

Today is Wednesday, February the 8th, 2023. Welcome to the study of the Book of Proverbs here at Grace and Truth Bible Church. We're going to be slightly less formal here because I have some current events I want to comment on, just for our general awareness, situational awareness, watching the horizon and seeing if it's red sky in the morning, sailor take warning, etc.

And also to finish our analysis of the parable of the crafty harlot. So let's take a moment to ask God's blessing on our fellowship, on our thoughts, on our hearts, ensure that the decks are clear and we can focus and concentrate and receive the undiminished ministry of God's Holy Spirit in understanding the Word and making application of it. Shall we pray?

Father, what a blessing it is and a constant comfort to be the recipients of your cleansing grace, to be freed from the drag and the bondage that sin entangles us with and corrupts us with and prevents us from rising above the dust from which we are made.

But in your grace, with the presence of your Spirit, the power of your Word, the example of the Lord Jesus and his saving and intercessory ministry on our behalf, we have been given a transcendent life, a transformed life, a life that can partake of eternity if we are awake and aware and alert to the wonderful opportunities that come to us through your grace. We thank you for that. We thank you for the portion of your Word that is before us this evening.

And we ask your blessing on us as we look at it together. Help us to understand it, to see how pertinent it is and how we can implement it and benefit by it and become brighter lights shining in the midst of our ever-darkening generation. And that as a result, others will see Christ in us, see the path into your presence in us, and ask us a reason for the hope that is in us.

We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.

Our passage for the last several weeks has been this section of Proverbs, pretty much chapters 7, 8, and 9. And you have in chapter 7 and in chapter 9 especially this harlot, this seductress, representing the allure of the world, the appeal to our self-interest, our self-gratification.

I asked myself a question in this regard, and no hands raised. Everybody play the best hand of poker that you can. But I asked myself this question, and I am embarrassed somewhat by the answer.

We have here this contrast between a woman that represents wisdom and a woman that represents the seductive allure of the world. And so I think, well, let's just take the evening hours, like the time between supper and bedtime, however long that is. I have a choice of how to use that time.

I can sit and be entertained. I can have someone tell me stories and pose mysteries that challenge my mind to arrive at a solution ahead of the scriptwriter. I can see reality TV. I can see Forensic Files, which has a great appeal to me for reasons I can't quite explain. And there are many things that can provide the bubble gum for my brain, the chewing gum for my mind.

And I justify it by saying, well, I'm tired and I don't want to think. I want to relax. I want to be entertained. Bring out the dancing girls. Bring out the court jester. Bring out the fools and the libations and whatnot. And let's have an interesting time before we pass out and start another day.

And then I ask myself, if I have any unspent energy or any remaining ability to think, which in fact I do, am I making a bad choice? Am I allowing myself to be led down a dark or at least twilight road by this woman that we've been studying in Proverbs chapter 7? Oh, you're tired. Let me comfort you. I've got Egyptian coverings on my soft pillows and incense is burning. I've already done my religious obeisance. I've offered my peace offerings. I'm squared away. I have no obligations in the direction of God. So let's just relax and have some fun.

And so then I think, well, should I just read nothing but the Bible, study nothing but commentaries, enjoy nothing but dramatizations of scriptural happenings? Or is it okay to partake of the entertainment that the world offers? And the conclusion I draw, and everybody has to draw this for themselves, I'm not telling anybody how to order your priorities or spend your time, I will simply offer as one path of conscious thought that, as with most things, the answer is yes and no. Sometimes yes, sometimes no.

But to be aware of the challenge is half the battle. To not blindly flip on the television and veg for three to six hours in an evening. To not necessarily binge-watch something just because they tell a good story and spin a great yarn.

But to be aware and to be conscious of our choices, I think, is the emphasis in these chapters of Proverbs. If you're going to make a choice, do it consciously, with thought, with some care for who I am and why I'm here. And with that awareness and with a consideration of how much time do I have, how much time have I spent in observing my proper priorities, can I relax and enjoy some entertainment, or am I behind on some of the things that take a higher priority and maybe I ought to flip the zero side of the switch instead of the one side of the switch on my electronics.

And ensure that I have in fact observed my ideals and what I like to tell myself are my priorities. And if I've not given any thought to the things of God all day long, I can pray for awakeness, I can pray for awareness, I can pray for enough energy to do what, 20, 30 minutes of review of what I've been learning in the Word of God, revisit things that have come up in recent Bible studies or recent conversations with fellow believers.

There is no simple answer to, as some sort of minority denominations have done, eschew all technology, throw your TV in the trash and live by candlelight and read Pilgrim's Progress. But it is equally thoughtless to spend, without tracking it and without really analyzing it, undue amounts of time being led by the crafty harlot into squandering my time, squandering my attention, squandering opportunities to be fortified.

The great thing about the Word of God is it doesn't take a lot of it. It's potent. It has divine power. All of the stuff that the world wants to sluice into our souls, it takes a lot of it to kind of blind you and deafen you and sedate you and make you numb and unaware. The Word of God is alive.

The emoluments and embellishments and entertainments of the world are dead. And generally, you begin to feel dead if you overindulge. You begin to get the feeling that you've been in a place and the smell is attached to your clothes and you need to shower and change and start fresh.

So without a long harangue, I just wanted to offer that as an example of application of the things that we are learning. We're attempting to find the application of these three chapters, the contrast between the crafty harlot and Lady Wisdom and the appeal that each makes. Each of them requires time and attention to be followed.

If the harlot's going to take us down to her Egyptian bedspread and incense, we have made the choice to be at that street corner and walk down that dark street and in the direction of Hades or Sheol. If Wisdom cries out at the crossroads and is offering us the thoughts of God, the plan and purpose of God, the character that Jesus Christ embodied, many of the commentaries are trying to decide if the embodiment of wisdom here is a foreshadowing of Jesus Christ. The greatest impediment to that being that she is regularly referred to with feminine pronouns and is pictured as a woman making an appeal in comparison and contrast to this crafty harlot.

The gender is primarily designed, in my view, for universality. You don't find it quite so universal and appealing if these chapters were to present a gigolo trying to attract and fool rich elderly widows or something. It's classic. It's universal. It has happened in every generation. It happens pretty much every moment of the day somewhere in the world where a naive young man makes poor decisions that ruin his future and it involves a seductive woman of some type.

So this is a parable. It is something to draw us up, as all Scripture does, and to make us think. So my encouragement is that we take an opportunity on a regular basis to just put a Post-it note where we are, put a comma or a semicolon mid-sentence, and just come up for air and stop and think, am I living the life of a committed follower of Jesus Christ in the stewardship of my time, my attention, my conversation, and what I take in through the eye gate and the ear gate? Because that's what these chapters are about.

Don't be blinded. Don't be emotionalized. Don't be subtly and unconsciously influenced. We've visited that topic in the past with things such as the book Predictably Irrational, talking about how we're unconsciously tipped in directions by things that we unknowingly and, in some cases, unwillingly and unwarily find coming into our minds.

So with that said, I want to add one short observation which occurred to me in reviewing and looking at this, and it is this feminizing of wisdom. Many of the things that are said to be true of wisdom, accompanying God in the

beginning, being a part of creation, by me, the heavens were created; by me, the earth was organized; by me, life came into the world. Speaking of wisdom, you go to John 1, and much of these are also said of Jesus Christ.

And it gives me pause for thought, because wisdom is in some ways neutral but has been presented in a feminine manner in the same way that the Holy Spirit is often referred to in the neutral, but when he does have a gendered pronoun, it is masculine. And I arrived at a happy thought because in thinking about my old standby comparison of the power of God coming into our lives through the Spirit and through the Word, like the resin and the hardener for epoxy, or like any two-part combination that you have to mix these things together to get a good result, if you think about this artificial and suggestive genderizing, you have this great marriage or union of the Spirit, who is often pictured with male pronouns, and wisdom, or the Word of God, which is often pictured with feminine pronouns, and that it is that marriage and that contact and that unity between the Spirit and the Word as it occurs in our souls that provides this supernatural and eternity-partaking presence, guidance, light, life, fruit.

And when you start thinking about the fruit of the Spirit, it takes a man and a woman to produce the fruit of the womb, and it takes the presence of the Spirit and the Word of God and allowing them to spend time together in our souls. This is the role of reflection, meditating, "in that law doth he meditate day and night." And this is where life comes from, the river of life, the water of life, not being a shrub in the desert and failing to recognize good when it comes.

So as we are wrapping up our look at these three chapters in Proverbs and the contrast between the woman who wants to shut down legitimate thought and proper values and the woman who calls us to those and calls us upward instead of downward and into the light instead of into the darkness, the practical means by which we do this is to ensure that the Spirit is at home in our hearts.

This is the role of recognizing, acknowledging, confessing, and abandoning sin, especially patterned sins, so that the Holy Spirit is in the house. He's at home. And then the woman of the house, the Word of God, the truth of God, the principles and promises and doctrines are also at home. And the product of that is life and a future, future generations, future kingdoms, future opportunities, just as progeny and healthy families were the life of national Israel in the Old Testament, there is this production in our souls.

So that was a thought that floated across the empty landscape of my mind as I thought about that Chinese balloon going across the sky and getting splashed there. And in that regard, I just wanted to make an aside here and talk about Turkey. I want to talk Turkey.

You've heard, I'm sure, that there was a very severe earthquake. There have been tens of thousands of people killed as a result. It's a gruesome catastrophe over there and a humanitarian crisis, as they like to say. But if you are keeping an eye on Turkey, taking nothing away from the awfulness of any loss of life on a mass scale, it tends to be a hand flapping in one part of our attention. And in the meantime, the thief's other hand is feeling around for our wallet.

And in feeling sorry for Turkey and wanting to send help and legitimate concern, especially for believers in Turkey and in Syria and a genuine feeling of sympathy and empathy for anybody that goes through something like that, I just want to give a quick reminder because I personally have the theory that Turkey is the place to watch in terms of being aware of the forward progress of the geometry of the world toward that pattern that is depicted in the prophetic Scriptures with regard to the end times.

We're not end-time prophecy nut people, but you can't just fail to ever look up at the sky and notice if there's clouds or if it's clear. What constellation? Is there a comet? Is there a star arising in Jacob and smiting the brow of Moab? It's worth just keeping track. So nobody light your hair on fire. This is just interesting to me in terms of observation with regard to that place on the planet that is specifically said to be Satan's seat.

And so just about a month ago, there was an article in not my favorite news source, CNN, about Turkey. And I want to share with you just the highlights of this real quickly. This is just situational awareness, not saying anything, not cutting a hole in a sheet and jumping up and down, just saying.

The name of this article on CNN's website is "The World Looks On as Erdogan Jockeys for a Third Decade of Power in Turkey." I did not know this. I haven't heard anybody say this, but unbeknownst to us out in the rabble, Turkey is less than four months away from a presidential election that could extend the 20-year rule of

President Recep Tayyip Erdogan into a third decade. Analysts say the result may be a close call for the long-term leader.

The poll, which is expected May 14th, takes place amid the most serious collision between Russia and the West since the end of the Cold War. This, of course, is your Ukraine invasion. Russia's war has seen Turkey's foreign influence grow to a level that has become an annoyance for some and useful for others. The 68-year-old president has perhaps never been as polarizing on the international scene as he has become of late.

"From the standpoint of global powers, Turkey fits at the intersection of the West and the rest," said Sinan Ülgen, a former Turkish diplomat and chairman of Istanbul-based think tank EDAM. Ahead of the vote, Erdogan has been on a quest to mend fraying ties and strengthen old ones. He's also been eager to leverage Turkey's NATO membership and position himself as a mediator. I just makes me smile when I see words that apply to the Lord Jesus used for somebody who is not the Lord Jesus.

As a mediator in the Ukraine conflict to both achieve national interests and promote himself as a regional and global leader. He is using the Ukraine-Russia conflict to position himself as a mediator, as a mender of frayed ties, as a global leverage user, a regional and global leader.

Among those keenly watching the Turkish election on the international stage, there are those who may be rooting for Erdogan, those who have decided to live with him, and those who want nothing more than to see him relegated to the history books. Here's a breakdown. And there's a sort of a three-part subdivision here, starting with Russia.

Moscow's preference in Turkey is no secret. The Ukraine war has been a defining moment for Turkey's international influence, also its relationship with Russia. Roche, you might say.

Erdogan's close ties with Russian President Vladimir Putin have given his country the unique position of being the only NATO nation whose ear Russia has. The only NATO nation that Putin will listen to is Turkey, Erdogan. He has not followed his Western allies in imposing sanctions on Moscow and is expanding energy ties with Russia while the West is severing them.

"Putin has given a considerable degree of support to Erdogan before the elections in a way that no other global leader has," Ülgen told CNN, citing their growing cooperation as evidence of their deepening ties. Ankara and Moscow are working on creating a regional natural gas hub in Turkey, which Erdogan previously said can be used to transport gas to Europe. Strategic supplier of an essential commodity controlled by Putin and Erdogan, in other words.

Turkey is also expected to add nuclear power to its growing energy dependence on Russia. Built, owned, and operated by Russia, the country's first nuclear plant is expected to become operational this year, according to state news agency TASS. Used to hear about TASS back in the 1960s. Remember the height of the Cold War? TASS news agency, those criminal propagandists.

The two nations also coordinate their activities in Syria, where both have a military presence, but back opposing sides. Analysts say that Erdogan often seeks a green light from Moscow, which backs President Bashar al-Assad's regime in Syria, before launching attacks in the country. In other words, it's a puppet show. They're posing as though they back different sides, but Turkey doesn't do anything that Russia doesn't want them to do. The two nations are both present there.

"It is clear that Putin has made his choice very transparent about who he wants to win in Turkey," said Ülgen.

The Gulf states, Persian Gulf states, the Gulf states have been uncomfortable with Turkey's role in the Middle East, but they have put those differences aside and have decided to work with Erdogan. Recent rapprochement with Gulf states. See, I learned that word because I went to college. If you were reading it as a Okie, you'd say rapprochements with Gulf states.

Negotiations, in other words, brought not only a much-needed cash injection into the slowing Turkish economy, analysts say, but also served as an endorsement of Erdogan and a vote of confidence in his rule. A landmark visit by Erdogan to Saudi Arabia last year marked the end of a bitter dispute between Turkey and Riyadh that exploded after the killing and dismemberment of Saudi Washington Post columnist Jamal Khashoggi in 2018 at the Saudi consulate in Istanbul.

Both Riyadh and the United Arab Emirates have also opposed Erdogan's support for Islamist parties in the region. The Turkish leader also made his first state visit to the UAE in a decade last year. First time in 10 years, he's been to the Emirates. He met with then-Crown Prince Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, known as MBZ because everybody likes to have—I'm going to go, I'm going to be SCH from now on—who is now president. The visit followed a landmark trip by MBZ to Ankara in 2021.

So he is strengthening and deepening the ties, the reach of his tentacles, both locally in the region and further afield. Both of these detentes came with financial benefits for Turkey. Ankara got a pledge for \$5 billion central bank deposit from Saudi Arabia, \$5 billion, and the UAE establishing a \$10 billion investment fund for Turkey.

Erdogan has never won elections when not delivering economic growth, says Soner Çağaptay, director of the Turkish research program at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy. That's why he is trying to cultivate financial inflows from outside actors. Resetting with wealthy Gulf states like the Saudis and the Emirates. Getting a cash inflow, much like our government leaders in recent times have printed a bunch of money to create a false sense of economic ebullience that is pretty heavily leveraged against the future. Erdogan is getting cash from outsiders to pump up the economy to help him win the election.

The U-turn in relations indicates that the Gulf Arab states expect Erdogan to remain in power for the foreseeable future, says another guy. Saudi Arabia and the UAE see Erdogan as a fellow king strongman, do not really believe kings leave power with elections. Adding that the newly mended ties are a marriage of convenience that balances the Gulf's concerns as well as granting Erdogan financial support.

This is one of those alliances that holds for a time because there is mutually beneficial outcome in the short term, but how long will it last?

In the West, Western states would be glad to see a post-Erdogan Turkey, according to analysts. The United States and the EU have struggled with the Turkey's leader as he continues to stand in the way of Finland and Sweden's accession to NATO and continues to cooperate with Russia.

Turkey's reasoning for the stalling of the membership of Finland and Sweden, who are trying to get in and Turkey's blocking it, is that the Nordic states have not taken concrete actions against terrorist groups, mainly separatist militant Kurdistan Workers Party, also known as the PKK, that Turkey accuses Sweden of harboring.

Turkey's final straw appeared to be the burning of the Koran during protests outside the Turkish embassy in Stockholm last weekend. There is so much international news that we don't get that is significant in terms of European responses and reactions to what's going on in the Middle East.

The U.S. has had its own share of problems with Erdogan. The Turkish president has been working for months to get a sale of 40 F-16 fighter jets to Turkey approved. Those are jets from us, especially since his country has been removed from the F-35 program since 2019 after purchasing the Russian-made S-400 missile system.

Congressional sources two weeks ago told CNN that the Biden administration, which has been weighing Turkey's F-16 request for more than a year now, is preparing to ask Congress to approve the sale. Erdogan isn't very popular in Congress. U.S. politicians have been critical of Turkey's human rights record. Biden is yet to invite Erdogan on an official visit, but the two leaders met on the sidelines of the G20 summit in November.

The EU and the U.S. would be happy to see a post-Erdogan Turkey, says Taşpınar, somebody they've been talking to. Such an outcome would prove that Turkey is still a democracy and could create hope for a honeymoon with the West.

Interestingly, you remember when we were talking about that pipeline that Israel was trying to run under the Mediterranean and would have circumvented the leverage of the pipeline that got blown up and all of these other centralized things? No mention of that in this CNN article whatsoever. Nobody talks about how the Biden administration colluded with Turkey to stop that pipeline, which would have put Israel in the catbird seat instead of Turkey and Russia.

So my suggestion is, if you're interested in the larger picture, the hockey stick graph of evil throughout the world and especially in our own country, the ubiquitous nature of power politics and suppression of Christianity and Christian values, just try to keep abreast of news related to Turkey vis-a-vis Russia and China, NATO, the

EU. A little bit of reading will go a long way, but I have the sense that this current humanitarian crisis has diverted attention away.

Of course, they didn't plan it. They didn't make the earthquake, but it is convenient in the same way that COVID was convenient to attract and hold people's attention while other important and nefarious activities were being perpetrated, policies were being implemented, laws were being passed, powers being seized, opponents are being squashed, neutralized, undermined, charged with crimes, investigated, and so on.

The seductive ploys of the harlot that we are looking at here in Proverbs 7 especially, this summary that we have of these 12 strategies, are both making use of natural features, natural terrain, the natural cycle of light and darkness, but she takes advantage of these things, takes advantage of our inbuilt allure toward the opposite sex.

In the case of this young man, you know, a beautiful harlot who's sort of plying her trade and flashing her wares here, takes advantage of things that are built in, but bends them to subversive and self-interested goals. And we have to be aware of this active and intentional seduction if we are not going to be taken in by it.

So every time the phone comes up to our face and we're looking at the influx of information, every time the TV gets turned on, to send up a quick prayer is my suggestion for wisdom, for balance, for perspective. Pray to see through the curtain and the tissue of lies that is often put forward as reality. I cannot believe that God doesn't hear and answer that prayer.

If we ask for wisdom and pray for wisdom, not just in understanding the Scriptures and in trying to make application of principles and doctrines and claiming promises and so on, but to be wise to the ways of the world. It's so interesting to me that this woman appears to the young man wearing the clothing of a harlot. She is clearly identifiable.

There are two kinds of people in the world. There are some who would say, "Well, that's a harlot. Let me cross to the other side of the street and get home quickly." And those who say, "Hmm, interesting."

It's a choice, as we saw last time. And that's where we left off. These opportunistic encounters, these lying in wait and looking for someone who is vulnerable, who's a bit gullible, who's naive, who isn't aware and alert for the possibility of attack.

This is why the devil roams the earth seeking whom he may devour. It doesn't say the devil roams the earth devouring people. He's got to look and find devourable people. And so it should be our goal to not be devourable. If he's seeking whom he may devour, well, can't get that one too quick, too fleet, saw me coming, heard me roar. That one's not a tart bit of opportunity. There are other more easily obtainable meals. There's lower hanging fruit than that. I don't really want to have to climb a tree. I am after all a lion. So the high hanging fruit that's closer to heaven, too hard to get. That's what we want to be. Hard to get.

Well, let's pause here and take our break. When we come back, we'll pick up on our outline and finish our study and hopefully have a little bit of a background in current events to put these exhortations and observations in a context that's useful to us for the future.

We'll pause here.