

Proverbs 23-11-15a

Greetings, welcome to Wednesday night Bible study at Grace and Truth Bible Church. This is the 15th of November, 2023. We're in Proverbs chapter 2. We're looking at this really wonderful section in verses 16 through 23, introduced by verse 15.

It is a microcosm, it's a nutshell, it is a great example of how the book of Proverbs works. How to read it, how to understand it, how to benefit from it, and how beautifully inspired and practical it is for our daily walk before the Lord. We're going to be picking up, doing a quick review there, and hopefully finish this section and perhaps move into the next tonight.

So if you're located in Proverbs chapter 12, right about in the middle, looking at the way of the fool in verse 15, that's a great place for us to start. Let's ask God's blessing on our fellowship and our study, and we'll begin. Father, it is such a privilege to gather with believers who share an enthusiasm for your plan and your purpose as fully revealed in the Lord Jesus Christ, our Savior.

What a privilege it is to represent Him in this time and as His body, and to be guided and strengthened by Your Word, enabled and empowered by Your Spirit, and looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, to see how those two expressions of Your power and purpose work together in our hearts and lives. We pray that this portion of scripture will be meaningful and helpful to each one of us, that we'll see its practical application and its outworking as we navigate the rocks and shoals of our circumstances and relationships. We pray that in all things the Lord Jesus will be glorified.

We ask it in His name. Amen. Let's quickly review our passage.

It's been a week since we looked at it. Beginning, I'm going to, even though this section is verses 16 through 23, it is really introduced by verse 15. So we will read 15 through 23.

15. The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, but he who heeds counsel is wise. 16.

A fool's wrath is known at once, but a prudent man covers shame. 17. He who speaks truth declares righteousness, but a false witness deceit.

18. There is one who speaks like the piercings of a sword, but the tongue of the wise promotes health. 19.

The truthful lip shall be established forever, but a lying tongue is but for a moment. 20. Deceit is in the heart of those who devise evil, but counselors of peace have joy.

21. No grave trouble will overtake the righteous, but the wicked shall be filled with evil. 22.

Lying lips are an abomination to the Lord, but those who deal truthfully are His delight.
23. A prudent man conceals knowledge, but the heart of fools proclaims foolishness.

At first glance, you say, well, this is a collection of somewhat disconnected observations. They do seem to hang together around the theme of what is wise and what is foolish and speech, what someone says. Does their speech reflect truth or deceit? Is it healthy or unhealthy? Is it good or bad? And some of them seem a bit like a tautology, sort of an obvious mechanism there.

He who speaks truth declares righteousness. You would expect that that would be true. We've delved into this now for the last few weeks and I want to pick up here because the overarching theme that weaves a thread through these verses is found in verse 15, the way of a fool.

And the way of a fool is right in his own eyes. He who heeds counsel is wise. And looking at this, you can say, well, this will help me identify fools in my periphery and fools on my television set, fools on the streaming news and up in government.

And I'll be able to tell, you know, if they're speaking deceit or causing harm or whatever, that this will help me identify them. I really and truly firmly believe that the purpose of this instruction here is for self-diagnosis. It is very difficult to figure out that we're being foolish because we don't feel like a fool initially.

It is mostly in retrospect or after we see the reaction of others that we suddenly say, oh, I should have remained silent and be thought a fool instead of opening my mouth and removing all doubt. And these are great for self-diagnosis. Even if you could identify a fool and say, well, he's treacherous, he's unstable, he's harmful.

I should stay away from him or that group characterized by these things. Really, the benefit in understanding this description is to identify it ourselves. There are many self-exams that people can do for various maladies.

They tell ladies how to do a lump check for breast cancer and to watch for various symptoms that might indicate that we have some sort of a health issue. This description of the fool and this description of wise and foolish speech is something that we first and foremost should apply to ourselves. And when we catch ourselves matching this description, we think back to the introduction, these first 10 chapters that contrasted the way of wisdom, lady wisdom calling out at the gate and in the concourse and in the public square and the crafty harlot calling to the fool to be seduced and deceived and led down a dark street.

Instead of her ways being ways of pleasantness and all her paths being peace, it is a dark road that leads to death and destruction. And there are many kinds of death and destruction. It can be social.

It can be relational. It can be economic. It can be lost opportunities.

It can be wasted time. It can be painting ourselves into a corner in any manner of circumstances. So this description should be useful to those of us who have studied the first 10 chapters and are committed to not going the way of the foolish.

To not ending up walking in the paths of the ungodly or standing in the way of sinners or sitting in the seat of the scornful, delighting ourselves in the law of the Lord, as it says in Psalm 1. So as we go through these descriptions, it's so easy to say, you know, I know somebody just like that. I saw that happen on my TV screen just earlier today or I see it regularly here or there or somewhere else. And we're quick to say, boy, I wish that person could hear this study.

I wish that person would read this portion of Proverbs and come to their senses. It's fruitless to do that. It's a deflection and it's sort of an unconscious defense mechanism.

What we want to do is look at this and say, there but for the grace of God go I. And if I am not careful and diligent to look for God's grace and avail myself of this illumination on my heart, I will receive and experience these negative outcomes instead of the positive. It's for me, my heart, my tongue, my effect on others. So that's how we should look at it.

And so when we begin in verse 15 with the way of the fool being right in his own eyes, what does this remind you of? You think about Jeremiah 17, 9, the heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked. Who can know it? Who can detect it in themselves that I'm deceiving myself, that I'm fooling myself. I'm giving myself a false picture of reality.

Our heart is what is supposed to detect truth and falsehood and wisdom and foolishness. But if our heart is deceitful, the tool we need is gone. It's like needing to find studs in a wall and you've got a stud sensor but the battery's dead.

And it never tells you where the meat behind the sheetrock is. It's of no use. And you're going to end up tearing things up trying to find structure and stability.

So you have Jeremiah 17, 9. You have Proverbs 14, 12, which is repeated in Proverbs 16, 25. There is a way that seemeth right to a man, but the ends thereof are the ways of death. Seems right.

Why would I not trust my rightness detector? I am right in this. My opinion, my evaluation is right. And if we don't detect it, if we don't refer to an outside reference, we're going to think we're right and we're going to end up in the ways of death.

That is the way of the fool. So verse 15 sets it up. The way of a fool is right in his own eyes.

So here is the exhortation right there in verse 15. Remember in the New Testament it says, let any man who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall. As soon as I no longer question if I am in the right, as soon as I am very self-confident, there is no visible line between confidence and overconfidence.

It's a seamless transition from being confident to being dangerously overconfident in what we know, what we think, how we measure and evaluate. And we need to check ourselves. You know, Paul says, examine yourself to see if you are in the faith.

And we should regularly question, any time we feel cocksure, that's the time to worry. Because at the point that we are sure, we stop learning. We stop growing.

We stop the process of gathering information. I've already got that figured out. Don't bother me with the facts, my mind's made up.

So that is the introduction to this whole section. Now we saw last time that this is very tightly woven and carefully structured. When you just read it in passing, it sounds like kind of a hodgepodge.

Generally held together with a thread of speech, wisdom and foolishness. But it's very tightly constructed. So you remember that you have the even verses are characterized by giving the negative, followed by the positive.

The odd numbered verses are characterized by the positive, followed by the negative. And this pertains to this whole section. And that's no accident.

Negative, positive, positive, negative. Negative, positive, positive, negative. All the way through this section.

It is stitched together. These are designed to be taken as a unit. Not isolated and proof-texted.

But they are taking a unified conceptual piece and turning it in the light and showing it from different angles and different sides. So when you get to verse 22, you realize that all of this is overseen, structured and guaranteed by the Lord Himself. So the Lord evaluates.

And the negatives are an abomination in His sight. Those who deal truthfully are His delight. Once again, you don't find the lukewarm idea.

You're either hot or cold. It's easy to figure out what to do with you if you're hot or you're cold. But being lukewarm, it's not considered here.

Well, sometimes I'm smart and sometimes I'm dumb. Sometimes I'm wise and sometimes I'm the fool. Our status is either delight or abomination in the Lord's sight.

And if there's any adulteration, how much foreign matter does it take in the punch bowl before nobody wants to drink? It doesn't matter how much punch is in there. One dead floating insect or worse spoils the whole thing. And we get the idea that we need to be dedicated to the positives here.

So what are they? Well, the characteristics of a fool are given throughout Proverbs and indeed throughout the scriptures. But the word that we looked at last time, AWIL, E-W-I-L, most of its uses are in Proverbs. So you have this description.

It is a derogatory word and it refers to people who have a moral deficiency. Where do we get our moral sufficiency? Can we adopt it? Can we choose it? Can we just say, I'm going to be high-minded and ethical and very moral? There is no power in that kind of wishful thinking. We are broken.

We are decrepit. We are corrupted. We are fallen.

And wishing a thing to be true is like having extra weight and devoutly wishing and deciding that we are going to be slender and fit. But we have no way to work out. We have no way to limit the bad food we eat in our diet.

And we're stuck with the weight because we don't have a productive way to remove it. It is the same with our foolishness and with our short-sightedness. Only God's power can fix it.

So if there is a moral deficiency, we need the power of God to create moral sufficiency within us. This is why we endeavor to remind ourselves constantly of the importance of the Spirit of God and the Word of God. This is where God's power comes from.

Those who are born of the Spirit, who are keeping in step with the Spirit, who bear the fruit of the Spirit, this is God's power created in us and flowing through us, hopefully being a blessing to ourselves and others. And the power of God's Word. It is alive and powerful, sharper than a two-edged sword, piercing to the dividing asunder of the soul and spirit, the joints and the marrow.

It is a critic, a judge, a discerner of the thoughts and intents of our heart. Notice the heart can't necessarily discern its own thoughts and intents because the heart is deceitful and desperately wicked. We can't get knowledge from our own heart.

It is the Word of God that enables us to measure, evaluate, and find what needs to be confessed and what needs to be eliminated in our hearts. We understand this. This is interesting to find though in the book of Proverbs in the Old Testament how important it is to be aware of God's presence and God's power as the only way to get this moral sufficiency that keeps us from being a fool.

So when you look at the uses of this word, you find that the fool has many characteristics

that we can look for in ourselves and realize that we are needing change. The wise and the foolish are antonyms. The fool is characterized by folly.

So the foolishness of fools is folly. You find this, we'll see it in chapter 14 verse 24. Contrasted with the crown of the wise in chapter 17 verse 12.

Let a man meet a bear robbed of her cubs rather than a fool in his folly. You will be less at risk for damage and harm from a bear robbed of her cubs. Remember in Proverbs 26 within the space of a couple of verses it says answer a fool according to his folly lest he be wise in his own eyes and then do not answer a fool according to his folly lest you also be like him.

They say well this is a hopeless contradiction. The juxtaposition they're not in separate chapters, they're not separated by great distance because as in Ecclesiastes by the same author, there is a time to gather stones and a time to cast them away. There is a time to wound and a time to heal.

There's a time for war and a time for peace and there is a time to answer a fool according to his folly lest he be wise in his own eyes. There's a time to not answer that same fool according to his folly lest you be like him. So those apotheosis statements, you know the prothesis is answer or don't answer the concomitant, the second line, what is the more likely outcome if I give an answer to this fool? Am I just going to be like him or is there a chance that he can realize that he's being wise in his own eyes? Being wise in your own eyes as we have just been noting is a characteristic of being the fool.

We should be cautious, we should be humble, we should be good listeners, we should try to evaluate the viewpoints of others even when at first blush it might be very off-putting. Even if their conclusion is false do their arguments have some traction or merit or substance and maybe there is a different conclusion to be drawn but the observations they make could be sound. There would have been a completely different outcome in let's say the push to get everyone vaccinated for COVID-19 if all of the facts and all of the data had been calmly evaluated by people on both sides instead of becoming so polarized and suppressing information and so on as just a recent example.

To not immediately assume vaccine bad or vaccine good but let's get the data. What people kept saying follow the science and then two sentences later they had abandoned the science and were going with policy and with instinct and with knee-jerk response and with a lot of other things and then forcing other people to conform and running people out of their professions, out of the military service, out of aviation and the rest of it if they would not conform to something that hadn't really been fully evaluated and when contrary data started coming in it was suppressed. This is a fact beyond any dispute and yet it happened.

Well, this is an example. I'm not picking on plus or minus vaccination. I'm saying this is

an example of what happens and how we can become foolish when we are sure we're right and we stop listening.

We don't have humility. We no longer learn. Humility is teachability.

Being receptive to information that maybe we don't have and it comes from the outside and then we weigh it against the scales that are built in our soul by God's word. So, you have this. The description in Proverbs is that the fool is not only characterized by folly in general but there are specific aspects of it.

The fool despises discipline and despises correction. Once I've come out with a position, I don't want to be corrected on it. So, in chapter 15 verse 5, a fool despises even his father's instruction.

The father is one of the first sources of wisdom and instruction. You see this throughout the Psalms as well as the Proverbs. My son, in Proverbs, in Psalm 2 and in Proverbs chapter 2. My son, if you will receive correction.

Proverbs is what I meant. Proverbs chapter 2. 15-20 of Proverbs. A wise son makes a father glad.

A foolish man despises his mother. Unwilling to take guidance and instruction and counsel on board. You more often get, in the classic family structure, you get instruction from the father and you get counsel from the mother.

Advice and discussion and looking at alternatives. The principles and so on typically come from the father. This is what's right, this is what's wrong.

And you have more of the communication of that structure from the father and more of the application and how it works out in practical terms from the mother. This is often the case, not always. The fool obviously lacks wisdom.

Proverbs 10-14 Wise people store up knowledge. This is why we do Bible class four sessions a week. We're trying to store up knowledge.

But the mouth of the foolish is associated with, is near unto destruction. Where there's destructive outcome, where there's a destructive result, you will find that the mouth of the foolish has been at work. There is 10-21 of Proverbs The lips of the righteous feed many.

The outcome of this speech is wisdom, is benefit, is health, and productive outcome for those around. The lips of the righteous feed many, but fools die for lack of wisdom. Not only can they not help others, they can't even help themselves.

So, the wise, their lips benefit themselves and others. The fool, he dies for lack of wisdom. 10-21 of Proverbs Proverbs 14-33 Wisdom rests in the heart of him who has

understanding.

Why? Because understanding its necessity, he stores it up. He treasures it. He collects it.

He looks for it and finds it. What is in the heart of fools is made known. And we see this in other places.

We see it here in our context. Verse 16 here, the fool's wrath is known at once. A prudent man covers shame.

The speech of the foolish is harmful and deleterious. Proverbs 10-8 of Proverbs The wise in heart receive commands, but a prating fool will fall. He's going to walk without instruction and he's going to trip and fall.

Two verses later, Proverbs 10-10 He who winks with the eye causes trouble and a prating fool will fall. Proverbs 17-28 Even a fool, this is our old better to remain silent and be thought a fool than to open your mouth and remove all doubt. That wisdom is sourced here in Proverbs 17-28 Even a fool is counted wise when he holds his peace.

When he shuts his lip, he's considered perceptive. Proverbs 27-3 A stone is heavy, sand is weighty, but a fool's wrath is heavier than both of them. It's an obstacle difficult to remove.

It prevents progress. It trips people. It traps people.

It's a burden and a hardship. And that wrath is what we see in our very next verse. Verse 16 A fool spreads slander with his speech and his lips.

This is Proverbs 10-18. Whoever hides hatred has lying lips. This is hiding in the sense of harboring, of keeping inside.

Whoever harbors hatred has lying lips. And whoever spreads slander is a fool. That hatred works itself out in speech.

And that is the characteristic of the fool. So, if I find myself bad-mouthing people and thinking I am totally justified in doing so, this is a symptom to watch out for. Let me think back over my last half a day or my last day, my last few conversations.

Who was I talking with in the family or at work or in my circle of acquaintance recently? And was a part of that conversation me pointing out the flaws and the faults and the shortcomings and the failures of someone? Someone in public life? Someone near at hand? Guess what? I'm a fool. And I ought to sing with Elvis Presley, Treat me like a fool. Treat me mean and cruel and don't love me because I'm a fool.

The fool spreads slander. And that slander is usually sourced in hatred and rather than just trying to control my lips and button my lips, what I ought to do is go back to my

heart and root out that hatred. What is the source of that hatred? I can disagree on principle with many people, but if I begin to make that personal, if I begin to hate the person instead of the policy or the belief system or the actions that they produce and I have personal individual hatred, that's a problem.

And that's my problem, not theirs. Remember in the New Testament when you get there and it says even the angels don't lodge a railing accusation against Satan, but the Lord rebuke you. The angels know the danger of this personal hatred and it working itself out in speech.

And so they say, the Lord rebuke you. And I'll say, you rascal, look at what you've done to some of my angel friends that followed you, you duped them, you deceived them, you made them fall. You could imagine that some of the unfallen angels, it'll be so interesting to find out what that history is.

But they don't lodge a railing accusation. The Lord rebuke you. God will take care of you.

That vengeance is mine, I will repay, saith the Lord, applies to you. And I'm not going to get between you and the Lord. The Lord can do your rebuke.

Well, whoever hides hatred, their lips are going to lie. Even when they think they're telling the truth, they're going to disparage and they're going to discredit someone and it won't even be true. They will slander someone falsely and unjustly and unfairly.

And they will, the judgment that they are trying to work on someone else is going to fall on themselves. It's a promise of scripture. We have to be so careful to avoid negative talk about people.

If we find ourselves doing it, stop the talk and then go dig into the heart. Again, this is Proverbs 10, 18. Whoever harbors hatred has lying lips.

If you've got hatred in your heart, you're going to be telling lies. You can't help it. You will embrace and spread falsehood.

Whoever spreads slander, that's the fool. I don't want to be the fool. I've had 10 chapters of don't be a fool, be wise, listen to lady wisdom, don't be seduced by the crafty harlot.

10 chapters of that. Of exhortation, of example, of description. So, I don't want to be a fool.

I've got to take these descriptions and apply them to myself. This is what we want to do. So, an easy thing to examine is our speech.

And sometimes we'll have loved ones close at hand. You can say, you know, that's some harsh conversation we're getting into here. Can we turn this into a more productive area? I really don't want to go down that road.

Remember that lesson we had in Proverbs here these last week or two? Let's not get into that mode. Any unbeliever can trash talk. Any unbeliever can slander and bad mouth.

Let's find something productive. Let's find something up-building. Let's be wise and not fools.

Proverbs 10, 18. And our passage here, Proverbs 12, 23, a prudent man conceals, harbors knowledge. And you don't always tell what you know.

You've got to read the room. You can push someone away. You can cast pearls before swine.

Read the room. Hold on to your knowledge as a part of prudence. Prudent man conceals knowledge.

The heart of the fool proclaims foolishness. Proverbs 12, 23. Right here in our section.

If we haven't examined that heart and gotten God to clean it out, purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean. Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. We acknowledge our sins.

God will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. Create in me a clean heart, O God. Renew a right spirit within me.

Psalms 51. So the prudent man, and notice this is the culminating fruit of the Spirit. The first one is love, and the last one is self-control.

That's the bracket. Those parentheses are equal. Love without control, without self-control quickly ceases to be love, and it becomes harmful instead of helpful.

It creates codependency instead of comfort and encouragement, and strengthening one another. Self-control. Proverbs chapter 15, verse 2. The tongue of the wise uses knowledge rightly.

You don't always use knowledge. When you're going to use it, it comes out right. So when I speak, if I'm sharing what I learned in Bible class, or what I know from the Word of God, or my experiences in the past, am I using my knowledge rightly? That's the tongue of the wise.

The mouth of fools pours forth foolishness with all of its danger, damage, division. There's your three Ds. Danger, damage, and division.

The mouth of the fool pours forth foolishness. Do I talk too much? Some of us, especially if you're given a communication assignment, the bane of your existence is not knowing when to shut up. Running long, saying too much.

The tongue of the wise uses knowledge rightly. The mouth of fools pours forth. It's a gusher.

My dad used to say it's like asking a fire station for a drink. All I needed was a glass of water. Well, this is what we want to use for self- diagnosis.

It's fine to note, to perceive, to identify foolishness around us and you want to avoid going too far down the road of tight relationship and intermingling and joining a pack of fools or entering into their foolishness. But this is primarily for us so that we can examine ourselves to see if we're in the faith. To use our knowledge rightly.

We're right at the 35 minute mark, so we'll pause here and take our break. When we come back, we'll see what else this section of Proverbs, it is so rich, it is so dense, it is so practical. The more we look at it, the more beneficial and helpful it is to us.

And we'll return to it after the break.