

Proverbs 23-02-01a

Good evening, welcome to Wednesday night Bible class at Grace and Truth Bible Church. This is the first day of February, 2023. We're in Proverbs 7, 8, and 9, looking at the parable of the crafty harlot.

There are notes available on the audio listing on the website if you would like to follow along and save yourself some writing because we have a lot of references to go with the points of observation and the points of application. Because as we have seen, this parable applies to each and every one of us. This seductress is not just a prostitute looking for naive young men.

This is the world looking to seduce the people of God away from the right path, the right values, the right focus in life. And as such, it is a wonderful description and warning for us by being familiar with the details of this extended metaphor. We can be watching and praying as instructed by the Lord Jesus and avoid being led astray.

Let's ask God's blessing on our fellowship and study and we'll begin. Father, we're grateful for another opportunity to spend this time together in fellowship and the study of your word. We ask your blessing on us as we seek to improve our understanding and be more thoroughly equipped for every purpose you have for us in your plan as we represent the Lord Jesus Christ as his body on this earth.

We pray that you will enlighten each one of us, help us to see the pertinence and application of the principles we observe tonight. We ask it in Jesus' name, amen. So Proverbs sort of loosely located at chapter seven.

And last time we saw the first two points about this immoral seductress. The overarching characteristic is that she flatters, divides and leads astray with her words. She is noted as doing so in verse five of chapter seven.

And there are extensive parallels in scripture. We saw this last time with passages that are noted under that point one. And the solution, the application, the way we can avoid being so misled, we saw in first Corinthians chapter one and that wonderful unifying passage that Paul presented to the people in Corinth who were being divided by words, who were being led into petty squabbles and away from Christ, away from effectiveness, away from opportunity for service and function.

So having seen that we moved in the second session last time to point two, which is where is this seductive influence found? And it is lurking where it hopes to find people who are alone, who have already perhaps divided themselves, have separated themselves, scattered themselves under pressure or for some other reason from fellow believers. So this young man is walking a residential street in the dark at night where he doesn't have comrades, he doesn't have family. He is relying only on himself for defense

and such loners are preyed upon.

This is commonly known among law enforcement and those who track vigilante groups and cults and those who are counter culture, anti-establishment, anti-government. On the web, they look for disaffected and unconnected individuals. A lot of times this is young men who are waylaid into weird groups.

This is how gangs form is finding individuals who are loners and are looking for some sort of connection. By maintaining our connections in the body of Christ, we reduce our vulnerability in this area. By holding grudges, by dividing into groups and doing finger pointing and doctrinal heretic hunting and so on, when we fractionalize the body of Christ without good reason, we make ourselves vulnerable to this kind of attack.

There are times to separate, but not in the bitter, hateful, vindictive and implacable way that it often happens when churches split, when believers part ways and are not on time speaking terms and so on. Our mandate is to be united. If our brother has aught against us, we go and attempt by every means available to us to be reconciled.

Reconciliation, the Lord Jesus has reconciled us to God. We should be reconciled one to another. And there should not be any dividing line.

This is the proper understanding of Paul's statement that there is neither Jew nor Greek, neither male nor female, neither bond nor free. We are one in Christ and we should not let petty issues divide us, not politics, not culture, not wrangling over issues or possessions or any such thing. That was point two.

And we need to be watchful and patient. We need to persevere. And we saw these passages in Matthew chapter seven, verse 15 through 23, the things that want to take us off the narrow road so that we can't go through the straight gate and so on in Luke chapter 13.

So we pick up tonight at point three. What is the third characteristic? These are coming verse by verse from Proverbs chapter seven. So the immoral, seductress, flattering with words is in verse five, lurking in residential neighborhoods, sort of seeking whom she may devour was verse six.

And now in Proverbs chapter seven, verse seven, we see that there is a simple individual, naive. He's among the youths. He doesn't have a lot of life experience and he is devoid of understanding.

You can't help being young. You can't always help being naive, but you can help in the understanding department. Even young people can develop understanding.

And this comes from being heedful and paying attention when instruction is offered, when advice is given by elders and parents and so on. But this young man has got two

strikes against him because he's naive and young without life experience. But the third strike is his own fault.

And that is being devoid of understanding. No excuse for that. So this crafty harlot is lying in wait for such people.

If we don't develop and maintain understanding, a clear grasp of wisdom, and it doesn't have to be advanced. It doesn't have to be years in the making. There are very simple truths.

The 10 commandments are exceedingly simple. Jesus' instructions in the Sermon on the Mount are extremely simple. It's not difficult, but it is a matter of choice.

So in verse seven, she is lying in wait for the simple, the young. And this word devoid of understanding, literally in Hebrew, it says empty hearted. Heart is empty.

We know from Jeremiah 17, nine, that the heart is deceitful and desperately wicked. And to have a void in the heart is to be vulnerable to someone who is going to shovel something into that vacuum. You can see this also in chapter six, verse 32.

Whoever commits adultery with a woman lacks understanding. You see it coming up in chapter nine, verse four. The lady wisdom calling out in chapter nine sends out her maidens, cries out from the highest places of the city.

Whoever is simple, let him turn in here. As for him who lacks understanding, she says to him, come eat of my bread and drink the wine I have mixed. Forsake foolishness and live.

Wisdom is available even for the simple, even for the empty hearted. Wisdom calls out. She too has mingled wine.

She too offers a place to go in such conditions. It's a choice. You've got the crafty harlot.

You've got lady wisdom. Which one do you choose? And over and over again, we see cases where either in our own lives or in the lives of others, when choices are made, almost immediately excuses are made. Well, I did this because, and then somebody else gets blamed.

Circumstance gets blamed. The Bible is clear. Our choices are a simple binary decision for deceit or truth, for wisdom or foolishness.

Those who want wisdom, God will ensure that we get it. Those who reject wisdom, those who suppress the truth in unrighteousness are gonna have the last half of Romans chapter one instead. And it is by their own choice.

So if we realize that we are not experienced, that we don't have a lot of background

knowledge in an area of decision, whether it's relationship, whether it's business, whether it's employment, whether it's education, and we want to live a life that pleases God, we want to be wise and not foolish, there is an answer. And it is here in Proverbs chapter nine. Also in chapter eight, the contrast between these two women is throughout chapter seven, eight, and nine.

So you see the contrast in chapter eight, verses four and five, wisdom is crying out, understanding is lifting up her voice in chapter eight, takes her stand on the high hill, crying out at the gates, to you, oh men, I call, verse four, and my voice is to the sons of men. Oh, you simple ones, understand prudence, and you fools, be of an understanding heart. We are not trapped in congenital foolishness or simplicity.

It's a choice. God gives wisdom to those who ask for it, who seek it and search for it, as for hidden treasures. What is required? Look at chapter eight, verse six.

What's the first word in Proverbs eight, six? Listen. Very difficult in these days with the advent of the kinds of communication we have, instant communication that has shrunk the world to the size of your phone, to be a good listener and to listen to valid sources of wisdom and understanding, accurate and well-prepared presentations from the word of God. If we are hungry for truth, we will know when that hunger is satisfied.

We understand, we grasp the fact that here is an answer to a longstanding question. Here is a perspective or a fresh level of insight into the word of God. When we have those, we're in the right place.

We are eating the meal that wisdom has prepared. If we come away still hungry, we've gotten Twinkies. We've gotten human philosophy.

We've gotten people who teach for doctrines, the traditions of men. Our own soul, if we are genuinely seeking, will tell us if we are being fed or not. And any believer anywhere who is not getting fed in this church or any place else needs to seek and find the place where they do get fed.

There are many good teachers of the word of God with different styles, different personalities, different types of insight into the word of God, teaching at different levels. And it is no sin, it is no crime, it is no harm against a pastor to conclude, me personally, I don't learn under that individual. I need to look around and find someone from whom I can learn.

And that's fair. If we could all learn from one guy, there would only be one guy. But God has distributed the teaching gifts and the pastoring function amongst many, many, many individuals.

And in this day and age, the productive side of technology is you can find them almost no matter where they are. If they've got something published out in media, search for it,

find it and grow thereby. It is silly to think that there can only be one fifth grade math teacher.

And if you can't learn fifth grade math from him, you can't learn math at all. Switch schools, switch sections, go to a different class. Find someone from whom you can learn.

Midshipmen at the Naval Academy do this all the time. You start in a section and after a couple of weeks, you're just glazed over and confused, switch sections. Find somebody from whom you can learn.

So wisdom is crying out and understanding is lifting up her voice. And this is initiation and we should respond. So we see this as well in Romans chapter seven, turn with me to Romans chapter seven.

This is one of my favorite chapters because it speaks to our human experience so profoundly. Beginning in verse 14, Paul says, we know that the law is spiritual, but I am carnal. The scriptures are spiritual.

It is spiritual truth. We are made of flesh and bone and we're sold under sin. Paul says in verse 15, what I'm doing, I don't understand.

What I will to do that I do not practice, but what I hate that I do. This is the line in the Theodore Roosevelt quote that says we're out in the arena and we're covered in dust and sweat and blood and we err and come short again and again. We strive, we effort, we try and we fail.

What we wanna do, we don't do. What we don't wanna do, what we hate, we end up doing. So if I do what I will not to do, I agree with the law that it is tov, it is good because the purpose of the law is to give us knowledge of sin.

So if I understand the law and its standards and its principles, and I look at myself and see myself failing, the law has done its job. So I see that there is sin dwelling in me that I cannot will to overcome. It is not simply a matter of choice.

There is a philosophy of understanding. You've heard of Calvinism and reformed theology and anyone who thinks there's such thing as free will, they call them, well, we are Calvinists and you are, what, Patty? Starts with an A. Arminians. Arminians, right? You're Arminians.

No, people who believe in free will properly from the Bible are not Arminian. Arminius didn't understand this passage and he thought that we could simply choose to be good. With an unaided human will, we had free choice to either do good or do evil.

Paul says, that is not true. The law is showing that even when I want to do good, I can't make my will do it because I am a slave to sin. I'm not just choosing to sin, I am enslaved

to it.

This is the thrust of Romans 9. The unaided human will cannot escape sin because in me, verse 18, in my flesh, nothing good dwells. To will is present with me, but how to perform what is good, I do not find. This is why we turn to God through Christ.

And when we are saved, the slavery to sin is broken. Paul is speaking here, not as a believer, but as carnal, as someone sold under sin, as someone under the law, without the Holy Spirit, without the grace that comes through Jesus Christ. So if you skip on down to verse 24, O wretched man that I am, who will deliver me from this body of death? I find that in me dwells no good thing.

That's not the believer with the indwelling Holy Spirit, is it? If you want to understand the first half of Romans chapter seven, just recognize that Paul is using himself as a parable of the Old Testament saint or the fallen man. Sin dwells in me and I can't escape its grip. I can will to do good, but I don't find the ability within me.

Who will deliver me from the body of this death? Well, the answer is in verse 25. I thank God through Jesus Christ, our Lord. That's how I am delivered from the body of this death.

And in this age, at salvation, something good does dwell in us, God's spirit. And by pursuing an understanding of God's word, having his words and keeping them, Jesus says, I and my father will come and dwell. And we've got the entirety of God's power available to us dwelling with us.

So what is the solution for deception and sin and evil lying in wait for us? Genesis four, seven, God told Cain, if you don't do well, sin is crouching at the door and it wants to possess you. It wants to overcome you. It wants to have its way with you like Romans seven.

You must overcome it. How do we overcome it? Even in the Old Testament, those who had a genuine desire to overcome sin had access to the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit came by request, not by default.

This is Jesus' words. If you being evil know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him? Those who wanted to overcome sin badly enough were given access to the Holy Spirit by request, but it was not by default. We are under an even greater obligation because we have the spirit by default.

How terrible is it to have the power within us to overcome sin and then fail to do so? That's much worse. Well, verse eight of Proverbs chapter seven tells us that going down the path with her is a choice. The author here looking out the lattice, perceiving this simpleton, young man devoid of understanding, passing along the street near her

corner, and he took the path to her house.

She didn't wrestle him down it. She didn't push him down it. He wasn't roped and dragged down it.

He of his own free will took the path to her house. Going down her path is a choice. Flip the page to Proverbs chapter eight and look at verse five.

Oh, you simple ones, understand prudence. You fools be of an understanding heart. Verse 10, receive my instruction instead of silver.

Receive knowledge instead of choice gold. You can pursue money. You can pursue prosperity.

You can pursue success and being well off in this world represented by silver and gold, or you can choose instruction and knowledge. You can choose prudence and an understanding heart instead of an empty heart. It is a choice, Old Testament and new.

We choose and we are accountable for the choice. So what is our application? If it is a choice, obviously we can say, well, I need to choose rightly. How do I cultivate making good choices and not wrong choices? Turn with me to Romans chapter eight.

We were just reading Romans chapter seven. Romans chapter eight. This is what Paul follows up the deliverance in Christ with.

Romans eight five. Those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh. We say, you know, every time a bad choice comes up, I end up making it.

There's a bad option and I do it. Something bad to say, I end up saying it. Wrong behavior, I end up doing it.

I want to choose right, but I feel more like the Romans seven guy. Here is Paul's answer how to not be the Romans seven guy. With my mind, I serve the law of God, but with my flesh, I serve the law of sin.

That is no longer necessary because sin as a master has been eliminated. That master is dead. We have been set free from that slavery.

So now that it is back to being a choice, how can I ensure I make that choice? Romans eight five. Those who live according to the flesh, why is that? Because they have set their mind on the things of the flesh. When we think of our own thought life, we think of our thought life, we analyze it, we look at it.

I have summarized it in the past under three headings, our goals, our values, and our priorities. Our goals, our values, and our priorities. Well, are my goals of this world to get ahead, to be well thought of, to accomplish something that is visible and that I can show

to others? What do I set my mind on? What are my goals? What are my values? Is my first and top moral and ethical standard, what feels good to me or what scripture tells me is God's will and God's standard.

My priorities, what is most important to me? Is my personal comfort? Is it something of this world? Those who live according to the flesh set their mind on the things of the flesh. And what we set our mind on is a choice. If the television gets my mind in the gutter, if social media gets my mind on the world and the flesh, then I need to set my mind on something else.

I need to change the inputs. Garbage in, garbage out. Word of God in, righteousness out.

And if I find that I am constantly failing and although I wish I was doing well, I am actually not. I've got to change what I set my mind on. And that's inputs.

Who do I associate with? What do I listen to? What do I spend time paying my attention to? Change that, set your mind. As Paul says, those who live according to the spirit set their mind on the things of the spirit. What would God's spirit set my mind on? The example of Jesus Christ, the sacrificial toward self-beneficial toward others mode of living.

For example, verse six, Romans eight, to be carnally minded is death, operational death. You're a fruitless tree. But to be spiritually minded is life and peace.

One of the ways we know that we have set our mind on the things of the spirit is we have a sense of life and appreciation of and capacity for life and we have inner peace. There is a spiritual satisfaction. It doesn't mean that we won't have turbulence and that we won't encounter difficult circumstances, that we won't be taxed and vexed and challenged.

But at the center of it, there will be spiritual peace. I am in tribulation, but didn't Jesus tell me there would be tribulation? I am suffering hardship, but didn't the apostle Paul tell me that after suffering a while, that's when I receive the inheritance, that this is what qualifies me. This is what distinguishes me.

This is the crucible in which the dross is removed and the precious metal is refined. This is needful. God understands that I need this time of testing.

I need this challenge. I need this suffering. This is what qualifies me for an eternity in the presence of God.

My momentary light affliction is working for me an eternal weight of glory. So I accept it in the same way that Jesus accepted the cross, knowing that it was the only valid path to the crown, to accomplishing the will of the father. The carnal mind is enmity against God.

It is not subject to the law of God. There are so many today in Christian circles who refuse to be subject to the law of God. Well, I just want a tiny portion of the Bible.

I'm just gonna pick a few pages and I'm gonna go by that. I don't like these other parts and I'm not gonna be subject to that. This guidance about women, this guidance about submission, this guidance about what I can and can't do and where I should or shouldn't go and who I should or should not associate with.

I don't accept that. Well, right away, the carnal mind is enemyship. It is not just not willing to obey God or serve God it becomes an enemy of God.

It works against God and his plan and purpose and against people who belong to God. Vertently or inadvertently, you become an enemy. Fallen from grace, cut off from Christ and so on.

So then those who are in the flesh cannot please God but you are not in the flesh but in the spirit if indeed the spirit of God dwells effectively in you. We can be indwelt and yet not really be allowing that to make a difference. Keep in step with the spirit, be filled with the spirit.

He's there but if he truly dwells, if he is at home with us, if we are in communion with God through him, that's gonna make a difference. If anyone does not have the spirit of Christ, he's not his. You don't really belong to Christ even though on paper you do in the same way that a Marine who refuses to wear his uniform and refuses to come to formation, he may be a Marine on paper but he's not gonna be a Marine for long.

He'll be in the brig. He may be a Marine on paper but he's not a Marine functionally. He's not accomplishing the mission.

He is not doing that for which he was recruited and signed up and that can be us. Well, we have more to say about this but this path is a choice. Carnal mindedness is a choice.

Spiritually minded people make that choice and we have to aim our minds. It's just like having a weapon. You can aim it in a productive direction or a catastrophic direction.

The weapon is the same, the power is the same, what do you aim it at? We set our minds consciously on the things of the spirit, prayerfully so, asking God as the man did, Lord, I believe, help thou my unbelief. Help me set my mind on the things of the spirit. God will never answer that prayer with a no.

If we pray for strength, pray for help, pray for guidance, pray for aid, pray for the ability to set our mind on the things of the spirit, ask and it shall be given. Let's pause here and take our break.