

Proverbs 23-03-01a

Welcome to Wednesday night at Grace and Truth Bible Church. We are on this first day of March, 2023 in the book of Proverbs. We're looking at the positive side, having studied the crafty harlot and become acquainted with her ways and how important it is for all of us to watch out for the seductive, deceptive, and deflecting ways of the world.

We're going to look at the positive side and see the advantages of wisdom. This will begin in chapter eight. We're gonna see her declarations across chapter eight and into chapter nine.

Let's take a moment and ask God's blessing on our fellowship and our study will begin. Father, we are grateful for another time of fellowship, another opportunity to be blessed through the ministry of your spirit as he resides in each one of us. We thank you for our fellowship.

We thank you for the encouragement and the uplift and the strength that we receive by speaking the truth to one another in love. We pray that as we look at this portion of your word together, that it will be meaningful and memorable and accessible to us in the days ahead so that we can live in a way that is pleasing in your sight, that prepares us for the future in terms of service and function, and that will reflect the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ. We ask it in his name, amen.

Let's take a look at chapter eight. We've looked at this in part, but it is good to review it. Wisdom cries out, understanding lifts up her voice.

She takes her stand on the top of the high hill beside the way where the paths meet. She cries out by the gates at the entry of the city, at the entrance of the doors. To you, oh men, I call, and my voice is to the sons of men.

Haven't mentioned this before, but there are two different words used here for man. When it says that she cries out to, oh, to men, this is ish-im. Remember ish and ishah back in Genesis, the man and the woman.

This is ish. This is man in his glory, in his strength, in his nobility, if you will. To be ish is to be sort of, in colloquial English, this would be, I call to you, oh, gentlemen, gentlemen.

And my voice, my sound, my call is to the sons of men. This is b'nai Adam. And Adam is the reference of man as he comes from the dust of the earth, the ground.

And so the sons of men, this is the hoi poloi. This is the rest of us, the field workers who are covered in dust and sweat and blood in some cases. So high and low is implied here in ish and Adam.

You gentlemen, you sons of the earth, so to speak. You simple ones, understand

prudence. You fools, be of an understanding heart.

This is our default state. Whether we are ishim or adam, isha or hava, whether you're man or woman, high or low, all of us by virtue of our humanity are in the state of simplicity and lack of understanding. It's just a result of being human.

Our place in the universe beyond the cosmos that includes the heavens, we're not smart. We're not good to go. There's no occasion for pride and self-confidence in our status as sentient human beings.

We all, man, woman, boy, girl, need, young or old, we need to overcome our simplicity and to overcome our foolishness. We need understanding. So she calls out and says, listen, I will speak of excellent things.

And from the opening of my lips, right things. Her words are going to give us the objective standard of righteousness that we have talked about in recent weeks, recent months, really. It is not to be found within us.

It is not to be found among us. It has to come from the outside. All you do when you amass human consciences is increase the critical mass that will go critical and create an explosion.

We don't have the collective ability to ascertain righteousness, to collect wisdom. We've looked recently at the artificial intelligence that is now being implemented that is sort of a second generation. It's AI 2.0. It's generative artificial intelligence that is collecting all of the typed up human knowledge and seeking to turn that into wisdom, seeking to give us opinions based on it and policies stemming from it and some sort of insight and big picture synthesis based on this just incalculably, unimaginably huge sea of information.

Here's the difference. The wisdom personified here as a lady is taking from the knowledge that God possesses. One of the things about the knowledge that God possesses, the facts, the information, the past, the present and the future, all of which he knows, is it is all perfect.

In him is light. There is no darkness at all. So every fact in the library, every piece of information, every piece of knowledge, every insight, every opinion, every standard is absolutely righteous, just like God is.

We are building our tower of Babel wisdom using corrupt information. And as I mentioned briefly last week, one of the difficulties they have is if you start questioning these chat bot, chat bot, maybe it is Bart. If you start questioning it too long, you push it to the limits of what it can imitate in terms of human interaction.

And it starts, they call this hallucination. It starts hallucinating and leaves the realm of reality and enters the realm of fantasy and starts developing pseudo feelings and gets

pseudo insulted. And it's really funny.

You can look up articles on this, but our point in this passage is in contrast to any collection of wisdom, whether it was the wisdom of the Babylonians, the wisdom of the Egyptians, the wisdom of Alexandria in Egypt that one of the finest libraries ever amassed in the ancient world. The problem is that what we gather and what we seek to preserve and to recall and to make use of is inevitably partial at best. It is often flawed.

It reflects the same fallenness that is a part of our nature. We touch a thing and it gets corrupted despite our best intentions. The best people in the world can do the best job in the world, but because it has touched us, it is unclean, so to speak.

And by way of application, I say this with all the love in my heart, which may not be that much, but whatever there is, I'm sloshing it onto what I'm about to say. There are wonderful human originators of content. They are blogging, they're writing books, past and present, go back, commentaries and so on.

But when we attempt to remanufacture, to remix and regurgitate Bible truth in our own words, this happens. The word of God is alive and powerful. Jesus didn't say, "'Man shall not live by bread alone,' but by every word that the rabbis have helped us to understand from God." It's every word that proceeds from the mouth of God, from God to me with the absolute minimum of intermediate handling.

It's inevitable if you have a rabbi, you have a pastor, you have a teacher, you have an author, that there is going to be some possibility, some probability of misunderstanding, misemphasis. We've talked about how you can take a perfectly good picture with a grid of pixels, but as soon as you swell some and shrink others, it's the same picture. All the information is still there, but by emphasis and de-emphasis, it is distorted and it no longer reflects reality.

And this is just the price we pay for not having God walking in the garden in the breeze of the day. We fell, we put a distance between ourselves and God. There is a necessary distance between us and God's word when it spans that distance and is handled by intermediaries is likely to be mishandled, filtered, biased, and so on.

Everybody is biased. Nobody is not biased. So how do we fix that? We have a thing in computers where as you're transmitting data in great quantities and over long distances and so on, the possibility of ones turning into zeros or zeros turning into ones increases.

Send it across wireless and so on. So there are various measures. In the earliest days, they had ECC, which is error correction.

And you have check bits on a byte and you attempt to determine whether or not the thing has been corrupt and you try to fix it on the receiving end. And you say, wow, something didn't make the trip. Send that to me again.

And you keep going until you can get it checked. But there is some data loss and some retransmitting and some fixing until you're sure that you got a good copy. God had that figured out before the world began.

What is it? How can you ascertain whether or not what you hear in our church or from any other source is in fact the living, breathing, all-powerful word of God or if it's been spun, filtered, biased, contaminated in some way? You know the answer to this question. How, where is our error correction? Right here behind my shirt pocket. It is in my heart because that's where God's Holy Spirit dwells.

God the Holy Spirit checks the incoming data. And if you are referring to the error correction instead of saying, you know, I don't know if this data is right or not, but I really like it. It fits my preconceptions, my confirmation bias, my predilections, my prejudices.

My prejudices, I like it just as it stands. And we don't go to the error correction. This is why our attitude of heart is so important.

We have to ask, we have to seek, we have to knock. Don't take it for granted. Don't take for granted.

This is the most prevalent and huge mistake you can make. My pastor said it. My favorite author said it.

I heard it on the radio from a reliable source. It's got to be true. This is the equivalent of saying Fox News reported it, so it must be right.

Or CNN put it on the air, it's got to be true. Go back a generation, I read it in the newspaper. I heard it on the radio.

It must be right. They wouldn't put it out there if it wasn't true. It wouldn't be published on the internet if it wasn't true.

You've got to fact check. So many people, there's, you know, memes and tropes and signage and little things. I can't remember if I gave you this example or not.

If I did, forgive me, I'm going to give it to you again. I recently saw somebody post a thing because it was Black History Month or something. They said, you know, little known fact, the modern elevator was invented in 1874 by a black man and had his picture.

And I thought, 1874? I have done enough reading from a century and a half ago. I think they already had elevators by then. So I went and checked.

I didn't go to Snopes. I just went back and started checking. The black man in question patented a device that would automatically close the elevator doors on floors where the elevator was not.

There were times where, remember, there used to be an elevator operator and he would close the doors and open the doors manually to be sure nobody came walking in. And, well, hello, Marge, why don't we go to the, whoop! And he's gone. So this guy, bless his heart, he was a great inventor and he patented this thing that as the car moved, it would automatically shut the doors where the car was not.

But he didn't invent the modern elevator. But this has been spread around and I could give you dozens of similar examples. There's a famous quote about, it is just as evil to do nothing about evil as it is to perpetrate evil or something to that effect.

It has to do with good and evil. It's been attributed to Dietrich Bonhoeffer for decades and Bonhoeffer never said it. The worth of the quote could stand or fall on its own, but Bonhoeffer scholars chased this thing all around the internet saying, stop saying Bonhoeffer said this.

He didn't say it. It's not his style. He might've sympathized with it, we don't know, but he didn't say it.

There are all kinds of quotes that are attributed to famous people. There are pithy things attributed to Yogi Berra. And he himself said, I never said half the things I said.

You hear people saying, oh, I love that quote by you. I never said that. So we have so much difficulty ascertaining the source.

We have the Holy Spirit, but it only works in terms of checking the accuracy, the applicability, the truth, and the righteousness by faith that accrues by putting it into practice by constant appeal to the Holy Spirit. This is one of the great things about the gift of the Holy Spirit. What's the first thing Jesus told the disciples? I will send you another comforter.

What's he gonna do? Say it out loud with me. He will lead you into all truth. Don't forget it.

If you want the truth, this truth and wisdom and prudence and all the things that are being spoken of here, you and I don't get that. You can read Proverbs chapter one to the end and never get the benefit of it without the Holy Spirit. Our own mind, our receiving equipment has got static and dropouts.

We hear, you know my favorite quote? I'm not even gonna say it. Paul Simon and the boxer. We don't even know that we're hearing what we need to hear or what we should hear.

We have dropouts. We have inconsistencies. It is the Holy Spirit that restores, renews and leads us into all truth.

Some of the hard truth that we need to hear, we don't hear because we don't like it. We don't wanna hear it. Oh, squirrel.

And we don't hear it. God, the Holy Spirit is the only way. This is why there were so many egregious problems in Old Testament days.

The Holy Spirit only came by request. Now we have no excuse because he is there by default, but he doesn't speak if we don't ask him questions. He's not gonna do error correction if we don't run our data, our information, what we hear through it.

Ask, seek, knock, claim that promise and it works in all areas of life. Not just is this theological proposition true? Am I understanding this passage correctly? But is my understanding of how this truth applies valid? Lord, I want to represent the Lord Jesus as a part of his body on this earth. I want to shine his light in the midst of my crooked generation.

Am I doing this right? Should I be doing more? Am I using the energy of the flesh? Should I be doing less? Lord, and praise Psalm 51. Hopefully you looked at it this past week. Show me my hidden faults.

Try me, see if there be any wicked way in me. Purge me with hyssop. I shall be clean.

Wash me. I will be whiter than snow. If you don't pray the prayer, it's like not confessing your sins in 1 John 1.9. He's not gonna be faithful and just to forgive if we're not interested in forgiveness.

He's not going to eliminate if we're not interested in elimination. This is our part. People in the Reformed and Calvinist persuasion say, well, you're cooperating with God.

It's all of grace. It's all of God. Sorry, no.

Read your scriptures. We have a part in deciding and in claiming God's grace and implementing God's power by request. Lord, teach us to pray.

Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread.

Why do I have to ask for it? Isn't there the same Jesus saying, take no thought for what you will eat. God knows what you need before you ask him. So why do we request it? Because that's part of how he does the provision.

Forgive us as we forgive those who trespass against us. If I do not forgive others, I will not be forgiven. Parable of the large and small debt servants.

Servant forgiven a huge debt by his master, but then he doesn't forgive his underling servant a small debt and his large debt is unforgiven. The forgiveness is revoked and

he's put in the debtor's prison until he pays every penny. Scary, scary thought.

This is the role of prayer. This is the role of active participation, holding up our half of our relationship with God. So keep all of that in mind as we read about this wisdom.

It isn't a matter of I'm listening to Bible doctrine, therefore I'm automatically gonna grow and be wise and bear fruit and give blessing and reward. Listening is not the thing. Interacting with what we hear, resorting to the error correction filter that corrects my misapprehensions, the misapprehensions of the communicator, the source, any intermediate handling that it may have done.

And back to my original point, this is why God bless him. And I slosh this with buckets of love. People that make up aphorisms and little pithy sayings to put on your refrigerator that don't come straight from scripture, watch out.

What's wrong with scripture? It's not good enough. I've got to reconstitute it. Do you like a boneless chicken thigh or do you want a chicken McNugget? Have you ever broken a chicken McNugget and looking in there? It's reconstituted.

It's, as it says on the TV, it's icky birdy bits that have been mixed together and put into some kind of poi that they harden and that's supposed to be chicken. That's icky birdy bits reconstituted. Break it open and look at it.

There's little like holes, like you would see in foam or in something that wasn't, there's air bubbles in it. Chickens don't grow with air bubbles. I'm sorry, but that reconstituted is never going to match the original in flavor, texture, or my personal enjoyment.

Don't take reconstituted truth. God gave us his word and has preserved it across all of these centuries for a reason. And the reason we are a Bible church and the reason I don't try to do a lot of, I am happy to do my best to explain, to illuminate, to try to help all of us get at what it means, but we're dealing with this text.

I didn't write a book and say, let's go through my Sam Hull book here on how to be a better Christian. Sam says, well, get up in the morning and do it. Look, evening and morning and at noon, I will pray and cry aloud.

That's what this says. I don't have to write a book talking about when should you pray? How much should you pray? What should you pray about? It's all in here. So cut out the reconstitution phase and all of us together, look at the word of God, every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.

That's how Jesus did it. It's good enough for him. It ought to be good enough for us.

We are his body. That is background for Proverbs 8 and 9. Every time you see wisdom, prudence, knowledge, discretion, understanding, just remember that stuff only works

through the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. You can't read a section of scripture and go boldly forth and say, I've got the knowledge, the prudence, the wisdom, the discretion, the understanding, the practical application.

No, we don't. We are hopeless, helpless, and useless. We are bene Adam.

We are sons of mud without the spiritual power to take the word of God and activate it. You got one tube of epoxy. Pick either one you want and see how far you get.

It takes both the word and the spirit to lift us up out of the mud and make us sons of God. So that having been said, skip down to verse 12. We've covered six through 11 in previous class.

Verse 12, this is Proverbs 8, verse 12. I, wisdom, dwell with prudence. I find out knowledge and discretion.

You can look in earlier classes. We have defined these terms. We know what they are.

This is the association. Wisdom claims to dwell with prudence. This is companionship, right? If you dwell with somebody, when you find one, you find the other.

You come to the house, oh, look, here's the husband and the wife. Here's the parents and the children. When they dwell someplace, they're seldom seen apart from one another, especially in the ancient world.

You go to a dwelling, the people who dwell there are there. So you see one, you see the other. So what is this saying? I, wisdom, dwell with prudence.

It's not just wisdom alone. Prudence is the knowledge of when and how to apply that wisdom. Just because I know how to do a particular thing doesn't mean I'm gonna necessarily always do it.

I've got wisdom, but prudence tells me when to apply any particular piece of wisdom. This is your ecclesiastes. There is a time and a season for every purpose under heaven.

Prudence is when and how to apply your wisdom. And you got to find them together. They need to be husband and wife.

You don't wanna be, this is the lady. Wisdom is the lady, so prudence is the man. And you don't wanna find an unguarded woman.

You don't want wisdom unguarded by prudence. They dwell together, they're companions. And prudence protects wisdom and ensures that it isn't misused or abused, right? And I find out knowledge and discretion.

So knowledge is the information that applies in a particular circumstance or situation.

Discretion is, all right, this is the refining of my application. All of these conspire together to help us navigate circumstances.

So that's her associations. That's what you find when you find wisdom. These things are near at hand.

They dwell with, they are found with, found alongside. They are identified and brought together as a group. Now look at verse 13.

The fear of the Lord is to hate evil, pride and arrogance in the evil way and the perverse mouth I hate. I'm gonna do something I rarely do here. I am going to give an opinion based on the way literature works, the way Hebrew poetry works.

And this is not an idea original to me, but it occurred to me before I went and checked and found other people think the same thing. That first line there, the fear of the Lord is to hate evil, circle that and put an arrow out into your margin. This is true, but I don't think it belongs here.

I think somebody made an early marginal note and it breaks up the meter. It comes from a different perspective. It's a truth that has been displaced.

It's like the pericope of the woman caught in adultery. It's not that it isn't true, it doesn't go here. So take that and in my view, you can say Sam says and ignore it freely if you like.

But if you take that out, look at how much better this flows. I wisdom dwell with prudence and I find out knowledge and discretion, pride and arrogance and the evil way and the perverse mouth I hate. All of this is a description of what wisdom is, where it's found, what it does, what it loves and what it hates.

This sort of abstract statement, the fear of the Lord is to hate evil. You can find this, put it out in the margin and then right beside it, Proverbs 3, verse 7 and Proverbs 16, verse 6. In Proverbs 3, 7, do not be wise in your own eyes, fear the Lord and depart from evil. The fear of the Lord and evil are just incompatible.

You go to 16, 6, in mercy and truth, atonement is provided for iniquity. Boy, I could stop right now and do three hours on that one line. But the next line, and by the fear of the Lord, one departs from evil.

The fear of the Lord is how you depart from evil. It's a great truth, nothing wrong with it. It just interrupts the flow here.

So we're going to excise that and we'll deal with it again when we get maybe to 16, 6. So in verse 12, we find what is always found with wisdom, active wisdom, lady wisdom, wisdom that is doing what it's supposed to do, dwells with prudence and it is found with

knowledge and discretion. What is not found? What is anathema? We're going to get the contrast in verse 13. Pride and arrogance and the evil way and the perverse mouth I hate.

Notice in verse 12, we have four things, wisdom, prudence, knowledge, and discretion. It's a perfect four, it's universal. Remember four is the number of universality, Northeast, South and West, and so on.

Now look at verse 13, if we move this first line out of the way, pride, arrogance, evil way, perverse mouth. You don't find those, you don't end up with those, you don't operate those. They're not found with wisdom.

So the opposite of wisdom is pride, arrogance, the evil way and a perverse mouth. They're just incompatible. When she says, I hate that, you can't fit those into the same room.

It's either or. Verse 14, counsel is mine and sound wisdom. I am understanding, I have strength.

See another perfect four. Counsel, sound wisdom, understanding, and strength. Four, eight, 12.

It's all descriptive, it's perfectly symmetrical, it's a thing of beauty, and you just got to get rid of that weird line. It isn't that it's not true, but I don't know how it drifted in here, but in my professional opinion, it doesn't belong. It just destroys a beautiful triplet of quads, a beautiful three fours.

Write it at the top of the page, read it in its own right if you like. But this is the introduction now to the value of wisdom. It says where she goes and to whom she appeals.

Now she's describing herself and what she is at home with, what she is adverse to, and what she possesses. All of this is greatly to be desired by Isha and Ish, greatly to be desired by B'nai Adam, the children of Adam, the sons of men, sons and daughters of men. We know that none of this is going to happen if we do not cultivate and avail ourselves of the active personal presence of the Holy Spirit.

With the Spirit, these things are our inheritance and our possession. Well, let's pause here and take our break. When we come back, we'll pick up at verse 15 and see what it is that the possession of these with the presence of the Holy Spirit allows us to do and to be.

Thank you.