

Proverbs 23-04-26a

Good evening fellow members of Grace and Truth Bible Church. This is the 26th of April 2023. We're continuing our fascinating study in the book of Proverbs.

We're in chapter 10. Hopefully you have a copy of the notes. Those of you who are here in the sanctuary can find some directly behind you.

It will be helpful in looking at the structure, which is very helpful in understanding the thrust, the content, and most importantly, the application of this section of God's Word. Let's take a moment to ask God's blessing on our fellowship and our investigation, our intake, our apprehension of His Word, and then we'll begin. Father, we are so grateful for the privilege of prayer to enter your throne room, to come before your presence and represent ourselves and intercede on behalf of one another, even as the Lord Jesus Himself at your right hand makes intercession on our behalf.

We make a special appeal tonight for those requests that have been presented and ask your grace and your guidance and your power to be expressed in every situation that faces us. We thank you for this portion of your Word. We pray that you will bless it to each heart as a source of challenge, motivation, and application in the days ahead.

We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. You will recall that an analysis of this chapter yields a very interesting symmetry that is a guide to the structure.

And if you have the notes that were uploaded a couple of weeks ago, this is not the be-all and end-all. I just find it helpful in bringing to mind the focus that Solomon built into this introductory section of the Proverbs proper. And the lead-in to this, the threshold that you cross, the welcome mat that you tread upon as you come into chapter 10, is this last section of chapter 9, beginning in verse 13.

Having given the characteristics of wisdom as the wise woman that has hewn out her seven pillars and built her house, slaughtered the food and mixed the wine, furnished her table, sent out maidens, and cries out from the highest places of the city, whoever is simple, let him turn in here. Whoever lacks understanding, she says to him, come eat of my bread and drink of the wine I have mixed. We had what I thought was a very fascinating look at wine this past Sunday.

The difference between oinos in Greek, which is the full-bodied wine of fermented grapes, and then the oxos, O-X-O-S, which is the sour wine, sometimes translated vinegar, although it's nothing like our kitchen cabinet vinegar. But the mixing of wine was common practice. To make it go further, you had to put the grape juice up in skins at the grape harvest in the fall.

It would ferment and thus preserve the beverage. It had health benefits. We know today

that it's antioxidant, and the small amount of alcohol that is in it is both a preservative and has medicinal value.

Hence, Paul telling Timothy, take a little wine for your stomach's sake and your frequent infirmities. But this made it available throughout the winter and spring and into the summer. But in order to ensure that the supply would last and also to make sure that it was not too strong for children at the table and so on, the wine would be mixed with water.

It was diluted. This was a very common practice that gave a very refreshing beverage at mealtimes, and it was very far from causing intoxication and so on. And this is what is referenced here, and it says it twice in verse 2 and in verse 5. Come and eat of my bread and drink of the wine that I have mixed.

This is wine and water. And you cannot help but think of our current excursion in Matthew chapter 27 at the crucifixion. And you remember that at the conclusion of Jesus' work on the cross, after he has dismissed his spirit to ensure that he is in fact physically dead, a Roman soldier pierces his side with a spear, and blood and water come forth.

Jesus, within the preceding 24 hours, has compared his blood to wine that is in a cup. And this notion is worth exploring. We'll talk about it in an upcoming Sunday session.

But the idea of wine and water, of being born of water and of blood and so on, is a fruitful spiritual exercise. Suffice it to say here that this mixed wine is mentioned not by accident. Not by accident.

The very act of mixing wine and of partaking of mixed wine is an expression of temperance, of moderation, of care. What is the proportion? Are you making it strong? Are you making it weak? Are you stingy and willing to water down the wine at the expense of your guest's refreshment and pleasure at the meal? Are you profligate and making it strong, intending to turn your evening into a debauchery? What is the intent? But she has carefully mixed this wine. There is food, and there is a properly balanced beverage to go with it.

And this idea of balance and mixing things in a proper proportion is a part of wisdom. It is what wisdom does. Wisdom is careful not to go to excess in one direction or another.

And she says, forsake foolishness and live, in verse 6, and go in the way of understanding. Travel. We say goodbye, which is a compressed form of an ancient blessing that would be, God be with you, God be with ye.

And it eventually compresses down to goodbye. That's where we get that word. To go with God, Godspeed, and so on, are common expressions of farewell.

Go in the way of understanding. You could not express a better blessing than that. This is

not just general knowledge.

This is not just scientific understanding or social understanding, the laws of physics, of biology, and so on. This, of course, is the understanding that is sourced in God. Then we have this interesting section, and I'm backing up a little bit just to ensure that we leave no valuable truth unexplored in Proverbs.

And in looking at chapters 7, 8, and 9 together, as we did some weeks ago, we didn't explicitly look at these verses, and I don't want to leave them with less than the attention they deserve. He who corrects a scoffer gets shame for himself, and he who rebukes the wicked harms himself. You can see the words in italics there designed to smooth this out.

It is better to change a to the, if you see what I'm talking about there. He who corrects a scoffer gets shame for himself, and he who rebukes the wicked. And they put man in there to indicate that this is singular.

This is not rebuke of wickedness or wicked groups or wicked activities engaged in by multitudes. This is an individual. So a wicked one, a wicked man harms himself.

It says only, but there is no only in Hebrew. If you correct a scoffer, why would this be in the Bible? Why is this a principle of wisdom? Shouldn't scoffers be corrected? The very nature of one who scoffs is someone who has already developed a rebellious and intransigent attitude. They will not respond to correction.

This is the pearls before swine syndrome. And we have an incumbent responsibility to identify those who are swine, if you will, swine in the sense of pig-headed. This we saw in Matthew back in chapter seven and verse six, Matthew chapter seven, verse six.

Why do we not cast pearls before swine? The sentiment is very similar in this passage to that. Jesus says, do not give what is holy to the dogs. This, by the way, is right after you remember this very well.

Matthew five through seven is the Sermon on the Mount. This is the concluding section. And he has just talked about beams and moats in the eye and correcting others.

Don't try to take out your brother's moat when you've got a large piece of lumber in your own eye. You hypocrite first take the beam out of your own eye. Then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye.

Do not give dogs what is holy. Do not throw your pearls before swine. This requires discernment.

People often get concerned that they are running afoul of the biblical injunction to judge not lest he be judged. Well, I don't want to judge. I don't want to decide that someone is

intransigent or hardheaded or pigheaded or a dog in the sense of being corrupt and unwilling to be cleansed and changed and transformed.

I don't want to make that judgment. So I'm not really sure what to do. Only God knows what is in their heart and so on.

And we are enjoined. We are required to discern whether someone is in any way receptive or not. How do we do this? You can bring up subjects in a very innocuous way in conversation.

It isn't a rebuke. It's not a hard and fast statement of truth. You can float a subject.

A subject will come up. This happens all the time when I'm talking to people in their homes. I'm there to tune their piano and there are verses on the wall and there are hymnals on the piano and Fox News is playing in the other room and I get the drift of what kind of people they are.

But I'm very careful to not say anything polarizing or very one-sided. But a subject will come up. And in sort of a careful back and forth, we soon find out if we are on the same page on things.

I really don't talk about politics, but I will talk about things related to church and what happens at church, activities, experiences people have had. They will share with me that there was a man who was very disappointed that the rest of his family had spoken in tongues and he had not. And I just said, you know, I really feel like God deals with each of his children individually.

And some of us, that may not be a part of our relationship with God. God can communicate with us and we with him in other ways. And everyone is unique and there's no profit in trying to compare or decide if someone is more spiritual because something is a part of their life that isn't a part of ours.

We each have our own individual relationship with God and we approach things in that way. I don't say anything about cessationism and temporary gifts or any of the rest of it. We can talk and have a very fruitful and upbuilding and enjoyable conversation without necessarily agreeing theologically.

But this happens by endeavoring to love one another, to love our neighbor, to do what is upbuilding and helpful and not cause division or conflict, especially in a casual encounter of that nature. So if you encounter, on the other hand, as I also have very rarely, people who are very clearly not believers. There are naked body parts in pictures hanging on the wall and there is a complete absence of hymnals and verses.

And there's a very obvious lifestyle that is quite different and somewhat antithetical. I'm still happy to tune their piano and provide a service and do the very best job I can. But I

am also wary of not seeing or doing anything that might antagonize that person.

There is no point in the middle of performing a service that someone is paying for, attempting to inject the gospel or try to leave them attracted or in some way bring up spiritual things. Why do I not do this? Here is a very likely, probably, and almost certainly an unbeliever headed for the lake of fire and so on. And there is an argument made by many in evangelical circles that, well, this is a person standing in front of a speeding train and if you don't snatch them off the tracks, they're going to be destroyed.

And how could you not, regardless of embarrassment or tact or propriety or anything else, tell them, Jesus loves you, you're a sinner, you need to be saved. Why would I not do that? This is why. These passages are why.

We can be prayerful. Anytime there is such a situation, I ask the Lord God in heaven, if there is something I should say or do, please bring something to my mind from the repository of scripture that is in my soul. May the Holy Spirit shine a light on a path that would be fruitful and helpful to this person.

I do not want to operate in the energy of the flesh or lean on my own understanding here. I want to acknowledge God. I want to look for His leading and His guidance and His prompting.

And I pray if there is some way that I can be a blessing or plant a seed or in some way just serve as an example of integrity and of patience and of general love that does not castigate or criticize or prejudge or frown upon or in any other way denigrate someone with whom I have a business transaction underway, to the extent that it is possible, live peaceably with all men. That is our guidance from the Apostle Paul. But if you see that someone has made not just a recent choice or a single choice, but a series of choices that extend across years so that they have furnished their home and decorated their walls and have dressed themselves and have gone down a road a considerable length, this is someone who is not a sheep, who is not asking and seeking and knocking, is not on a quest for truth, has found a comfortable resting place for their self-image and their view of the world and whether or not there is a God, whether or not there is a need for salvation.

This is something that took place before I got there and is pretty well entrenched. Not to say that there is no hope, but it is to say that it is clearly not an occasion for me to take pearls and scatter them on the ground in the hope that this person is going to recognize their value. Do not give dogs what is holy.

What is holy? What's the holiest thing you can think of? To be more specific, who is the holiest person you can think of? It is our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, and it is not appropriate to try to give Him, to present Him to someone who is clearly not interested. It is not going to do good, it is going to do harm. If I knew this person better, if they were

in my circle of relatives, if there were occasions where topics of discussion came up and there seemed to be interest, there that would be a different question.

But in a short, blind encounter, as it were, this is not the place and not the time. God has innumerable believers that He can maneuver into position. He has people who can work with this person, who can talk with this person, who can pray for this person, who know much more about them than I do, who are far better equipped, positioned, and hopefully guided by God to be the one who will meet that seeking note if it ever occurs in their heart and mind.

Do not throw your pearls before swine. Why? What does Jesus say? This is Matthew 7, verse 6. If you do, if you give what is holy to the dogs, if you cast your pearls before swine, they may trample them under their feet and then turn and tear you to pieces. This is not a productive outcome.

And they knew even in the ancient world that swine, one of the reasons they were forbidden in Torah, is they are some of the dirtiest and most infectious animals while they are alive. A bite or a gore from swine was almost always fatal because of the loads of infectious bacteria they carry everywhere in and around their bodies. And to be torn by swine was a death sentence in the ancient world.

It is to be avoided at any cost. Same thing here in chapter 9, verse 7 of Proverbs. He who corrects a scoffer gets shame for himself.

You should be ashamed because you have acquired shame. You have put shame on yourself. Why are you covered in shame if you try to correct a scoffer? Because you should have known better.

Wisdom gives discernment. A prayerful attitude seeking God's guidance is honorable. Ignoring God's guidance, rushing in where angels fear to tread, where the Holy Spirit has not been active and prepared the ground and received a positive response, this is hubris.

This is arrogance. This is misguided zeal. A zeal for God but not according to knowledge is shameful.

That's what Proverbs says. So, if you want to be a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth, we will prayerfully, carefully evaluate opportunities for bringing into a conversation that which is holy. Those who scoff have no appreciation, no capacity.

Their head is adamant and you cannot crack it. If the Holy Spirit can't do it, we should not believe that we can. Notice, it doesn't say correcting the wayward or correcting the fool or correcting the gullible or the naive.

That's a different situation. This is a scoffer. Someone who scoffs has their mind made

up.

They are arrogant. They are sure of their rectitude. They are very convinced that they know best and trying to correct them, you only get shame for yourself.

He who rebukes a wicked one, the wicked man, only harms himself. How many times do you have to see a video of a guy trying to hit a golf ball out of a treed area? He hits the ball, it bounces off the tree and hits him in a very sensitive and vulnerable place. This is what you do.

You only harm yourself. So, verse eight continues, as if that were not enough of a warning, do not correct a scoffer lest he hate you. To the extent possible, live peaceably with all men.

That is our instruction. If we do not do this, it's our fault and we can make matters worse by attempting to correct someone who has this attitude, this scoffing attitude. Rebuke a wise man and he will love you.

So, if we turn this around, we are hoping to be wise. We want to absorb and practice and benefit from wisdom. This is why we're in Bible class at this very moment.

We want to get wisdom and with that getting, get understanding. We want to be on the positive side of these benefits of righteousness and wisdom. So, what should our attitude be if correction comes our way? Our gut, our nature is to immediately say with the people in Star Trek, raise shields, pull up the defenses, stop.

I don't want that to penetrate. That hurts. I will lash out.

I will find something wrong with the person correcting me and say, well, you know, I will be that rebound and the correction that they're trying to give me, I'm going to try to give correction right back rather than accepting it and seeking to benefit from it. It is hard to be corrected. We all know this.

It is hard for somebody to point out where we have failed, screwed up, come short, etc. We don't say, oh, I so appreciate you letting me know. You know, I'm really going to work harder on that.

It's difficult. It's not a part of our nature. But if you rebuke the wise, he will love you, appreciate you, seek to be a benefit, not a critic, not to return in kind, not to, well, you've hurt me, so I want to hurt you back.

You've embarrassed me. I want to embarrass you back. I feel ashamed, and I want you to feel ashamed, and I want to shift the issue from me to you.

It doesn't matter what the source of a correction is if it is valid, right? If it's a valid criticism, even if it comes from an enemy, if the criticism is valid, a wise man will analyze

it, seek to benefit from it, and go to God and ask for the strength and the wisdom to overcome whatever the deficiency is. Rebuke a wise man, he will love you. Notice it says give instruction.

Instruction is in italics. Give any kind of beneficial input to a wise man, and he will be still wiser. Teach a just man, and he will increase in learning.

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and this is the key to understanding these preceding verses. The knowledge of the Holy One is understanding. Go in the way of understanding.

We saw in verse 6, what is understanding? Knowledge of the Holy One. The Holy One. Do not give what is holy to the dogs.

Do not cast pearls before swine. By me, your days will be multiplied. Years of life will be added to you, and this reaches into the metaphorical level of laying hold of eternal life.

This is not mere duration. This is quality. This is blessing.

This is benefit. This is enjoyment. If you are wise, you are wise for yourself.

If you scoff, you will bear it alone. Ultimately, the choice that we make is self-determination. This is another area that Reformed Theology has a real difficult time understanding and acknowledging is personal responsibility.

If we are a scoffer, that's our fault. If we are wise, it is because we have made that choice. We are pursuing that goal and that priority.

We value wisdom and understanding because it partakes of God Himself. If you are wise, you are wise for yourself. This is my constant reminder as someone who studies and presents truth from the Word of God that it is a great mistake to study to teach.

Let me find something in the Word of God I can lay on the crowd and then have an effect on them in some way, impress them or even help them or guide them or do whatever. I'm going to excavate and I'm going to put this out for the masses. We have to look for wisdom for ourselves.

It is the goal of a good teacher to learn and to be the first one to benefit and then to share what he himself has learned. But it is a grave mistake to just try to assemble a meal to give to others that you haven't personally understood, digested, benefited from. This is true in any area of life.

It's true of parents with children. It is true of teachers and students. It is true of any generation to generation transfer.

We have to know where we speak before we speak. This lends authenticity and

enthusiasm because if you learn something that you appreciate and recognize the benefit and see the benefit for yourself, there's no better advocate. Look at advertising for people.

It always amuses me. Anytime they say the product, I know that they've been coached because fill in the blank here for the product. It's like an Alfred Hitchcock saying where in any mystery movie there is the MacGuffin.

There's something people are looking for that they can't find. Give us a paper so we will kill the girl and whatever it might be. It's just the MacGuffin.

Well, in the same way, there is the product. But the most convincing form of advertising is testimony by people that have used a thing and say this made a huge difference for me. Look at me.

Here's the before and after in my weight loss. Here's the before and after in my age spots or the color of my clothes or whatever it might be. And we are most impressed by friends who recommend a product or a service or the provider of a service.

I know a good plumber. I know a good mechanic. I know a good piano tuner.

I know a good dentist. I know a good fill in the blank here. We trust someone who has had an experience and can vouch for it personally.

Well, this is what this is talking about. If you are wise, you are wise for yourself. We're going to see in chapter 10 and we have seen in chapter 10 that wisdom, a wise man can save a city.

This is coming up in Proverbs, but it is first and foremost for himself. We have to get wisdom for ourself. I'm going to get some wisdom so I can go talk to that person.

I'm going to, I'm going to excavate some passages and I'm going to, I'm going to preach them at this person because they really need that. That is a bad approach. That is fraught with landmines.

It will come back to bite us. We will inevitably be exposed as hypocrites. You can't do that.

If you are wise, you are wise for yourself. With all you're getting, get wisdom and with that getting, get understanding for ourselves. Then we will be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

We have to be equipped before we run out there on the battlefield trying to hand out shields and swords and boots and helmets to other people. Where's yours? You don't even have your own armor on. What are you out here trying to dispense the armor of God to other people? You're, you're poorly dressed.

You're vulnerable. You're, you've got arrows sticking out of parts of your body here because you don't have your own armor on. Be wise for yourself.

If you scoff, you will bear it alone. If you scoff, this is an implied choice here. You can choose to be wise or you can choose to be wise in your own eyes.

You can choose to have understanding of the Holy One or you can choose to have, you can lean on your own understanding. Who is God in your life? The Holy One or oneself? Our society is strongly encouraging everyone to be their own God and determine their own truth and establish their own priorities. And it is all about me, myself, and I, the unholy Trinity.

If you scoff, you will bear it alone. Turn this around. If you are in the periphery of a scoffer, don't feel like you must have had something to do with it.

It's your fault. There was a failure. You should have spoken.

You should have done this. You might've done that. What if, what if, what if, what does the word of God say? If someone is a scoffer, they bear it alone.

It is their fault. It's not God's fault. And it's not your fault.

If you're a parent of a child, if you're in the periphery of someone who has gone down a bad road, there are so many people who beat themselves up and say, what did I do wrong? What did we do wrong? How did we, where did we fail? You are flying in the face of the truth of the word of God. We need to be wise for ourselves. Scoffers are going to bear the consequence of scoffing themselves.

God doesn't look around and say, you know, the community turned this person into a scoffer. If they had just been more accepting, if they had been more supportive, if they had been said kinder words, no. Read Proverbs 9, 12.

Those who are wise are wise for themselves. And those who are scoffers are going to bear the responsibility for that scoffing before God alone. Well, this brings us to verses 13 through 18, which I want to give full value.

And then we're going to return to our outline of Proverbs chapter 10 after the break.