

Proverbs 22-10-05b

Let's resume our study now in the book of Proverbs. We're on the threshold of chapter three, and we're going to see the reason that we're reviewing tonight, the imperatives and incentives is that there is a real turning point and an emphasis on this pattern when we get to chapter three. We've seen it introduced in chapter one, looking at verses eight and nine.

My son, hear the instruction of your father. Do not forsake the law of your mother. You have a positive and a negative.

Do this, don't do that. And then there is the incentive. There'll be a graceful ornament and a necklace, an adornment.

And then in verse 10, my son, if sinners entice you, negative command, do not consent. There are things that we should pursue and accomplish and do. There are other things that we should avoid and from which we should flee.

Then you move down to verse 15 and 16. My son, do not walk in the way with them. The first negative in verse 10, if sinners entice you, do not consent.

This is kind of a point in time. They come to you and say, hey, I've got a proposition for you. We're going to do this tonight, or we're going to embark on this activity, this enterprise, this scheme.

If they entice you, don't consent. There's a decision point. It's a yes or no.

By the time you get to the completion of the description of what they do and how they do it, you get to verse 15. My son, do not walk in the way with them. Not only should you refuse their proposals, but don't walk in the way.

This is always a metaphor for a pattern of life, for continuing to consort. Why would they approach a young man in the first place and try to entice him? He's known, he's a friend, he's an acquaintance. He's someone that they think might be a prospect.

But if you never walk in the way with them, they're going to stop approaching you. You're going to be off the list of prospects. Do not walk in the way with them.

Keep your foot from their path, their habits, their way of thinking, their way of acting. Stay away from it as a pattern of life. And what is the incentive part? Why should you do this? Because their feet run to evil and they make haste to shed blood.

And if you walk in their path, if you walk in their way, if you associate and confederate with them, you will be guilty of evil. You will be blood guilty. Evil is one thing, blood guilt is the worst and most heinous form of it.

So imperative, incentive. Then beginning in verse 20, you have the fool's way. Wisdom calls out and is trying to turn fools out of their way.

And this is largely a description of wisdom's exhortation, wisdom's opportunity presented to give people a chance to change, to be delivered. And there is an imperative in the midst of this. It's not a direct imperative to the son of the father and mother, like we saw in the earlier part of the chapter.

But remember wisdom in verse 23 says, turn at my rebuke. That's the imperative to the fool. Turn at my rebuke.

When you hear this, stop and change your mind, change your path, change your way. Tom Jones did a song with Hugh Laurie. If you know, everybody knows who Tom Jones is.

If you know who Hugh Laurie is. Anyway, Hugh writing on the fame of his long series called House on TV. And before that he was well-known in British comedy circles.

But after his stint as House, he was very well-known. He was a household word, if you will. And that's for Dan.

And so he published an album. He's a very enthusiastic jazz musician and aficionado. And so he did an album of jazz.

And there's a song on there that he does with Tom Jones. And it's really a catchy tune, but all I can hear when I come to this section of Proverbs is Tom Jones singing, baby, please make a change. Please make a change.

I think it would do you good. And whatever you may think of Tom Jones from his career in the 60s and 70s, when he sings this song, he just hits it out of the park. Baby, please make a change.

I think it would do you good. I know it would do you good. Make a change.

And that's the call of wisdom here. It is an imperative. Turn and my rebuke.

There's a lot of things we can do when we get a rebuke, right? Somebody points out an inelegancy or an inefficiency or a lack or a failure. Sometimes we're forgetful. Sometimes we're neglectful.

Sometimes we're just busy. We like to give ourselves all kinds of excuses for malfunction, but somebody points it out and it's a rebuke. It's like, what'd you do that for? Didn't we talk about this? Why are you doing this? And we have options at the point of rebuke.

Now, once again, remember, the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. So let's put ourselves in the context of the fear of the Lord. The Lord is at hand.

I need to be moderate in everything. God is with me. John, the great high priestly prayer there after the upper room, Jesus says, I am in the Father, you are in me, and I am in you.

If you have my words and keep them, you're the one that loves me. I and my Father will come to you. We will make our home with you.

What is the purpose of that? What's the purpose? Why should God bother to make his home with us? God, the Father, making his home with me? Why on earth would he do that? He's got the third heaven throne room. He's surrounded by legions of angels who do exactly what he wants. I am gonna be a huge disappointment.

This is going to a fishing cabin instead of dwelling in the great, you know, \$500 million mansion. Why would God do that? Why would the Lord Jesus and the Father come to where the Holy Spirit already is and the three persons of the Trinity dwell in and with us? Why would they do that? They do it because we have chosen the fear of the Lord. And because we've chosen it, they are going to help us implement it.

The Lord is near. The Lord is at hand. The Lord is within me.

I am indwelt. I am filled. I am accompanied.

I am observed. I am carrying around the three persons of the Trinity. If I'm an obedient, faithful believer, God is with me.

Now, how much motivation, how much persuasive power is there that God is riding around, looking out my eyes, hearing what comes in my ears, monitoring what comes out of my mouth? How easy is it to maintain, develop, cultivate and grow my fear of the Lord when God is with me? That's why he comes and dwells. Because now the effulgence of his glory can begin to be manifested in, through and beyond me. God can manifest his glory out of me, which is, that's just such a mind boggling concept.

It almost brings tears to your eyes. God can manage to turn this lump of corrupt and fallen clay into a lighthouse for his glory to shine. Crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights.

What is the light that shines? It's not works of righteousness that I have done. It's not my wonderful character and my scintillating personality. How can I shine as a light in a dark, fallen, corrupt and crooked world? Among whom you shine as lights, because God is present.

He is the Fresnel lens. He is the source of this intense divine glory and power that is working in and through me. It's a stunning privilege to be a place where God can do that.

How easy is it going to be to maintain the fear of the Lord if I am aware of that every

waking moment? God is just looking for another opportunity for his glory to shine through me in the midst of this crooked and perverse generation. Notice he doesn't say the light will shine forth from you and fix the crooked and make it straight. And it's going to hit the perverse and turn it into the lovely and the beneficial and the blessed.

The light shining forth is a call to people to be transferred out of darkness into the kingdom of the son of his love. It isn't a fix for the darkness. Our light isn't gonna fix darkness.

Our witness isn't going to transform. We can be salt and we can be light, but those have an effect that transforms because of the presence and power of God and people coming to it. I wanna read you something and I'll apologize in advance.

I'm not trying to cast aspersions on anyone, but this is a representative specimen of what is being put out as truth in the progressive Christian world. Now, to be fair, there are other expressions that are closer to the mark than this, but the fact that someone can say this at all is scary. This is kind of your pop quiz.

We're gonna just set Proverbs down for a minute. We're thinking in terms of the fear of the Lord and how God accomplishes his work in us and through us, right? Now, I want you to listen to this. As we daily draw from the inexhaustible riches of Christ, which are spoken of by Paul in Ephesians 3.8. You think about Ephesians, Ephesians 3, Ephesians 3.8, the riches of Christ.

As we daily draw on this inexhaustible source, everything is good so far. He is an inexhaustible source. It's the riches of Christ, Ephesians 3.8. I'm with you 100%.

Great. We are able to cast aside all religious hamster wheels. All right.

So we're about to get a metaphor. So what is a hamster wheel? You're running, running, running, but you're not going anywhere. Unless they hook up an external generator, you're not producing any useful work.

You're just working for its own sake. This is like a treadmill. You don't go anywhere, but it might do you some personal good.

All right. We can cast aside all religious hamster wheels as we daily draw from the inexhaustible riches of Christ. Okay.

I'm not going to get my power and benefit from a hamster wheel activity. I'm gonna draw on the riches of Christ. Okay.

Good so far. If you define your terms the way I define them. But here's how it continues.

A religious hamster wheel is a metaphor for spiritual performance programs designed to make us good enough for God to love and accept us. Okay. I'm thinking legalism.

I'm gonna buy my good works, impress God and earn his grace or earn his favor. Okay. I wouldn't want to do that.

The Bible invades against that. Jesus invades against it. So once again, a religious hamster wheel is a metaphor for spiritual performance programs designed to make us good enough for God to love and accept us.

What would such a spiritual performance program be in your experience, in your observation? Can you think of us? Okay. Maybe if I'm gonna go do a... I'm gonna go to a seminar. I'm gonna work through a book.

I'm gonna answer questions. I'll go to a retreat. I'll maybe... Somebody says witness to a person a day.

Read a verse a day. Memorize a chapter a month. And in some kind of way, I'm gonna view that as spiritual health and pleasing in God's sight.

And he'll bless me because I'm doing such a thing. I'm a little bit confused by spiritual performance program, but I keep reading. Religious hamster wheel.

It's spiritual performance programs designed to make us good enough for God to love and accept us. I don't think anybody pitches them that way. These wheels include... Okay, so now we're gonna get a list of what this viewpoint believes are spiritual performance programs that are designed to make us good enough for God.

These wheels include prayer, Bible study, Bible memory, quoting Bible passages, being a good neighbor, loving the unlovable, giving to the poor, witnessing for Jesus, going to church, and otherwise being a moral and pleasant person. These are specimens of... These are all spiritual hamster wheels. So let's break them down one by one.

Prayer, spiritual hamster wheel. You're just trying to make yourself acceptable in God's sight by praying. Bible study.

You're studying your Bible because you're trying to make... You think by studying the Bible, you'll make yourself good enough for God. Bible memory, memorizing those scriptures. You're just trying to impress God, I guess.

Quoting Bible passages. If I don't quote Bible passages, this is gonna be a really short class. Being a good neighbor.

Second Great Commandment, anyone? And these people are the first to embrace love your neighbor, love your enemy, express the love of Jesus. So I'm really confused by this perspective that says... Now, I suppose anybody could turn something into a hamster wheel by not doing it for the right reasons. But it seems to me a dangerous thing to say this and diminish the importance or the centrality.

Prayer is me talking to my Father in heaven. Bible study is my Father in heaven talking to me. And if you say, that's just a hamster wheel, you're not gonna get anywhere doing that.

So I'm gonna be waiting to say, okay, well, what do you think is going to be the grist for my spiritual life? I just have to read this again. A religious hamster wheel is a metaphor for spiritual performance programs designed to make us good enough for God to love and accept us. Was prayer designed to make us good enough for God to love and accept us? Was Bible study designed to make us good enough for God to love? Bible memory, being a good neighbor, loving the unlovable, giving to the poor, witnessing for Jesus, going to church, being a moral and pleasant person.

These are just programs designed to legalistically make us good in God's sight. Either this is a very poor expression and a misuse of the English language or something's off here. This is the next paragraph.

Like hamsters, we run and run and run to be good enough and to get rid of guilt and condemnation from our impure thoughts and motives. But we never really make progress, no matter what, it is never good enough. There's always more to do.

We spend endless energy in all kinds of attempts to get God and others to accept us. So is the idea here that we should stop attempting to be qualified for God to accept us? Is there such a thing as somebody who is not acceptable in God's sight? In this narrative, all such attempts are just running in a hamster wheel. What you need to realize, the good news is, the grace of God excludes all performance wheels.

You see, God does not love us because of our works. The unmovable fact is that we are accepted exclusively because of the person and work of Jesus Christ. This is what the marvelous matchless grace is all about.

By faith in Christ, we are in Christ and Christ alone is the one who makes us accepted in God. Ephesians 1.6, we've made acceptable in the beloved, remember in him, those wonderful things we studied in Ephesians 1. So no need for wheels and treadmills. You just said prayer, Bible study, Bible memorization, loving your neighbor is a hamster wheel.

And now you're saying there is no need for those wheels. Are you saying there is no, I mean, is this really what you mean? I'm baffled by this. No need for wheels and treadmills.

God accepts us because of Christ and nothing can change that. I'm including this tonight as a specimen of propositional expression. It's an expression of an expression.

I don't know what to call this. This is what is being put forward as viewpoint, philosophy of life, the life of a believer. This is being put forward as the way to do it.

What does your fear of the Lord tell you about this? We've been talking about the fear of the Lord in his practical outworking. What does that tell you? It tells me there is a confusion here. I gave you that FF Bruce quote in the first session on purpose.

A partial truth that is put for the whole truth is dangerous. Is it true that we are acceptable in the beloved? Ephesians 1.6, of course it's true. The Bible says it.

Can you say that because we are accepted in the beloved, there is unconditional acceptance? And there's no, you don't have to do anything. It doesn't matter in terms of acceptance before God. It doesn't matter if you pray.

It doesn't matter if you study the Bible. It doesn't matter if you know the commands. It doesn't matter if you get any revelation from Proverbs, Matthew, or anywhere else in scripture.

You're already accepted. And so the conclusion here is no need for wheels and treadmills. God accepts us because of Christ.

Nothing can change that. It really is all about Jesus. This sounds great.

I mean, how can it not be all about Jesus? What do you think of that? Pop quiz. It really is all about Jesus. True or false? False.

Listen to each word. It is really all about Jesus. A lot of it is about Jesus.

He is the way, the truth, and the life. But what is he the way to? If it's all about Jesus, what happened to the father? What happened to the Holy Spirit? What happened to the word of God? What happened to wisdom? What happened to consequences for foolishly ignoring the path of wisdom by saying... Let me put it this way. What was the Pharisees' assumption? We are sons of Abraham.

We're acceptable in God's sight because Abraham is our father. We have Abraham as our father. We're automatically accepted.

It doesn't matter what we do. Oh my goodness. It doesn't matter what I do.

I'm accepted in Jesus. How is that any different than it doesn't matter what I do. I'm accepted in Abraham.

Well, I cannot even measure the distance between those two because it's microscopic. There's virtually no difference. It is a partial truth.

Were the Jews heirs of the Old Testament covenant promises? Read Romans nine. I grieve for Israel because to them belong all of these. They're the chosen people of God.

To them belong the covenants, the promises, the word of God, of course. But if you take

that truth and put it as the whole truth, it's entirely dangerous. And that's what this does in my view.

So one of the things we're going to see as we move forward in Proverbs is there is a lot of wisdom. And you don't take one proverb and run it all the way to the bank any more than you take the promise of the Lord Jesus. Whatever you ask in my name, I will do.

Did Jesus say it? If Jesus said it, is it true? He is the truth. And he said, whatever you ask in my name, I will do for you, right? It's a truth. Is it the whole truth? Any conditions, any limiting features, any other factors to be considered? Or can I just say, well, I'm a Christian.

Jesus said, whatever you ask for, nothing doubting, it's going to happen. Danger, danger, danger. This is what the fear of the Lord protects us from.

Let me just finish this message. He has made us accepted in the beloved, so no need for wheels and treadmills, which has been defined above as prayer, Bible study, Bible memory, Bible passages quoted, being a good neighbor, loving the unlovable, giving to the poor, witnessing for Jesus, going to church, otherwise being a moral and pleasant person. If that were true, and as true in the Old Testament as in the new, would you have a pattern in Proverbs of imperatives and then incentives? Do this and don't do that, because here are good and bad consequences.

You have to make a choice. If you say I'm acceptable in the beloved, I am relieved of choice. I'm relieved of responsibility for whether or not I pray, whether or not I study the Bible, whether or not I am a sanctified and dedicated to God individual.

Romans 12, one and two means nothing to me. Present your bodies a living sacrifice, that takes some work. Presenting a sacrifice took work.

It took analysis. It took choices, this animal and not that animal. And if I'm gonna present myself, I better be sure that I'm at least as qualified as the metaphorical qualifications of the animal, that unblemished, without spot.

If it's dirty, better clean it up. Present yourselves a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable. This is your reasonable service.

It takes a choice and it takes action based on those choices, right? This says, nah, no need for hamster wheels. God accepts us because of Christ, nothing can change that. Is that true? Can our acceptability in Christ be changed by anything? Absolutely.

What does the Old Testament teach in terms of approach to God? Could leprosy change your acceptability in Abraham, your acceptability in the 12 tribes? Were you allowed to approach God if you were leprous? What about if you had come in contact with a dead body or with blood? Are you always acceptable because God has declared that in Isaac

shall thy seed be called and Israel is my chosen people and you are all priests and so on. There is so much truly dangerous thinking and teaching going on in the modern church. It's scary, but I am not here to say, wow, look at the failure over there.

I am using this as an example of the kind of thinking we can all do. I'm not worried about that guy over there or that group over there or these people posting this stuff over here. I'm worried about Sam blindly committing the very same thing.

The three fingers that would point back at me were I to point my finger at this and come out with some sort of, you know, response and try to squelch it, end it, counter it, oppose it. I'm not interested in that. I'm interested in try me and see if there'd be any wicked way in me.

Am I blinding myself? Am I making this same kind of mistake of taking a partial truth and making it my whole truth and excusing myself from responsibility and thereby what am I doing? I am missing the fear of the Lord and I'm not going to find the knowledge of God. That's what scares me. Me scares me.

This kind of thinking cropping up somewhere in me. This ought to scare all of us. Scare us sober, scare us straight and have us not walk, but run toward Mount Sinai.

I want to be Joshua. I want to be the 70 elders. I want to be Aaron.

I would love to be God helping me, Moses. Invited up the mountain, commanded up the mountain into the very presence of the glory of God so that my face shines, right? Why was Moses qualified? Is there anybody like Moses in terms of fear of the Lord? He is one of the few that is virtually untouchable in that regard. His, the biggest mistake you can accuse Moses of is striking the rock the second time.

And you think he hit a stick. He hit a rock with a stick. One of his biggest mistakes.

Wow. Wouldn't you love to have a record like that? This thing concludes by saying it is really all about Jesus. No, it isn't.

And by extension, this is saying it is really all about Jesus in his first advent, in his incarnation. It's about Jesus' example as he walked and talked among the people. That's what it's all about.

It's being like Jesus in his humiliation, in his emptying himself and taking on the form of a servant and coming in the likeness of men. Somehow amalgamating John 1 18. If you've seen me, you've seen the father.

And then looking at Jesus when he has emptied himself of everything that partakes of the father and has become human like us and gets tired and weak and hungry and is killable. And not finding a balance of all scriptures and all factors. We have to examine

ourselves to see if we are in the faith because the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.

Every waking moment, we ought to be conscious of the presence of God. That's the fear of the Lord. Little kids behave when the disciplinarian parent is around, when the strict teacher who can impose all kinds of consequences.

People drive great just at the sight of a police car. How many times have you gone through a town? Anytime you go through Salina, they got a police car parked right at the base of the hill after the bridge over Lake Hudson and you're coming downhill and the speed limit is 30 and it's so easy to coast into town doing 35 or 40. There's a police car sitting right there.

Everybody slows down. You see nothing but brake lights, especially somebody that doesn't drive in Salina much. Those brake lights get slammed on just at the sight of a police car.

The presence of law enforcement makes, Google can say there's a speed trap. Everybody slows down, right? When I know I'm being observed, when I know that there could be consequences for misbehavior, my priority is obedience. Not my needle is gonna be right on that or slightly below the speed limit.

I don't wanna get stopped. I don't want a ticket. I don't wanna have to go to court.

I don't wanna pay a fine. I am aware, when I'm made aware of law enforcement, I am a model driver. Put me in the manual for the course on how to drive.

I'm perfect. Why does God come and make His home with us? Why does the Holy Spirit indwell us? Why does the Lord Jesus knock at the door wanting to come in and sit at our table and fellowship with us? Would we say the things we say at the table if Jesus was at the table? Would we treat each other the way we treat each other sometimes if the Lord Jesus was standing there? How patient would we be? How diplomatic would we be? How empathetic would we be? How kind? How loving? How joyful? How peaceful? How patient? How long-suffering? How gentle? How good? How faithful? How meek? How self-controlled? Which you recognize as the fruit of the Spirit because the Spirit is present. If we're not doing that, the fear of the Lord is not before our eyes.

We are going to do a really interesting study on the fear of the Lord, but that is the heart of it. The fear of the Lord is the presence of the Lord and our response to it. How sanctified a life could we live? How representative of the Lord Jesus Christ would we be? Look at the Lord Jesus.

You want to look at Him in His Incarnation? Can you ever find a time that He is not aware of His Father? At the age of 12, I must be about my Father's business. If you've seen me, you've seen the Father because I am aware and I am representing the Father's interest

every waking moment. And possibly when He was asleep in the back of the boat.

Still, representing God's interest. That should be us. This is what Proverbs is going to plant in our soul.

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. And this wisdom, like the presence of the Lord Jesus for us in the church age, like the presence of God the Father in this age, the presence of God's Word, capital W, in the hearts of Old Testament saints was as good as the presence of God Himself. It engendered, it sponsored, it's a perpetual motion engine.

We can't do it in physics. We can't make a perpetual motion machine. But the presence of God and His Word in our soul is an inexhaustible source of power.

The power to be what we should be and to do what we should do, to think what we should think, say what we should say, invest the time, redeem it even though the days are evil, shine as lights, be prepared, learn what we need to learn, to be equipped and to be experienced for service and function in the kingdoms that are to come. What's not to like about this? Well, that's exactly how Proverbs is structured. If you fulfill this command, here are the concomitants.

This is the consequence. Here is the imperative. Here's the incentive.

We have that squared, exponentially multiplied in our age with the Holy Spirit, with the example of the Lord Jesus, with the New Testament scriptures. What's our excuse? What have we got going on that's better than this? Well, there were plenty of people who were fools and did not turn at the call of wisdom. And we can look at ourselves and say, you know, there are certainly times when I am the fool.

I don't listen. I blind myself. I shut off my sensitivity to the fear of the Lord.

Well, why am I doing that? Let's dedicate ourselves to heeding this exhortation. Taking a time of reflection before we commit. Just take a beat and think, fear the Lord.

How am I doing? Minimum of three times a day. Gut check. I'm preparing my plan for the day, evening and morning and at noon.

I will pray and cry aloud. Prayer is no hamster wheel. You cannot live the life to which we are called without it.

Knowledge of the Word of God, this wisdom. If wisdom is calling and you're saying, well, but I'm already accepted. What do I need that for? Wisdom is no hamster wheel.

The fear of the Lord is the only reason we are here. The only reason. There is no other reason except for us to be here and be people who fear the Lord.

It's our purpose. It's our definition. It's our function.

It's our opportunity. It's our privilege. Never more so in this age than to be members of the body of Christ.

Something to think about as we approach Proverbs chapter three. We have seen introductory and concluding imperatives and incentives in the first two chapters. When we get to chapter three, chapter three is nothing, but the first half of this chapter is nothing but imperatives and incentives.

These are just going to be piled on verse after verse after verse. It's an imperative and it's an incentive. Here's what you should do.

And here's why. Here's what you should not do. And here's why.

We've got to catch this pattern and not just observe it, but apply it. This is what I need to do when class is over and I'm folding up the tables and putting my Bible away. This is what I should be doing.

And this is why. We have to train our soul to think in these terms because society is not going to train us that way. Education is not going to train us that way.

Media is not going to train us that way. Christians who have been deflected off the path are not going to teach us this. I'm just going to bask in my acceptance in Christ.

You are going to fail. You're going to crater. You are going to pancake.

You are going to be crushed and destroyed by the first flaming arrow that Satan launches. You're going to be incinerated if you just say, but I thought I was accepted in the beloved. That is true.

But that is one of many truths, and it is not the defining truth. The defining truth of our life is the fear of the Lord. And you don't get there without wisdom, and wisdom is manifold.

That's why Proverbs is so long. But we'll see more of it when we come back next Wednesday. We'll close here in a word of prayer.

Father, thank you for the power of the sharp sword of your word, dividing us asunder, exposing the thoughts and intents of our heart. We pray that as we reflect on these truths, that the Holy Spirit will illuminate for us those areas where we can improve, where we can make effectual change, where we can begin to implement our respect, our awe, our love, our appreciation for what you have done for us in Christ, the privileges that you've bestowed on us, the opportunities that you have granted to us, that these will live and breathe in our souls and will define us as people, hour by hour, day by day, in the time that remains to us until the Lord Jesus comes to take us to himself and to

present us in your presence. We pray it in Jesus' name.

Amen.