

Proverbs 23-01-11a

Greetings, welcome to Wednesday evening at Grace and Truth Bible Church. We're in the book of Proverbs. We're in Proverbs chapter 4 and we're going to be taking a step backward to view Proverbs 4, 5, 6, and 7 in kind of a summary fashion tonight.

Rather than going verse by verse, really a lot of this is conceptual and the concepts are exceedingly pertinent as we will soon see. Let's take a moment to ask God's blessing on our fellowship, on our conversation, and on our study of God's Word. Father, thank you for another opportunity to gather around the true manna from heaven that we find in the scriptures.

Thank you for granting to us the presence and power of your Spirit to enable us to digest it, to make good use of it, to have it sink deep into the soil of our souls and bring forth fruit. We pray that the portion we look at together this evening will be beneficial to each one of us. Shine a light on our paths.

Help us to see clearly how we can best serve and best function in the light of your plan and purpose, that we can reflect your glory, draw others to the Lord Jesus Christ, and be thoroughly equipped for every good work now and in the kingdoms to come. We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.

If you remember in chapter 4, we have another situation where it begins with the father exhorting his sons, his children, to listen and give attention to wisdom and understanding. We saw that last time. And the benefits that accrue.

This took us all the way up through verse 13, take firm hold of instruction. And we once again see the emergence of wisdom personified as a woman, as a lady. We first saw this in earlier chapters where she cries in the streets and appeals in the gates to those who are passing by.

We saw in verses 14 through 16, the allure and the appeal of the way of the evil ones, the paths of the wicked. And you'll notice in verse 17, this is where we pick up tonight, these wicked and evil individuals who do not sleep unless they have done evil. Their sleep is taken away unless they make someone fall.

And this, oddly enough, is an example of subjectivity. These people aren't content to practice evil behind their own closed doors. They have to go achieve success in waylaying and subverting others.

There is a perverse satisfaction in not just choosing wickedness and evil for yourself, but to allure others into it. And there is a missionary counterfeit, a missionary effort, to bring people into the fold. You can see it in the progressive Christianity movement, Deconstruct, Reconstruct.

I didn't find my church satisfactory. I was oppressed and abused, which may have in fact been the case. But instead of looking to find a good healthy church and learning and growing and fellowshiping there, they create their own movement and then they go back to existing churches and try to proselytize people to their cause.

But look at verse 17. We're in Proverbs 4, 17. This is new for tonight.

They eat the bread of wickedness and drink the wine of violence. How much of an intersection with our Matthew study in recent weeks with the upper room and the body of the Lord Jesus represented in the bread and the covenant that is represented in the cup and the wine that represents the blood of the Lord Jesus, His atoning sacrificial expression of love on our behalf to deliver us, to sanctify us. You think of the pictures in Revelation where saints wash their robes and make them white.

How? In the water of the river of life, by loving one another, their robes magically turn white. How does this happen? They are washed in the blood of the lamb. And this is a logical impossibility.

Anybody that's familiar with a wound or a surgery or whatever, if you got to change the bandages, what does blood do to white gauze? It stains it. And until the invention of enzyme sort of cleansers, it was a difficult stain to get out. So to wash robes and make them white, to take soiled linen and turn it white by washing it in blood is drives you to the figurative meaning because the physical literal meaning absolutely does not work.

Nobody washes white clothes in blood. It's just the opposite. You wash blood out of clothes.

But the counterintuitive nature of much of what we find in scripture tells us that with getting our wisdom, we really have to pursue understanding. We have to seek it as silver and search for it as for hid treasures. We have to ask and seek and knock.

We have to recognize that the surface meaning is not always the best meaning or the right meaning. And so this eating the bread of wickedness and drinking the wine of violence, the Lord Jesus blood was spilled and shed by violence. Right.

But this is used in the will and purpose of God for good. God works it together. The violence that Jesus suffers at the hands of men works out for good.

The principle is found in the story of Joseph. When his brother sold him into slavery, you meant it for evil. God meant it for good.

It doesn't excuse selling your brother into slavery. It doesn't excuse deceiving your father and lying to him and saying that your brother was eaten by wild animals and showing him the bloody garment. But God used it for deliverance.

And the exposing of wicked hearts is something that returns in the Joseph story when they come down to buy grain. The extended interactions with Joseph and his brothers, sending them back, demanding to see Benjamin. Is Joseph testing the hearts of his brothers? And it is a heart issue.

So here, these wicked and evil individuals who can't sleep unless they have waylaid and attacked and subverted someone else, they eat the bread of wickedness, eating the bread as a representation of the Lord's body, his sinless life. He was tested in all points, like as we are yet without sin. And to partake of his righteousness because we cannot achieve it by our own works is represented in that bread.

This is my body, which is for you. Body, as we're going to see tonight, represents life and lifestyle, the flesh and our associations and our connections. Our sustenance is all wrapped up in this.

These individuals eat the bread of wickedness. It is the diametric opposite of what is reflected in that symbolic meal Jesus shares with his disciples. And they drink the wine of violence.

This is not covenant of peace with God. It is a covenant with each other to perpetrate and glory in violence. So many antithetical elements on Satan's side of human life.

He will eventually have a false messiah. He will have a false Holy Spirit. He will serve as the antithesis of God the Father, as the empowering, planning and enabling force behind what takes place.

It already happens now. There have been many antichrists, John says. There are many representations of an invitation to peace on earth by illicit means, by means that are separate and apart from God, of justice in society that are separate and apart from God.

And working for justice in society where God is not a part of it does not partake of either God's power or reflect God's glory. And human efforts to achieve human ideas of justice not only are going to fail, but they are actually a part of the satanic counterfeit to the plans and purposes of God. And Christians get seduced into this all the time.

And it is happening today in great swaths. So you have the false Lord's table, if you will, here in verse 17. Look at verse 18 now.

The path of the just is like the shining light, the shining sun, that shines ever brighter unto the perfect day, the fullness of the day, the noontime of the day where everything is illuminated, darkness is minimized, light and sight are maximized. The way of the wicked is like darkness, they do not know what makes them stumble. Then in verse 20, my son, give attention to my words, incline your ear to my sayings, do not let them depart from your eyes, keep them in the midst of your heart.

Notice it takes conscious and determined, purposeful effort to not lose what we learn. This is a conscious effort to review, a conscious effort to pull these things out of our reserves and prey over them. Any of us that have emergency food, you buy it, you sock it away, and you say, well, I'm set when the lights go out and the store shelves are empty, I've got emergency food.

If you don't go back and take the oldest of that and pull it out and go ahead and consume it and replace it with new, if you get canned goods, if you get frozen goods and they've got an expiration date, you constantly have to refresh your store, pull it out, use it and replace it, otherwise in the day of need, it is spoiled, expired, unfit for use. That's a crude but memorable example of what we need to do with our spiritual understanding. We need to be pulling it out and regularly using it and applying it and not letting it get stale, not letting it disappear from our memory and from our practical application.

We can pray it. One of the great things about intercessory prayer is even truths that don't pertain to my particular situation might pertain to someone else's. And to think about the principles that apply and to pray them out before God and to ask for insight and wisdom and understanding is a wonderful way to review and refresh what we know.

One of the great benefits, not only in expression of love for others by bringing them before the Lord in prayer, but also it is review and exercise and refreshing. The great thing about the Word of God is by bringing it out and handling it and partaking of it and bringing it before God, that use-by date gets extended well into the future. It's the same truth, but it's got a new sell-by date.

It's got a new use-by date because it has been refreshed. The Holy Spirit enlivens it and makes it active and meaningful in our souls. So give attention to my words.

Do not let them depart from your eyes. Keep them in the midst of your heart. These are exhortations.

These are like commands. You must do this. You have to take an active part.

You can't listen to them, agree with them, and expect them to be there three months from now. Three days from now, they are life to those who find them and health to all their flesh. If a doctor prescribes medicine and says, without this, you're going to get very ill, possibly hospitalized, possibly endanger your life.

How much attention do you pay to that prescription? Well, this is life. If I don't take this, if I don't use this, if I don't follow these instructions, great bodily harm can come to me. It can be life-threatening.

Well, where is that diligence when it comes to God's truth? And I think a lot of us are aware of that and do make it a priority and realize that these truths that we learn together on Wednesdays and Sundays need to be brought to mind and reflected upon,

meditated upon, contemplated, and prayed back to God. Any of it that is obscure or we feel like we don't have a good grip on, there's your ask and seek and knock. But this is our life.

It is more important. I love that verse that someone graciously supplied to me on the back of a GTBC t-shirt from Job. I have esteemed the words of his mouth more than my necessary food.

More than my necessary food. That has to be true. It is our life.

To those who find them health to all of their flesh, keep your heart with all diligence for out of it spring the issues of life. Put away from you a deceitful mouth and put perverse lips far from you. Let your eyes look straight ahead and your eyelids look right before you.

Don't get distracted is how we would say this in the vernacular. Think about driving at 75 miles an hour down a busy highway, say in Dallas or Tulsa or wherever your metropolis is, and constantly looking out the left-hand driver's window or the right-side passenger window instead of paying attention to the road. Or you're looking down at your phone because BFF just texted.

Your phone made a noise. You've got to look down and see what it is. You take your eyes off the road.

How quickly can it happen that you are suddenly injured or have injured others? Perhaps fatally so. It only takes a moment of distraction, a moment of inattention. And that is the warning here.

Eyes should be looking straight ahead. Eyelids looking right before you. Ponder the path of your feet and let all your ways be established.

Be grounded. Be the house built on the rock. Notice that again, this takes efforting.

It takes conscious prioritization. We should get up in the morning and think, oh boy, look at all the things I have to do. Let me just take a few minutes and think about how this fits into my life as a believer before God.

Can I do these things in a way that translates them and lifts them up out of the mundane and the immediate and the short term and turns them into treasure in heaven? That God can inspire and infuse the mundane, ordinary tasks of my life, my fulfillment of responsibilities. They can be done in a way that eternalizes them, that makes the time invested in them redeemed. And it counts.

Do not turn to the right or to the left. Remove your foot from evil. Notice it doesn't say keep your foot from evil.

You'll find that in other passages. This says, remove your foot from evil. If we're looking ahead and we're watching where we're going, every once in a while, we're going to look down and realize that we've stepped in it.

Anybody with small dogs, sooner or later, or even any size dog really, you sooner or later will have to remove your foot from evil and then you will have to remove evil from the sole of your foot. It's just inevitable. You cannot move through this life without occasionally getting your foot in it.

And the exhortation here is you've got to fix that. If you find your foot on an evil path, pick your foot up, swivel and get your eyes back on the narrow road and the straight gate and put your feet on that path. We will inevitably find our foot in evil.

Remove it. If our hand offends us, chop it off. If our eye offends us, pluck it out.

Actively, aggressively change that which puts us in a wrong posture on a wrong path, heading in a wrong direction. This takes effort. We can't just simply soak in the word of God and we are suddenly like helium in a balloon just raised up and blown by a divine wind in the right direction.

We are captain of our ship and master of our fate. We have to choose our direction and we have to fix it when it goes wrong. God gives us the resources.

He makes the power available to us, but he doesn't direct the power. He puts it in our hands. We decide if we're going to use it and we decide how to use it, where to use it, when to use it.

Why? Because we are children of God and he is training us to be thinking, functioning, mature creatures. Grabbing us by the hand and dragging us in the right direction does not mature us. It does not strengthen us.

It does not bring us into the future with God as useful. We are being trained in righteousness, trained to follow God's way and we have to learn it. We have to practice it.

We have to internalize it. That's what this whole section is about. That brings us to chapter five.

My son, pay attention. How many times in Proverbs have we seen this? Listen, pay attention, wake up, listen to me. Two hands on our shoulders shaking us.

Are you getting this? Are you listening? Is it penetrating? So much love is expressed here. Every time you see my son, you can put love in the margin. An unloving parent doesn't care what their children do.

Farm them out, let teachers, coaches, after school groups, somebody's daycare, let them

take care of it. Every time you see my son, my sons, this is love. It is love in the earthly realm of the father who is represented here, but it is a reflection of divine love for us.

It tells us in the New Testament over and over again, it is by the Holy Spirit that we can cry out, Abba, father. We are sons of our father and to be sons indeed, to be fruitful, obedient and sons of whom God can be proud. And this is children.

We're going to see tonight the ladies are not excused out of these exhortations by any stretch, by any means. People like to say, oh, the patriarchal society just left the women out. Not even close.

My son, pay attention to my wisdom. This is difficult because it requires humility. One of the most egregious and visible problems in teenage years and early adulthood is throwing over the wisdom of the preceding generation.

We've got a better way. We've got it figured out. Your structures and your traditions are odious and abrasive and holding me back.

I can't be who I want to be and do what I want to do because you've got these stodgy old crusty ways. And it takes humility. It takes respect and it takes genuine love for those who have gone before and they can be gone.

This can be the traditions that go back generations. But to have the humility to say, you know, I would like to think that I know everything, but my little inner compass that tells me right and wrong, good and bad is not trustworthy. Yet I need to test this thing against the wisdom of my forefathers and ultimately against divine wisdom.

I will test their wisdom against the word of God. I will test my wisdom against the word of God. But I recognize and I respect the ultimate standard of truth.

And that is the word of God. And whatever is not of faith in that truth is sin. Lend your ear to my understanding so that you may preserve discretion.

Overriding our built in discretion will break it. Your sense of guilt, your healthy sense of shame at malfunction can be dulled and broken. This is what the New Testament calls having a conscience seared with a hot iron.

It's an Old Testament truth. If we persist in an unrighteous path, in a bad practice, whether it is sins of the tongue, whether it is mental attitude sins, if we persist, we will find less and less of our soul acknowledging that it is wrong and more and more self justification building up like barnacles and fixing that in our soul as a pattern, as a habit and as a behavior. That we no longer recognize as wrong.

This is why it says, pay attention to my wisdom. Lend your ear to my understanding. This pairing over and over again.

Get wisdom and with all you're getting, get understanding. Critical to what we're going to see tonight. Lend your ear to my understanding so that you may preserve discretion, discernment, perceiving what is right and what is wrong.

Romans 12, what is that good? What is the acceptable? And what is that perfect will of God? Can you tell the difference? Wisdom and understanding give us an ability to discern, to be discreet. You know, when you talk about discrete elements, they are separate. They are distinct.

You can tell them apart. There are discrete colors in the color wheel. If they've got lines between them, if you've got a blended color palette, that's got infinite shades.

You know, they used to talk about 256 shades of gray. And in modern high definition displays, there is such an infinite graduation or gradation between going from red to blue to yellow. Discrete means there is a distinction between this and this.

And discretion is observing the distinctions and the differences. This is not that. So you may preserve discretion, verse two, and your lips may keep, guard, preserve knowledge.

Wouldn't it be great as if when someone presses you for counsel, for an answer, they say, I'm having this problem. And they're kind of putting it out there in the sense of what do you think? What's your response to this? How do you see it? That your lips would keep knowledge. What we say would be useful.

Not guidance that's going to come back and bite us because, well, you said to do this, and I did it, and look at the disaster that followed. That knowledge and wisdom and understanding would be expressed in our speech in such a way that the individual is responsible to take these true principles of the word of God and apply them for themselves. We don't speak in terms of practical steps.

We speak in terms of divine principles. But it is up to you, my correspondent, my conversation partner here. I can't tell you what to do in this situation, but I can tell you what the word of God says by way of principle so that our lips may keep knowledge.

Now, look at verse three. This is where we're going to really pick up in a big way tonight. For the lips of an immoral woman drip honey, and her mouth is smoother than oil, but in the end she is bitter as wormwood, sharp as a two-edged sword.

Where have you heard that phrase? There's two different ways you can get sliced open. Somebody with a knife can cut you open in the midst of a mugging and leave you bleeding, defenseless, and potentially fatally injured. A surgeon can take a scalpel and also cut you open, but there is benefit, and there is healing, and there is restored function.

The word of God is sharper than a two-edged sword, piercing to the dividing asunder of

soul and spirit, joints and the marrow, judges the thoughts and intents of the heart. This is beneficial incision, beneficial exposure, beneficial opening up to see and remove that which needs to go. But the lips of an immoral woman are sweet like honey, smooth like olive oil, but in the end bitter as wormwood and sharp as a two-edged sword.

Her words will pierce and cut in a harmful, divisive, and destructive way. This is the wrong kind of cutting. It is not beneficial, it is destructive.

Her feet go down to death, her steps lay hold of Sheol. Lest you ponder her path of life, her ways are unstable, you can't figure them out. It's like a snake.

You can maybe see one curve of the snake's body, but you can't figure out where its tail is or where its head is. It's unpredictable. It's dangerous because you can't establish knowledge of the entire thing.

You see a little here and a little there, but you can't make sense of it. You can't extrapolate or interpolate from what she says or what she does to establish any kind of truth. And because you don't know where the landmines are, you don't know where the IEDs and the tripwires are, you are in constant danger.

The little bit that you know doesn't tell you enough to figure out what's going on. Too much deception, too much entrapment, too much seduction, too much blindness, too much instability and unpredictability. It is just hazardous six ways to Sunday.

If she's got spices in the cabinet and half of them are poison and you see her baking, well, is this batch of muffins going to be healthy or kill me? You can't know. One day, they're harmless. The next day, you're dead.

That's the idea here. Therefore, hear me now. How many exhortations? Pay attention.

Please listen. Parents that have had to raise children and try to take the contents of experience and hard-won knowledge and put them in a can and hand them to a child and say, open this can, take these contents. Trust me.

They just roll that can away. They don't even open it. They don't sample it.

They don't taste of it. It's like, yeah, well, you know, I'm sure that was good for you. But this is a different generation.

You're stuck in the past and that might have worked in the day, but not now. And I'm not speaking of my own children, necessarily. I'm just saying, as parents, everybody has had an experience.

You can observe this, even if you don't experience it personally, that a previous generation has hard-won knowledge. Anybody that stays at a military base longer than three years, there's a three-year turnover of institutional knowledge because everybody

is rotated out after three years. And if you extend for a year, oh my goodness, what has become old and we know not to do that, it's all new and fresh again.

And the very same thing that failed three years ago is now being reborn as a bright idea. And, oh, we must do this and get on board and the colonels and the generals get together and, well, this will fix it. And, sorry, I was here three years ago.

We tried that. It was a disaster. Please don't do that again.

Listen to me. I plead with you. But I was there.

I've got the scars. Look at the wasted money. Look at the wasted time.

Look at the lost opportunities. Oh, no, I'll get a medal out of this. It's the best, newest, brightest idea.

We just did that. But nobody's here. The few that can cry in the wilderness are ignored.

So over and over again, hear me now, my children, do not depart from the words of my mouth. I'm telling you, this is gold. This will preserve you.

This will enhance your life. What does it take for somebody in a subordinate position to accept and take on board this kind of exhortation? It starts with hume and ends with ility, humility. I need to be teachable.

I need to respect and treat with love and acceptance the well-intentioned and loving words of those who have gone before me, those whose lives evidence faith and the grace of God at work, the willingness to acknowledge failure, to be lifted up by God's grace and restored. But there are people that they're insensate. There is too strong an impulse.

Where does this impulse come from to not listen to this kind of wisdom, to not receive it from a father or a grandfather, to not receive it from the scripture? Where does it come from? How can we identify and avoid this danger? Because I will tell you what we're about to see when we come back from the break. This is not limited to the young man about to leave home. These words apply to you, whoever you are, whatever gender and whatever stage of life you are.

They apply to me. They apply to every single believer drawing breath on this earth at this moment. We have to understand the danger that is being identified and spoken of here and the way to avoid it.

There is nobody for whom this exhortation is not immediately and importantly relevant. We'll see that when we return.