

Proverbs 24-09-25a

Greetings, it is Wednesday night at Grace and Truth Bible Church. This is the 25th of September, 2024. Interestingly, a week and a half ago on Sunday, we observed the anniversary of my dad's birth and he went to glory on September 25th, back in 2016.

So we happen to have church sessions on both the birthday and the departure day. 10 days apart, and I think about the church at Smyrna, you will have tribulation 10 days and between birth and death, 10 days. I find a personal significance in that, that our days may have a momentary light affliction, but they work for us an eternal weight of glory.

So I've been thinking about my father a little bit more than usual today, but I am happy that he is in the winner's circle after having run his race and look forward to seeing him here pretty soon. In the meantime, we're in Proverbs, we're in chapter 14, we're picking up tonight in verse 15. Let's ask God's blessing on our time of investigation and fellowship and we'll begin.

Father, we are grateful as always for this time of refreshment to set aside the distractions, the cares, the opportunities, the requirements of our lives, which always seem to be busy, whatever phase we are in, and to take refreshment at the oasis of your word and in the company of fellow believers. We're grateful and we ask your blessing on us in this time of study and perusing and pursuing the understanding of your word in a way that is meaningful and helpful to us. We pray that in all things, the Lord Jesus will be glorified and we will be drawn closer to you and better equipped for every good work.

We ask it in Jesus' name, amen. You will remember that there is structure in Proverbs. I am never more grateful for this than when I go to one of my severe real commentaries and see how they are trying to make sense of what appears to be an incongruous and unplanned pastiche of individual sayings.

And there is this mighty striving to try to find some sort of order, pattern, logic, but in many cases, it's a really heavy slog. It has been so helpful to me. I was doing this again this afternoon.

I was reading through a commentary thinking, and there are some wonderful observations in terms of vocabulary, usage of words elsewhere in the Old Testament. And they do this extensively because the context itself doesn't lend itself to their forward movement. However, it is such a blessing to see the structure here and find that this is beautiful.

It reminds me of a string of pearls. We're going through, and each one of these little five verse sections is a pearl. And it's got that grain of sand at the center, which is actually the point that is designed to be memorable and be emphasized in these lead in and lead out verses, inform it and give it three dimensions and bring it to life.

Any one of these verses taken in isolation, it's unclear whether it is going to be able to stand alone or whether it's going to seem like a tautology or a truism or a shallow and almost meaningless trite saying. So we're here at verse 15 and our section centers on verse 17. And you could take the time to do this yourself.

If you pay attention, now that you know that there is structure here, you can do this. And as you watch the repeated words returning to specific kinds of comparisons, wise, foolish, righteous, evil, or righteous, wicked, that which is temporal and short-term and ephemeral, that which is permanent and lasting and eternal. Once you start watching for these symmetries, it comes right off the page.

This is a prime example. Our section tonight to begin is verses 15 through 19. As I mentioned last time, you're typically going to have a section and it will be comprised of an odd number of verses because you've got the knot of the bow tie in the middle and you'll have an even number of symmetrical verses on the outside, almost always.

Once in a while, just for variety, just to keep you from getting woodenly accustomed, there will be a variation. We saw that last time in our review. But this is a standard one.

The next one in verses 20 through 24 is going to be standard. And the next one in verses 25 through 29 is going to be standard. And that's enough for us to anticipate for now.

So two verses, your central concept, two more verses. Sometimes it's a chiasm and the interior verses align and inform each other and so do the outside ones. Other times it's a funnel that takes you to the center and then there's another funnel for the lead out.

And so the first verse before your center and then the first verse after the center will align. And then you just go down and they follow that pattern of two or three verses around the center. This one is going to be a double V. So let's read this section in its entirety and watch for the concepts because as soon as we have a couple of concepts introduced in the first few verses, this is what we're gonna watch for on the way out.

And there will be something in the center that may or may not even directly reference or explicitly reference those ideas. The simple believes every word, but the prudent considers well his steps. What do you see there right off the bat? What are our contrasting concepts? There's a contrast between the simple and the prudent.

The simple has one outcome, the prudent has another. You can also notice, and I do this all the way through Proverbs, there's almost always a positive idea or a negative observation. In this case, the negative comes first, the simple believes every word.

This is not a good thing. This is what we call gullible, easily fooled, easily misled, satisfied with a superficial explanation or a superficial account. A parent walks into the room, something has been broken, vase got knocked off the coffee table.

You've got three children in there and you ask each one, did you do it? No. Did you do it? No. Well, did you do it? No.

Well, I guess no one did it. Thanks a lot. See you later.

That's simple. Taking the first answer and accepting it without scrutiny, without critique, without a second thought. It is not the path to truth.

So that's negative. The simple believes every word. The prudent considers well his steps.

That's a positive. I would expect that in the next verse, I am also going to have a combination of a negative and a positive. As we get to verse 16, a wise man fears and departs from evil.

That's an affirmative. But a fool rages and is self-confident. When you see a reversal like this, we've got even more depth to our structure and we'll return to this momentarily, but it is helpful as we go, just mark negative, positive, positive, negative, whatever it might be.

Now we come to verse 17. A quick tempered man acts foolishly and a man of wicked intentions is hated. This is something of a rarity because it's a double negative.

This double negative does not create a positive like you get in English. Being quick tempered and of wicked intentions, that's negative, negative. The simple inherit folly, but the prudent are crowned with knowledge.

What do you see here? What did our section open with? What was our initial contrast? The simple and the prudent, right? Very same thing here. So we've got a real obvious marker that this is where our symmetry resumes. So verse 17 obviously compares back with, I'm sorry, verse 18 compares back with verse 15, the simple and the prudent.

Verse 19, the evil will bow before the good and the wicked at the gates of the righteous. This is going to compare positive and positive. And that's going to end our section.

So in the middle, we've got the quick tempered man and a man of wicked intentions. Thematically being wise, being prudent, or being foolish and being quick tempered is at the heart of this section. So we are encouraged to take these together, to take them as a group and let them talk about each other.

Let's begin at verse 15. The simple believes every word, but the prudent considers well as steps. This isn't really a perfect symmetry, is it? If the simple believes every word, you would expect that the prudent would carefully check every fact or would investigate every claim, but it changes ground, doesn't it? The simple believes what he is told without any question.

The prudent isn't so much looking at, is what I am being told true or not, but what is my

course of action going to be? In the light of this person saying this, maybe it's true and maybe it's not. The challenge here is not to figure out, is it true? I need to go investigate. I'm going to have to check on the facts and interview other witnesses.

If you're prudent, it isn't so much about, I need to verify every claim. Think about the political maelstrom we're currently in with the upcoming presidential election. Here's one candidate, makes a claim, gives some statistics, says here's a result of a policy they consider to be bad.

Here's a policy that I consider to be good and here are the outcomes. You could spend the afternoon on the internet trying to verify, well, was the economy really better or has it gotten better with this policy? Is immigration or illegal immigration better or worse? And you could spend your time believing that these words are true or that they need to be verified as true, but that's foolish. Not that it isn't a good idea to understand when something is true and when something is false, but ultimately and finally, when all the dust settles, what is our course of action going to be? This is far more important than establishing the veracity of individual claims.

The fool is going to pick one side or the other and he's going to believe their claims. You may watch CNN or MSNBC. You may watch Fox or some other conservative outlet, One American News or one of the others.

And you find the ones that you pretty well decide are trustworthy and you just believe what they say. And most people are not inclined to switch to the opposite polarity channel and watch them for very long because you get cognitive dissonance and it's just too difficult. So it's easier to turn on something that basically aligns with my point of view, confirms it, informs it, supports it.

And I've already decided that my viewpoint is right. So I want to hear what aligns with what I think. There's nothing intrinsically wrong with this.

Why? Look at your scripture. If you stop at just believing what you're told and you don't consider well your steps, that's foolish. Once we have heard whatever we're going to hear, we have to consider and consider well our steps.

How should I then live? If these things are true, should I refrain? Should I commit? Should I march? Should I write letters? Should I vote a certain way? Should I encourage other people to pay attention to facts they are apparently unaware of? What should I do? How should I then live? This is prudent, prudent. So what concept would you take away from verse 15? I can simply find an environment where there's no dissonance, there's no contrary point of view. If you believe differently, please don't tell me so.

I would rather just be content with my mind being made up. I'm happy with it. I believe it's right.

And you may have very good reasons for doing so, but we have to pay more attention. It is not enough. And we're not going to stand up at the judgment to simply say, well, I heard the right things.

The goal is to be prudent. Therefore, what we should vindicate in our lives is not I listen to right viewpoint. I hold right opinions.

I'm on the side of the good guys. That is hearing and believing. Our goal is to make application that is wise, to consider carefully and well our steps.

Are we living? Are we walking as we should? There is so much self-righteousness in the world today based on I'm on the side of right. My political opinions, my social beliefs, my ideas of what is good and right vindicate and justify me. And it doesn't extend to our walk.

So considering well our steps is prudent. You look at verse 16, and this is an extension. Remember we had a negative positive and then positive negative.

So verse 15 and 16 invite us to think in terms of a little mini chiasm, a two verse chiasm. And you notice that the prudent considering well his steps flows naturally into a wise man fearing and departing from evil. Instead of someone telling me that the other guy is evil, that they're a threat, that they're going to wreak havoc, we're gonna have World War III, we're gonna have an economic bloodbath or whatever it might be.

I am well served as a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ as a child of God in considering well my steps and fearing that I might be committing evil. I might be party to evil. I might be practicing evil and I haven't given sufficient consideration to my steps to know it.

And instead of looking at the other guy and having the constant hand-waving and distraction of current events, social media, political firestorms of every shape, size and description, this is an enemy ploy in many cases that prevents us from considering our own lives. What priorities have I set? What goals am I pursuing? What personal values do I maintain in my own walk? I need to spend more time looking at that than I do looking at the news or looking at the feeds or looking at the trends and the winds of change and opinion. So a wise man, as he considers well his steps, will fear and depart from evil, prudence and wisdom.

But the fool, which is the simple, rages and is self-confident. He hears words, notice this is he's imbibing and taking in the opinions of others, the analysis of others, the take. And the worldview of others, and he's self-confident to the point of raging about those who don't share that view.

Do you see the little chiasm here in these two verses? Being simple and being a fool means believing every word and then being self-confident and even angry at those who

disagree. And it never gets to prudence and wisdom. Then you come to your center gem here in verse 17.

A quick-tempered man acts foolishly and a man of wicked intentions is hated. Now, how can you know what someone's intentions are? This is the favorite question that fathers used to ask gentlemen callers when they came and started approaching with interest in a daughter. What are your intentions? This is the question that actors famously ask directors when they're playing a part.

And well, what is my motivation? Well, how am I supposed to act here? What's my thought process as a character? This will inform how I do what? Behave, how I act. My behavior is going to be driven by my intentions, by my motives. And in this centerpiece, a quick-tempered man acts foolishly.

Foolish actions arise from being quick-tempered. What's another word for quick-tempered? It is a virtue to be slow to anger. So if you're quick-tempered, what are you? You rage, you're angry.

And what did we see in the immediately preceding verse? A fool rages, a fool is angry, and he is quick to anger. So you can see the wings attaching to the bird here in the middle. This idea of being quick-tempered connects back to the fool and the simple.

You're quick to adopt a view. You're quickly angry if anyone disagrees or tries to undermine it by pointing out facts. I often quote, ironically or sarcastically, the claim that don't bother me with the facts my mind's made up, and I don't wanna be bothered with anything that would cause me to question or would undermine my facile opinion.

All of these are given to us as believers so that we can carefully consider our ways. We can consider well our steps. So we can look at this and say, well, that's certainly true of the fool, and I think that's probably true of the wise and the prudent.

We don't just want to know these things. We want to apply them. We want to be the wise and prudent.

So with this description, we have some traction. We have something by way of practical steps we can take to become and to continue to be and to improve in the areas of wisdom and prudence. So I wanna be wise and prudent tomorrow, Thursday.

What can I do? Well, if I flip on the news or I turn on some device where I need information, and here comes an information flow, a news feed. Here's Facebook, and people are posting memes and tropes and little quickie jibes at the other side and so on. What can I do? I remember what I saw in Proverbs 14, 15 through 19.

I'm gonna take a step back. I'm not gonna be quick to judge. I'm not gonna be quick to agree, nor am I going to be quick to disagree with something that someone says or

something that comes my way.

That would be simple. What I need to do is consider well my steps. Maybe my political opinions are on point.

Maybe they're off the mark. I hope that they reflect biblical values and a spiritual understanding of that which is temporal and that which is eternal, of the fact that there is no political solution to personal problems. It is always spiritual.

It is always individual reliance on God's power with his word and his spirit. And as much as I might like to see this person or that person elected, Jesus isn't gonna say, well, who did you vote for in 2024 at the judgment seat of Christ? Did you consider well your steps in 2024? How did you live? How did you speak? How did you treat others who might have had a different point of view? Were you giving a soft answer that turns away wrath or did you have a quick nail in the coffin argument that you're just waiting for somebody to express a different view and you're gonna pound that nail and you're going to rage. You're going to end up exposing wicked intentions and a quick temper that causes you to act foolishly.

It's never a good idea to get angry quickly. I've told you this story before, but anytime I think about quick anger, I think about the foolish prank I played on my dad. I was in, all young men when they're, you know, get to be junior high or late grade school, you wanna do magic.

Everybody used to. It was just a thing. You go through your magic phase.

So I sent off to the magic company and I got these little things. And one of them was a clear piece of plastic with a really beautifully realistic drawing of a crack on it. And dad had just gotten our first Sears color television.

It'd only been in the living room for a couple of weeks. And so I took that clear crack thing and I put it on the front of the TV and then I got with Matt and Denise and Danny and I said, let's pretend like we were wrestling in the house, which is verboten. And when dad walks in, I've got a little couple of pieces of glass over here.

I'm gonna clinkle them. And when dad comes in, we're gonna look at the TV in horror and he's gonna see it. Well, it worked flawlessly.

My dad came in, clinked the glass. We looked at horrified at the TV and he saw that crack. He grabbed me by the stack and swivel and was dragging me down the hall in the direction of the closet where the belts hang.

And I was saying, dad, no, wait, wait, wait. He was immediately and righteously indignant and angry. So you wanna be careful about inciting quick anger as much as perpetrating it yourself.

When I finally calmed him down before the inevitable judgment fell, he saw the joke and he was more relieved than amused. But then he proceeded to tell me that he had done the same type of thing when he was a boy and he'd gotten a double suction cup and stuck in the gravy boat. And at Sunday dinner, his dad was gonna reach for some gravy and put it on his mashed potatoes.

And he picked up the spoon and the whole boat came and dumped on his plate, on the table, on the tablecloth and into his dad's lap. And that really was a judgment result and richly deserved. He couldn't say, just kidding, it's not real gravy.

I got some of that red ink that I intentionally spilled it on my mom's beautiful white tablecloth. And she was immediately horrified, but it's the kind that goes clear when it dries. You have to be careful, stirring up anger.

Grievous words and silly pranks stir up anger. What's our point here? Anger seldom turns out well. I think scripture encourages us to leave righteous indignation and concomitant vengeance to God.

Let God's wrath and righteous indignation fall. There is a day of wrath that is coming, read Romans chapter two. But it is better to not be quick-tempered, to not rage and not be self-confident.

Self-confidence is one facet of unteachability. I'm confident in my view. There's nothing you can say to change my mind.

We should hold our views firmly, but humbly. And it could be that we are firmly holding a view that might not be quite right. And you can't improve, you can't learn and you can't grow if you're not willing to improve your understanding and shift your perspective from time to time.

And people get all kinds of flack for, well, you said something bad about this candidate and now you're all in favor. You think we could learn anything in eight years over time? We saw someone and they were new on the scene and we didn't understand their perspective. They were an unproven quantity.

Now they have proven themselves and I changed my mind. It's perfectly legitimate to not be intransigent and inflexible. On the other hand, it is a man of wicked intentions is hated.

Wicked intentions inevitably expose themselves in actions. Remember the verse, be sure your sins will find you out. Your intentions, your false motivation will eventually out itself.

And this does not make friends. And this idea of friendship is going to be repeated here. So as you come out now, we saw that verse 18 and verse 15 are linked.

The simple inherit folly. Not only are you a fool, if you are simple, but your inheritance is foolishness. What the result is of your foolish, imprudent, and hasty behavior is going to be foolish.

It is foolish to win at something and alienate everyone around you. That you actually want to cultivate relationships with and have their respect, have their friendship, have their love. And you foolishly prioritize some kind of gain.

Your inheritance, the outcome, the aftermath, the future of that is going to be foolishness. It was foolish to act foolishly because now you're in a fool's paradise. It does not last, turns to ashes in your mouth.

The prudent are crowned with knowledge. Here, the contrast is between foolishness and knowledge. And the inheritance of foolishness, you can lose an inheritance.

Think Esau. Think believers who fail to maintain hope and confidence, and therefore faith and obedience. And when it comes time to inherit, there is nothing.

You inherit the wind, you inherit Hevel, you inherit chasing after the wind, as it says in Ecclesiastes. The prudent are crowned. This is described in other places as a crown that fadeth not away.

It's an eternal crown. And a big part of this crown is knowledge. Knowledge we take forward.

So much in this life doesn't transport into the eternal future. But what we learn, the wisdom we acquire, our appreciation and understanding of our heavenly Father and His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, this is preserved and is the foundation for everything that happens in the eternal future. So the simple inherit folly.

This is a look forward. What is the outcome? And if you're considering well your steps, one of the ways to know whether those steps are good or if we need to retrace them and take a different path is what do I inherit going down this road? If I keep stepping in this direction, am I going to inherit foolishness? Or is this leading to a crown of knowledge? How do I consider my steps? It's one thing to say, do it, and it's commended here in scripture. I've got things that are underway right now.

I've got projects I'm pursuing and tasks and priorities and goals I'm prosecuting. If I consider them, how do I know if they're good or not? Should I keep on cleaning my garage? Should I keep on repairing broken things? Should I reprioritize? Should I reallocate my time and spend less on this and more on that? How do you know when you do consider your steps and consider them well that your judgment is sound? Well, look at the other side of this symmetry. The simple, because he's not considering his way and he's just self-confidently strutting and fretting his hour on the stage, sound and fury, signifying nothing.

What a great line from Shakespeare. I wish I could think thoughts that are as great as the ones he wrote down, but that's what the fool does. You strut and fret, you're on the stage, you're there to be seen, you're chewing the scenery, you're overacting, you're hogging the whole scene, but in the end, you don't receive plaudits and adulation and good reviews.

You really thought you were doing it, and in the end, people are walking away. The prudent are crowned with knowledge. This is a worthy and permanent possession.

So when I'm considering my steps, what is the eternal outcome of this? Am I learning and doing and becoming something that leads into the eternal future? Or is my binge watching this series going to cause me to inherit foolishness? Entertainment has its place, but remember when Paul says, "'Let your moderation be known to all, the Lord is at hand.'" Moderation in all things. Take a little wine for your stomach's sake. Eat food in moderation, not gluttony.

Enjoy pleasures to a point, but don't be self-gratifying. Don't be consumed with pleasure, consumed with stimulation, consumed with distraction. If I'm doing anything in an immoderate way, and I consider my steps, I'm going to return to moderation, because moderation will lead me to a crown of knowledge, not to an inheritance of foolishness.

Well, I can tell you every outcome of the plot in this long extended series. It ran for nine seasons, and here's all of the arcs and the characters that came and went and the actors who played them. And is that knowledge of a fictional story that somebody told and provided bubble gum for my brain and chewing gum for my mind, does that build into eternity in any way? Now, it can.

I've quoted Shakespeare. There are pieces of entertainment that illustrate, even in the fictional world, biblical truths. And there are outcomes that can be memorable and a reminder of what we've learned in the Word of God.

But we start with the Word of God and see a reflection in entertainment. We don't go to entertainment, as I discovered when I was an English major, there are people who go to literature and that's their Bible. They try to derive truth for life from fiction written by fellow humans with no inspiration whatsoever.

That is the way to inherit foolishness. Then you come to verse 19. The evil will bow before the good and the wicked at the gates of the righteous.

Notice how both of these verses, 18 and 19, on the other side of our pearl in the middle, look to the future. The first two look at present behavior, present priorities, present wisdom or foolishness, prudence or indifference to wisdom. That's what we're doing now.

Ultimately, we're either gonna act foolishly and have faulty wicked intentions or not. What is the outcome going to be? The evil will bow before the good and the wicked at

the gates of the righteous. So there is more negative caution and warning in this particular section than usual.

We've got a double negative in the center and we've got a double negative at the end. And it's a reminder also, proportionally speaking, a little wisdom and a little knowledge, a little prudence can counterbalance and overcome a great deal of evil and foolishness. And even though you have mostly negative statements here, you have the simple believing every word, you have the fool raging and being self-confident, quick-tempered man acting foolishly, man of wicked intentions being hated, simple inheriting folly.

But notice verse 19, two positives to counteract the two negatives. The evil are going to bow before the good and the wicked will bow at the gates of the righteous. Ultimately, wisdom, prudence, goodness and righteousness in the future are going to prevail.

Doesn't always happen in this life, but it will happen in the future. This is our hope. This is our motivation to live a life of faith and obedience manifested in self-sacrificial love.

And you have the foundations of that life, the Christian life laid here in the Old Testament with wonderful inspired words, such as these. Let's pause here and take our break. When we come back, we'll pick up in our next unit, which is going to be verses 20 through 24.

Another five verse section with a wonderful gem in the center. Let's pause here and take our break.