good and evil. So we want to take note of this other kind of fear, but we're going to concentrate on the fear of the Lord mentioned in Proverbs 1.7. We saw it again in 2.5. After receiving the words and treasuring the commands, inclining our ear and applying our heart, crying out for discernment, lifting up our voice for understanding, seeking it as silver, searching for it as for hid treasures, then you will understand the fear of the Lord.

Understand the fear of the Lord and find the knowledge of God. This is knowledgeable fear, abject fear, fear of destruction, fear of pain, fear of judgment and consequences, is largely an unthinking and visceral flight mode. You can't fight it, so you can only flight.

It's not fight or flight, it's only flight. People crying out for the rocks to fall on them because that would be better than the judgment of God in Revelation. This is a thinking fear.

This is a conscious and choosing fear. Let's read the first seven verses of chapter three. My son, do not forget my law, but let your heart keep my commands for length of days and long life and peace they will add to you.

Who would not want these blessings? And to have God clearly state the means by which they are obtained is, this is great, it's not a mystery. Length of days, long life, peace they will add to you. Let not mercy and truth forsake you, bind them around your neck, write them on the tablet of your heart, and so find favor and high esteem in the sight of God and man.

Once again, who wouldn't want this? Verse five, trust in the Lord with all your heart, lean not on your own understanding, in all your ways acknowledge Him and He shall direct your paths. Your New King James text note is good there. This has the idea of making your path straight.

He will make your path straight. A straight path is easier to follow than a crooked path. You don't have to worry about going too fast and not making a curve.

You don't have to worry about tripping over something that was unseen. The call of God's messenger is to make a straight path for the glory of the Lord to return. No impediments, no encumbrances, no hindrance.

He will make your path clear. The one thing about a straight path, you can see quite a ways down that path. If you're walking in the light and your path is straight, you're not wondering, well, what's around that left turn? What's around that bend in the road? You are ready.

You can anticipate whatever may come your way. Look at verse 7. Do not be wise in your own eyes. Fear the Lord and depart from evil.

It will be health to your flesh and strength to your bones. Flesh there is literally your navel. People recognized or watching the birth of babies that life seemed to enter the baby's body from the mother through the navel.

Continued health would enter your body the same way that initial life and health entered it. Of course, this is figurative for all sorts of blessings. Health to your flesh, strength to your bones.

So this is refreshment and it transcends the merely physical. You can not feel that great and yet feel great. You can see God and yet not see God at the same time.

Something we're going to see a bit later tonight. Have we seen God or have we not seen God? Yes. Have we not seen God or have we seen him? Yes.

Can we be physically afflicted and yet have health and strength in our bones and through our navel? Yes. Because we live a transcendent life, we see what is unseen. It is still unseen and yet it is seen.

We may not be perfectly well off. I've managed to endure several self-inflicted wounds here lately and yet I'm with the Beatles. I feel fine.

God loves me and I feel fine. And it's a blessing to be granted by God a transcendent life. A life that rises above circumstance so that our happiness doesn't depend on what is external, what is temporary, what is fleshly, and what is earthly.

This is a gift of God and it is promised to those who do what? Fear the Lord. I want this fear of the Lord. I want to choose it.

There is a passage coming up that says we choose the fear of the Lord. Well, to choose it, I have to know what it is. So what is it? Flipping your Bible back to Deuteronomy 10.

God left Israel in no doubt about what He meant when He enjoined the fear of the Lord on His people. Deuteronomy 10 is the time of the second set of tablets through disobedience. The first ones ended up getting shattered and so God makes Moses carve out a fresh set.

But when you get to verse 12, Deuteronomy 10, 12, this is our passage. Now Israel, what does the Lord your God require of you? This is a passage I want to read. Don't you want to know what this says? What does the Lord require of you? What does He expect? But to fear the Lord your God.

Now He is going to detail, that is the heading. The Lord requires you to fear the Lord your God. What is that? Number one, to walk in all His ways.

Number two, and you're going to see many of the answers you gave me at the beginning in this list. Number two, to love Him. Number three, to serve the Lord your God.

Moderately, occasionally, haphazardly, indiscriminately. How is it that we are to serve the Lord God? With all your heart and with all your soul. Jesus reminds us that we are to love the Lord, our God, with all our heart and all our soul and all our strength and all our mind, as we've recently seen in Matthew.

So what do you have so far? Number one, to walk in some of His ways, to walk in selected ways, to walk in all His ways. How can you walk in all His ways unless you have familiarized yourself and acquainted yourself with all His ways? There are doctor shows where a patient comes in and they're trying to figure out why they've got these peculiar symptoms. What could account for this white blood cell count and this low level of one thing and this high level of something else? Why do they have hives? Why are they experiencing a liver problem or kidney problem or an infarction somewhere else in their system? And these doctors, because they are highly skilled and the best at what they do, can from memory say, well, there are only three conditions that account for this plus this.

It's either diabetes or it's whatever it may be. They are so familiar with medical knowledge that given a set of symptoms, they can offer possible causes. To walk in all His ways, we have to be intimately acquainted with what those ways are so that we don't inadvertently walk some way that we shouldn't.

That's why we're in Bible class, right? So number one, to walk in all His ways, circle all, all His ways. You don't get there by going to church once a week, occasionally listening to a program on the radio or cracking open a devotional and randomly picking a stream in the desert and reading that. To walk in all His ways, you have to be intimately acquainted with them.

That's number one. Number two, to love Him. Pretty difficult to love someone with whom we are unacquainted, who we don't know about, that we haven't learned about, that we don't understand.

Hard to love someone you don't understand. Number three, to serve Him with all your heart and with all your soul. This is full commitment.

This is full commitment. It's like a rocket launch when they're checking with all the different systems and, you know, flight, go. You know, checking on the astronaut's health, go.

Are the engines ready? Go. Is the navigation spun up? Go. Is the computer online? Go.

Has everybody gotten away from the gantry? Go. And all of these different things that they check, and then they commit, and they say, okay, we're committed to launch.

There's no turning back at this point.

When I was a child, we learned a song, I've Decided to Follow Jesus. No turning back, no turning back. It's full commit.

This is what I've chosen. I'm not rethinking it. I'm not second-guessing it.

I am fully committed. All the heart, all the soul. There's no part of my heart, no part of my soul that's left to wander around saying, well, I wonder if there's an alternative.

It's full on, pedal to the metal, everything in. Number four, to keep the commandments of the Lord and His statutes. The commandments of the Lord and His statutes.

What's the difference in commandments and statutes? You know what a commandment is. Do this, don't do that. What about the statutes? The statutes define what is right and what is wrong.

Oppressing the poor and the widow and the orphan is wrong. Cursing the deaf and putting a stumbling block in front of the blind is wrong. Whether that is phrased in terms of a command or not, those principles widen out and apply in other circumstances.

There is a command that says, do not curse the deaf and do not put a stumbling block before the blind. By the way, it's one of our fear of the Lord passages. You are to fear the Lord by not doing these things.

What statute would derive from that command? Never take advantage of someone just because they're vulnerable. Maybe you've got a business and someone else has a competing business and they suffer a setback and there's an opportunity to take their customers and wipe them out. They're helpless in that regard.

There was a fire at their warehouse. They lost a bunch of employees. Some bad thing happened.

Maybe they were robbed. And you say, wow, now is the time to strike. They're vulnerable.

They're deaf or they're blind. The statute is, don't finish off someone just because they're vulnerable. What is the right thing to do? It's the counterintuitive thing.

Help them. Let them get back on their feet. Make a friend of them instead of wiping them out as the competition.

As just one example, the statute is a principle. We can derive statutes from commands. Many of the statutes are stated explicitly.

This is clean. This is unclean. And we know to avoid what is unclean and to restrict

ourselves to what is clean and so on.

So to keep the commandments and the statutes, not just a literal observing of the tithe right down to the spices in the cabinet, but to not miss the higher points of the law, the higher concepts. Remember Jesus condemning the Pharisees because they were keeping the commandments, but they were completely missing the statutes. The meaning behind those commands, the principles that guide God's heart in establishing right and wrong, good and bad, moral and immoral, ethical and unethical.

Then he says something here in verse 14. Indeed, heaven and the highest heavens belong to the Lord your God, also the earth with all that is in it. Why is that included at this point? We're defining the fear of the Lord.

God's people are enjoined to express and exercise the fear of the Lord in these specific ways as defined by these elements. Then in verse 14, what happens? What have the heavens and the highest heavens got to do with it? What does this do? Let me ask my question a different way. What is the key to understanding scripture? What are the three C's of scripture interpretation? Context, context, and context.

What is the context in which we are fearing the Lord, keeping his commandments, loving him, walking in his ways, serving him with heart and soul? What is the context? He is the God of heaven. He is the God of the highest heavens. This is not an arbitrary God that has been picked out from among many.

This is the unique one and only creator God. And to remember that there is a reason to love him, a reason to appreciate him, a reason to serve him. If he is the God of the highest heaven, what's above him? There is nothing above him.

Remember the name of the devotional, My Utmost For His Highest? Think about that title. It's a great title. Some of these titles you think they're just virtually inspired.

Streams in the Desert, My Favorite of All Time, How Should We Then Live? But My Utmost For His Highest. You could imagine that Oswald Chambers and some of these titles looking at scripture. Does this not look like My Utmost For His Highest? He is the God of the highest heavens.

The Lord delighted in your fathers to love them, and he chose their descendants after them, you above all peoples, as it is this day. This is true of Israel. What is true of us? We were chosen in him before the foundation of the world.

Being in Christ, that's better than being chosen because of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob. We are chosen in Christ. Context.

Where is the Lord Jesus Christ right now? He is seated in the highest heavens at his father's right hand, representing us, interceding for us, serving as high priest for us. Of

how much greater motivational force ought that to be than this statement for the people of Israel? Therefore, verse 16, circumcise the foreskin of your heart. Circumcision was the sign of the covenant.

It is a physical manifestation of covenant relationship to God. God gave it to Abraham way back. This is before Sinai.

This is before Isaac. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the sign of God's covenant, an overt sign, a reminder sign. Every day men were reminded that they were in covenant relationship with God.

So, circumcise the foreskin of your heart. What does that mean? Your heart should be marked by an overt, visible dedication to covenant relationship with God. I am not the same.

I am different. In England, they say different from. In America, we say different than.

It's a real curiosity to me. I don't know how that developed. We're Americans, so we say we are different than unbelievers.

We're not dedicated to job. We are not dedicated to family. We are not dedicated to loved ones.

We are not dedicated to spouses or children more than we are dedicated to God. This is a hard truth because we love intensely. We love dearly.

We love fully those who are close to us. And as believers, we have even greater capacity to invest in each other, friends and family. There's a friend that sticks closer than a brother.

There is a love that is so great that you would lay down your life for another. But what did Jesus say? If anyone loves father and mother, son or daughter, brother or sister more than me, he cannot be my disciple. Love for God is first.

Circumcise the foreskin of your heart and be stiff necked no longer. You remember several years ago, we encountered what it is to be stiff necked. And all day long, I have held out my hands to a disobedient and stiff necked people.

And in that study, without rehearsing it or reviewing it, this is not that you can't turn your neck. This is to show the back of the neck. It is the one who is the swine leaving.

And Jesus said, do not cast your pearls in front of these departing swine. Why? They will turn. They were leaving.

And you said, wait, don't go, don't go. Here, look at these pearls. Swine have no appreciation, no capacity to even understand what a pearl is or how valuable it is.

They will turn and rip you to pieces, showing the back of the neck. What does it mean here? Be showing the back of your neck no longer in order for God to see the back of your neck. You have to be turning away from him towards something else.

We are always turning toward something else. Eve in the garden had the command of God. Eat anything you want from these trees.

Just don't eat this from this one. Satan placed something else in front of her as an idea, and she prioritized that over the command of God. She thought God said, you shall not eat of it, neither shall you touch it.

If that's what she thought, what did she do? She broke both. She reached out her hand and took the fruit and she ate it. You can argue whether or not God said anything about touching it, but she told the serpent, God said, don't touch it.

And then she reached out and touched it. She said, we shall not eat of it. And she reached out and ate of it.

That is the back of the neck. You know, the command of God, or you think, you know, the command of God and you turn away from it towards something else. Well, this she saw that it was good to look upon and desirable to make one wise.

She was created second after Adam. And she thought, I can, I can accelerate past him here. I'll be the first one to be wise.

I'll be wise like God. Adam hasn't eaten the fruit yet. Something about that appeal caused her to show the back of her neck to the word of God, to the statutes, to the commandments.

She didn't stop and think, why would God give me this command? How is this fruit different than any other fruit? It wasn't poison. Even though God said in the day that you eat thereof, you will surely die. It wasn't poison.

They didn't fall down with arsenic poisoning. It wasn't a neurotoxin. What happened? It was the disobedience that sowed the seeds of death.

There's nothing probably any different about the fruit, except that God said, don't. That's showing the back of the neck. Are there areas in our lives where God has said don't? And we suppress that truth in unrighteousness, where God has said do, and we suppress that truth.

It is not as important to us as something else. Well, that takes too much time. Well, let me wait and do that at a more convenient season.

Remember in the latter chapters of Acts, Paul's talking to Felix and Drusilla and them. And now I'll hear you again at a more convenient time. It's not convenient for me to think

about your words right now.

I'll save that for later. And of course, it's the round to it that we never get. God is not kidding about the fear of the Lord.

It has to be first. It has to be most. It has to be all in.

This is the description. If you don't ever write another verse down and stick it where you can read it on a mirror, on the fridge, on a bulletin board, in something that pops up as a daily alarm on your phone, this is a passage because the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. The fear of the Lord is life and health.

37 of Proverbs, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve him with all the heart and all the soul, to keep his commandments and his statutes, to go beyond just the explicit do's and don'ts, to perceive the principle that is involved, to circumcise the heart. I have decided to follow Jesus. No turning back.

This is a once for all commitment. I am committed. It is a covenant and I will not break it.

Make a covenant marriage? Not going to break it. Make a covenant with God? Not going to break it. Do you really want God to break his covenant with us? We take our salvation so for granted.

Well, what if I'm a little apathetic? What if I'm a little sinful? What if I'm kind of sloppy and kind of haphazard and so-so and here and there and scattered? I'm a pretty good person. I'm better than a lot of believers I know. Do you just turn it around? Do you want God to be as faithful on his end of the bargain as we are on our end? Well, I mostly saved you.

I got most of your resurrection body put together. I got part of your mansion in the sky built. Do you really want God to be sloppy, haphazard, indifferent, so-so, here and then busy? Oh yeah, I know I made you that promise, but all my son's here.

I'm talking with him. I've got the Holy Spirit. I've got all these angels.

Look at how many people there are in the world. I know you're praying, but I'll listen to that later. We are forgiven to the extent that we forgive others.

We are blessed to the extent that we are a blessing because we are a residence place for God and his Spirit and his Son. And taking it casually, taking it sort of for granted and is not a big priority, what if God treats us with exactly the same priority we treat him? Now I'm putting him at number one. I am going to think about him when I wake up.

I'm going to think about him about once an hour. I'm going to set a beeper on my watch to go off and am I doing, am I walking, am I loving, am I serving, am I keeping, am I circumcising, am I loving the stranger? That's the next one. And we'll see that when we

come out from the break.

We've got five more infinitives here, five more parts of what it is to fear the Lord. In just this little section of Deuteronomy, the key to the fear of the Lord, the definition of the fear of the Lord is given to us. And once we latch onto it, once we realize what it is, and once we begin to practice it, you want to talk about something that is life transforming, this is it.

We'll see more when we come back from the break.