

Proverbs 22-11-30a

Welcome to the Wednesday night Bible study at Grace and Truth Bible Church. This is the 30th day of November 2022. We pick up our study in the book of Proverbs.

We're looking at this fascinating introduction section in chapters one through nine. We saw last time, two weeks ago, the structure and the clues that point to it in Proverbs chapter two and how these chapters anticipate the remainder of this opening section. Let's ask God's blessing on our fellowship and study and we'll get started.

Father, we are so grateful for the daily bread that you provide for the nourishment of our bodies and the wonderful manna from heaven that nourishes our souls. We find a portion of it before us this evening and we ask that your Holy Spirit will bless it to the health and strength of each soul, that we will be drawn closer to the Lord Jesus and through him to you, that our lives will reflect your glory and that our time that remains to us in this life will be conserved and invested in the kingdoms that are to come. In all things, we pray that the Lord Jesus will be glorified and we ask it in his name.

Amen. If you remember and if you annotated your text, your Bible, you will remember that Proverbs chapter two, after the introduction in chapter one, which we've seen and reviewed several times, chapter two really summarizes and outlines what is going to follow in chapters three through nine, which is establishing the need. We've seen many times that if you're going to embark on anything that requires time and attention, it's helpful to have a sense of need.

The problem with much of the agnostic and atheist and apathetic Christian world today is that because there is so much affluence and because there is so much distraction, the sense of spiritual need is often lacking. God's people in the Old Testament developed this failure to appreciate their opportunity and their relationship with God and God would send the prophets in the later days, beginning with Moses and extending through the major and minor prophets to call his people to appreciate their need for him and for his grace. So chapter two is an essential part of this call for the need.

And what do we think about it? We're in Bible class on a Wednesday night because we realize that this is essential time to be spent, that we require sustenance from God. We require clarity from God. We need moral standards and an understanding of truth that is anchored in objective reality because we are awash in a sea of deception, confusion, manipulation, and self-interested communication.

So we saw last time, and just by way of quick review of chapter two, remember we have the if, then, then, in order to, in order to, so that. It's a 22-line chapter. Each line is meaningful.

There are 22 because there are 22 letters in the Hebrew alphabet. So after the call to my

son, verse one begins with an aleph, verse five begins with an aleph, verse nine begins with an aleph. This is the beginning.

This is the condition. This is what is required. If you will receive my words and so on, then you will understand the fear of the Lord, central concept, which we're exploring in some detail.

Then you will understand righteousness and justice and equity in verse nine. When these elements enter our soul, knowledge is pleasant to us. Discretion preserves us.

Understanding keeps us. Verse 12, this is halfway through. If you're counting 22 things, number 12 is the beginning of the second half.

And this is the, it begins with the letter lamed, which is the 12th letter of the Hebrew alphabet. And verse 12, verse 16 and verse 20 all begin with aleph, to deliver you, to deliver you, so that, to deliver you. I want to focus just for a moment on the second half of the chapter here, because the first thing we're delivered from in verse 12 is the man who speaks perverse things.

In verse 16, it delivers us from the immoral woman who seduces, flattering with her words. The interesting thing here is you have a man leading young people astray, leading anyone astray, actually. And then you have a woman leading astray and they use two different methods.

The man speaking perversity is not using reason or logic. He's inviting someone down a destructive path. And the appeal of that path is in verse 14.

There is joy in doing evil and there's delight in the perversity. This man suggests perversity and perverse things because they appeal at an emotional level. You'll enjoy this.

You will find it delightful. I would have expected joy and delight to be associated with the woman. But oddly enough, when you look at the woman in verse 16 and following, she flatters with her words.

This is drawing upon the classical historical understanding of the roles of men and women and the relationship between a man and a woman. Some of us were introduced to this years ago as the man being the initiator and the woman being the responder. You find echoes of this in the relationship of Christ and the church.

The Lord Jesus initiates salvation and we respond. The reason and cold hard logic are more associated, not exclusively so, but there's an emphasis on this for the man and emotional response, empathy and sympathy. The caring side of the soul is more often associated with the woman.

This is why the women are entrusted with child raising to a large extent. The man provides structure and resources and the woman provides nurture and guidance. But there is this association and again, it is not exclusive.

Just like priesthood in Israel was not exclusively the role of the Levites. They predominated. They symbolically led worship life in Israel.

But every man, the elders in Israel, could also offer sacrifice on behalf of their families. The Lord Jesus is our high priest. We have a priestly role as well.

But what's somewhat surprising when you think about it here, and this pertains to our present day, our present time and our personal application right now. The appeal of the way of evil, the man who speaks perverse things, is emotional. He is courting the womanly side of the soul.

He's saying, this will be delightful. This will be enjoyable. So he's perverting the role of a man who should be responsible for his own wife and his own household.

And he is instead canvassing the highways and byways and looking for the gullible, those who are not pursuing the way of wisdom and appealing to them at the emotional level. This is how men seduce women. Do you remember Paul talking about this in the pastoral epistles about those who enter into women's homes and seduce them and lead them astray? It's an emotional appeal.

The woman, the immoral woman, on the other hand, is not appealing to the sense of enjoyment or delight. She is using words. She's appealing to the man based on his reason and his logic, which she is subverting.

Here's what I find interesting. If you were going to go out today and say, well, there are people who are going to lead you astray. Men are going to do it and women are going to do it.

How would you think the women would typically operate or be employed by those who are manipulating? This is the old advertising aphorism that sex sells, and you would expect that it would be her mincing footsteps or her shapely form or her beauty. And the seduction would be at the physical level. This is why they like to use pretty girls in advertising, because there is an appeal to the man at almost a prior level, at a physical level.

There's no hint of that here. And I find it fascinating because if you're wanting to give exhortation to a young man and don't mess up your life by going down a bad road, and there's a woman involved, you would say, don't let her beauty and her pulchritude and her appeal at the physical level shut off your brain and cause you to make bad decisions. But that's not what this says.

So I was fascinated to deliver you from the immoral woman, the seductress who flatters with her words. And the word for flattery here is an interesting one. This is something that means to smooth.

It's used in the later prophets for the guy who is hammering out an idol and he uses a hammer to smooth the surface. So this is not flattery in the sense of complimenting you and tell me more about my eyes and someone does, and it leads you astray. This flattery is one that, this word is similar to halak in Hebrew.

Halak, to walk, to travel, to go down a road is H-A-L-A-K. This is C-H-A-L-A-Q. It's got a different beginning and ending, but it's sort of a rhymes with word halak.

And you can find it in Psalm 36. Keep your finger in Proverbs and turn back to Psalm 36. This gives us an important insight into the way this deception and seduction works that we're finding in Proverbs 2. Psalm 36, this is dedicated to the chief musician, a Psalm of David, the servant of the Lord.

An oracle within my heart concerning the transgression of the wicked, same subject that we're finding before us in Proverbs. There is no fear of God before his eyes. How central is this theme of the fear of the Lord? The one who is wicked and actively transgressing is doing so because the fear of the Lord, it doesn't say he doesn't possess a fear of the Lord or that he doesn't fear the Lord as an active verb.

The fear of the Lord is not before his eyes. He's not looking at it. He's not considering it the way we have been attempting to do these last many weeks.

And look at verse two, there's no fear of God before his eyes for he flatters himself in his own eyes when he finds out his iniquity and when he hates. So there is conviction. He finds out that he's acting in a hateful way.

He's participating in and practicing some kind of hate. And he finds out that this is iniquity. This is wrongdoing.

But what does he do? He doesn't compliment himself and say, but I'm handsome. And, you know, when I look in the mirror, I find no fault with myself. This is smoothing out, smoothing over, explaining away the iniquity.

I'm convicted, but you know, it wasn't my fault. I will shift the blame to someone else. It couldn't be helped.

I was forced by circumstance. I was, it's somebody else's fault. And so the truth about iniquity, the truth about hate is glossed over.

It's smoothed over. It is, this is what the word flatter actually means, halak, C-H-A-L-A-Q. Think about that.

It's going to be used later in Proverbs, Proverbs 28, 23. You may recollect this proverb. It's quoted from time to time.

He who rebukes a man will find more favor afterward than he who flatters with the tongue. This means that when something is wrong and a confrontation ensues, you say, you know, this was wrong. And ultimately you will find more favor by being truthful about wrongdoing, truthful about iniquity, truthfulness about bad choices than the one who smooths it over with their tongue.

Well, that probably wasn't your fault. You couldn't help it. Favor is with the truth teller, not the one who glosses over.

So those are two references you can put in the margin next to what this woman does in Proverbs chapter two. She is a seductress who smooths things over with her words. The attraction is not her feminine beauty or her physical attractiveness.

It is what she says. She is comfortable to be with because there's no guilt trip. Now, this is advice about the perverse man and the immoral woman that is given at first blush to a young man.

He's being warned by his mother and father. Don't let these things seduce you. But what does it mean for us? In the same way, we can look at what God says to Israel and interpret and apply for ourselves.

How does this interpret and apply? This section from verse 12 through verse 19, the man who speaks perverse things and the seductress who flatters with her words, the man who appeals at an emotional level, this will be enjoyable. You will find delight in it. And the woman who uses these smoothing over words to justify forsaking the companion of your youth and forgetting the covenant of her God.

It doesn't say she's going to make you feel good. She uses her words to justify disloyalty to those who deserve loyalty, the companion of your youth. This would be the husband that she wedded and made vows with.

And the covenant of God. This is rationalizing and smoothing over bad choices that are disloyal and hurtful and destructive. The woman is the one who does this.

The man says, this is going to be fun. Let's go down this perverse way and do perverse things. It's going to be great.

Let's eat, drink, and be merry. She vindicates and justifies the kind of disloyal immorality from which there is no recovery. Notice in verse 18, her house leads down to death.

The man speaking perverse things and encouraging perversity isn't associated with a house. The man is the one that is supposed to build a house and get his bride and

ensconce her in it. That's the whole principle of the wise and foolish virgins.

And here comes the groom, and he's going to get the bride and take her to the house that he has built. Right? Instead here, the woman has a house. This is a structure.

What does it mean for us in the modern day when we interpret and apply this warning? There is an appeal to the gut, to the narrative, to an emotion generated by that narrative. This is the way of evil in verse 12. Those who leave the paths of uprightness in 13 to walk in ways of darkness.

This is pattern behavior because it brings enjoyment. I will engage in this behavior because it's gratifying. It makes me feel good.

And the appeal that is made is that this way is the way of happiness, but they are crooked ways and deceitful. In our day, what is this? You should vote this way. You should choose this.

You should do this. You should support this because here's how I want you to feel about it. Here's the story I'm going to tell you about situations overseas or situations at home.

There are certain stories I don't want you to hear. There are other stories I do want you to hear. And this is the feel good story.

Listen to the feel good story and do what makes you feel good. It doesn't matter if the right way is the hard way. The wrong way is the easy way.

The wrong way is the feel good way. So do it for that reason. Even more interesting is the immoral woman and the seductress who smooths over the wrong with her words.

And this is how you can justify heinous policies, heinous practices. You can think about the abortion debate. And there are certain stories we don't want you to hear.

There are certain pictures we don't want you to see. We will suppress that. The algorithms will scoot that out of the way if you are searching for information.

Instead, we will use words to justify. We will redefine words. And we will smooth over and paint over and hide the wrongness and the evil.

And we'll build a house out of this viewpoint. It is a structure. It becomes a philosophy.

In the first case, it's just a pattern because it feels good. I do it and I just keep on it because I like how it feels. Rejoice and delight.

This is a house and it is built with words. Words that deceive by covering up what is wrong. Remember Psalm 36.

The wicked man, when he is made aware of guilt, when wrongdoing is pointed out and

hate is pointed out, he flatters himself. Instead of the fear of God before his eyes, he puts flattery of himself before his eyes. He flatters himself in his own eyes.

I want to be vindicated in my own eyes. I don't want to look at God and realize that he is what should be before my eyes. And this happens all around us today.

And there is an enormous danger and it is being fulfilled. There is an enormous potential for disaster and it is being fulfilled in the Christian world today because these principles that introduce Proverbs and are going to be repeated throughout Proverbs are not appreciated and not taken to heart. We don't have the fear of the Lord before our eyes.

We vindicate and justify practices that don't honor God that instead justify what we really want to do anyway. We basically decide what we are going to do and then go to the Bible looking for justification, looking for a proof text, looking for something we can use to vindicate and justify what we've already decided. We don't go to the Word of God objectively and say, what would God have me do? Fear of the Lord drives us to our knees before God in prayer, asking and seeking and knocking.

Not proof texting something I've already made up my mind I want to do, I need to do, I enjoy doing, or I've been seduced and flattered into believing is right when it's not. That's why it says in verse 18 of chapter 2, her house leads down to death and her paths lead to the dead. This doesn't make a great deal of sense in the blush of this woman is whispering at the street corner, come down to my house and we'll make hay while the sun shines.

You don't typically associate that with death. But the problem with this, and this is not said of the man who appeals to joy and delight, it is said of the woman. Because when this becomes a house, look at verse 19, none who go to her return.

You can begin to realize that the pleasures of sin for a season do not ultimately satisfy. If you're doing things out of a sense of hilarity and self-gratification, enough times waking up with the ashes in your mouth and the cold light of the next morning, and the not just physical but emotional and spiritual hangover that comes from dedicating yourself to indulgence of the flesh and self-gratification, you can recover from that. It doesn't say up above you can't get away from what you find in verse 12 through 15, but 16 through 19, none who go to her return.

People that embrace the deconstruction, that embrace progressive Christianity, that build a house that removes sin from the equation. I don't need an atoning sacrifice on the cross because sin's not a problem. Love is the issue.

Acceptance and disabusing myself and separating myself from any association with the sins of the past and racist this and empirical American patriotism that and slavery this and holocaust that, I reject that. I adopt a resolution and I reject that outright. If I had

been there, I would have never done such things.

You remember the Pharisees that Jesus quotes? He says you're condemned out of your own mouth because you acknowledge that it's your father's who slew the prophets. You're condemned out of your own mouth when you say, if we had been there, we would not have done it. It's in the Bible.

These attitudes and these expressions are anticipated and we are warned against them. How can we avoid this? How can we not go into this house of smooth words, of self-justification that calluses over the conscience and sears it with a hot iron so that the Holy Spirit's conviction can no longer be perceived? Recognition of sin can no longer take place. What is the way to avoid it to begin with? The fear of the Lord.

The fear of the Lord has to be our first and foremost priority. It requires humility. It requires thinking, shutting off the noise, getting away from the constant babble stream that floods the world, thinking about the Word of God, reflecting on the Word of God.

The man who does not walk in the counsel of the ungodly or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of the scornful doesn't have his phone on all the time, doesn't have the news on all the time. His delight is in the law of the Lord, and in that law doth he meditate day and night. He is the one that is the tree planted by the rivers of water, bringing forth his fruit in his season.

Twelve months out of the year is not fruit season. Most of the time, we're not bearing fruit. Why? Other things are taking place.

The strong winter blasting winds are snapping off dead branches. The spring rains are bringing renewal and nourishment and growth. And in his season, that tree planted by rivers of living water will bring forth his fruit.

Don't have to panic if it doesn't seem like we're bringing forth fruit. Don't have to be unduly concerned if we don't understand why things are the way they are. Most of the season, vines are not bearing grapes.

Most of the season, fruit trees are not bearing fruit. So many other things have to take place. This to me, just as a quick aside, the atheist argument is, look at the size of the universe.

This little insignificant galaxy with an insignificant star, insignificant planet. Man is on it. How can you possibly think that we are the center of a divine plan and purpose? Look at the size of the universe.

Here's my thought on that, which is a fresh illustration of it. I may want to watch Bible class with a browser. I may want to listen to preaching that is available through streaming of various kinds of ways.

In order to do that and do it effectively, I will buy a computer that's got four gigabytes of RAM, has got a four terabyte hard drive, has got a massively fast and instruction crunching processor. It's got everything. I've even retrofitted it with a DVD drive in case I want to play something from the past.

Then when I go in to watch something like we're doing tonight or listen to an mp3 of a past Bible class, how much of that computer's resources am I actually using? Oh, why didn't you just get a little mp3 player? Why this big computer for such a small task? Why this big universe for such a small project? There's a reason. I have other things I'm going to do with this computer. The fact that I'm doing this one task doesn't mean I can't be doing many other things that require more RAM and more hard drive space and so on.

To second-guess the motives of the Creator in having a large universe and saying, well, what is man that thou art mindful of him or the son of man that thou visitest him? When I look at the heavens, I'm overwhelmed. There's a lot about God that we don't know. The fear of the Lord respects that God can be things that are beyond our understanding, and it's not nonsensical to fear him because of his immensity.

This is the message of the end of Job. When God appears in the whirlwind, he doesn't read to Job the first two chapters of the book that give an explanation for his suffering. There's no indication that Job got the first two chapters of the book that gives information.

God says, do you have any idea how immense I am, how large my projects are? It's your job to keep the fear of the Lord before your eyes. And if you don't understand everything I'm doing, understand who I am, God says. This is the argument for faith from the character of God.

Do we really want approval authority for all of God's plans? Well, Lord, reveal your plans to me in all of their detail, and I'll let you know if I think that's a good plan or not. It's the other way around. One other thing I want to point out before we leave chapter two, remember in verse nine, these are the Alephs, my son, if, then you will understand the fear of the Lord.

And in verse nine, then you will understand three things, righteousness, justice, equity, every good path. That word equity, these three things were mentioned back in verse three, remember of chapter one, to know wisdom and instruction, perceive the words of understanding, to receive instruction of wisdom, justice, judgment, and equity. The same word tzedek, t-s-e-d-e-q is translated justice in Proverbs one, three, and it's more properly translated righteousness in chapter two, verse nine, righteousness, justice.

The third one is equity. This word equity is quite fascinating. It means something that is straight, something that is straight.

So it comes to mean orthodox, if you will, orthos is something that is, is straight. But this word is a noun formed from a verb. So it is, you can put an M in front of a lot of Hebrew verbs and turn them into a noun.

So this is may sharim, may sharim. And this is from the Hebrew verb yashar or sharah, S-H-A-R-A-H is one form of it, Y-A-S-H-A-R, shar is at the center of it, may sharim. I'm going to belabor this a little bit because this is one of the oldest Hebrew words.

It is translated straight to make straight, to make upright, or to make right, to be right, to be straight, to be level. Remember that the man of God may be mature, rightly dividing, laying a straight course in the word of truth. That is the New Testament equivalent of this Old Testament concept.

What is translated equity here? We understand righteousness. This is the standard of what is right and what is wrong. Justice is implementing right and wrong as policy.

The core of the justice word is shafat, mishpat is the, remember you put an M in front, shafat. This is what comes from judging correctly. This is what you do because of what is right.

So wisdom is going to let us understand righteousness, what is right and what is wrong. Justice, which is implementing policy and procedure and action and lifestyle that is in accordance with righteousness. And then we have equity here, this misharim that comes from sharah or yashar.

And this means straight. Flip over a page to chapter three, verse five. Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding.

Most of us have memorized this verse long years ago. Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding. In all your ways, acknowledge Him and He shall direct your paths.

Guess what the word is that is translated direct there. It is yashar, yashar. Yashar, yashar, yashar, yashar.

He will make straight, upright. He will bring about rightly dividing the word of truth in your life. Your path will be straight.

I'm skipping forward to this because when you look at what we've seen in verses 12 through 19 in chapter two, her house leads down to death and her paths lead to the dead. Paths in verse 18. Look up in verse 15, the perverse man who delights in the way of evil, his ways are crooked and his paths are devious.

Crooked and devious paths, patterns, practices, ways of life. These patterns of behavior, this is, you know, taking one step doesn't really establish much of a direction or a path,

but step after step, one foot in front of another, you know, the journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step or whatever. A series of steps, a sequence of steps.

This establishes what is your path? What road are you on? Over and over again, Proverbs emphasizes righteousness and justice and straightness. This is the old Latin idea of orthodoxy. Orthos, orthopedic guys help you have straight bones.

They straighten out what's broken or sprained or crooked or whatever. Orthos. Orthodox is a straight idea, a proper implementation of policy based on what is right, what is true.

So how important is it to keep the fear of the Lord before our eyes? Anything else that gets before our eyes, that subjective distraction is going to put us on a crooked path. It is going to put us inside a house, in some cases, from which we cannot escape. There are people who, and I think this is referred to in other ways in scripture as sin unto death, or those who continually crucify the Son of God afresh, put Him to an open shame, it is impossible to renew them.

They can't escape. This is a deadly pattern. It is a deadly voice whispering at the street corner, come to my house.

I'm going to smooth over the wrongness of it. I'll make you believe that there is nothing wrong with it. You're fine as you are.

That's the seductress that flatters with her words. And it's not only a hazard for young people, it is a hazard for us all, especially in this day and age. Let's pause here and take a break.

When we come back, we're going to dive into chapter three, and we're going to see how chapter two has outlined everything that is coming up in chapter three through nine.