

Proverbs 23-02-22a

Good evening. It is Wednesday night Bible study of Grace and Truth Bible Church. We're in Proverbs.

We're going to be looking at chapters 8 and 9 tonight. Also taking a look at some recent developments that pertain to our understanding of the topic here, which is wisdom. Where is wisdom to be had? How do we know it is in fact wise? And what is the nature of the choice between what we are offered by our Heavenly Father and what the world offers? Let's take a moment to ask God's blessing on our fellowship and on our study and we'll begin.

Father, we're grateful for this opportunity to spend time together absorbing the truth of your word, looking for the sustaining grace that comes through the guidance that it provides, the divine power that it inculcates into our souls, and the active ministry of the Holy Spirit to lead us and guide us into it, through it, and on to application and fruitfulness. We pray that as we reflect on these things and share them together that the Holy Spirit will find us amenable, soil that is easily plowed and into which the seed can be planted deeply to form roots and permanent effects that will result in praise and honor at the coming of the Lord Jesus. We pray it in his name.

Amen. As I was saying, we are in Proverbs. We're looking at chapters 8 and 9. We have seen the strategies of the crafty harlot.

We have seen how this is representative of the strategies that are used in general to deceive us, to deflect us, and to attack us in this world with appeals to our self-gratification, to our self-image, to the allure and the attraction of momentary pleasure, making us short-sighted, blinding us to future consequences, future judgment, and so on. The alternative is what we find presented in Solomon's chapter 8 and chapter 9. So when you look at chapter 8, it opens with a question, and this is a very pertinent question. After detailing this harlot with her enticing speech, you can see that in 721, and the ease with which she can draw the unwary into her web in verse 22.

Immediately this young naive man goes after her as an ox goes to the slaughter or as a fool to the correction of the stocks, it says, or as a dog to his chain, is the alternative reading there. They have about the same semantic equivalence, until an arrow strikes him in the liver. One of the things about an arrow striking you in the liver is this is typically an arrow that hits you from the back.

It doesn't say an arrow strikes him in the vitals, the usual word, the reins or the kidneys or the frontal abdominal part. This arrow hits him from behind and hits him in the liver. So it is a surprise.

As a bird is trapped in a snare, he didn't know that following this attractive

advertisement would end his life. More about that when we get to our application phase in a little bit. So the alternative to that, all of which we have seen in great detail.

We saw last time the examples, Old Testament and New, of how the figure that is made of sexual sin, sexual sin is a real thing, adultery is real, fornication is real, incest and bestiality and all the other things, these are real, but they are put for spiritual unfaithfulness in both the Old Testament and the New. We saw detailed passages last time where that is the case, and I believe that is the case here. It is coincidentally, and as a side note, also the case when you get to the Lord Jesus and his teaching on the hill or the Sermon on the Mount.

There are many who believe that Jesus is only talking about sexual sin when he says, you have heard it said, you shall not commit adultery, but I say to you, if you look at a woman to lust after her, you have already committed adultery in your heart, and so on. Certainly everything is true of the actual sin that is given there, but it is a figure for many kinds of formal prohibitions that you can keep the letter of the law and violate the spirit or the intent, which is, do you set your heart on the things of the world? I would put that reference in Matthew chapter 5 along with this one in Proverbs chapter 7. But we pick up tonight in chapter 8 because this is the alternative. This is the solution.

This is the preferred option, really the only option, if we hope to live a life that is pleasing to God. Does not wisdom cry out in understanding, lift up her voice? Is there a lack of alternative? Do we just have no choice? It is just hopeless. You cannot turn on your TV or spin up your social media without being attacked by seductive messages and salacious content, so it is just kind of hopeless unless I join some anti-technology denomination and go off into the fields and grow a beard and plant corn.

It is just hopeless. The question here, the answer is the same now as it was then. Does not wisdom cry out? Is there not a viable alternative? Obviously there is.

She does, and we are looking at and listening to the content of that cry tonight. We are using technology to do it, and it is a reminder that the good and evil is not in the technology. It is in what people do with it.

Cars are morally neutral. They are not good or bad. They can be used for good purposes, or you can drive one into a crowd of people and do great harm, as we have seen in the not-too-distant past.

As with anything, there is the individual use that is made of a thing, and that use is what will be judged. Technology is not going to be brought before the judgment seat. God is not going to say, Internet bad or Internet good.

God is going to bring individuals to stand on the yellow footprints and give an account of what they did with what was available. Individuals are judged because it is within us as

individuals that righteousness or sin, goodness or evil, is to be found. That is why the sword is both a symbol of violence and a symbol of proper capital punishment.

That is why the shedding of blood can be murder, or it can be the means by which the murderer is eliminated from society. There is a song by a guy that I occasionally listen to, and the name of it is There's No Place to Hide Down Here. Don't look it up.

Don't listen to it. You won't like it. But one part of this song, it's an allusion to Cain, or someone in a Cain-like position, and he says, to paraphrase, it is blood that caused my problem.

Shedding blood has made me a sinner, and only blood can make me clean. I thought that was a really nice way to phrase it, although I can't remember the exact words at this moment. But shedding blood is one of the original sins of the human race, Cain and Abel, and yet it is the blood of Jesus Christ that can cleanse and make clean the sin that we commit and perpetrate.

It's shedding blood that caused our problem, in a sense, and it is only the shedding of blood that can bring about the remission of sins. And so, shedding of blood, in and of itself, is neutral. What is the context? What is the purpose? What is the heart behind that shedding? And that's what counts.

As a further illustration, I have a friend who is pursuing a doctoral degree, and his dissertation is on the biblical underpinnings of civil government. His approach is that there are first principles in the Bible that would be the foundation for any civil government, and by ascertaining what those first principles are, you can then judge whether any particular government or aspect of government is good or bad, because all subsequent derivations and functions and laws or policies would be judged by whether or not they violate the biblical first principles that define what that government is. And I get that.

I understand the approach. I appreciate it. My response is, go be warmed, be fed, because in my view, and I was asked for my view, so I had to distill it a bit, is the same as what we're looking at here.

A government isn't good intrinsically because you gather to yourself some biblical principle by which you are judging that government. For example, you could go to Genesis 9 and say, if a man sheds blood, by man shall his blood be shed, and say, well, any biblical government should have some form of capital punishment to eliminate murderers from the population, because that's what Genesis 9 says. Except that's not what Genesis 9 says.

It does not specify that this is a function of government. It says, you figure it out. This is why even in Israel, that had a formal system of government specified by God, there were

various ways by which capital punishment could be inflicted.

There is public stoning. There is the avenger of blood, as two quick examples. And you can say, well, but we'll go to Old Testament Israel.

Those are the principles of government. Israel is a special case. Israel is viewed as the people of God, all believers, and it began as a theocracy, and then the theocracy was eventually delegated to a monarch who is to be a son of David, and is to be in covenant relationship, and is to copy out the law of Moses for himself, and study it regularly, and so on.

And as soon as you realize that Israel is a special and unique case, and is not given in scripture as a model for any human government, you can't cite any particular feature of the Old Testament government in Israel as normative or determinative for what is a good or bad government. You can't derive, in my view, first principles from that. And notice that we've had an old saw for a long time.

You can't legislate morality. The Old Testament government that was set up by God was not intrinsically good. It provided a structure where people who were hungering and thirsting after righteousness could be good, and could bring about good.

But good is committed as evil, not by institutions, but by people who are wielding authority that has been granted by that institution or by that government. Why am I belaboring this point? Wisdom can cry out in the streets, but what is the model that you see here in these first nine chapters of Proverbs? She is not crying out to the people en masse. She's not crying out to Israel.

She's not crying out to the government. She's not crying out to the elders of the people to create and execute better government in Israel. And remember, Solomon is writing in the days of monarchy, benevolent dictatorship, if you will.

And yet, she is not crying out to the king to perpetrate righteousness throughout the land. Who does wisdom cry out to? The individual, the people individually who are at the crossroads, who are at the gate, who are passing through the streets. And it is an individual who responds or does not respond.

We can be a part of any type of government. A monarchy can be a thing of beauty when it's done right, when the people who occupy positions of power are seeking to fulfill the will of God. Uh, you can make communism a benign form of self-government.

Look at Acts. They had all things in common. People sold their goods and it was a, you can't get around it.

It was basically communism, socialism, uh, of a brief and ephemeral form. It didn't last long. Uh, but initially you had Holy Spirit filled people who were looking to fulfill, love

your neighbor as yourself.

And they were willing to expend their resources and contribute their assets for the good of those around them, their neighbors, people they were in contact with and knew. And even today within local churches, you can have transfer of assets between people who know each other. I've got an excess, you've got a lack.

I can help fill that. And it's done as unto the Lord and not to men. And the left hand doesn't know what the right hand is doing and so on.

Uh, and you could say, well, isn't that some sort of, you know, having all things in common and you know, commun-ism is commonality of resources. It isn't the form and you cannot create goodness by adopting a particular form. Therefore, I don't think you can go to the Bible to ascertain and then call Christians to implement first principles of government.

That's not the purpose. And that is not what the Bible provides. That is not what God's truth leads us to.

We are called from Genesis to Revelation to individual holiness. And those who are pursuing individual holiness will find commonality and fellowship and friendship and brotherhood with others who share that view. This is why there is no form of government for churches, um, expressed or dictated in the New Testament.

You can have one pastor or more than one. You can have elders, you can have deacons, you can have as many or as few. It is, it is very significantly not detailed in terms of structure.

It's not detailed like the high priest and the priesthood in Levitical administration of Israel. Not even close. There is the vague notion that there are elders who rule well.

Doesn't say how many, doesn't say how long, doesn't say if they're elected, doesn't say if they're appointed. There are hands laid on, there's some form of recognition by which somebody says, you know, that, but it's, it is by mutual consent of some form. If you don't like it, you can leave.

But the idea that the basis for church government is extremely vague, vague at best, because God assumes that those who are like-minded in pursuing faith, hope, and love can figure it out. Children have to be organized and managed and supervised and dictated to and penned in and let out and so on. Those who are mature, figure it out.

Do what makes sense in your circumstance and in your environment. Improvise, adapt, and overcome. Be overcomers.

That's the goal. However you can organize to do it is fine. This is Paul's exhortation with

regard to observing feast days.

He doesn't tell the church, they're God's way of communicating, so observe them. Or they've been superseded by grace, so ignore them. Let each one be fully convinced in his own mind.

So I say that to say this, when we look at the call, it is to individuals. Even our small but extremely interesting and healthy church can't tell you how to live your life. We are individual priests.

The church is not in between. Your pastor is not in between you and the Lord God. There is only one intermediary between each one of us and God the Father.

There is one mediator between God and men, the man, Christ Jesus. As Christians in this age, he is our high priest. We are a believer priest.

I'm not in that chain of command. I am beans and bullets. I'm logistics.

My father was commissary supply. That was his MOS in the Marine Corps. I think he was always disappointed that he didn't get to be in a combat MOS, infantry or artillery or tanks or something where he could be out there at the point of the spear, so to speak.

But I will tell you that I think it was hugely significant. It was a great example for me because you cannot find a more gung-ho Marine than my dad. He was just as dedicated and just as motivated and just as thorough and giving 110 percent in providing.

He was ammunition officer for guys in Vietnam. He would occasionally join some of them on patrols and so on. But he knew what his job was and he did it very, very well.

It is an honor to be the guy that makes sure that the people at the point of the spear have everything they need and lack for nothing. It's a great honor. It is my honor in this position to try to make sure there is an ample supply of beans and bullets for each of us as we go out to wrestle against principalities and powers and the rulers of the darkness of this age.

But don't misunderstand. That is my job. That is what wisdom does.

Wisdom, which is the content of what pastors and teachers are supposed to supply to the lead them in green pastures and beside still waters, not raging seas, not controversies, not political action and social warfare and a lot of the things that the churches are getting involved in today, political involvement. Individuals can each decide. Is it God's will for my life? Do I feel means, motive and opportunity under the witness and ministry of God's spirit and the word I have in my soul that I should do something politically beyond merely voting my conscience? Great.

That is between an individual believer and the Lord. The church is not here to tell people

to get politically involved. It's an individual decision.

The church is not here to foment organizational charity. Charity is an individual responsibility. It is up to you to choose to whom, as a steward of God's resources, you choose to distribute whatever may be at hand.

That can include time, talent, effort, showing up and ladling soup at the table, the mission for the homeless. God bless you if that is your opportunity and you do it as under the Lord, stars in your crown, no doubt. You can carefully select charities that you believe will use dollars to do good.

The point here, and it is a point that is manifest in chapter seven, chapter eight and chapter nine, is our interaction with the world is individual. Even in the Old Testament, even in the days of Proverbs, this is an individual decision. You can't hide behind, well, we have Abraham as our father, therefore everything we do is right because we're Israel.

We are God's chosen people. I'm in this church or that organization, therefore whatever I do is golden because I've been touched. Only Jesus has the power to touch something corrupt and turn it pure and clean and alive from the dead.

Churches don't do that. Pastors don't do that. Organizations don't do that.

Affiliations don't do that. Being in a family doesn't do that. Just because you've got Christian parents and Christian siblings or whatever, any one individual, any multiple of individuals can be on their own doing their own thing.

It's not like, well, I've got an in, I've got to get out of jail free card because of some organizational connection. Sorry, no. Search the scriptures and see if there is any judgment where, well, Grace & Truth Bible Church is now being brought before the throne and Grace & Truth Bible Church is going to be judged as a collective on what it did or did not do and what fruit it did or did not bear.

Even the sheep and goats, if you pose this to somebody and say, well, the sheep and goats, as you say, the nations will be gathered before him. And so did you notice they're not judged as nations? What did you individually do when someone was sick or imprisoned or hungry or naked? What did you individually do? The nations, everybody is gathered and sheep and goats. They are not sheep nations and goat nations.

He's just saying everybody that has ever been, whatever their nationality, will be gathered. And regardless, there are no longer, you know, there's not like 70 groups. The nations will gather and he will place some of the nations on his left and some of the nations on his right.

No, they are either sheep or they are goats and sheep. There is one sheep. You have another sheep and another sheep.

Now you have sheep plural, but sheep plural is made up of individual sheep and each individual sheep will be posed when he says, enter into, when you've done it to the least of these, you've done it to me. It's individual action, individual righteousness, or individual evil. And that is a paradigm for every judgment.

They are all individuals. So my exhortation from an overview of these chapters, looking at the crafty harlot with her seduction, she is seducing individuals. She's not pulling down the King.

Solomon is not saying, you know, those 300 concubines, that was my undoing. They pulled the King down and the whole nation went down the drain because these crafty women got ahold of me and made me build shrines and holy places on high hills and whatnot. You individually, fill in your name here, have a responsibility to choose and are called upon to choose between wisdom and its counterfeit.

It seems like a good idea to follow her down the street and surprise, an arrow has struck me in the liver. And that was a fatal wound in ancient Near Eastern times, because that is organ failure. It is a slow, gruesome, grisly death.

You know, in the Westerns, when somebody says, well, he's gut-shot, he's got no chance. That because the disruption of your internal organs leaves intestinal contents and other things out in the area where there is no hope of that in the pre-antibiotic days, and even in the modern day, sometimes an infection gets ahead of them and they can't fix it. Arrow in the liver, it's fatal, but it is a slow, grisly, painful death.

It's the thousand yards of ground glass that you crawl through before you exit this life. So, having detailed the appeal of the crafty harlot, against which this my son is warned, in chapter 8, does not wisdom cry out and understanding lift up her voice. She takes her stand on the top of the high hill beside the way where the paths meet.

It's not hidden. It's not up in heaven and you've got to climb Jacob's ladder. It's not down in Sheol and you've got to descend through the three levels of Hades or something.

It is near. It is at the crossroads. It's at the gate.

Wisdom is shouting. It's available to anyone who is willing to pay attention. All you have to do is be willing to listen.

To you, O men, I call, verse 4 of chapter 8. To you, I call, and my voice is to the sons of men. O you simple ones, understand prudence, and you fools, be of an understanding heart. Again, you don't convert a group.

You don't convert a club. You don't convert people en masse. They are addressed as a category, but it is a category made up of individuals.

Be of an understanding heart, singular. This is a wonderful exhortation because if wisdom says to us, be of an understanding heart, it means it's possible. It's available.

It is an option I can choose. I am not Calvinistically not elect. Therefore, I can't be of an understanding heart because I'm not elect, or I will only be of an understanding heart if I'm already elect and I'm just responding to this call.

Sorry, no. Be of an understanding heart. This is a call in the open square.

It's not in the temple. It's not in the place of sacrifice where people have been made holy. It's in the open square.

There's all kinds of people walking around, walking by, and wisdom says be of an understanding heart. Anyone can do this, and you really have to start going into contortions to understand this any other way. Anyone can listen, verse 6. I will speak of excellent things, and from the opening of my lips will come right things.

My mouth will speak truth. Wickedness is an abomination to my lips. You're not going to hear wickedness from my lips because it's completely incompatible.

It's an abomination. It is utterly distinct and separate, not possible to mix. All the words of my mouth are with righteousness.

There is nothing crooked or perverse in them. The beauty of this is this is divine wisdom. It is absolute truth.

It is uncorrupted, undistorted righteousness. It is an external, objective standard of rightness and truth. This is what we must have.

This is what we cannot survive without. This is how we know whether or not our magnetic compass has been deflected. If all you do is check the compass, there is a way that seems right to a man.

The ends thereof are the ways of death. We have to heed. We have to listen.

We have to respond to this exhortation to objective, absolute standards of righteousness, justice, and truth. Can't survive without it. Well, this has implications for what is currently happening and what is about to happen in our society.

That's what we're going to look at, the practical need and consequences of this when we come back from the break.