

Proverbs 23-10-04a

Greetings, welcome to Wednesday Night Bible Study at Grace and Truth Bible Church. We're continuing to enjoy and benefit from this section in chapter 12. We missed a week, but we're going to return to chapter 12 and look at the second half of it tonight.

It is a great example of the hidden structure and beauty and integrity of the Proverbs. As we have seen, far from being a pastiche or a crazy quilt, there is great design and intent in the presentation of these truths, and that I think will become apparent tonight. Let's take a moment to ask God's blessing on our fellowship and our study, and we'll begin.

Father, what a wonderful privilege it is to have our souls nourished from the wonderful truth we find in Your Word. We thank You for the presence and power of Your Holy Spirit to enable us to understand it, to remember it, and to see its application. We pray that all of those things will take place as we gather together around the spiritual table of fellowship and worship and instruction.

We pray that as a result, each one will be edified, all of us will benefit from the action and function of our own spiritual gift and those of others, that we will be more fully prepared to represent the Lord Jesus as His body on this earth, to shine as lights in the midst of our generation, and to let others see Christ in us and be drawn to You as a result. We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.

As you may remember, chapter 12 is a beautiful passage. It is composed of 28 verses. It divides exactly in half.

The first 14 verses are one section. The remaining 14 verses are a second section, or sub-unit, as the scholars like to say. These are both addressing our words and our deeds.

It doesn't get any more practical than that. Words and deeds. Each section begins with an overall thematic statement, sort of a summary conclusion that contrasts those who are wise with those who are foolish.

It isn't just that this information is important. We literally cannot be wise without it. The wise will take it on board.

The foolish will ignore it, not find it helpful, move on to their own lights. Each of these sections concludes with a synthetic statement, something that draws things together and presents a beautiful summary. So there is an introduction, and there is a conclusion.

And the units themselves are further divided into sub-units. We've already looked at this first section. And my only point in bringing this up, I would encourage you, if you want to make bracket marks out in the margins or whatever, but this is our pattern.

This is our model. After the first 10 chapters of introduction, and we start launching into

this first collection of parables, it is orderly, it is intentional, and it is structural. So in chapter 12, you are going to see that the wise build into and partake of permanence.

The foolish are impermanent, transient, ephemeral. And I think all of us, especially when you start contemplating life and death, you attend a funeral, you look at pictures of yourself a few years ago, you find that the idea of something that lasts, something that goes beyond the moment, something that persists and partakes of the eternal instead of the momentary, appeals to all of us. Even unbelievers will try to leave something behind, whether it's their family, it's a tradition, it's a monument, it's some accomplishment, their name on anything from a pew to a wing of a hospital.

But we all recognize that life is short. And we would love to transcend this brief moment of the sunshine, the grass withers, the flower fades. It's the word of God that stands forever.

So this particular contrast of the wise and the foolish talks about permanence versus impermanence relative to what we say and what we do. Can't think of anything more pertinent that has more traction or more interest for us as believers who want to leverage our gift of eternal life into something more than I'll get resurrected. So that's what this deals with.

So the first three verses were the introduction that reminds us that it is the Lord that brings these things about. This is by way of review. These are not just abstract laws of physics or the universe or ethics.

God sees to these effects, these outcomes. And so we have this interaction between character, between conduct and consequences. That's my alliteration for the night.

Character, conduct and consequences with respect to what we say and what we do. So the first three verses of this chapter laid out this relationship. Then we had two equal sub units that follow that in verses four through seven pertaining to speech and verses eight through 12 that pertain to deeds.

And if you are accustomed to making notes in the margin of your Bible, you can just draw a little curly bracket or put little corners on the outside and four through seven address speech, eight through 12 address deeds. In the conclusion, which is in verses 13 and 14, the two topics are united and you find that this section is sort of lassoed or bracketed by references to good, tov, T-O-V or V as we've noted previously in verses two and verse 14. Good people in verse two, good things in verse 14.

And that sort of serves as a frame. We've looked at this in some detail. I'm not going to review that detail except to say that after the introduction in verses four through seven, which is the speech section, this primarily has to do with the household.

So you have the wife mentioned, you have the work that is accomplished, plans that are

made and so on. Uh, and how these plans are put into effect and plans give rise to words. You can't really communicate your plan if you don't talk about it.

And this has to do with speech. So in verse seven, you have, uh, the house of the righteous will stand. What is the effect of our communication? What we emphasize, what is the substance of our conversation and our interaction with others? So then in the second section, we have deeds and this has to do with property.

The household is interacting with people. The deeds is more, what do we do with our stewardship, with our opportunities? And so we saw this, uh, dealing with the, uh, man who works for himself. We've corrected the translation a bit.

Um, so, uh, beginning in verse eight, a man will be commended according to his wisdom. The one of a perverse heart will be despised. Well, how do you know if someone has a perverse heart? How do you know if someone is wise, it is reflected in what they do or what they fail to do.

And this gets more specific in verse nine. Uh, better is the one who is lightly esteemed. Remember it's the very same word, um, that, uh, is used back in, in Samuel for the Lord, uh, lightly esteeming someone.

Um, and it says, but has a servant, but better is, but works for himself. And we've, we looked at the Hebrew to, to correct that. Um, you may be ill thought of, but you're working and accomplishing your own purposes.

It doesn't matter what people think about how you operate and the work that you do, but those who honor themselves and puff themselves up and put on appearances, but they have not worked. Therefore, they don't eat. That's a new Testament principle.

Paul communicates, uh, he who does not work does not eat. And it doesn't matter how many errors you put on or what pretenses and appearances you try to keep up. And this is a biblical principle.

And this is not only just an observation, even secular people might say, well, you know, if you don't work, you don't eat. Although there are many ways around that in, in the human world of, of effort, activity, charity, and so on. But remember, this is bracketed by the Lord God super intends.

And although it may seem that there are those who do not work and yet they eat, there may be those who are, uh, seemingly working the system, getting over. There is a judgment and the momentary success doesn't last. And again, what is our theme? What is permanent versus what is impermanent? There are transient successes.

There are transient, uh, Prosperities. There are transient fame, transient, um, victories, but what is it that lasts? God's people are looking at the longterm. That's why one third

of our Christian virtue is looking ahead.

Hope. What is coming? Our momentary light affliction is working for us an eternal weight of glory. What is light? What is momentary affliction? What is eternal and heavy glory, but we need the word of God and we need the Holy spirit to impress these things on us, to remind us of them so that it isn't an aphorism.

Like one in the hand is worth two in the bush or pie in the or whatever. It needs to be something that motivates us and defines us and changes our priorities and our goals and our values. And that is God's work.

That is God's energy in us. God at work in us to will and to do for his good purpose requires us to reflect on his word and to cultivate the presence and power of his spirit. We do this through Bible class.

We do this through our own personal reflections, devotions, meditations. We do it through prayer and we do it through speaking the truth with one another in love. And these are things that we can decide to do and knowing their purpose and knowing their function, knowing the kind of power that they impart to our life so that these aren't just words on paper, but it becomes characteristic.

It becomes instinctive. It becomes natural. And we're going to see in the ongoing unfolding development of this chapter that that's why the righteous is compared to a root and to a branch and to something that fruits.

This is a natural outcome of a thriving organism. So we've seen this and we then moved to the second section which began in verse 15. And once again, you have the foolish and the wise contrasted.

The way of a fool is right in his own eyes. And you want to talk about something that scripture emphasizes. Remember, this is mentioned over and over again with the use of the tongue reflecting whether one is wise or one is foolish.

And the parallel passages of this are such that it reminds us that God is watching when we go our own way. God's not busy elsewhere. So you can see this in the book of Judges over and over again.

The children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord. You remember that Gilgal pattern we saw in Judges, the rolling wheel. They would be oppressed.

They would come under attack and God would send a judge and he would deliver them and there would be peace for a time. And then you have this refrain, the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord. They forgot the Lord their God, served the Baals and the Asherahs.

This idea of remembering versus forgetting is central to our success. So it is the devil's own business to try to distract us and occupy us and wave one hand while he's picking our spiritual pocket with the other. And that's why prayer evening and morning and at noon reminds us of who we are and why we're here.

From Psalm 55, 17, the example of Daniel who prayed three times a day. Why was David such a success? Why was Daniel such a success overall? Not without failure in David's case, but conscious prayer, breaking up the day, starting the day, interrupting the day and concluding the day in prayer. This is a key.

It shouldn't ever be a mindless recitation. It shouldn't be a superficial habit, but remembering versus forgetting. When Jesus says, watch and pray that you do not enter into, that you don't get led away by temptation, watchfulness, watch and pray, watch and pray.

The Lord Jesus is a model of that kind of prayer. And this is the idea. And so we've seen this in that second section.

What I want to do now is move on to, in other words, the second subunit of the first section. I want to move on to the second section here. And so you have the further expansion of these ideas of speech and deeds.

There's not much else that you can say defines us. You go to any, I've got funerals on the brain for some reason, and those that have departed. But what do you remember as the reflection of someone's life who is no longer here? You remember what they said and you remember what they did.

And there will come a day if the Lord tarries that all of us will exist largely in the memories of people who outlive us. And what will they remember about us? What is our lasting testimony? Anybody can be remembered for good or for ill. But if we are going to have a lasting testimony and a lasting witness to the grace and the power of God, it will be those words and those deeds that define us and that impress themselves in the souls of others.

So this is not idle material by any stretch. So this, again, is introduced as the first section was looking at the wise and the foolish. That was verse one, the one who loves instruction or the one who hates correction.

And now in verse 15, you see the way of a fool is right in his own eyes. And how many times have we seen this reflected in scripture? There is a way that seems right to a man, but the ends thereof are the ways of death. And we're going to see it again in verse two of chapter 16.

You can put this out in the margin beside this. Proverbs 16.2 says, all the ways of a man are pure in his own eyes, but the Lord weighs the spirits, weighs the lives. We think

we're pure.

We judge ourselves good and righteous and well in the center of the average, but it is the Lord that evaluates. You see it again in Proverbs 21, verse two. Every way of a man is right in his own eyes, but the Lord weighs the hearts.

Chapter 14, verse 12. There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death. Chapter 16.

By the way, you remember our observation that the more often scripture says a thing, the more important it is for us to remember. So we have it here. The way of a fool is right in his own eyes.

So that's here in 12.15. You see it again in 14.12. There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death. That is repeated in chapter 16, verse 25. Identically, there is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death.

It is in chapter 16, verse two, as I mentioned, and you see it again in chapter 21, verse two. Every way of a man is right in his own eyes, but the Lord weighs the hearts. He weighs the hearts.

He measures the life, weighs the spirits. So how important is this? Well, very. And instead of saying, well, I'm a wise person doing foolish things, if I am constantly assuming that my sense of rightness determines how right I am, we are the fool.

You can't trust feeling right. All of us can think back. We were so sure.

We had it figured. We were so sure we had parsed a situation. We knew who was at fault.

Somebody took my fill in the blank, and then we find it where we put it. And that sense of certainty that I know I put it right here, someone has taken it, just translate that absolute memory, that absolute feeling of justification. I've got the facts.

I've evaluated this political situation, these people running for office. I've got it figured out, this social issue, this moral issue, this circumstance in someone else's life. And if you live long enough, you discover, oh, there was something I didn't know.

The reason these parents don't seem to be as involved in their children's life as I judge that they should be is they've got an invalid parent that they are taking care of full time to prevent sending them someplace else. And that's why their time is limited and so on. We've all had these experiences where we have woefully misjudged because there were certain facts that we lacked.

There is a way that seems right, but the ends are the way of death. What if something comes out of your mouth by way of judging or slandering and defaming and tearing

someone down based on our observation? And we're so sure we've got it figured. The ends thereof are the ways of death, death to relationships, death to fellowship, death to just righteousness and justice.

We change the way we act. We change the way other people act. Remember, what is the content of this section? Words and deeds, wisdom and foolishness.

We should be chastened by this scripture. Isn't Proverbs practical? It hits us right in the gut, right where we live. It affects how we live every single day.

And by God's grace, with God's spirit being enlightened and illuminated by God's word, we can be better. We can do better. We can be a blessing.

We can be wise. We can be used by God for support and for encouragement and for a buffer and a dampening effect when others want to carry observations to an extreme. They want to defame.

They want to slander and malign and judge and gossip about someone else. You've seen this happen. You get into a group and all of a sudden the person that's not there comes up and, oh, and one wags their head and another wags their tongue and a third tells a story.

And it gathers mass like a grass fire. And you know the thing about a grass fire, there's a lot of heat and light for a moment, but there's not a lot of substance there. You can't, nobody burns grass in their wood stove in the winter.

All it does is singe your eyebrows and your eyelashes off and go away. And what is the result? Harm, death, foolishness. So this is something we can pray about.

This is something we can stop ourselves. If I say I am going to religiously pray in the morning, I am going to interrupt myself in the middle of the day and I am going to conclude my day. Morning, look forward.

Middle of the day, how am I doing? End of the day, look back. This is why all of the military services have some sort of five-paragraph order saying this is what we're going to do. There are people on the ground saying, you know, this is not working.

Let's make a few radio communications and see if we can't improvise, adapt, and overcome. And then there is an after action report. You get together and review.

How did that go? How can we improve? What went right? What went wrong? It's just practical wisdom. But in the spiritual sense, we can transcend the mortal and the limited by going to God in prayer. Let God be a part of the planning.

Let God be a part of the adaptation. And let God be a part of the evaluation. And in His presence and by His Spirit, we can actually be and do better.

We can speak better with our words and we can do better with our hands, our actions. That's what this section is about. And it is so eminently practical.

Well, this brings us now to this section. We're going to find that verse 15 is our introduction. Good understanding gains.

I'm sorry, I'm reading the wrong page. Boy, that happens if you're ever annotating a sermon and you look down and you want to put the reference. And if you're not careful, it's chapter 13 and not chapter 12.

And it comes back to bite you if you have a job like mine. Verse 15, the way of the fool is right in his own eyes. He who heeds counsel is wise.

Notice, heeding counsel. This is applicable in multiple ways. We have the humility to listen to the observations of others.

We have the humility to heed counsel from the Lord Himself through His word and let the Holy Spirit speak to us. Those who speak the truth in love to us. And as we fellowship and endeavor to cultivate the humility that listens, you can circle the word heeds.

Heeds means listening and thinking about, right? You can't heed something you didn't hear. Heed means I've heard a thing and I'm going to do something with it. I don't brush it off.

I don't dismiss it. I don't say, well, consider the source. And conveniently, this is something I may have to do another special on the dangers of progressive theology, progressive Christianity, because it is partaking of something that is widespread in the world around us as a direct feature of post-modernism.

Post-modernism changes, and I'll just give you the quick Christian application of it. What is it that we are to study? What is it that we exegete? What is it that we attempt to understand and use as our authority for faith and practice? It's the scriptures, right? As a result of post-modern thinking creeping into the church, into the life of believers, we are being infected with the virus. Post-modernism doesn't parse the facts, doesn't honestly and objectively look at the evidence.

It parses and exegetes the person presenting those things. That's why if you go to history, whether it's racism, gender issues, any of these politics that are promoted by groups that are defined by various issues, if you try to bring up facts, what is the immediate response? You're saying that because you are fill-in-the-blank. That's your systemic X coming out, and you begin to exegete the person instead of exegeting the facts that they bring up.

Facts could be written on the bathroom wall, and if they're facts, they ought to make a difference. But if you say, I can't trust anything written on a bathroom wall, and you

refuse to consider how factual is this, is this in fact science, is this in fact scripture, and instead you're constantly parsing the source and exegeting the person with whom you have a difference, this is fatal, and it is antithetical to the word of God. Do you want to throw out the Psalms because David did the Bathsheba thing and had Uriah murdered? Okay, he's a faulty source.

Look at him. He's an adulterer and a murderer. No Psalms for me.

Wrong answer. All of us are psychoceramics. All of us are cracked pots.

All of us are flawed. All of us are sinful, and yet God uses us. Evangelism, God has chosen to accomplish it through people.

God could have an angel appear at the point of closest approach and say, I'm here to tell you that there's a God and His Son is Jesus Christ. He died for your sins. Do you want to accept Him or not? God doesn't use angels for evangelism.

He doesn't use skywriting. He uses people who present the truth. And if you are talking with someone and endeavoring to share with them the beauty of the grace of God in Christ and the opportunity to be delivered from our sin and our hopeless, useless life, and they say, well, you know, I remember some rascally things that you've done.

You've committed some sins. You don't have any credibility with me. Nobody would be saved.

There is none that doeth righteousness, no, not one, consistently and without fault, to use ad hominem and to use personality. And the convenience of this is even when there is legitimate, has there been actual racism perpetrated? Of course. Has there been actual suppression of women when there should not have been? Of course.

Has there been fill in the blank here of a social issue? Has there been injustice? Has there been wrongdoing? Have there been victims? Have there been perpetrators? Of course. But if you try to provide balance, if you try to speak truth from the word of God, and someone says, that's just your systemic function appearing. You're unconsciously this or that or the other.

You can't help it because you are this color or this gender or this background, this economic status. It is impossible for you to say anything that I'm going to listen to because I classify you in this group. Nobody is ever going to receive truth that can rebuke, correct and instruct when it comes to the Christian realm.

And there is going to be no meeting of the minds, even in the social political climate in which we live. Everyone is in attack mode on personality and on origin and on background experience. And if someone speaks a truth, that truth can be dismissed because, well, consider the source.

Well, there are no pristine sources except the word of God. And if someone is speaking the word of God and you say, well, you're just quoting that verse, you know, women, wives be in subjection to your husband. You're a man saying that I can't listen to you because you're a man.

Well, what does the word of God say? We should all go to the word of God. Now, how you understand it, that's through the Holy Spirit and before the Lord. It is, it should not diminish or be abused.

If a man goes to that scripture and uses it to abuse and belittle his wife, he's going to be standing on the yellow footprints in front of God's desk. And God is going to ensure that his wife is not a victim for long. There are remedies, there are recourses, but the whole issue here is what do we speak? What do we do? And is it based on the absolute standard of the word of God? Or are we busy exegeting the exegete and saying, well, I don't have to listen to that because there's something wrong with you.

We are in this age, all priests. We are a kingdom of priests and a holy nation in the spiritual sense. We connect to God directly through our high priest, the Lord Jesus Christ.

And if the Lord Jesus Christ sends us information from his word, that's what we consider. We prayerfully reflect on it. We cultivate the illumination and the power of God's Holy Spirit to understand it and to apply it.

And it doesn't matter who said it. I have gotten some very profound insights from people with whom I theologically am on one side of the Grand Canyon and they're on the other, but they said a good thing. I get insights from what I consider to be bad commentaries.

I read reformed commentaries and I'm not reformed. I listen to Pentecostal observations and I'm not Pentecostal. And the truth is the truth.

And God's word carries its own authority. The word of God doesn't get authority because any particular individual speaks it. That leads to confusion because what if that person is talking about something that's not the word of God, but you've assigned them authority.

So now their opinions and their politics and their likes and dislikes start coming through as though they have God's authority with them when they don't. The authority of the word of God comes from God himself, not the communicator, which means that regardless of how the information comes to us, we take it to God. We pray through it.

We reflect on it. We ask for understanding, ask and it shall be given, seek and you will find, knock and it will be open to you regardless of the source, human source. If it's the word of God, it carries its own power and its own authority.

And in the hands of the Holy Spirit, it will transcend whatever the flaws of the communicator might be. If we could remember this, there would be a much more ironic

discussion about social issues as they impinge on the church and problems that crop up in a church and how they should be handled. I'm talking now about, you know, big churches that have these problems where we're blessed to be small and largely free of that kind of thing.

But this is why Proverbs is so critical to understand. What do we say and why do we say it? What do we do and why do we do it? It can't be, well, I'm a part of a social justice warrior crew. It needs to be because I am body of Christ.

I am a representative of the Lord God in heaven. I am a member of his royal family and I need to be thinking and acting and speaking in a way that reflects that. Well, that's the difference between wisdom and foolishness.

We can be a fool and think that we are totally right. How many times, just in Proverbs alone, not to mention quotations elsewhere, but we've got a half dozen references to caution about being right in our own eyes. You can't trust that feeling of rightness.

We need an objective standard. Did you ever lay out in the sun on a summer day, go to the lake, get on a boat, swim, float? You feel fine and it isn't until you get back that you realize that you are thoroughly roasted and your skin is going to peel. Your nerves didn't tell you you were getting burned.

Thought you were fine. Didn't know your sunscreen washed off or didn't think it was a cloudy day and you weren't getting burned. Can't trust that feeling of everything is okay.

It is the Word of God and the Spirit of God that convict. Holy Spirit will convict of sin, righteousness, and judgment. It is the Word that gives us doctrine and rebuke and correction and instruction so that we can represent the Lord Jesus as we should.

Well, more about this when we come back from the break.