

Proverbs 23-09-06a

Greetings, fellow members of Grace and Truth Bible Church. This is Wednesday, the 6th of September, 2023. We're in the book of Proverbs, finishing up chapter 11 and moving into chapter 12.

We'll take a moment to ask God's blessing on our study, on our time of fellowship, and then we'll begin. Father, thank you, as always, for another opportunity to spend time together in mutual enthusiasm for attaining a greater understanding of our place in your plan and how best to fulfill it and exploit it. We thank you for the presence of your Holy Spirit, the example of the Lord Jesus Christ, who so beautifully exemplifies the power that can be manifest in our lives with the presence of your word and that Holy Spirit's power.

And we pray that as we look at these words of wisdom contained in the book of Proverbs, that the Holy Spirit will impress them on our hearts, help us to understand them and see their pertinence and their application as we move forward in our lives so that those lives will reflect your glory and the glory of the Lord Jesus. We ask it in his name, amen. We have seen the structure of the book of Proverbs, and I think it is useful from time to time to just remind ourselves that this book is organized.

I want to read you something that was written by Dr. Bruce Waltke in the introduction to his commentary. This is actually the author's preface. It is a reminder.

We covered many of these points when we began our study, but it is useful as we move into this application section to remind ourselves of why it is such a fruitful study. There is no finer scholar, there is no more worthy theologian, there is no more exemplary student of the word of God than Dr. Bruce K. Waltke. You will never be disappointed if you resort to anything he has ever said or done.

He is one of those great men of faith on whom those of us in later generations rely and on whose shoulders we stand. I love everything about Dr. Waltke, and I want to take just a few minutes to read you this very wonderful preface to his two-volume commentary on the book of Proverbs. He says, And by the way, this was written a while back.

If it was true then, how much more so now? In a world bombarded by inane cliches, trivial catchwords, and godless sound bites, the expression of true wisdom is in short supply today. The Church stands alone as the receptacle and repository of the inspired traditions that carry a mandate for a holy life from ancient sages, the greatest of whom was Solomon, and from the greater than Solomon, the Lord Jesus Christ. As the course and bulk of biblical wisdom, the book of Proverbs remains the model of curriculum for humanity to learn how to live under God and to live before God and before humankind.

Do you notice the vertical and the horizontal there that we have seen so many times?

Before God, under God, and before humankind. As a result, it beckons the Church to diligent study and application. To uncommitted youth, it serves as a stumbling stone.

Notice the adjective, to uncommitted youth. It stands as a stumbling stone. And to committed youth, it is a foundation stone.

But tragically, the Church has practically discarded the book of Proverbs, which was written for young people as a compass by which to steer their ship of life. See chapter 1 verses 2 through 6. Of its 930 ancient sayings, many Christians know three. Fear the Lord, chapter 1, verse 7, trust Him, chapter 3, verses 5 and 6, and to train their children in the way they should go, Proverbs 22, verse 6. If you ask somebody to quote something from the Proverbs, you're likely to get one or two, maybe those three quotations, possibly something about the virtuous wife in chapter 31.

However, quote, to fear the Lord is misunderstood, quote, to trust Him is a platitude divorced from the book. The promise that the child will not depart from childhood rearing raises more questions than solutions. And the poem about the virtuous wife seems out of date.

For some honest readers, as one student confessed, Proverbs seems banal or wrong. Obviously, these are some examples of what I like to call obviosities. So, obviously a truthful witness gives honest testimony.

That's a quote from 1217. Obviously a truthful witness does not deceive, chapter 14, verse 5, and gives the Lord delight, chapter 12, verse 22. So, what am I learning when it's a tautology or a truism, is his point.

For sober theologians, the book's heavenly promises of health, wealth, and prosperity are troublesome. And for many saints, they seem detached from earth's harsh realities. If you're like me, you have had thoughts and observations about the book of Proverbs that match these understandings, right? Just seems a bit detached.

Heavenly promises don't seem to be real. Some Proverbs contradict each other. Answer a fool according to his folly, in 26.4. Do not answer a fool according to his folly, in 26.5. Moreover, whereas Proverbs affirms a righteous order, Job and Ecclesiastes seem to deny that reality.

For the logical mind, the book seems to be a hodgepodge collection. Does that ring a bell? Proverbs is a hodgepodge collection, having no rhyme or reason in its grouping of sayings. They jump from one topic to another like scatterbrains in a living room conversation.

How does one preach and teach such a mishmash? This was the question I asked myself when I decided this was one of the few remaining Old Testament books that we had not covered. It looks like a hodgepodge mishmash at first blush. How are you going to cover

that without just bouncing like a ping pong ball in a room full of hard surfaces? For the modern mind, the book's cultural setting seems far removed from the 21st century.

Proverbs puts a high priority on tradition and age, while the modern mind prizes change and youth. Proverbs admonishes parents not to spare the rod, but the state's welfare workers want to jail those who obey it. Its psychology is psychosomatic.

Modern psychology uses more scientific terms. Does that make sense to you? The psychology is psychosomatic. A merry heart doeth good like a medicine.

You know, bitterness rots the bones and so on. There seems to be a relationship between your spiritual status and your physical health in Proverbs, but modern psychology has much more sophisticated insights according to itself. Some academics, including evangelicals, have not helped.

They are skeptical about the book's claim to Solomonic authorship. They substitute trust in man for trust in God, and they speak of a world order instead of divine retribution. You know how unpopular divine retribution has become in the modern day? The wrath of God is being written right out of the scriptures by Christians in conservative evangelical circles and seminaries and churches.

Instead of accepting its inspired teachings by faith, they call for a curriculum of human rationality and experimentation. Academics have demonstrated that Proverbs is at home in pan-Oriental pagan literature and have called into question whether its apparent lack of an Israelite orientation has a home in Israel's covenants and biblical literature at all. According to others, compared to Job and Ecclesiastes, Proverbs represents quote, a single false doctrine.

For Christians, Proverbs seems irrelevant. If Jesus is greater than Solomon, why bother studying and memorizing this ancient book? Besides, if Solomon was so smart, how come he died such a fool? For the translator, Proverbs defies translation. This is something I was just talking about last week.

I had not seen this, but he makes the very same point. A proverb depends on sound and sense. He actually uses the very same example that I used, and I promise I had not seen this until this past week.

I just got this commentary. A stitch in Time Saves Nine works because of its alliteration, as well as its uncommonly obvious good sense, but the sounds and puns of the biblical Proverbs cannot be caught in translation. And so, unlike an English proverb, they are not usually memorable.

Remember this just last Wednesday, we were talking about the importance of trying to get these into our memory by some other means, because they don't catch in English the way they do in Hebrew. It's exactly his point. In English, a proverb expresses a

universally accepted truism, but, quote, trust in the Lord with all your heart and do not lean upon your own understanding, is not a truism that many Americans accept.

Americans may claim to trust in God on their coinage, but in fact, they teach and preach, believe in yourself. So, that is the modern Christian and cultural setting of the book of Proverbs. It's avoided, you don't hear preaching on it or teaching from it very often, because it does seem to be, at first glance, a crazy quilt that doesn't seem to follow in terms of thematic material.

If anyone does resort to Proverbs, it's usually the introductory section that we saw, where you have the extended poems about wisdom and they hang together. There's a passage there that you can follow a narrative. The young man who is accosted at the corner and has the temptation to follow the crafty harlot down a bad road to her house of pleasure, only to infinitely regret it afterwards.

But once you get to chapter 10 and following, where you get into the Proverbs proper, these antithetical dis-stitches or bicola, depending on how you want to refer to them, two halves of a verse, so the first half and the second half are versets, bicola, dis-stitch means the same thing, a two-line aphorism. They become very difficult. Well, we have seen already in our coverage of chapter 10 and chapter 11, that there is a thematic element and it was provided to us in those first nine chapters, and so we saw the contrast between righteousness and wickedness, between wisdom and foolishness, and those things are equated.

Now there is a point to this review. There is a main point that we want to undertake tonight and it is this, this large thematic contrast that we have seen throughout these first 10 and a half chapters lines up wisdom and folly. Are you wise or are you foolish? Are you righteous or are you wicked? And these things are paralleled.

To be wise is to be righteous. To be righteous is to be wise. To be foolish is to be wicked.

To be wicked is to be foolish. They are parallel. They are not the same thing, but they are coordinate.

They are inextricably linked. The righteous are not fools. The wicked are not wise.

So now comes the question, well, obviously if I have any functional neurons between my ears, I want to be wise and righteous, not foolish and wicked. How do I accomplish that? Is there cause and effect? And as we have seen in recent studies over the last year or two, there is a very strong movement in Christianity today that says, and it's not necessarily new, it's just been repackaged, but it says if you engage in good behavior, this will lead to healthy spiritual life and function. You can improve your relationship with God.

You can become, in Proverbs terms, wise and righteous by changing your behavior. Just

do some good works. The book by David Gushy and Glenn Stassen that deals with the Sermon on the Mount is organized on this theme.

Which is that the Sermon on the Mount is Jesus ethical guide on how to be wise and righteous. And they then proceed to translate, interpret, and apply Matthew chapter five, six, and seven in terms of when Jesus says, if your neighbor has ought against you or your brother has ought against you, as you are going to offer your sacrifice, drop your sacrifice, go and be reconciled to your brother, love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, pray for those who spitefully use you, all of these exhortations, these examples that Jesus gives in the Sermon on the Mount, this very large, very strong, very pervasive movement represented by folks like Stassen and Gushy, is pushing, just do it. And so they call these examples and exhortations by the Lord Jesus, be reconciled to your brother, love your enemy, that these are transformative initiatives, the way to be holy, the way to live a righteous and acceptable life, the way to function as kingdom people, they link all of this to the kingdom, is to do these things.

And if you restrict yourself to these three chapters in Matthew, you might be able to imagine that that will fly. If you balance the Lord Jesus in his context, with his audience, with first verses, second advent, with the epistles of Paul and Peter and John and James, you discover that you can't sustain that view. Why? Proverbs provides the answer because in Proverbs, as we see in our context tonight, look at, we pick up here in verse 29 of Proverbs chapter 11.

He who troubles his own house will inherit the wind. He who troubles his own house will inherit the wind, but, and the fool will be servant to the wise of heart. Notice, the fool will be servant to the wise of heart.

The wise and the righteous are contrasted with the fool and the wicked. So in verse 28, the one trusting in his riches will fall. That is inevitably going to be someone who is wicked, but the righteous will flourish like foliage.

Do you see a connection between these two verses? If you trust in riches, you fall. And this, this word for fall, this is not to trip and fall. This is to fall in the sense of a building or a tower or a wall falling.

And so when you have the reference to a house in verse 29, the one trusting in his riches, his house is going to fall. That which he has constructed is going to collapse. This is the collapse of what one has built by faith in wealth, in prosperity, in assets, in having wherewithal, it is going to fall.

He who troubles his own house will inherit the wind and the fool will be servant to the wise of heart. Now look at verse 30. The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life.

And he who wins souls is wise. A tree of life. We just had a reference to foliage.

So look at the parallel between verse 28 and verse 30. The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life. The righteous flourishes like foliage.

And these are fruit trees. This, this word is what are used for trees that fruit and feed their owners, feed people who come by. This is like the fig tree that Jesus went to looking for food because he was hungry.

So a tree of life, this is a tree that provides that which augments, sustains, benefits the lives of many. So if you trouble your own house, you inherit the wind and the wind is so often in scripture, a metaphor for absolute loss. Remember the beginning of Ecclesiastes, a chasing after the wind, chasing after the wind, you're chasing after something that you cannot grasp, that you cannot retain.

So this leads us by observation over these first 10 and a half chapters, this consistent metaphor, this consistent conclusion all across this book so far has been that it is righteousness that is wisdom. And it is wickedness that is foolishness. So what can we say about wisdom? Is it intellectual? This is the point now.

Do I want to accumulate knowledge? Do I want to glean facts? Do I want to collect and weigh evidence? Is that the kind of wisdom we're talking about? Because wisdom and righteousness correlate. This is not intellectual wisdom. This isn't IQ.

It isn't grasp of complex issues. This is ethical wisdom. This is the kind of wisdom that Paul talks about when he says, I pray that you will come to know the things of God.

His prayer in the first chapter of Ephesians, I pray that you may come to know what are the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints, the surpassing knowledge of God. This is spiritual wisdom. This is ethical wisdom, knowing when to do and what to do, when to speak and when to remain silent, that's why we have had these constant references to keeping your counsel or tail bearing.

We saw that in chapter 10 verse, I'm sorry, chapter 11, verse 13, a tail bearer reveals secrets, but he who is of a faithful spirit conceals a matter. Well, how do you know? Should I communicate this because we all need to pray? Should I hold it close to my chest because it's a confidence and to reveal it would do damage? How do you know? Wisdom and that wisdom is righteousness. So the point being many times we want to quote unquote do better by trying to do better.

I'm going to eliminate a bad habit. I'm going to cultivate a good habit. I'm going to change the pattern of how I use my time.

I'm going to, uh, issue one thing and, and pursue another when that is not the key. The key is in verse 29, the wise of heart, righteousness in the heart, righteousness by faith, by cultivating ethical wisdom, which comes from the word of God and is leveraged and interpreted and made real and pertinent for us by the Holy spirit. We don't work

righteousness and wisdom from the outside in.

It has to come from the inside out. This is the fundamental difference between us and our understanding of scripture and great swaths of Christianity that you're going to find publishing books on every conceivable subject, walk into a Christian bookstore and look at all of the subcategories, walk down any aisle, Christian marriage, Christian family, Christian parenting, uh, Christians in the workplace, uh, Christians in ministry, Christians that witness, uh, Christians, Christian missionaries, whatever you want to look at and begin reading these books, they all inevitably move toward this is the kind of behavior you should cultivate. This error is as old as the law.

The law defines wrong behavior. And by not doing what is wrong, you're at least at zero on the righteousness number line. Uh, look out for the widows and orphans.

Um, don't harm your neighbor. Love your neighbor as yourself, uh, as you would have others do it to you. That's how you do to them.

This sums up horizontal dealings from the law. But what was the problem? People that tried to base their righteousness on the works of the law. Paul says by the works of the law, no flesh will be justified.

Works don't create righteousness. Righteousness is in the same place as wisdom. And that's in the heart.

It begins in the heart. This is why it is such a wonderful privilege to come to a Bible church and study the word of God, because if you want wisdom, which equates to goodness, righteousness, it starts with transformation in the heart, renewing of the mind, the washing of water by the word. This is the cause how we treat people and how we worship God is the outgrowth, is the result.

So there is horse and there is cart. The horse is what we are doing now, which is looking at this wisdom. This is why the father back in Proverbs chapter two says, my son, he doesn't say my son.

Think of what Proverbs two could have been. Turn back to Proverbs chapter two. What could this have been? My son, if you will treat your servants well, if you will carefully examine the oxen and the goats and the sheep that you purchase, if you will cultivate in the time of cultivation, if you will plant at the time of planting, if you will reap at the time of harvest, if you will pursue and practice wisdom in actions, then you will understand the fear of the Lord and find the knowledge of God is not what it says.

And yet this is what practical Christianity is emphasizing all around us today. I look around and it looks to me like a battlefield where there are casualties in every direction. There's no advance.

There's there's no, uh, when I say no, I'm exaggerating slightly there. It's not, you know, Lord, I alone am left. We alone are the outpost.

There are many, many small congregations, but it's kind of like voters in flyover country. There can be a lot of us, but we in no way outnumber people that are in the, the metroplexes and in the, the urban areas of these big, dense cities that outvote and outweigh doesn't matter how many signs you see for one candidate in the Plains and in the rural states, look and see what's stuck in the window of the apartments and the condos and the projects and the densely populated cities of this country. That's what determines the direction of the country.

We're scattered and generally not organized and unified. You, the people who prevail, go to the densely populated areas and bust them down to vote and make sure that they get benefits. And it's similar to when they used to hand out whiskey at the, at the polls in the early days of this country.

Uh, whoever bought the whiskey, I'm voting for him. Um, it is similar when it comes to Christianity. There are a lot of us.

We are not alone by any means. There are any number of thousands of wonderfully, uh, biblically oriented, growing faithful believers all over the place. We are by no means alone, but when you look at the visible landscape, when you look at who's talking, who's making videos, who's publishing books, who's dominating the airwaves, who's all over the radio, it's not those.

And young people growing up are all over the media. They read books on their phone. They see videos on their phone.

They, uh, hear community conversations. Uh, and that's not us. With rare, I mean, exceedingly rare exceptions.

What you get in any kind of media is this other. At best. It is backwards.

Christianity at best. It is. Well, you, you need to do this.

You need to take this pledge. You need to follow this, you know, get rid of this habit and develop this habit. And it is completely backwards of what scripture teaches.

That's what Proverbs is about. Just remember wisdom is righteousness. Foolishness is wickedness.

And when the fool says in his heart, there is no God in practical terms in the modern day, the fools of today say there is no, it isn't just, there is no existence of God, there is no fulfillment of promise of God in the future. There is no judgment coming. There is no wrath.

There is no consequence. God is love. Jesus is love.

The gentle Jesus is the only God there is. And it doesn't matter what I do. It doesn't matter how much I know.

It doesn't learning the scripture is not important. All I need to know is Jesus loves me. Jesus loves me.

This I know. And, and that's enough. Well, it's not enough.

That's why you have nine chapters of exhortation that say, you've got to listen. When wisdom speaks, you've got to avoid the deceptive allure, the, uh, seductive pull of folly of the crafty harlot. And when it talks about the, the finding a good wife versus trucking with loose women, wisdom is pictured as a lady for a reason.

And the seductive foolishness of the world is pictured as a woman for a reason. It creates a choice. It is more difficult to do the right thing.

It is easy to do the foolish thing. So that's what we have here in Proverbs. That's why we had such a strong contrast set forth in those first nine chapters.

And we have to remind ourselves constantly, every moment of the day, we are making a choice, am I being wise or am I being foolish? And with that choice should come the concomitant, am I being righteous or am I being sinful, wicked, off God's path? The wisdom is not intellectual. It is ethical. And to compartmentalize and to fragment and to pick and choose what you take out of scripture is foolish, thinking themselves to be wise, they became fools.

So the outcome, how do we know if we are on the track of this wisdom? How do we know that we are on the path of righteousness? When David says in Psalm 23, he leads me in the paths of righteousness. What does that conclude with? Why does he lead us in the path of righteous? He leads me in the paths of righteousness for my own personal happiness. He leads me in the paths of righteousness because the poor will no longer be oppressed.

He leads me in the paths of righteousness because it's going to model a good witness, how does that verse conclude? He leads me in paths of righteousness. And with that is practical wisdom, spiritual wisdom for his name's sake. Our lives will reflect God's glory.

Our lives will represent the Lord Jesus Christ in his body as when he was on earth for his name's sake, we are inevitably, inextricably as believers, representatives of God on this earth. So I think we all want to be led in the path of righteousness because of God's name. I can remember when I was a very small child, my dad would often conclude a prayer by saying, we pray this in Jesus name and for his sake, amen.

In Jesus name and for his sake, he leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake. So how do people know that we are representatives of the Lord Jesus Christ, that we are God's children on this earth? What did Jesus himself say? By this shall all men know that you are my disciples. What is the measure? Love.

Love is sacrificial to self. It is beneficial to others. Read Corinthians, love does not seek its own.

It keeps no record of wrongs. Love is patient. Love is compassionate.

It judges every one of us. Read the chapter. We can easily, remember when you were a child, we can easily measure is my point.

I find that I only say half a sentence and then I go off on a tangent and I don't ever come back and finish it. We can easily measure. Think about when you were a child and your parents would take you to a doorway or some inconspicuous wall and stick the ruler on your head and make a mark and then put a date.

This is how tall Sam was on such and such a day in 1963. Here's one in 1964. You can see them, you know, you get into your early teens and all of a sudden there's a great gap between the lines.

You get your growth. Well, what is the measure of our spirituality, of our wise heart? How does righteousness get measured? If he's going to lead me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake, how do I know I am on a righteous path? How do I know my life is characterized by and is expressing righteousness? What is the measure? Where is that wall and how do you determine the marks? It is love. Well, how do I know if there's any love operating in my life? Read the love chapter.

What is the faith chapter? Say it out loud. What's the faith chapter? Hebrews chapter 11. By faith, all of these guys obtained a good report.

By faith, Abraham lived in tents, waiting for a city whose founder and builder is God. Abraham didn't think he was in the kingdom. He lived in a tent.

And he died, still living in tents. Anybody who doesn't think there is a literal millennial kingdom coming has to believe that God was lying when he told Abraham he would get to live in a city that God himself founded and built. Abraham dwelt in tents, waiting for a city, a concrete, marble, gold, pearl city with gates, with walls, built four square, whose founder and builder is God.

Anybody that questions the literal millennium, which is most of Christianity today, ask them about Abraham. So, what's up with Abraham? When he comes back, is he just going to see a bunch of Christians walking around, helping the poor, and that's the kingdom, that's his city? Is he even going to come back? A lot of them don't even believe

in a literal resurrection anymore. Love is the measure.

So, the faith chapter is Hebrews 11. What is the love chapter? 1 Corinthians 13. Read it.

Stand up against that wall. Am I patient? Am I kind? Do I keep no record of wrongs? Am I speaking with the tongues of men and angels, but I don't have love, so I'm just a noise? Am I throwing myself sacrificially, giving my body to be burned, but it's not actually benefiting anyone? Who's benefited if I go throw myself on a bonfire? It doesn't help anyone. It's better to stay alive and do what you can do than to give your body to be burned.

This is what people do when they get cremated and they don't donate their organs, for example. So, that is the measure. And oddly enough, that seemingly New Testament concept is what Proverbs is all about, because wisdom is righteousness, and righteousness expresses itself in love.

This is why when you come to the end of this chapter, the righteous will flourish like foliage. The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life. It's not just a little fig that forms in his own possession.

It's a tree of life. A tree provides an abundance. This is a wonderful, healthy, foliage-filled tree.

That's why Jesus was so disappointed. The fig tree had all kinds of leaves, but no fruit. This is a tree of life.

So, what does it mean then at the second verse there in 30? And he who wins souls is wise. Is this an evangelism verse? We'll take our break, and when we come back, we will figure it out.