

Proverbs 22-11-02a

Welcome to the Wednesday night Bible study here at Grace and Truth Bible Church. This is the 2nd of November 2022. We're in the book of Proverbs.

We have taken a bit of time as something of an excursus to dwell on and be sure we have a good grip on the fear of the Lord. It is a theme about which most of this book centers. It is introduced in chapter 1 verse 7. It is reiterated in chapter 2 verse 5 and continues to be revisited and mentioned over and over again throughout the collection of wisdom that we have before us.

We're going to continue and my favorite part of any such study is having seen the definition, having seen the description, having looked at the references to it and the facets of it that are revealed in scripture. The thing that's most interesting is how do I get it? How do I develop it? How do I answer the question, if the fear of the Lord is so great, so what? What does it mean to me? How can I put it into practice and make application of what I have learned? That's going to be the focus of our evening. Let's take a moment to go to the Lord in prayer, ask his blessing on our fellowship and on our understanding and we'll begin.

Father, we are grateful. We are humbled when we come before you and recognize the mighty gulf that you have spanned at Calvary with the words and the work of our Lord Jesus Christ, his life and his death and his resurrection without parallel in terms of importance in the history of this world, the history of the human race and certainly our own personal lives. We are so grateful to be called by your name, to be related to you permanently and eternally through the Lord Jesus Christ.

We thank you for the opportunity to be educated, to have your truth impressed upon us by the Holy Spirit who has been left to us by the Lord Jesus as a gift, as a comfort, as a source of guidance and power in these days where we seek to push against the resistance of the fallen flesh, a fallen world and an active adversary in the devil. And by your grace and through your provision, we can redeem the time and turn the days of this life into opportunity and potential both now and in the kingdom of your Son, the Lord Jesus, and your own kingdom which follows. We pray that as we look at these concepts and these portions of your word together that the Holy Spirit will make them meaningful and memorable to us, that we will truly be transformed, that our minds will be renewed.

We will know what your good and acceptable and perfect will is for our lives both individually and collectively. We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.

Our theme verse, of course, is the fear of the Lord, which is the beginning of knowledge. The last thing we want to do is be a fool that despises wisdom and instruction. And we immediately saw the link that the fear of the Lord is not a mystical attitude.

It's not an abstract emotion of dread. The link is to wisdom and instruction, knowledge, wisdom, and instruction. There is no fear of the Lord without this information.

Not just being informed, but taking that information on board and converting it, as we used to like to say in a New Testament sense, from gnosis to epinosis, from the page of scripture and from a head knowledge to a heart knowledge. That's how they taught me in Sunday school. Can't be head knowledge.

It's got to be heart knowledge. In other words, not just something that I can repeat or cite verbally or mentally, but that it gets inside me and changes my goals, my values, my priorities, therefore, my attitudes, my speech, and my actions. But working from the inside on the way out.

We understand that, I think, pretty well. You could say, well, I know that the fear of the Lord is grounded in the Word of God, which is the source of all spiritual, meaningful wisdom and knowledge and instruction. It doesn't come from anywhere else.

God has put it into His Word. That's why we have it. That's why He has preserved it.

However, here's my first question for the night. You ready? If there are so many Bibles, why are there so few actively fruitful, faithful, humble, fruit of the Spirit believers? We have unparalleled, unprecedented access to the Word of God. Never in the history of the world from Adam forward have there been people that were given so much by way of opportunity and access to God's Word.

Never, ever. More today than yesterday. More this month than last month.

More this year than last. More at the present time than ever. It's never been as accessible.

And I would argue that you don't see that accessibility and that availability translating into a nucleus of God-fearing, Holy Spirit, indwelt, filled, empowered, fruitful, active, shining a light in the dark place believers. They exist. I would like to think we exist.

But when you look at the world at large, do you see vast swaths of America populated? I see isolated corners populated. But certainly in the public discourse, the voice and the presence of such genuinely biblical, genuinely faithful, hopeful, and loving believers drowned out in the noise and the flurry of current events. I'm sure that social media and those who control it are partly to blame.

The rest of the media and they who control it are partly to blame. But I think you have to also observe that simply having the information and even knowing the information doesn't translate into spiritual maturity, spiritual fruitfulness, spiritual service, and function. The genuine humility that is the key.

I think the fear of the Lord is a facet of the genuine, biblical, spirit-driven humility that we should all have. Humility being teachability. Looking out not only for our own interests, but also for the interests of others.

Having the mind in us that was in Christ Jesus, the Philippians 2 description. So, that having been said, just having the wisdom available, having the knowledge at hand, having the instruction, and even sitting and listening to the instruction, exposing myself to instruction, doesn't necessarily make me what I ought to be. I saw somebody point out this past week that they really have trouble with the Southern Baptist denomination.

And why they got singled out for a rifle bullet this week I'm not sure, but the Southern Baptist got called out because even though they centered themselves on the Bible and prided themselves on preaching the Bible from their pulpits, their denomination was formed specifically to perpetuate slavery in the South. And splitting off from the rest of the let these people go, the Southern Baptist said, I don't think so. Everybody's reading the same Bible, everybody's worshiping the same God, everybody is saved by the same Lord Jesus, and yet there can be these massively different understandings and interpretations and applications with ostensibly the same So, along with my personal desire to cultivate the fear of the Lord in my own heart, I also have developed and continue to develop a very healthy fear, as it is described in the early chapters of Hebrews, where a promise being left of entering into God's rest, any of us should seem to fall short of it.

And the author who, as you know, I believe is Paul, says, let us fear, lest that promise still in existence doesn't get fulfilled in our lives. And we're all made out of the same clay. We are all as an unclean thing, all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags.

We all do fade as a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away. And to get an us versus them mentality is the key to disaster. Even within Bible church circles, and within that, the even tighter circles of some of the very intensive, verse-by-verse categories, exegesis, isagogics types of things, many assemblies, many churches have self-destructed by failing to see the difference between wisdom, knowledge, and instruction, and its intended result, which is the fear of the Lord.

So, that is my introduction, my point-out-the-need moment here at the beginning of our study tonight. Do we need to be sure we know how to develop, cultivate, and flesh out the fear of the Lord in our own lives? It's not enough to know that it comes from the Bible. We have to know how to nurture it, how to practice it, how to grow it in our thinking and in our hearts all the time.

Here's my second question for the night. Remember my first question? Why so many Bibles and so few faithful Christians? At least, how it appears from this vantage point. Here's my second question.

How can we increase the fear of the Lord in our own life? You might say, well, if it's based on wisdom, knowledge, and instruction, then I should get more wisdom, get more knowledge, and receive more instruction. That is certainly key. But let's say we've looked over these past several weeks of study on the fear of the Lord, and we say, I recognize that's important.

Is there anything more important? There are other things that are as important, but is there anything more important in our lives than having and expressing and living in the light of fear of the Lord? I would suggest there is not. I can't think of a higher priority than the fear of the Lord. If you doubt it, look up the 500-odd references to it that we have not talked about in this short survey.

We've spent about a month of Wednesdays looking at it, and we have not touched the hem of the garment of what the Scriptures have to say about the fear of the Lord. If you want a fruitful devotional study, chase it down. We're going to look at a few more of them tonight.

But I say all of this to emphasize that I don't think you can find something more important to wake up tomorrow morning thinking about, to stop in the middle of the day tomorrow and check on, and to review at the end of the day tomorrow, than what's my grade, what's my performance with regard to thinking, acting, cultivating attitudes that reflect the fear of the Lord. So, rather than just taking that measure and finding that we have dismally failed, it would be helpful to look at, how can I do this? We've got an abundance of instruction. I would argue that most of us know quite a bit of Bible.

I think it's just fair to say we know quite a bit of Bible. Are there any of us that really don't need any progress on the fear of the Lord? That I doubt. I think we could all do better.

I think we could all be more fulsome, more dedicated to that goal, and have a higher and greater expression of it, minute by minute, hour by hour, day by day. So, how do we do it? Well, first of all, we've talked about the importance of instruction. I think we've got that covered.

We do our best during the day, during each week, to either look at the Word of God afresh, or review what we've already seen from it, and think about it, pray over it, pray in the light of it, examine ourselves to see if we comport and conform to that faith. I think it's fair to say that any of us that are serious about our spiritual life already do that. That is an essential step.

This is the equivalent of if I want to drive my car to the store, I've got to start by finding my keys, going to the car, strapping into the driver's seat, inserting the key, turning on the ignition. You can't get there without that. But only getting those steps accomplished isn't going to get me to the store.

There are several steps, each of which is essential to arriving at the goal, right? So, yes, understanding of the Scriptures is key, but it's not the whole thing by a long shot. We have seen this, obviously, in 1.7 of Proverbs, and in Proverbs 9, verse 10, we saw the same thing. Fear the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, just as it is the beginning of knowledge.

That's all good, but turn forward in Proverbs to chapter 15, verse 33. This is also by way of quick review. There is an attitude that must prevail.

I'm going to talk a little bit about this attitude because this is a harder thing to trap. It is much more difficult to get by the tail and subdue and overcome. It is relatively easy to figure out a way to get the knowledge, to listen to the instruction, and so on.

Take notes, read books, listen to the radio, listen to Bible classes from a variety of sources, right? We can just do that and say we've done it. We're not there yet. We haven't arrived.

Not in the Walmart parking lot by a long shot. We're sitting in the car with the motor running. What is required? Well, you've got to know the route.

You've got to know the path or one of several paths that will get you there. We're here at my current location about 16 miles from Walmart. There are four or five different paths by which I can get there.

But look at Proverbs 15, verse 33. The fear of the Lord is the instruction of wisdom. We've got that.

But remember what the last half of this says? And before honor is humility. Oh my. All right.

Pop quiz question number three. How do I get humility? God resists the proud and gives grace to the humble. Being humble is a good thing.

I want to be humble. It's hard to be humble, Mac Davis saying, when you're perfect in every way. I can't wait to look in the mirror because I get better looking each day.

To know me is to love me. I must be a Gehenna of a man. Oh Lord, it's hard to be humble, but I'm doing the best that I can.

How do we actually acquire and become? Well, now I can't finish that sentence. How do we acquire humility? How do we become humble? Proverbs 15, verse 33 says, you've got to have it or there's not going to be honor. There will not be reward, blessing, accomplishment, opportunity, service, function, overcomer blessings.

Without humility, it's not going to happen. God will resist the proud. And if you ever noticed in scripture, there's no middle ground.

You're either humble or you're arrogant. You're either prideful or you're humble. What was the Lord Jesus? What did he say about himself in the take my yoke upon you and learn from me passage? For I am meek and lowly in heart.

The Lord Jesus Christ, the incarnate son of God, the Lord of glory was meek and humble, lowly in heart. How did he do that? Well, this is part of our study tonight. How do we acquire this humility? First of all, we know that we draw on the word of God, which we have already referenced, the wisdom, knowledge, and instruction has content.

It opens our eyes to spiritual truth. It's easy to be self-satisfied. It is easy to declare myself righteous when I don't know the word of God or knowing it, if I don't measure myself by its standard.

Have you ever suddenly been at the store and you want to buy a thing? Maybe it's a little cabinet or a little table and you've got the perfect little nook at home where this thing needs to fit. I'm not sure. It looks like it might fit, but I don't have a tape measure with me.

I don't know exactly the size of the nook and I don't know exactly the size of this piece of tape. This could be a complete make or break. In the old days when you couldn't take stuff back, you buy this and it doesn't fit.

Well, now you've got to do something else. It's helpful to have measured the gap and have a little purse size or pocket size tape measure that you can pull out and measure. When you measure, now you know what works and what doesn't.

You know what fits and what doesn't fit and we need to use the measure of the word of God to examine ourselves and see if we are truly operating in humility or if we are being arrogant. Well, now that I have successfully impressed on you the fact that the word of God is the measure, what else is the measure when it comes to practical measurement? I've got the tape with its marked off graduations. It's got numbers and it's got half inch and quarter inch and eighth inch and 16th inch graduations on it.

I've got the measure. I lay it against the thing. Then what do I do? I have to draw a conclusion.

This table is either going to fit or it is not going to fit. Measuring it by itself isn't really the point. Taking the measurement and saying, okay, conclusion, this will fit or this will not fit.

We take the measure of the word of God and apply it to ourselves. What is the conclusion we are looking for? Faith is the means, hope, and I would say the fear of the Lord is the motivation. What is the measure? Love.

So to check myself and see if I am operating in love and expressing love, I can't just say,

well, I'm a loving person. People love me and I love them and we get along and we smile and laugh and people see me and wave. Is that the measure of love? I give my body to be burned, give all my belongings to the poor.

Paul says, we need to turn over there. Just turn over to 1 Corinthians chapter 13. That'll get us in the ballpark.

My memory is always terrible for locations. Paul says in chapter 13 verse 1 of 1 Corinthians, Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I become a sounding brass or clanging cymbal. We've been through this.

We've thought about it. This is a very familiar passage. Here's a thought.

You may or may not have had this thought before. Do you notice that Paul can speak with the tongue of angels? He can do that, but not have love. Look at the next verse.

I can prophesy. I can understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and I can have enough faith to move mountains. I can have knowledge and I can have mountain moving faith and I can not have love.

Have you ever looked at these verses that way? It is possible to have these abilities, these accomplishments, these attributes, these characteristics, these attainments talk in the language of angels, faith to move mountains. Look at verse 3. I could bestow all my goods to feed the poor and give my body to be burned. Greater love hath no man than to lay down his life for his friends.

Paul says you can have that kind of self-sacrifice, sacrifice your belongings, sacrifice your person, and not have love. Someone who does these things can use them as an ultimate expression of love, but doing these things isn't always love. Do you see the difference? Do you see the Venn diagram here? What overlaps and what doesn't? Somebody can give everything they have to the poor.

They can be charitable to a fault. They can throw themselves on the burning pyre on behalf of others and not have love. Paul says I can do these things and not have love.

This should scare us a little bit. My idea of my level of love may not be accurate. What would happen if you printed inches and half inches and quarter inches and eighths and sixteenths on a nice, wide, long strip of rubber? I can make it fit.

I can make my waist only 32 inches. I could be a little short guy. I could be 5'7".

Just step on the end of that thing and stretch it up here. Look, I'm just 5'6". Oh wait, I'm 5'5".

Oh wait, stretch a little further. I'm just 5'2". We need an actual measure that does not change, that is external to me, that is unrelenting, unchanging, that sears through all of

the fluff and the self-deception.

I have to measure by the standard of the Word of God. So what am I saying? What is the Word of God saying? Actions alone are not the measure of love. Love isn't measured by actions alone.

We like to think, well, I did a nice thing. I said a nice thing. I gave a nice smile.

That's not the measure. What does Paul go on to say? Starting in verse 4, love suffers long, doesn't wear out under suffering. Suffers, keeps on suffering.

You can't post a picture of this on your Facebook stream or whatever that is. Look, here's a picture of me suffering long. Even a short video wouldn't get it, because sometimes this is days and weeks and months and even years, right? This is a pattern of thinking, a pattern of being to suffer long.

Kindness. It doesn't say it produces acts of kindness. It is kind.

It's inherently, characteristically, habitually kind. You hit it, kindness comes out. You squeeze it, kindness comes out.

You put it under pressure, kindness comes out. It is kind. No matter what you do to it, what emerges is kindness.

It does not envy. It doesn't say, well, look at that person over there. Look at that situation over there.

I feel like, why not Judd? I want to say, why not me? Why not me? Why don't I get that? Why isn't that my lot in life? Why didn't God plant those roses in my window box? It doesn't envy. And so on. You can work your own way through this.

I haven't got time to do 1 Corinthians 13 again, because what is our point? To get to the fear of the Lord requires humility. How do I know if I'm humble? Well, how do I know if I'm loving? The standard of the Word of God cuts through my self-deception and my wishful thinking and my self-important, self-excusing, self-gratifying view and says, sorry, no. Just because you did something kind doesn't make you kind.

Just because you did something loving, you can't tie yourself to that mast and say, I have love. Therefore, I'm good to go. God's not going to do it at the judgment and woe unto us if we don't learn how to judge ourselves so that we will not be judged.

The standard is the Word of God. This is why the foundation of the fear of the Lord is wisdom, knowledge and instruction. But it is like having a really good tape measure.

That's just the beginning. It's like getting your keys and sitting in the car and starting the engine. That's great, but you're not there yet.

There is a process. And along with wisdom, knowledge and instruction, the fear of the Lord, to be honored for it, to be recognized as having it, humility comes first. This is our 1533 Proverbs.

So, have I got wisdom and knowledge? Check. Alright, next. Have I got genuine humility? Well, what is the measure of humility? It's love.

If we are operating in love, if we can pass the hard test, the hard measure of 1 Corinthians 13 as a habitual, characteristic thing, you cannot love without humility. What is humility? What is love? Love is sacrificial to self and beneficial to others. You can't do that without humility.

If you have love, genuine love, love as it is described here, you have humility. There is not really another way I know of to measure it. Self-effacement? What does that involve? But what is love? Love is a blessing and a benefit to others.

You can't love in a vacuum. It has to be an object of love. Just like you can't have faith in a vacuum, there's got to be an object of faith.

You can't have hope in a vacuum. An abstract, sort of, well, I know I've been unemployed for three and a half years, but I really, I just expect a job will come or anything else. Hope has an object.

Hope is faith in the promises of God and the anticipation and expectation and therefore preparation for their fulfillment. Hope motivates us to prepare. Hope motivates us to get with the program.

Hope motivates us to ensure that our faith produces fruit, that the promises of God are mixed with faith in those of us who hear them and we don't run afoul of that dismal history in Hebrews. All of them left Egypt. All of them were baptized with Moses.

All of them were sustained by God in the wilderness. All of them ate the same spiritual food and drank the same spiritual drink, but with most of them, God was not pleased. Remember Sunday? Just saw this on Sunday.

With most of them, God was not pleased. Why? The promises of God were not mixed with faith in those who heard them to turn into hope. If we're going to the promised land, we'd better be ready.

We need to be the kind of people that God can bless in that land, that God can use in that land, that will know not only how to fight and extinguish the Amorites, but cultivate and bring forth the maximum amount of fruit and bounty and blessing and opportunity in that land, to be the kind of people worthy of a land flowing with milk and honey. Living in a land flowing with milk and honey doesn't make you a good person, and that land will stop producing those benefits with a rotten population, which is exactly what happened.

So, love is the measure.

So what have we figured out so far? To get the fear of the Lord, we need wisdom, knowledge, and instruction. The knowledge comes from the instruction. It certainly helps.

And wisdom is putting that into application, practicing it, rehearsing it, getting familiar with it, learning how to do it, and have it become muscle memory and habituated in our minds and in our lives. That's one thing. The second thing we need is humility.

If I am not humble, I'm probably not paying much attention to wisdom, knowledge, and instruction, or I am subverting it, perverting it, and twisting it for my own purposes, usually that is to beat others over the head with it. I will have a subjective view where these people need to get fixed, this situation needs to get fixed, this political problem needs to be solved, this governmental bad thing needs to become good, and so on. We want to go fix other things, other people, other situations.

That's not humility. Humility says, tend to your own knitting, work with your hands quietly, hoe the row that has been assigned to you in God's field, and don't be worrying about the servant over there. Who are you to judge another man's servant? To his own master, he will stand or fall.

We have our hands full. I certainly have my hands full trying to make sure that I cultivate humility, that I turn knowledge and instruction into wisdom. Without this, I'm not going to have the fear of the Lord, and when there is no fear of the Lord, there is judgment.

Harsh, negative judgment is going to follow, and it will be my own fault. It's on me. It'll be on us.

So these are the first two steps toward having, cultivating, and rendering fruitful and growing the fear of the Lord. We'll see more of these when we come back from the break.