

Proverbs 23-05-10a

Welcome to the Wednesday night Bible study here at Grace and Truth Bible Church. This is the 10th of May, 2023. We continue our study in the book of Proverbs.

We're moving on to chapter 11. We may not be completely finished with chapter 10. I am in the process of studying the structure of the book of Proverbs.

And the more I study, the more I learn. And as I have mentioned before, the introduction in chapters one through nine begins the process. And then starting in chapter 10 and moving forward through chapter 23, we have this section of largely two line Proverbs.

And chapter 10 gives us clues as to the structure. And it's largely unexplored territory in terms of structure in the book of Proverbs. There are people who suspect it's there, who have made attempts to try to ascertain its nature and its markers, but there's not a lot of persuasive work that has been done.

So it's fun to go in and try to figure it out without a lot of prior work that seems to compel. And it's a work in progress. So we're going to move forward in terms of the content and we may come back and gain some additional clues from structure in the future.

Let's take a moment to ask God's blessing on our fellowship, on our time of study and reflection on these wonderful truths from his word. Father, thank you for this time of interaction where we can come together despite geographical distance and share our enthusiasm, our appreciation for the Lord Jesus Christ, our love for your plan and purpose and your character as it is revealed to us in scripture, as it is expressed toward us in your grace and faithfulness. We are humbled and so greatly benefited from the blessings that you bestow on us each day, the weaving together of circumstance and lives to give us purpose and hope for the future.

We pray that as we look at these principles from your word this evening, that they will be meaningful, that God the Holy Spirit will plant them deeply in our souls so that they will transform us, cleanse us, renew us, motivate us and encourage us to love and good works. We pray it in Jesus' name, amen. If you will turn to Proverbs chapter 11, we can continue looking at these contrasts by way of a quick review.

The chapter 10 has introduced us to this idea of contrasts and it is a contrast that is, in principle, what do I mean by in principle? I am struck by the similarity between this form of teaching and what you find in Matthew chapter five, chapter six and chapter seven, in terms of what Jesus expresses that constitutes blessing and is important to understand as we order our priorities and establish our values and pursue our goals. So what is this comparison that I am suggesting? It is this, you can find expressions of truth in the Sermon on the Mount, in the Proverbs as two worthy, prominent and straightforward

examples that aren't always true. One of the biggest objections when you start studying Proverbs and looking at people who talk about the Proverbs is, well, it's either trite, it's a truism, the rich benefit, the poor suffer.

What's new about that? What's inspired? Why is that even in the Bible? So it is accused of not having divine traction, not having inspiration at its core that is any different from aphorisms that you find out on the economy. That's one accusation. Another is, well, but these aren't always true.

The ones that we've seen here in chapter 10, blessings are on the head of the righteous, violence covers the mouth of the wicked. Well, I see the wicked prospering and I see the righteous suffering. He doesn't look blessed to me and it just does not always seem to be true.

He who walks with integrity walks securely. Well, I can watch forensic files and see someone that did everything right and they were still victimized and still became a statistic. So how are these true? And I want to suggest something that is going to condition our study and our understanding of the book of Proverbs throughout and certainly from here forward.

And that is the difference between description and principle. Let me try to illustrate what I mean. When my dad was first teaching me how to change a tire on a car, you've got a flat.

So there are certain things you need to do. If you're going to jack up a car, you want to set the emergency brake, you want to block the wheels so that it doesn't roll. Once you get it up on the jack, that could be a very bad thing.

Can you change a tire by just setting the parking brake or just blocking the wheels? And it's probably going to be fine. Why do both? Why do either? In park, a car should not roll. If you're changing a front tire or even a back tire, well, what if it's a front wheel drive? What if it's this? What if it's that? Once it's up on the jack and you've raised the flat tire high enough that a fully inflated tire will replace it, there's no point in getting it up just high enough to get the flat off because when you try to put the next one on, you're going to have to jack it up some more because the flat is not as tall as the full tire.

So you jack it up enough. And then my dad said, loosen the lug bolts before you get the tire off the ground so that you can use that friction. What if that tire wants to spin? What if it's a front tire? And the emergency brake is only set to back.

My point being, there are many things that you can do that you just prescribe as part of changing a tire. It may or not make an absolute difference in your particular circumstance. Once you've got the lug nuts loose and you go ahead and finish jacking up that tire to the adequate height to replace it, my dad said, always remove the upper lug

nuts first.

Leave the bottom one or two lug nuts for last. Why would you do that? In the unlikely event that something happens, a gust of wind or some other soft spot in the ground or some unforeseen circumstance, and the car comes off of the jack, if the tire, whether it is the one you're taking off or the one you're putting back on, if you put those bottom lug nuts on first, if the weight of the car unexpectedly comes down onto that partially attached tire, the bottom ones will hold it much better than the top. If the top are on, it can be at a crazy angle and you can't even get the bottom ones on.

The bottom ones, in principle, will secure the tire closer to vertical. Now, all of these things that I have mentioned about changing a tire are just trite pieces of good advice. Right? And in most cases, it doesn't matter.

Every time I've ever changed a tire, I've always followed my dad's encouragement. Bottom lug nuts last off first on, block the tires, set the parking brake. Obviously, pay attention to where you put the jack.

Be sure you know that this is a valid jacking point for that vehicle and don't jack up on something that turns out to be a tie rod and now your car is towed in and won't steer because you just picked any old thing to try to raise it. These are principles that are generally true and often helpful in unexpected situations. They don't all make a difference every time you apply them.

They are good practice. They are best practice. And this is true for anything.

Is it a good idea to floss your teeth? Every time you brush? Yes, it is. What if I don't have time? I'm not going to die if I don't floss my teeth this time. Flossing is good practice.

It is long-term benefit across time. It is great maintenance. If you want to keep your teeth into your old age, you should floss.

Floss regularly, floss thoroughly, get a water pick, get a vibrating electric toothbrush, whatever it may be. It may not make a visible difference at the time that you apply this best practice principle. It is valuable over time.

It is insurance against the unexpected and it is generally beneficial in almost any circumstance. Just do these things. If you are going to ignore or not apply one of these principles, it is on an exceptional basis and there are mitigating or extenuating circumstances.

But it is good practice and it will serve you in good stead across time. This is what Jesus is talking about in the Sermon on the Mount. This is what Solomon is talking about and the other authors in the Proverbs.

These will serve you in good stead over time. Are there exceptions? Are there times where you will consciously not follow this particular practice? Is there a harvest going on right now but I'm not going to participate? Some higher priority has taken its place. Are there exceptions? Are there extenuating, mitigating and circumstance altering situations where I won't strictly follow this proverb every time or this teaching in the Sermon on the Mount every time? One of the most often discussed elements in the Sermon on the Mount is love your enemies.

Do good to those who hate you. Pray for those who spitefully use you. Do not resist an evil man.

If someone asks you for your coat, give him your cloak also. Give to those who ask you. Is this true in every case? Should I always in every case legalistically someone has asked me, some nefarious guy says, I know this guy is a Bible literalist and he really believes that anybody who asks him, he should grant that request.

So I'm gonna ask him for his car. I'm gonna ask him for his house. I'm gonna ask him for his wife.

I'm gonna ask him for whatever he's got. He's bound by his interpretation of scripture to honor that. I'm an evil man.

I'm gonna bust in and I know he's not gonna defend himself. He won't shoot me. He won't resist me.

Jesus said, do not resist an evil man. I'm an evil man. He's not resisting me.

Is this something I should do and just trust God for the outcome or not? Do we never ever resist an evil man? What about evil in society? What about evil in the culture? What about a personal evil? Somebody's mugging me and I don't resist. I just throw up my hands and do the dying cockroach. This is the point of similarity between the Proverbs and the Sermon on the Mount, especially certain portions of the Sermon on the Mount that illustrate the approach we need to take, that we need to understand, and that is explicit in the Proverbs.

The Proverbs themselves tell us this. Turn with me over to Proverbs 26. I hope my memory is serving me here.

Proverbs 26, and we're going to violate our personal rule and not pay much attention to the context. I want to go directly to verse four. Proverbs 26, four.

Do not answer a fool according to his folly lest you also be like him. So when a fool is talking and he's expressing folly, I'm not going to answer him. I'm not going to contradict.

I'm not going to debate. I'm not going to argue. I'm not going to point out the folly in his speech because this verse says, do not answer a fool according to his folly.

He's talking foolishness. I'm just going to clam up. I'm not going to answer him.

That'll just make me like him. He's going to drag me down to his level and beat me with experience. So I'm not going to answer the fool according to his folly.

However, what about the next verse? 26, five. Answer a fool according to his folly lest he be wise in his own eyes. Wait a minute.

I thought you just told me don't answer a fool according to his folly because I'll end up being like him. Now you're saying I need to answer a fool according to his folly. I need to contradict him.

I need to argue against him. I need to point out the folly. Otherwise he will be wise in his own eyes.

Well, which is it? This set of verses constitutes such an apparent contradiction that the Jewish arbiters of what was and was not canonical debated whether Proverbs ought to be included in the Old Testament. How can it be the word of God and have such a blatant contradiction, not even separated by a verse or a chapter or a section, it's juxtaposed. I've got a juxtaposed contradiction.

How can this possibly be inspired scripture when it contradicts itself? This is the key to understanding how all of the Proverbs should be interpreted and much of the rest of scripture, in particular, Jesus' teachings in the Sermon on the Mount, the teaching on the hill, I prefer to call it, to his disciples. And what is the key? How do you reconcile this contradiction? 26, four and five. This is a principle.

When do I apply this principle? Always, anytime a fool is speaking, I should or should not find a way to answer him based on which of these verses I'm concentrating on. What do you think? Here is a fool speaking folly. What is my responsibility? What are my options? Well, I know both of these verses and I believe they are inspired and I believe that they could and should guide my personal response to this situation.

So is this a time to enter into debate? Should I stand up and say, wait a minute, that's not right. That's foolishness and here's why. Or should I remain silent? You know, the aphorism, the old adage that is not inspired, that says better to remain silent and be thought a fool than to open your mouth and remove all doubt.

So do I speak up or do I not? I faced this innumerable times in my college education, both my bachelor's and master's programs. There were times where I was convinced in my own mind that the professor was speaking foolishness, sometimes outright evil. This is not true, it's not right, it's not valid.

It isn't an accurate representation of what the Bible says or who God is or how Christians see their responsibilities. This is a fabrication, this is foolishness. So do I speak up or do I remain silent and let it pass? These two verses are essential to answering that question.

And it's a matter of priority. It's a matter of value. It is a matter of my goal.

Do not answer a fool according to his folly, lest you also be like him. If in this situation, I perceive that by answering, I am simply going to be categorized as somebody with an equally foolish point of view and it is not going to accomplish any good. All it is going to do is diminish me to speak up in this context, on this issue, with this person, in this format.

I am just going to be another seed picker another babbler, that's the word in Acts that is applied to the Apostle Paul by the Greeks. They say, who is this spermatologos? Who is this seed picker speaking up and questioning our ways and our values? Who is this babbler it's translated? Well, I have to evaluate whether or not speaking up is going to do any good. And it's different in each situation for each person.

There could be 15 believers in a group. Somebody is speaking foolishness as a fool. 14 of them draw the conclusion, rightly so, I need to remain silent or I'm going to end up just like this fool.

I'll be like him. One of them says, you know what? I need to answer this fool according to his folly. Otherwise he's just going to be even more fully convinced.

Well, do I care if he's convinced in his own mind? I care if he is speaking this folly and influencing people. And in my estimation, this needs to be addressed. It needs to be refuted.

It needs to be contradicted. Otherwise impressionable people are going to be impressed with his wisdom. He's wise in his own eyes.

He says, see, I'm obviously right. Nobody's arguing with me. He's lived in an echo chamber and no one has ever pointed out an obvious contradiction.

Some of us may be called to speak up. And in the very same context and in the very same room and in the very same moment, others of us would be like him if we spoke up. Maybe we are not fully equipped to address that folly.

Maybe we don't know the best way to refute it, to contradict it, to call it out and to show it for what it is, but somebody else is. So which of these verses is true? Which of these verses is our guide? Is it verse four or is it verse five? What's my favorite answer? Yes, they both guide us. We have to determine when and where the application of this truth is pertinent for us personally.

So Jesus says, do not resist an evil man. If he asks you for your coat, give him your cloak also. So should I never resist an evil man? We'll probably be doing a special reviewing some of the misunderstandings of the Sermon on the Mount or I would take time to do it here.

I feel the need to address Matthew five through seven again. We covered it some years ago in our Matthew gospel study, but there are fresh insults against that section of scripture that I feel like need to be addressed. So I'm not going to do it here except to say, if you look at the context, our guiding principle, we should try to put the lug nuts on the bottom bolts first.

We should block the tires. We should set the parking brake if it's functional. We should assess and at first blush, if it is possible, this is what Paul teaches, to the extent that it is possible, to the extent that it's up to you, live peaceably with all men.

If an evil person is pressuring me, if an evil person is making demands of me, my first option to examine, my preferred option is not to resist, not to create an unpeaceful situation. If I can avoid conflict, if it does not endanger, if it doesn't violate other principles by which I am commanded to live, such as protecting my family, honoring the Lord, being accountable and responsible as a steward for what God has given me. If I can avoid conflict with an evil man and not compromise priority principles, I should do so.

I should not resist just for the sake of resisting. Well, he's evil, so I'm just going to, I'm going to argue, I'm going to refute, I'm going to resist. I'm going to refuse any and all input from this person because they're evil.

My default, my common practice should be to find a way to live peaceably with all men, irrespective of whether I judge or perceive or consider them to be righteous or evil. Yes, it's an evil request from an evil government that I pay confiscatory taxes, but I can do it without compromising my principles. I don't believe in what they're doing with my money.

I don't believe in their policies. I think these are evil policies. I think they're dragging the country to its death, this government, and this government is asking me for my coat.

And then they're asking for my cloak on top of that. Should I try to cheat on my taxes? Should I find shady ways to minimize what I pay to the government because it's an evil government? No. I will endeavor in good faith to avoid conflict with the government.

I will render to Caesar what is Caesar's. I don't have to feel responsible for what Caesar does with the coin that's got his image on it. Give him the coin.

He's accountable to God for what he does. I am accountable to endeavor to live peaceably with all. And if I get a request from an evil person, can you move your fence? I want this tree in my yard.

Can you paint your mailbox? We've got a homeowners association and I'm a tin pot dictator of the homeowners association and everybody else is painting their mailbox yellow. And I want you to paint your mailbox yellow. Everybody else is putting out Rudolph decorations for Christmas this year.

You need a Rudolph in your yard. That's evil. That's restricting my freedom.

That is asking me to spend money on a Rudolph. I don't even like that song. And they want me to put a red-nosed Rudolph in my yard.

To the extent that it is up to me, live peaceably with all. If an evil person asks me some, make some request, asks me something that costs me, go out of my way to not make an issue in a non-essential. Think about the coat and cloak.

I'll be talking more about this in the near future, but how essential is the coat and cloak? Do you seriously only have one? Remember when Jesus told his disciples, when you go on this journey, as I send you forth to address the nation and go to the towns and villages, don't take an extra? What does that tell you? They own an extra. So if you've got two coats and somebody asks you for one, well, if you've got an extra cloak, give them that. Don't give the last one that you've got, is the idea.

But don't resist on the basis that the person asking is observed to be evil, or the request is evil, or I'm going to find a pretext to not grant, why would somebody ask for my coat? Why would they want my coat to begin with? Evidently, they don't have one of their own, and they need it, and am I going to say, well, but you're evil, so you don't deserve a coat. Whether or not they are evil or righteous, evidently there is a need, or they wouldn't be asking. Jesus doesn't say, if somebody opens up a used coat business and they come and ask you for yours so that they can resell it and make a profit, He said, don't refuse because you don't think they're righteous enough for your neighbor love.

You could declare them an enemy because they're evil and you're trying to be righteous. Well, Jesus said, love your enemies. And the idea is, we should err on the side, as a principle of reflecting God's grace, loving our neighbor as ourself, irrespective of whether we think they are righteous enough to associate with us, righteous enough for our charity.

This is why I quibble with charities that say, well, we'll give you food, but you've got to listen to a sermon first. I don't think that's God's best plan. I think you could make materials available.

You could say, we've got an optional message we would like you to hear, but we're not gonna withhold the food until you endure our gospel message presentation. It's conditioned on something. We think you're a rascal, you're socially unacceptable, you're unemployed, you're homeless, you're this, you're that.

You've made a mess of your life. So you've got to listen to our solution for your problem and then we will give. I think the principle in the Sermon on the Mount is such that we don't judge somebody to be wicked and therefore withhold the coat or the cloak.

If there's a need there and we can meet it, irrespective of their righteous wicked status, wow, this coat may not keep you warm enough, here's a cloak as well. Don't skimp based on your judgment of someone's life when they are in need. But my belief is that the situation Jesus sets up, if someone asks you, he says, do not resist an evil person.

What did the Pharisees do? Well, the tax collectors and sinners, the prostitutes, we're not gonna do anything for them. We've judged them to be evil people. So nothing for you.

Jesus said, don't resist an evil person. And what is he, he doesn't say if they are attacking you, give them everything you've got. If they're robbing you, submit.

He said, if they ask you for your coat. So this is someone who has a need. You can fill it without negative impact to yourself.

It may cost you a coat or a cloak, but you're not gonna freeze. Your family's not gonna freeze. And by meeting a need, this is in harmony with God's causing the rain to fall on the just and the unjust, right? God causes his rain to fall on the just and the unjust.

And when there is a need, this doesn't mean that we should go around proactively giving away things. Someone has a need and they come to us. This is in our personal periphery.

And we say, you know, you are not living a righteous life, but that is not gonna stop me from doing everything I can to meet your need and then some. All you've asked me for is a coat. I'll give you a coat and a cloak.

God has given me enough that I've got a spare that I can give you. I'm not gonna have my children freezing in the middle of the night. I can meet your need and go above and beyond what you asked for.

This is what God does for us all the time. It is our light so shining before men that they see our good works and glorify our father. That kind of understanding that needs to come to the interpretation of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount needs to come to the Proverbs.

You can't say, well, these aren't true because I've seen the righteous hungry. I've seen his seed begging bread. So the Proverbs that says I've never seen it, that's just not true.

The Proverbs are encouraging our pursuit of these positive attributes and our drawing away from the negative, encouraging us to be wise and not foolish. And when you see these contrasts throughout chapter 10 and we have seen them, these contrasts, which we're going to see again in chapter 11, in chapter 10, verse six, there are blessings on the head of the righteous. This doesn't mean always and invariably a righteous person is

just going to be a walking manifestation of blessings.

If we pursue righteousness, our life is going to be blessed. It's going to be blessed over time. We may have periods where we're Elijah by the brook and things are pretty thin and few and far between.

But generally speaking, if you put those lug nuts of righteousness on those bottom bolts over time, it is going to serve you in good stead. If you regularly set that parking brake, whether you think you need to or not, over time, that priority and that practice is going to be vindicated. God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble.

That's a proverb quoted by Peter and James. Does it mean that the proud are always going to find their plans and purposes stymied and the humble are always going to find themselves just with a smooth way forward? No, but it is a principle that if we believe it and if we apply it, we will see its fulfillment over time. It is not a description of every moment of the life in the righteous life or the wise life or the diligent life.

It is true over time. It is a general principle to be followed with faith in God and trust that he will vindicate that priority. People who try to make these descriptive and say, well, this doesn't describe every situation I've ever seen, miss the point.

In verse seven of chapter 10, the memory of the righteous shall be for a blessing. This is true over time. The fragrance of memories and the reminiscence, there's not a day that goes by that I don't remember the influence that my parents have had on me.

My dad is gone, but his influence permeates my life. He lived his life according to his favorite passage of scripture. What you do, do it heartily as unto the Lord and not unto men.

And so those are a memory that is a blessing to me. And you have that in chapter 10, verse seven. The memory of the righteous is blessed.

The name of the wicked will rot. There are people who, when you call them to mind, you think, I wish I'd never known that person. I wish they'd never been a part of my life.

And they are principles that are true over time. 10, eight, the wise in heart will receive commands, be amenable to instruction and to guidance and to the imperatives of life. A prating fool will fall.

So we may say, well, wait a minute. I know a prating fool and he hasn't fallen. Well, at this particular moment, maybe not.

But over time, these are priorities that guide our decisions, that inform our values and help us to pursue worthy goals and the best priorities. And our life will find these principles and these promises and these truths vindicated over time. Everyone doesn't

apply at every moment in every circumstance.

And I commend to your attention, answer a fool according to his folly. Do not answer a fool according to his folly. We have to figure out when and how to observe these.

And the wonderful advantage we have in this age is the Holy Spirit. We can pray and he will lead us into the pertinent truth for this hour and this circumstance, this conversation, this relationship, this challenge. God, the Holy Spirit is so ignored when he is the subject of attention in the modern church.

It is very often in a charismatic and emotional way. And in Bible study, his role and his value are so often overlooked to the point that he's not even mentioned. We need the guidance of the Spirit to know when to answer a fool or to not answer a fool.

And we know that there is a time and a purpose. The same author that collected the Proverbs and organized them and presented them in this forum, pointed out different purposes, different times, different activities, different seasons. There is a time to gather.

There is a time to scatter. There is a time to mend and there's a time to break. There is a time for war and there's a time for peace.

Various Proverbs pertain at the time where that principle is gonna come to the fore. So it's essential to understand this as we move forward in the book of Proverbs to not say, well, wait a minute, I just think that's a truism, that's just trite. That's a meaningless aphorism, not when you recognize its inspiration, not when you recognize that the same Holy Spirit that inspired it will lead us to its pertinence and application.

Let's pause here and take our break. When we come back, we'll start chapter 11 and see the vindication of this approach.