

Proverbs 23-01-25a

Good evening. Welcome to Wednesday night Bible study at Grace and Truth Bible Church. This is the 25th of January, 2023.

We're in Proverbs. We're looking at chapters 7, 8, and 9, and specifically what I'm calling the Parable of the Crafty Harlot. I think this is one of the more neglected pieces of scripture for most believers.

You find it visited generally in youth groups, where they're wanting to warn the young teenage boys against the hazards of making bad choices under the pressure of your hormones. But it's such a tragedy that this has not been mined for the wonderful treasure that is in it. And it's my hope that we'll be able to do so for our own good.

We're going to be in a lot of places in scripture. The notes that I am going to be teaching from will be posted in the Proverbs folder for download, perusal, printing, whatever. So if you don't get everything written down, panic not, be not dismayed.

The notes will be there in full. Let's ask God's blessing on our time of fellowship, and we'll begin. Father, thank you for each of the believers who has chosen to assemble, to fellowship, and share in the appreciation of the Lord Jesus Christ through the study of your word and the function of the spiritual gifts that you've placed within each one of us and with which you bless each one in our midst.

We pray that the Holy Spirit will be able to activate and employ his presence and those gifts for mutual blessing and edification. We pray that the portion of scripture that we look at and the truths that we glean from your word will be meaningful and helpful so that we can live as we should and represent the Lord Jesus now and in the ages to come. We ask it in Jesus' name.

Amen. We began looking at this parable in Proverbs 7, beginning in verse 6. And the characteristics of this seductress, this harlot, are not here simply to describe a young woman who hopes to waylay, seduce, and deflect young men. This is a metaphor for the ways of the world in general.

And all of us becoming acquainted with her tactics, her techniques, her objectives can be forewarned and forearmed against being spiritually seduced. So we began looking at this last time. And my first point is that this immoral seductress flatters with her words.

And the word flattery, as you may remember, has a fundamental meaning of to divide, to separate something from its mooring, from its place. You place your foot on a path, but then your foot slips. It comes to mean something that is smooth because it's slippery.

Things don't stay where you put them. And it is also used in dividing so as to get a portion of. If you can divide as an inheritance, you hope to receive some portion of that

inheritance.

This is a very multifaceted word, and all of that is in the introduction to this picture. She flatters. She divides.

She has her own objective, and she wants to get a piece of something. She is smooth. You can't maintain a good foothold on your values when she starts talking.

This is flattery, division, parting us from the way by words. This is talking, verbalization of arguments and allurements and so on. Much of what she says, by the way, we never see.

She says, I've done my peace offerings. I've paid my vows. I've spread my bed with Egyptian linens.

I've lit the perfume incense sticks. I've done this, and I've done that. In this parable, you notice we never actually go to the house of the harlot.

We never see these things. It's all in prospect. It's all designed to create a picture in the imagination that takes the place of reasonable, objective thought.

You begin to picture world peace. You begin to picture the abolition of hunger and starving kids, oppressed masses leaving their countries and looking for a new start, war, pestilence, disease, results of catastrophes and disasters. We think, oh, what a wonderful world it would be.

And it is a painting with words. We don't see the house. We hear about the house that she has prepared and all of her wily preparations.

So she flatters with her words. And we looked at this in a number of passages last time. I will not repeat those.

But with each of these points, there is an application. It's one thing to observe and say, okay, the world is trying to seduce us. And it does this largely through talking, fairy castles in the air painted with fine words, fine sounding speeches.

What should we do to avoid being seduced in this way? Turn with me to first Corinthians chapter one. The application is beware of those who speak divisively. One of the ways that we can identify this, you know, it sounds great.

You talk a great fight. Wouldn't it be wonderful if we could do A and B would be the result. We will do C and D will be the result.

It all sounds fine in prospect. We will make this cause and this will be the effect. And it's a fine effect.

It's a wonderful and attractive prospect. Beware of those who speak divisively. First Corinthians chapter one.

You will remember this. We did first Corinthians not terribly long ago, but specifically we're looking at four through nine. Now this is a sandwich in first Corinthians chapter one.

It's a sandwich. It's a symmetry, the first piece of bread. And it's a beautiful thing.

How Paul communicates this truth. You know, that there are problems galore in the Corinthian church. They've got all kinds of factionalism and division and infighting and idolatry and compromise with, with the idolaters and so on.

So how does Paul begin? Does he get up on his platform and start shaking his fist and deriding and abusing and condemning and charging with error? What does he do? This is a sandwich and it's got a great piece of bread. Then it's got some less tasty. Maybe this is a liver sandwich or a liver worst sandwich or something.

So the, the less tasty part is in the middle. And then he's going to come out to another piece of great bread. So verses four through nine, what is Paul going to emphasize? Unity, harmony.

These are the things that should be. I thank my God always concerning you for the grace of God, which was given to you by Christ Jesus. What is something that all believers have in common? We have all been given grace from God through Christ.

This is a unifying truth. Somebody could be so far out in the theological weeds that you can't see them. But one thing, you know, is if they're a believer, they got grace.

I got grace. We are together victims of grace. Remember our memory verse to the extent that things are true and pure and noble and lovely and of good report.

If, if there be any virtue and if there be any praise, think on this. This is how Paul begins. He's got a lot of bad news to deliver to the Corinthians, but he begins by binding up and talking about common divine truths.

Grace to you in peace. I thank God for the grace of God given to you by Christ Jesus. You were enriched in everything by him in all utterance and in all knowledge.

This is positive speaking. This wasn't flattery with words, utterance leading to knowledge. Good speaking was delivered to all of you.

Verse six, even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you, your group manifested the testimony of Christ so that you come short in no gift, eagerly waiting for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ. Anybody who is a genuine believer in Jesus can't wait to see him. Can't wait to be united with him.

Whatever else you want to say about beliefs and interpretations and understandings and eschatologies, any believer literally worth his salt is hasting the day of the return of the Lord Jesus. Looking forward to that. Have you ever found yourself in conversation and maybe this is a fellow believer, but they've really got kind of a theological agenda to push.

They're kind of wanting you to get on board with something that you're really not on board with. I don't think this is a train I want to ride. I think this is a train that's going to smash me as I stand on the tracks.

What can you do? What can you do when someone is trying to go down a road of what we believe honestly to be misunderstanding of scripture, misunderstanding of God's plan and purpose, misunderstanding of how God works and how we should then live? What do you do? Turn to the unifying truths. You can just break into mid-sentence and say, but won't it be great when the Lord returns? Won't that be something when the Lord Jesus comes back? Turn the conversation in a unifying direction. This is what Paul does here.

So the application, if the immoral seductress comes flattering with their words and wants to mislead, what do we do? Unifying truth, speak the truth in love. And not just any old truth, in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth is true, but maybe not helpful in that moment. If it is a smooth, flattering and divisive path of conversation, go to your reservoir of common truth.

We have all received grace and we're all going to glory in the presence of Christ. Some nearer and some further, but we're all going to be gathered to him. So this is a tool in our tool belt.

This is something we can get some traction with, right? Counter divisive and misleading words with unifying truth. That's what Paul is talking about here. So then that's what he does in verses four through nine.

God is faithful by whom you were called into the fellowship of his son, Jesus Christ, our Lord. He will confirm you to the end that you can be blameless in the day of our Lord, Jesus Christ. I read eight and nine out of order, but you get the idea.

Looking ahead, we have a unifying hope, a unifying expectation. However you see it happening, is it pre-mid or post-tribulational? Is it pre or post-millennial? Details. The Lord Jesus is going to come and take us to himself in some form or fashion.

As you're talking to someone, it's great to have an understanding of these things, but don't let it stand in the way of fellowship and unity. Find that unifying truth. This is what Paul does here in the first piece of this sandwich.

This is the top piece of bread. You look at it and you say, wow, can't argue with that. That's great.

Now he's going to put in the middle here, verses 10 through 17, here's what's not so great. And he's doing this because he's an apostle, but he has begun by doing what he can to tie everybody together and remind them of their common grace, common hope, common identity in Christ, and common bond with one another. Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, I plead with you by a unifying truth, that you speak the same thing.

Notice, not flattering words, not divisive words. Speak what we can all agree on. Now, we're not saying don't have a Bible class that digs and that refines understanding.

This is fellowship speech. Teachers need to teach. We need to plumb the depths.

We need to sink the Word of God deep in our souls, and we need to dig for the treasure that is in the Word. This is not talking about, well, don't look at the Word of God too closely because it might divide you. This is Christian interpersonal relations.

Speak the same thing. If somebody starts saying something you can't agree with, you say something they can agree with. We speak the same thing.

Let's get on common ground. Let's explore the wide range of truths that nobody can disagree with. Jesus Christ came in the flesh, died for our sins, rose again.

Remember the gospel in Romans 10, 8 through 13? I deliver to you as of first importance. Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures. He was buried.

He rose again the third day according to the scriptures. Boy, when we get to Sunday in Matthew, that according to the scriptures has blown my mind. I hope I can find the scattered fragments and organize it to good effect on Sunday.

But according to the common truths, this takes effort. This takes thought. If we are, in fact, the more mature believer in the conversation, then it's our place to speak unifying and edifying truth.

The other person is not as far along. You're really putting a harsh and unfair expectation for them to find a way. That's our job.

This is how we operate and are beneficial presences in the lives of the weaker brother, weaker in the faith, not as far along in understanding. So they want to go down some side trail. Speak the same thing, that there be no divisions among you, verse 10, and that you be perfectly joined together in the mind and in the same judgment.

Now, what if somebody comes up with a political agenda or a political issue and they say, well, you know, because I'm a Christian, I think X or Y or Z, and it isn't something we can unify on. I think there's some things that nearly all believers agree, you know, taking human life, not a good idea unless it's in the context of judicial punishment or warfare.

But there are other places where, you know, faithful people will disagree politically.

Well, you got to get off of that subject. If you're going to be perfectly joined, you can't be tolerating and trying to talk someone into. I've been thinking a lot about this because there are many people who are out there and their agenda is to convert someone to their way of thinking.

This is not our job. It is not your job. It is not my job to observe someone who we believe is thinking wrongly and fix them.

I've got the knowledge. I've got the wisdom. I've got the Bible study.

I know a Greek word. I've got a chiasm here I can lay on you and I can fix your broken viewpoint. I can change your understanding of what's best, what's good, what's wrong.

No. Whose job is that? Who convicts of sin and righteousness and judgment? Not me and not you. I ran across, you know how it is, you're doing one thing.

It's like when you're looking for something and you find something else that you're really glad you found it but that wasn't what you were looking for. I ran across where Jesus was teaching about defilement and it isn't what goes into someone in terms of what they eat that defiles them. It's what comes out of their heart and that's the defiling truth.

The Pharisees got upset at this. They believe that righteousness is maintained by touching not the unclean thing. They get scriptures they can cite.

And so the disciples come to Jesus and they say, you know Lord, Pharisees are getting really upset at what you're talking about. And in a nutshell he says, let them alone. It's the blind leading the blind and they will both fall into the ditch.

He doesn't say the blind leading the blind. We've got to help these blind people. You all go out there and grab them and don't let them go into the ditch.

We could have another Good Samaritan story if you don't go out there and stop them from falling into the ditch. What does he say? Let them alone. It just smacked me like a board in my head.

Let them alone. If they're blind, unless you're the Lord Jesus or you've got a special commission as the two by two disciples, you can't cure blindness. How do scales fall from people's eyes? As Paul on the Damascus road, Jesus confronted him, the Holy Spirit entered him and the scales fell from his eyes.

It's a God thing. We can be on hand. We can support, we can encourage, but you cannot cure willful blindness.

Pharisees come to Jesus. Are we blind also? In John nine, Jesus said, if you were blind,

you would have no sin because you would acknowledge your blindness. You would confess your blindness and you would be given sight.

But because you say we see, he doesn't say because I haven't preached eloquently enough or because my disciples haven't set a great enough example because you say we see your sin remains. It's individual choice. There's a lot of individual choice in our crafty harlot parable.

We have to recognize that we can be ready always to give an answer to someone who asks, but you cannot tackle somebody and try to prevent them from falling into the ditch. And many times they're not content to be blind. They want to lead other blind people.

Jesus never sent his disciples to fix that. And he doesn't send us to fix it. It takes self-discipline.

Many times these are people that we care about, that we love, that we're close to. You've got to rein that instinct in because you are elbowing the Holy Spirit out of the place. You are interrupting God's timing.

There is a time and a place. Why didn't Paul get accosted by the Lord Jesus before he was on the Damascus road? Why didn't Stephen convert him when he was standing there holding the coats? It wasn't the right time. Paul had to reach a place where it became hard for him to kick against the pricks.

He wasn't kicking against the pricks when Stephen was stoned to death in his presence and he heard the chapter-long speech and rehearsal of Israel's history that Stephen gave. He wasn't ready. We don't know the right timing.

God does. Don't gum up the works. See this in our Sunday study.

There is a time for a sword and there's a time not for a sword. Swinging it at the arresting party and hitting the servant of the high priest is not the right time, not the right place, not the right way. Jesus has to tell Peter, put that sword away.

You're messing with the plan here. You're messing up the argument that Jesus is going to make to Pilate later. Are you a king? If my kingdom was of this earth, my servants would fight.

Well, he had a servant trying to fight and it messes up the whole point. It's like Moses striking the rock. We've got to have the discipline to trust that God knows what he's doing when he tells us to keep our own counsel, let the Holy Spirit do his work, be ready.

God will bring someone to us with a question if it is time for us to give an answer. So this is Paul in Corinthians. You need to be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in

the same judgment.

The only way we can do this is to limit our converse and our concourse with fellow believers to things where we can achieve that unity. That's what we've got to look for. Look for that which unifies, separate from that which divides.

You've got to divide from the divisive. You've got to get it out of the conversation. Otherwise, trouble.

Verse 11, it's been declared to me concerning you, my brethren, by those of Chloe's house, that there are contentions among you. It's very interesting that he mentions who gave him the information. Many times, anonymous sources tell me, isn't this going to get Chloe's household in trouble with the Corinthians? Why does Paul mention this? I don't know.

I just think it's a good question. Anyway, now I say this, verse 12, each of you says, I am of Paul, I am of Apollos, I am of Cephas, I am of Christ. Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Were you baptized in the same way that he was baptized? Verse 17, for Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel.

Notice, John was sent to baptize. He's called John the Baptizer, the greatest last Old Testament prophet, right? He was sent to baptize. Paul says, I'm not John.

I wasn't sent here to baptize. I know my mission. We need to know our mission, what it is and what it isn't.

Now, Paul did some baptizing, but it's not his mission. And he's glad that he didn't do much of it. Why? Because it is beginning to detract and divide.

What are people saying? Well, I don't know if you can really be trusted. I was baptized by Paul. I know I'm a Christian.

I'm not too sure about you. I know my understanding is correct. I was baptized by Paul.

Divisive. Paul says, I'd rather not baptize anybody if it's going to divide you. It's just a matter of having faith.

You can't be a believer without faith. We cannot emphasize in these days and in these times, believers need to stick together, fight together, or all our cause is lost. It is the unity of faith, the bond of Christ, the presence and the shared expression of spiritual identity and spiritual gifts in Christ, in the Spirit, dedicated to the Father.

We have got to be united, not divided. If we find ourselves divided, we've got to find a way to unite. Get away from what divides and unite with fellow believers on what is common.

Set aside the glass half-empty. Focus on the glass half-full. We have to do this.

Paul doesn't say to the Corinthians, you know what you really ought to do is this, you're kind of a big church, you need to split up into five churches. Have the Church of Christ, the Church of Paul, the Church of Peter, the Church of who I baptized, the Church of who I didn't baptize. Is that what he says? He says, look, Christ is not divided.

You weren't baptized in my name. Christ is a unifying feature. Your spirit baptism is a unifying feature.

Focus on that. So that's in the middle of the sandwich there, and he continues all the way through to verse 18, where now we have the emphasis again on the unifying truth. And 18 through 31 here in 1st Corinthians is the unifying truth.

For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing. Who should you be separate and distinct from? The perishing, those who are headed for destruction, those whose lives are meaningless, fruitless, nothing to do with the plan and purpose of God. The message of the cross is foolishness to them.

You want to divide from somebody? Divide from someone who isn't united with you in Christ, isn't united with you in the Spirit, isn't united by the common grace that has come to us from the Father. That's the only people we ought to be separate and distinct from. Come out from among them and be ye separate.

The message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved, it is the power of God. All of these people he mentioned up here that are dividing into factions, what's the common truth? We are being saved by the power of God. Common truth.

Defining truth. Essential truth. It is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise and bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent.

It's not your theological pin dancing. It's not your theological pinhead angel counting. It's not you know, infralapsarianism, superlapsarianism, sublapsarianism.

It isn't posy-nome-pocari-nome, posy-pocari. It's not all of these creedal formulations. If you know me, you know, I love deep understanding of the Word of God.

Love to dig into it. Love to get answers to questions. We are not talking about personal understanding and personal application here for ourselves.

We are talking about unity of the body. Don't let your understanding divide us. Right? There's a difference.

My deep understanding deepens my fellowship with God and it ought to deepen my fellowship with fellow believers. If my understanding divides me from believers, I need to

fix that. In my concourse and my contact with fellow believers, I don't need to be trotting out, you know what I think happens after people die? That's divisive.

Won't it be great when we are all absent from the body and present with the Lord? Everybody can light a candle off of that fire, right? Couch understanding in a way that is accessible and unifying, not mystery knowledge and divisive. But a lot of mistakes made in the quote-unquote ICE church community developing an us-and-them mentality because well, our pastor knows Greek. We know secret truths and you don't.

We've got vocabulary and you don't. We've got answers to questions and you don't. That is poison.

That is the flattering crafty harlot splitting believers up. Don't let that harlot lead us down that road. Verse 20, where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this age? You want to go cross swords and tilt windmills? I've tried this a few times on, you know, theological discussion boards and somebody, some really nice guy will just post a question and he gets dogpiled with with insensitive, intransigent dogma and people who won't listen, they only want to talk.

The guy just had a question when he tries to get an answer and then the two dogmatists trash the thread fighting with each other and insulting each other, exposing their immaturity, but there's no progress made. There's no unity. It's divisive.

It's harmful. The guy never gets his question answered. It's It's a real mess.

Little of that goes a long way. Where is the disputer of this age? Has God not made foolish the wisdom of this world? Since in the wisdom of God the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe. That you don't have to understand advanced cases of rigorous argument to get the message of the cross.

Jews request a sign, Greeks seek after wisdom. We preach Christ crucified. It's a simple message.

Christ died for our sins. Christ crucified. We were hopelessly separated from God.

We have an unsolvable, incurable sin problem. We are corrupt, fallen, dead and dying. Christ died to fix that.

You don't have to parse. I had somebody arguing me over the difference between atonement and redemption. Why? Christ died for our sins.

Let's unify on that. Let's celebrate that. Let's go in the strength and power of that and do what God calls us to do in this world, which is to be a light that shines, not a squabbling, mud-throwing, hateful, bitter crowd.

Jews request a sign, Greeks seek after wisdom. We preach a very simple message. Don't have to be wise to get it.

Don't have to see a miracle to believe it. Yet it's a stumbling block to the Jews and it's foolishness to the Greeks. Why? Because they have chosen to blind themselves to this simple truth.

Jews say, I won't believe it unless I see a sign because I don't think something is true unless there's a miracle. Well, you decided that. God never said it won't be true unless you see a miracle.

Greeks demand wisdom. God didn't say, you know, you've got to really weigh all the evidence and get all the arguments on both sides. If you're really sharp, you'll be able to to solve this quadratic equation and arrive at the truth.

To those who are called, to those who hear the call and have that hunger and sense of need, have the humility and the recognition of the problem within, both Jews and Greeks, Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God. Christ himself is the sign. Christ himself is the argument.

Do you see this? Jews are looking for a sign. Christ is the sign. Greeks are seeking wisdom.

Christ is the wisdom. And if you are asking and seeking and knocking, when you find Christ, you've got your sign and you've got your wisdom. And that should unify us with others who have done the same thing and appreciate the same thing.

The foolishness of God is wiser than men and the weakness of God is stronger than men. The weakest thing God ever did is stronger than anything we can do. The silliest thing God ever did is wiser than the smartest thing we could ever do is sort of the argument.

Anyway, that is the answer to point one. The immoral seductress, she's got a set of words. She can say, well, if it's God, there will be a sign.

She can say, if it's God, it will make all kinds of erudite intellectual sense. Paul says, no, it's the message of the cross and the only people that are going to get it, you're not going to get them with a sign. You think the Pharisees who saw Lazarus walking around after four days dead, the sign didn't convince them.

They said, we need a sign. No sign is good enough. Those who seek wisdom, you can give them the best scriptural arguments.

You can show them the beauty and the symmetry and the depth and the height. There's no wisdom going to convince them if they're not looking. Just think about that sign.

If a Pharisee looks at the walking around Lazarus four days dead, raised by Jesus Christ,

if that sign doesn't convince him, what will? No sign is good enough. No wisdom is good enough for those who are not seeking. And you're wasting your breath trying to cross a divide that is uncrossable.

Rich man and Lazarus. There is an impassable gulf here. We can't meet.

Rich man's on one side, never gave it a thought. Send Lazarus to my brothers. Abraham says, no.

If they're not convinced by the preached word, somebody raised from the dead won't convince them. There's no wisdom you and I can employ that will bring someone to the light. They have to be looking for the light.

They have to be groping and feeling after God. God says he's not far from anyone. If they're seeking, if they're feeling, you will seek me and find me.

You will find me when you search for me with all your heart. Well, as I said, 14 points. We've got one done.

When we come back from the break, we'll do the other 13.