

Proverbs 24-09-18a

Greetings, it is Wednesday night here at Grace & Truth Bible Church, and we are resuming after a seven month hiatus. Is that a sabbatical? Seven months, is that a sabbatical? We put Proverbs on hold for a few months while we covered some special material, including Paul's stewardship of the mysteries and some very interesting and helpful truth from the pastoral epistles. And we took a quick look at the first few miracles of the Lord Jesus, but we are returning tonight to our Proverbs study.

This gets us back in our standard pattern of Old Testament, New Testament, alternating meetings. And so we'll be in Proverbs chapter 14, where we left off back in February. Let's ask God's blessing on our fellowship and study, and we'll begin.

Father, we're so grateful for this time of fellowship and edification where spending time together gives us the benefit of the spiritual gifts that you've distributed, encouragement, intercession, the kind of spiritual friendship that makes us a family and draws us closer to you through the Lord Jesus and through the ministry of the Holy Spirit. We pray that as we look at this truth, the Spirit will minister it to our hearts, help us to understand it and see how it applies in our current situation, the circumstances and challenges that we face, the opportunities that we have, so that we can grow in grace and knowledge of the Savior, we can be more like Him and represent Him more fully as we shine the light and reflect the light of your glory as representatives on this earth, that in all things, the Lord Jesus will be glorified and that you will find our lives pleasing in your sight, an acceptable sacrifice of a sweet-smelling savor. We ask it in Jesus' name, amen.

Well, it might be good to read our passage since it's been an interval of time, but before we do, let me just point out once again that Proverbs can look like a collection of scattered and seemingly disconnected aphorisms. I was reviewing the translation by Robert Alter of the Wisdom Books. He has done a translation of Job, Proverbs and Ecclesiastes, which is a resort back to the Hebrew and an endeavor to bring the Hebrew alive in a fresh way.

And it is extensively footnoted, but coming to Proverbs 14, we're going to see that there is a rather significant statement in verse 10. And so Robert Alter says, in the midst of the didactic platitudes of this chapter, we suddenly get an arresting aphorism about the incommensurability of each person's private experience. And so he sees these as didactic platitudes, and it's understandable if you just look at them in isolation.

We have learned together over the years that the setting in which you find each verse of scripture, each statement, each development in an episode, each Psalm verse is connected and is laid in a pattern. It's part of a fabric and to detect and understand something of that setting is so helpful in figuring out exactly what's going on. So if you

just pull a proverb out of its setting, it may still have value.

We often quote one that's coming up in this passage. There is a way that seems right to a man, but the ends that are ever the ways of death, that's coming up in our chapter. And it can stand alone.

Verse 10 can stand alone. It's a powerful statement of the heart knows its own bitterness and a stranger does not share its joy. You can think about that one sort of on its own, but we gain the richness and there is light shed and there is background and three dimensionality on these that otherwise might seem like trite obviousities or bromides that are just not very deep.

And without discerning that structure, Proverbs is quickly abandoned in favor of something more challenging or so it would seem. But we have seen that there is structure, there is a plan, there is design in this book. Let me just remind you that what we have seen is a chiastic pattern.

I'll just go back to chapter 13. And if you have your trusty number two pencil, my red Marine Corps pencil is here. I like a number two because it's easily erased if I need to modify it, but it's dark enough to read even on a Bible page.

And I've got a nice soft eraser on this one. But beginning at the beginning of chapter 13, there is a heading there that is a thematic statement talking about the wise son who pays attention to his father's instruction, scoffers do not listen to rebuke. So correction is water off a duck's back where someone who heeds instruction and notes that there are authoritative sources of instruction.

And so this is the son father metaphor, but any authoritative structure by which God brings us instruction, it's his word that carries divine authority. It is the words and works of the Lord Jesus, the pattern of behavior in the old Testament and in the new, this is an authoritative source of instruction. And it doesn't have to be your father presenting it.

It can be a pastor, it can be a teacher, it can be a wise fellow believer, it can be a mother, it can be a brother or sister in Christ. The authority lies with the message itself. And the advice, the counsel is as authoritative as the scripture upon which it is founded and the extent to which it accurately reflects that scripture.

So people think that the Bible is patristic, that it concentrates on the men and fathers and sons. Well, where are the mothers and the daughters? Remember that this is a way of talking about authority in general and those who can provide wise instruction in general. And don't feel left out just because the metaphor happens to be male.

We used to understand this in the English language where when talking about people in the abstract, we would say he and him and use the masculine. It wasn't an attempt to put women down or denigrate children or anything else. It was just a convenience, but

people took offense and now you've got to say she, he, him, her, them, it.

And it's just silliness. I think people ought to get over themselves. It wouldn't bother me if the pattern had been all feminine.

Be that as it may. That is the statement, but now notice the pattern. And if you haven't marked in your Bible already, verse two through verse six is a unit.

These are not a quilt of random sayings. So verse two and verse three are the lead-in to the center of the chiasm, which is a dis-stitch, a two line statement in verse four. Verse four is the center.

So in my Bible, I draw a V shape that starts on the outside corners of verse two and ends at verse four. So I've got a V there and then verse four is circled. Now at verse five and extending through the bottom corners of verse six, I've got an upside down V. So it makes an X with my circled verse at the center.

And we have seen this. I'm not gonna review the details, but if you draw that shape and then look at the correspondence between verse two and verse six, there are thematic similarities. And in many cases, there are even similar words.

And the same thing with verse three and verse five, they relate to each other. And within these two line statements, the technical word is a di-stitch or a dis-stitch, stitch is a line, di is two. So you will find that there are positive statements and negative statements.

You look at verse two, a man shall eat well by the fruit of his mouth. That's positive. The second line, the soul of the unfaithful feeds on violence, that's a negative.

And so out beside these lines, I will put a plus and a minus. Here's a positive statement, here's a negative statement. And you'll see a pattern of these.

Just like in verse one, a wise son heeding his father's instruction, that's positive. A scoffer failing to listen to rebuke or correction or instruction, that's a negative. And you begin to see that there's a plus minus, plus minus, plus minus, all the way through the verse two and verse three.

But then when you get to verse four, one of the ways you can tell this is the center of the chiasm is that plus minus pattern is reversed. Now, this is all kind of technical. This is form rather than substance.

But if you want to excavate, if you want to study, if you want to dwell on Proverbs and many other parts of scripture, the Psalms often work this way. To make these observations, they were obvious to someone who heard this in Hebrew, who read it in Hebrew. And that's the way their language works.

It rises above itself. It's not just words with meanings. The order of the words, the tense

of the words, and the pattern of sound words that we've just been seeing in 2 Timothy.

The form or pattern, it's important to at least see how it works and then watch for these patterns because this is sort of a second channel God uses to communicate and to emphasize and to link together elements of truth. So I apologize if it seems a little bit dry looking at the form, but once you're sensitive to it, and once you know to look for it, if you come to a passage and it seems to be a bit of a head scratcher, if you step back and take a look at the form, many times it just leaps off the page with meaning and with pertinence and application. And it will create joy in your soul when you realize that God is talking in stereo here.

We don't have to just listen to monaural one channel. There is a second almost commentary that the Bible makes on itself. So again, let's just look at this first chiasm.

So here's the first chiasm as a pattern. Verse two and verse three are positive, negative, positive, negative. And they're heading toward this central idea in verse four, which is the soul of a lazy man that craves.

It has desires, but there's nothing. There's just emptiness. Reminds you of Ecclesiastes, vanity, vanity, all is vanity and a chasing after the wind.

Then when you come back out in reverse, the corresponding verse to verse three is verse five and you're back to the positive, negative. In the middle there, verse four is negative, positive. So it stands apart.

It's circled just by the way it's stated. Then you're back to positive, negative and positive, negative in verse five and verse six. And so that five verse unit of double statements, 10 total statements, it makes a beautiful little symmetry.

And when you begin to study verse two against verse six and you study verse three against verse five, they inform and illuminate each other. So that's the pattern. Without going into any detail whatsoever, you have the identical pattern in verses seven through 11.

So you could imagine seven and eight are gonna be your downward pointing V. Verse nine is gonna be the center. And then you're gonna come back out with an upside down V, the bottom part of the X, if you will, the chiasm in verses 10 and 11. And that tells you that the point of emphasis and the thematic statement is in verse nine or set of statements.

And you can then compare verse seven and 11 and verse eight with verse 10 and they illuminate and inform each other. So there is design, there is purpose in the order and the way in which these proverbial statements are given to us. Same thing happens in verse 12 and verse 13 and verse 14.

But there's a variation here. And we find that verse 15 and 16, there's sort of a doubling. So we have a three verse lead in, verse 15 and 16 was the center, verse 17, 18 and 19 are the lead out.

And just when you begin to think that this is gonna be predictable and pedestrian, the design of the text is you need to watch, be sensitive, pay attention. You've got to think your way through this. You can't just start cookie-cutting the text.

And we saw that in detail. You can go back and review those lessons if you're interested. And that continues through the end of chapter 13.

And there's actually kind of an unfortunate chapter division because the final chiasm that begins here extends through the end of chapter 13 and into 14. So we've already seen the wise woman in chapter 14, verse one, builds her house, but the foolish pulls it down with their hands. He who walks in his uprightness fears the Lord, but he who is perverse in his ways despises him.

I encourage you, if you're new to the Proverbs study, you can catch up with where we are if you just go back and get the last two dates before tonight. I believe it's the first two weeks in February. Go back two lessons and just start there.

And that'll be a total of four sessions. The previous two, listen to those. It will catch you up on the way this works and the overall strategy.

We're gonna pick up tonight in verse three of chapter 14. This is the beginning of a new section. And it's also going to change from a chiasm to a double V. And I mentioned this in our closing set of lessons back in February.

So we're not gonna belabor this because we're gonna move forward in chapter 14, but we're gonna have a lead in, a V, that goes down to our central concept. And then instead of a mirror image where the inside and outside brackets correspond, the first verse after our central idea is gonna mirror the first verse of the lead in. In other words, verse six is gonna be our center.

Verses three, four, and five are the lead in. And then verse seven is gonna correspond to three. Verse eight is gonna correspond to verse four.

And verse nine is gonna respond to verse five. Don't get tangled up in the form here. I'll review it as we go through.

But some of these statements that Alter and others call didactic truisms and sort of shallow obviousities are actually much more meaningful when they're connected with their partner on the other side of the central point. So what we're gonna do is we're gonna start here at verse three. And this section, this unit is verses three through nine.

Three through nine. There's almost always an odd number of verses in one of these units because it's gonna have a central element and it's gonna have a certain number of verses leading in, certain number of verses leading out. That ends up giving you an odd number of verses total.

So what does it say in verse three? In the mouth of a fool is a rod of pride, but the lips of the wise will preserve them. What does this mean? In the mouth of a fool is a rod of pride. A rod has two primary purposes in the ancient world, especially in Old Testament days, especially when you think about Psalm 23, the Lord is my shepherd, gets down a ways and he says, thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me.

There's a rod and a staff. Aaron had a rod. It is a mark of authority in its proper usage.

And it can be used for guidance and for correction. A gentle tap with the rod is guidance. A heavier, more definitive tap is discipline.

It's I will give you a little bit more forceful correction. That's the rod. So notice here in the mouth of a fool is a rod of pride.

Instead of a rod that is guided by wisdom, that is informed by the word of God, the plan and purpose of God, this is pride. So a fool, instead of appealing to scripture, instead of appealing to the wisdom of God and the truth of God, what is happening? And notice it is in the mouth of a fool. So when the fool speaks, he's going to try to offer guidance.

And he is also going to try to correct those around him. But instead of the authority of the word of God being spoken and being reflected, this is his own pride. And that guidance is going to be faulty and the correction is going to be off.

And so the rebuke and the dismissal and the denigration that you often hear in our society today, it is coming from the mouth of a fool. And you can either identify someone as a fool and move from that to figure out that their guidance and their correction is off, or you notice that the guidance and correction is off. And that tells you that the source is foolish.

It either way, it is helpful because we have just seen in the earlier context that there is explicit guidance about separating from fools. Do not have a companionship with fools. And so this is helpful.

This is, how do you know someone is a fool? Maybe we're just misunderstanding. Maybe they're actually smarter than me. And the wisdom of men is foolishness with God and so on.

How do we know? Well, here are some characteristics. And so when you determine either that someone is a fool, then I'm going to be suspicious of their guidance and correction. And this applies in the workplace.

It applies in the classroom. It even applies in areas where someone is our actual authority. They're our boss.

They're our teacher. They're our authority in the home or in marriage or whatever. And we have to understand our situation so we know how to apply the word of God.

And the first thing is to determine what the word of God has to say about foolishness versus wisdom and obedience versus departure, companionship and consorting and maintaining fellowship with someone or separating and placing a distance. So this is really important. This is a biblical description of one of the characteristics of a fool.

They're motivated by pride and that pride is going to drive what they say. This rod of correction and guidance is in their mouth. So how do I know if maybe I'm the fool and they're the wise one? Well, you will detect this pride that is driving what they say.

And this, notice that it says the lips of the wise will preserve them. There is preservation. Let's say that there is a fool who is trying to guide or correct you with their rod of pride coming out in their speech.

And you don't want to be a fool. You want to be wise. So you're not going to do the same thing.

You're not going to reflect back what you are receiving. So if they are trying to guide you and correct you and drive you in the wrong direction with this rod of foolishness that's coming out in their speech, what can you do? Well, you have to speak. You can't remain completely silent when someone who is exerting an authority rod on you.

So what do you do? Well, the lips are a refinement and an enhancement. And the mouth is one thing. The lips are something else.

Lips are very expressive. We use our lips to express all kinds of things. Our facial expression is, we don't talk about our mouth.

We talk about a smile or a frown, or we kiss with the lips. We can purse our lips. We can have a thin line of our lips.

They're very expressive. And the lips of the wise, whether it is your expression or whether it is your words, will preserve. The wisdom will control our lips.

This is why the prayer in Psalms is, set a watch on my mouth, O Lord, and keep the door of my lips. I can prevent my inner thoughts from escaping. I can avoid conflict by wisely controlling my lips, both in the expression, my comportment, and what I might say.

Just a nod to structure here. How do I know that we have a three-verse lead-in and then a central idea in verse six? Notice verse seven is going to repeat terms from verse three. Two terms you see in verse three are fool and lips, right? Look down at verse seven.

Go from the presence of a foolish man when you do not perceive in him the lips of knowledge. This is your clue. You've got fool, foolish, and you've got lips in verse three and verse seven.

This tells you, ah, so here's where my symmetry is gonna pick back up. Here's where my pattern is going to be evident. And we're going to find that this holds true as you come down to verse four.

And we talked about this last time, which was seven months ago. Where no oxen are, the trough is clean, but much increase comes in the strength of an ox. It's better to have a dirty barn where you've got working oxen than a beautiful clean barn and you're literally all had and no cattle.

And so verse four is going to compare and contrast with verse eight. The wisdom of the prudent is to understand his way, but the folly of fools is deceit. It is a deceit.

You are fooled and you're deceived if you think that the neatness of your ox trough is the thing that counts. This is a faulty value, which leads to bad priorities, which drives bad thinking, wrong thinking, wrong goals. My goal is to make sure everything looks great.

But if you sacrifice wisdom and you sacrifice function and you sacrifice getting important things done for the sake of appearances, this is what the Bible invades against. So you can keep a nice clean barn and have a spotless ox trough by never having any oxen. But that is a deceit.

You are deceived if you think it's better to do no work and have nothing available to do work with and keep up great appearances. So these verse four and verse eight go together. Look at verse five.

A faithful witness does not lie, but a false witness will utter lies. This is one of the things that the commentators look at and say, well, how is this an inspired, helpful, applicable piece of scripture? Isn't it clear and obvious that a faithful witness would tell the truth and not lie and that a false witness would utter lies? How is that helpful? Well, standing by itself, it might not seem to carry much insight, but remember that this is going to correspond with verse nine. Fools mock at sin, but among the upright, there is favor.

Say, well, that may be true as far as it goes, but verse nine by itself isn't all that helpful. But put verse five and verse nine together. A faithful witness does not lie, but a false witness will utter lies.

So in both cases, we have a witness. One is faithful and one is false. So there's testimony being given.

There is a narrative being delivered. There's a story being told. One is a faithful witness.

Remember, this is one of Jesus' many names. He is the faithful witness. One of the last things he says before his crucifixion, talking to Pilate, for this reason came I into the world.

This is why I was born, to bear witness to the truth. A faithful witness is going to tell the truth. So faithful and false in the area of communication.

Now look at verse nine. Fools, what is their message? What is their witness? Well, they want to mock sin. They see a failure.

They see a perceived fault. And instead of endeavoring to be helpful, instead of providing loving rebuke, speaking the truth in love, and endeavoring to help someone escape sin. Remember in James, hate the garment spotted by the flesh, pull someone out of the fire without yourself falling into the fire with them.

There is the desire to support one another and encourage one another. And in appropriate circumstances to help someone escape sin. Fools prefer to mock.

They're going to use it to club someone over the head. Oh, you had a peccadillo. You had a failure in the past.

And anytime I need a weapon to undercut you, anytime you start saying something meaningful, I'm going to mock your sin. And I'm going to try to neutralize you and silence you and cow you and embarrass you and shame you into going away. Fools mock at sin, but among the upright, there is favor.

There is positive consideration. There is someone there desiring to help. Take those words from verse five.

So the fool is false. The upright is faithful. Those adjectives, and you can transfer them back in the other direction.

Foolishness or uprightness goes back to verse five. It is upright. It is proper.

It is pleasing to God to be a truth speaker, a faithful witness. And it is foolish to utter lies, to tell a false story, to soft pedal the truth or distort the truth or leave part of the truth out and not be a faithful witness. So that is the pattern here.

And right in the center, where is our thematic element? A scoffer seeks wisdom and does not find it. How many verses have we seen over the studies we've done together where God says, you will seek me and find me when you search for me with all your heart. Seek and you will find along with asking and knocking.

Seek and you will find. Well, here's someone who is seeking wisdom, but they're not going to obtain it. Why? Didn't God say, if you seek, you will find? If you seek me, seek him early while he may yet be found.

Call upon him while he is near. There's dozens of verses about seeking and that effort being rewarded. Here, someone is seeking wisdom and does not find it.

Why? Their attitude is one of scoffing. They want to dominate. They want to sit on top of.

They want to be the judge of God. I will judge scripture. I find these parts of scripture politically incorrect and not helpful.

I think the authors were just trying to express God and his plan as they understood it, and then they messed up. It's not inspired. It isn't the word of God.

It's the word of man, and I'm going to sit as judge and jury on it, and I'm going to dismiss the testimony of the Old Testament. I'm going to dismiss the Israelites going into the land of Canaan and annihilating these Amorites that God had placed under judgment. I'm going to dismiss the apostle Paul and his attitude toward women and his opinions and his statements about women being silent in church, and that can't be scripture.

I will be the judge, and I scoff at these statements of scripture that don't comport with my standards of righteousness and truth, and when those people go to scripture, they are not going to find wisdom. Even when they search the scriptures, they're not going to find because their motivation and their attitude is wrong. What is the opposite of scoffing? Him who understands.

You know what a right understanding starts with? Humility. I am the needy one. God is the provider.

God is the savior. God is the gracious one who is meeting my need and solving my issues for his glory and for my benefit. It is God's plan and purpose.

It is God's knowledge and wisdom that is far greater than my own. His ways are higher than my ways. His thoughts are higher than my thoughts.

It's not the other way around, and if I have cognitive dissonance with something I find in scripture, the problem is with me, and I need to have an attitude of humility as I seek if there's something that seems dissonant or is out of line with what I always thought or what seems to be right to me. I need to prayerfully and humbly ask and seek and knock, and God will provide that understanding. So a scoffer does not find wisdom when he seeks it, but knowledge is easy.

It's going to suddenly become clear. You don't have to scale a mountain. You don't have to plumb the depths.

You don't have to enter into Sheol. It is near. It is in our hearts and on our lips.

Knowledge will be easy to him who understands, and understanding is the beginning of wisdom, and it is based in and grounded in humility. I understand where I am. I

understand what God is doing.

Well, that's the benefit of observing this pattern and this purposeful arrangement of these Proverbs. Now they don't look trite. They don't seem to be mere shallow aphorisms.

They inform and illuminate each other. We'll pause here and take our break. When we come back, we're gonna resume in chapter 14, and we're going to see the next section that begins in verse 10 with this very powerful statement about the heart.

We'll see that when we come back.