

Proverbs 24-12-04a

Greetings, hearty fellow soldiers and citizens and members of Grace and Truth Bible Church. Get the hardcore group here on Wednesdays. And after a gap of a couple of weeks that we haven't had Proverbs since November the 10th, the Marine Corps birthday.

So glad to be picking up this study again. We are in Proverbs chapter 15 and we'll resume tonight at verse 18. Let's ask God's blessing on our time of fellowship and study.

We will resume where we left off. Father, we are so grateful for another opportunity to spend this time together looking at these wonderful scriptures in the Old Testament. We ask that your Holy Spirit will be our teacher, give us clarity of understanding, a good memory and perspicacity and ability to perceive when these things apply in our conversations and our decisions in the course of our actions in the coming days.

We pray that in all things, the Lord Jesus will be glorified and we ask it in his name. Amen. Picking up now in Proverbs chapter 15, we left off last time looking at the better thans, better this than that.

And one of the things that you will notice in those is there is a pattern where attitudes and approaches and the way we view a situation often is counterintuitive to expectation. You would expect that if you're wealthy, things would be great, but better than says that having a proper attitude of heart, having peace, having contentment, having a lack of strife converts whatever situation we have in terms of material goods. So we surveyed all of the better than passages in Proverbs last week, and we're going to resume now at verse 18 of chapter 15.

A wrathful man stirs up strife, but he who is slow to anger allays contention. Then verse 19, the way of the lazy man is like a hedge of thorns, but the way of the upright is a highway. These make a kind of sense at the outset, but what we are going to discover is that there is some depth here that depends on context.

We start with the wrathful man, having talked about how to be content using the better thans in verses 16 and 17. We pick up here, the wrathful man stirs up strife. This is what you don't want to have.

Trouble and hatred and strife have been detailed in verses 16 and 17. They render moot, whatever advantages expectation says would have brought about happiness or contentment or peace and hatred, anger, strife, trouble. Nothing is enjoyable.

You can't express, you can't enjoy capacity for life, capacity for love, capacity for happiness when there is division and contention. We've seen this in second Timothy chapter two, looking at those who stir up grievous struggles and contentions, arguments and ruin the hearers in so doing. So we want to know why it is that this man is wrathful to begin with.

A wrathful man stirs up strife. Well, we've seen this previously alluded to in Proverbs chapter 10, verse 12. Hatred stirs up strife.

So someone who is a wrathful man, someone who is a wrathful man by association is harboring hatred. There is a problem of attitude. It's interesting to me, we're going to see this when we get to verse 20 and following, and I'll save a full discussion for then, but it is related to our study of love in the pastoral epistles, especially.

We are going to see that love isn't the emphasis here. It is more the joy and the peace that are that first three elements of the fruit of the spirit. We have love, joy, and peace.

You don't find the old Testament exhortations to Israel emphasizing love so much as it emphasizes joy, happiness, gladness, and peace, lack of strife, lack of division and contention, and the hatred that underlies so much of that. So in Proverbs chapter 10, verse 12, hatred stirs up strife, but love covers all sins. And it's one of the relatively rare references to love in the old Testament in general, in Proverbs in particular, love covers all sins.

And that, of course, we saw quoted in the new Testament, love covers a multitude of sins, but hatred does the opposite. Hatred stirs up strife. If there's a difference, it's going to inflame it and make it worse.

We'll see this in Proverbs 19, 19, a man of great wrath will suffer punishment. There are going to be consequences. And even if you rescue him, you'll have to do it again.

People who can't control anger, you can get them out of a situation. You can come alongside and usher them out of the room. But with the root of anger and bitterness and wrath, which goes along with this hatred and arrogance, you're just going to have to do it again.

Rescuing them from the consequences really doesn't do any good at getting to the root of the problem. So what do we draw from this? Just in this first phrase, a wrathful man stirs up strife. We are going to see that there is a need for separation from such people.

Proverbs 22, 24 makes this clear. Make no friendship with an angry man. If you're around someone who is constantly carping and stirring up strife and expressing anger, make no friendship.

Make no friendship with an angry man and with a furious man, do not travel, do not go, do not be a companion along the way with a furious man. No friendship, no fellow traveling. Create a distance, avoid, separate from people that have an anger problem.

People would say, well, but I think if I maintain this acquaintance and this friendship, maybe I can help them overcome this anger. What did we just see? If you rescue them, you're just going to have to do it again. Your interceding, your interposing, your efforts at peacemaking with someone that's got an anger problem will fail.

The Bible says so. Give it up. Don't try it.

Separate. That is the biblical exhortation. In Proverbs 26, 21, these people are like charcoal to burning coals.

They are like adding wood to a fire. A contentious man kindles strife. This is true in a family.

It is true in a church congregation. It is true in any collection of individuals. If someone is looking to pick a fight, whatever the cause, maybe they are insecure and they're trying to express some sort of dominance.

Maybe they are prickly and they want to find fault. They want to spread blame and shame. They want to somehow transfer whatever criticism might be coming their way to someone else.

But if they are contentious, they're like charcoal. They're like wood. They are just going to take a flame and feed it.

It doesn't say, but love is the water that will put out the fire or go along to get along or keep working with them and counsel with them and put an arm around the shoulder and try to LA their contentious behavior. It says no friendship, no traveling, separate. It's very clear.

We saw that hatred is behind this contention and strife making. You find in Proverbs 28, 25, he who is of a proud heart stirs up strife. So this wrath and anger is fed by hatred and pride.

Proverbs 28, 25. He was of a proud heart, stirs up strife. He who trusts in the Lord will be prospered.

You can't fix a hatred problem without the individual turning their attention to the Lord in heaven, placing their confidence and their faith and their trust in the Lord. It is the only way this problem can be cured. If we ourselves have an anger issue, if we are quick to get into arguments, if we find ourselves contending and on opposite sides with fellow believers, instead of saying, well, I've got to find a way to just think positive or whatsoever things are true.

You can't do this without first mending relationship with the Lord. He who trusts in the Lord will prosper in the area of horizontal relationships. Relationship with God has to come first.

It has to be healthy. It has to be mended if it's got problems. And one of the symptoms of a lack of faith, a lack of trust, a lack of communion with the Lord is contention and strife and difficulty with fellow believers.

And we like the direct approach. Well, I've got a problem with fill in someone's name here. I need to find a way to get along with them.

No, we need to go to the Lord and ask for grace. We need to cultivate our relationship with the Father through Christ, the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. We will find that our horizontal relationships mend as a result of the presence and power of God's love, God's grace,

God's power, the fruit of the Spirit, love, joy, and peace will almost supernaturally, if not actually supernaturally mend horizontal problems.

We will have greater patience. We will have more long suffering. We will be gentle.

We will be good. We will be faithful. We will be humble.

And we will have the self-control that enables us to heal breaches instead of making them worse. We will be water on a hot flame instead of charcoal and wood. But it's indirect.

Don't address the symptom. Go to the cause. We have a weak relationship with God the Father if we have people problems.

It isn't the people. It's us. Proverbs 29, 22, an angry man stirs up strife and a furious man abounds in transgression.

This will not be the only problem. When you have a wrathful man who is stirring up strife, angry, wrathful, this furious man is going to have other expressions of a damaged and dysfunctional soul. His relationship with God, his or her, is not good.

And rather than trying to wheedle them or cajole them or encourage them or try to be an influence for good, the scripture says separate. They need to mend their relationship with God first. It doesn't work the other way.

You don't fix it with people and then come back to God. Believers have to seek God on their own individually first. We have the gift of the Holy Spirit's indwelling presence.

He is the one who convicts of sin and righteousness and judgment. And it is listening to the voice of the Spirit and returning to the Father like the prodigal and looking for his grace, looking for his forgiveness. That has to come first.

You can't try to fix horizontal relationships and hope that that is going to somehow draw someone to God. All it will do is distract. You see examples of this in 2 Samuel 19 and 20 when David is returning and he is in the process of becoming the king of all Israel.

And Judah and the two tribes, Judah and Benjamin, and the ten tribes of the north are contending over their relationship to David and whether they are going to be favored. You can read about that. The men of Judah respond with fierce words.

And this doesn't heal the breach. In chapter 20, verse 1, what you find is the ten northern tribes say, every man to his tents, we're going away. The fierce words of Judah, they are David's tribe, but their harsh words drive the other ten tribes away.

And it is going to take other measures before Israel will unite under David. But the men of Judah, with their fierce words, all they do is make things worse. They're throwing gasoline on the fire, as it were.

You find in James 3, verses 14 through 16, James 3, 14 through 16, if you have bitter envy and self-seeking in your hearts, do not boast and lie against the truth. This wisdom does not descend from above, but is earthly, sensual, and demonic. We saw Sunday in the description of perilous times, people will be diaboloi, they will be devils, they will be demonic in their behavior.

So, boasting and lying against the truth doesn't descend from above. It is earthly, sensual, demonic. Where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing are there.

It's that cluster of sins we saw in that preceding proverb. A contentious man, the angry man that stirs up strife, is going to have an abundance of sin. He's going to cluster sin.

He's going to spread it. It's going to metastasize and get worse. That's why we have to separate.

To remain in contact is to be infected. The wisdom that is from above in James 3, 17 is pure first. It is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield.

This doesn't mean to grant someone the victory that they are right and you are wrong. This doesn't mean to exceed to their point of view or their contention, what they are arguing about. The wisdom that is from above is first pure.

We maintain purity in understanding the truth, in remaining faithful to God, in loving the Lord our God and seeking His purpose and His will in our life and seeking to be a blessing to those around us. But the wisdom that is from above is first pure. Do not compromise purity.

Don't go along to get with error or evil. But it's pure, but then it is peaceable. I am not going to strive to no purpose about words.

I'm not going to allow grievous ruin to happen to the hearers. If I speak the truth in love and someone rejects it, they want to argue. We are first pure, but then peaceable.

Okay, well, I am sorry we don't happen to agree on this, but each of us has to pursue an understanding before the Lord. And this is what I have come to, but you have every right to your view. And we can all pray and hope that God will grant us light on the path and the Holy Spirit can grant us understanding.

And if I'm in the wrong, then please pray for me that I will come to a better understanding. If you're in the wrong, I certainly pray for you that God will illuminate us. And as we come to a common understanding of His truth, that will draw us closer together as well.

But we must be first pure, no compromise, but then peaceable. Don't wrangle if someone disagrees. Gentle.

We've seen this so clearly in 2 Timothy 2 and 3. Humility, in humility correcting them, if perhaps God will grant repentance and the fruits of it and the blessings that come from it. It's the end of chapter 2 in 2 Timothy. Willing to yield.

If they're insistent on a point, yield. You're not yielding what is right or what is wrong. You're yielding the floor.

Yield the platform. If you want to go on about your point of view, go ahead. You haven't convinced me, but you haven't silenced me.

I am silencing myself. I am taking control of the conversation in the sense that I am not going to let this turn into an unfruitful argument. Say your piece.

I yield to your verbal assault. Remember when Jesus was wrongly accused and He opened not His mouth? He wasn't granting that they were right and He was wrong, but He refused to argue. He refused to create a contention to no purpose.

He knew that this was going to result in the cross no matter what, so why argue? And if it is clear that someone is not going to listen, they are not going to consider, they are not thoughtful, they are not humble, they are not willing to yield themselves, yield them the floor, let them speak their piece, say something ironic, noncombative. Well, it is obvious to me that you are very persuaded and convinced on that front, and my understanding is different. We have the same Holy Spirit, we have the same Heavenly Father, we have the same Savior in the Lord Jesus Christ, and we can all pray together that we will together grow in grace and knowledge, and sooner or later, one of us as we grow is bound to come to a better understanding, and at that point we will be united in the faith.

But in the meantime, let's not argue, let's not divide, let's not create strife. Any two unbelievers can get into an intractable argument that never ends. Let's agree to disagree and find common ground.

We can certainly agree that we love the Lord Jesus, that we are grateful for salvation through Him, His self-sacrificial work on the cross, His representation of us in heaven at the Father's right hand. Turn the conversation to things upon which any healthy believer will be glad to agree and to assent, move in a positive direction. This takes practice, it takes skill, and it most of all takes self-control.

The love that is at the beginning of the list has to be a companion and a partner with self-control. If I begin to believe that I've got to win this argument or die trying, my love has evaporated. I'm not being self-sacrificial, and I'm not listening to James when it says here, be willing to yield, be full of mercy and good fruits.

Jesus says in Matthew 5, blessed are the peacemakers. When you avoid contention and strife, you're making peace. You're practicing peace, peaceable, gentle, full of mercy.

Without partiality, this means don't cling to the flag of your opinion or your view of a person. This isn't partiality between people. This is your loyalty to a cause, and you become defined by, well, I'm a pre-trib, pre-mill person.

I'm defined by this theological understanding. I'm Reformed. I'm Arminian.

I'm this, or I'm that, or I'm the other. Without partiality means I don't wed myself to a viewpoint or a cause or a creed or a confession. I am a representative of the Lord Jesus Christ, enabled and empowered by the Holy Spirit, endeavoring to please my Heavenly Father and vindicate the work of the Lord Jesus Christ on my behalf.

That's my cause. That's my flag. I am not of Paul.

I am not of Apollos. I am not of Cephas. I'm not even of Christ in the sense that I'm a Jesus follower.

I'm a child of God, and I am first and foremost dedicated to love for my Father in Heaven, for the Lord Jesus Christ, and for the Holy Spirit. That's the only flag I fly, without partiality and without hypocrisy. In one discussion, we're gentle, full of mercy.

We yield. We're peaceable. Then in the next discussion, we let fly, and iron skillet are impacting all over the area, and sweat grenades are going off all around us.

Without hypocrisy means to be consistent and to be genuinely interested in peace above prevailing, peace above winning the argument. So long as someone is willing to be peaceable, remember Paul says in another place, as much as it is up to us, live peaceably with everyone. This is the one another's, the neighbors, those who are outside, and the enemies.

To the extent that I can control the heat, I'm turning down the flame. Somebody else wants to flame, flame away. I am going to yield.

I'm going to be humble. I'm going to consider that I might, in fact, be somehow responsible for this conflagration, and the best thing I can do is be quiet. Let it run its course.

Let someone burn themselves out with their wrath and their anger. If they're in the wrong, the best thing I can do is don't add to it. Don't multiply it.

Don't make it worse. That is James 3, 14 through 17. And finally, in verse 18, the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace, peacemakers.

Sow the fruit of righteousness in peace. Peace is the goal. Peace is, in many ways, the measure of a successful encounter or conversation or discussion.

Did it end peacefully? Can you smile and embrace at the end if it is up to you? Now, there are people who will go off and there's no help for it, and you have to then just go to the Lord and say, Father, if I've got an unknown fault or flaw, please expose it. It's the Psalm 51 prayer. Show me my hidden faults.

If this was my fault in some way I'm not aware, I don't want to repeat it. Make me aware. May the Holy Spirit apply your word so that I can do better next time.

But we should be at peace. Even if we discover that we are in the wrong, okay, fine, I'm going to dedicate myself in God's grace and by God's power, the grace that is in Christ Jesus will strengthen me for next time. And if I messed up, I confess it, I've got a plan to do better next time, and I'm going to establish peace in my soul.

Jesus said, peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you. And it's not like the world gives. This is a supernatural peace.

I even have to be at peace if I have failed. I have done the remediation. I have brought the sacrifice of myself before God.

I've presented myself holy and acceptable. I have been cleansed in the blood of Christ. There's nothing I can do to say words come back.

I don't get a do-over on that conversation, but I can be prepared. I can be prayerful. I can be humble on the next occasion.

And that's as much as you can do. So rest, be at peace. Peace is the goal.

So back to Proverbs chapter 15, verse 18, a wrathful man stirs up strife. If I find myself being the cause of contention, if every time I get involved, all of a sudden there's argumentation, I need to start looking at what is the common denominator? People are going along fine, and I joined the group, and all of a sudden there's arguments. Maybe it's me.

We should ensure first and foremost, that we are not unconsciously sparking contention, because if we find our blood temperature rising, what goes along with it? What were our concomitant verses telling us? There is arrogance. There is hatred. There is something wrong with our relationship with the Lord, that we are an agent of disunity and disharmony, instead of a peacemaker.

I've got to check myself. It isn't a matter of, well, but who was right, or who fired the first angry shot? I have got to be a buffer and someone who ameliorates and brings the temperature down, always, every time. And if people go off without us, let them go.

Do not join them in the sin. That is the first line of verse 18. He who is slow to anger, this requires self-control.

This is a fruit of the Spirit. This is the product of a healthy relationship with God in heaven and a steady view of the Lord Jesus. Placing our eyes on Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross and didn't give any profitable consideration to the shame.

It didn't dissuade him. It didn't divert him. He despised the shame.

He is now seated at the right hand of the Father, looking unto Jesus. If we want to be slow to wrath, don't look at the person. Don't be incensed and indignant at the cause or the practice or

the evil that they espouse or promote.

You say, well, but can't I be righteously indignant? Not in the conversation. Not in a divisive and destructive way. Grievous words, stirring up anger.

Be slow to anger, letting someone vent, letting them get excited, letting them say too much and be too harsh. And we are on a slow fuse. Preferably that fuse doesn't burn out until after the person is long gone.

And we can be angry in private and in a quiet time. And we can vent and get over it and do all of our palliative and constructive recovery measures by ourself or with our spouse. This is one of the great things about being married is we're a team and we can help each other do this.

But within that closet, that private room, that space, slow to anger, this allays contention. You're not an agent of spreading it. You're not helping it metastasize and infect others.

That is verse 18. You come now to verse 19, and this seems a little bit non sequitur, so much so that people have tried to go to the Septuagint translation and change the meaning that you find in Hebrew. It says in verse 19, the way of the lazy or lazy man, lazy one, is like a hedge of thorns, but the way of the upright is a highway.

And so you get the idea that a hedge of thorns would impede progress, would be painful and difficult. And a highway is easy to travel. You make great progress.

But the contrast here is not between the fool or the wicked versus the upright. It's laziness versus uprightness. And they said, well, how do you get a contrast between lazy and upright? Well, this is one of the beauties of Proverbs.

We've purposely sort of belabored the parallels of verse 18, so that when you see the wrathful man stirs up strife, you find that someone who harbors hatred stirs up strife, and someone who is arrogant stirs up strife, and someone who has a cluster of sins in their life will stir up strife. And so any one of those symptoms leads back to the same source. So here, if you're contrasting laziness with being upright, what does that tell you about being lazy? Lazy people are not upright.

Laziness is associated with and linked to the opposite of upright, which is fallen, wicked, foolish, self-centered, all of those associated issues. And you find this in the Proverbs. If you go to Proverbs 22.5, you can put that in the margin beside this one.

Thorns and snares are in the way of the lazy. No, in 22.5, thorns and snares are in the way of the perverse. Perverse.

Lazy and perverse produce the same result. By the way, the advice to those who are endeavoring to live an upright and fruitful life is the same in Proverbs 22.5. He who guards his soul will be far from the way of the perverse, and the thorns and snares that populate their

way. Separate from those who are contentious.

Separate from those who are divisive and create strife. Separate from the lazy and the perverse. Their progress is impeded in a painful and destructive way.

Separate, be far from them. If you value your soul, if you want to guard your soul, if you want to preserve your relationship with God, you have got to separate. This notion of inclusiveness, remember part of DEI, which happily I think they're trying to reverse a lot of its deleterious and evil effects.

But what's the I in DEI? Diversity, equity, and what? Inclusion. Christianity is not inclusive. The way of faith is not inclusive.

It is exclusive. It is conditional. We are not to be accepting of everyone, everywhere, all the time.

We are to be discerning. We are to be discreet. We are to be selective.

This is replete in the Bible, Old Testament and New. Postmodern, progressive, deconstruct, reconstruct Christianity emphasizes absolute unconditional inclusivity and tries to base it on the Lord Jesus. That is sloppy.

It is a failure to observe the gospel accounts of the Lord Jesus. The Lord Jesus was exclusive. What happened when he went to the upper room? Did he say, well, as many of you 12 want to come up to me and watch me raise this little girl who's not dead but sleeping, come on up.

I'm going to head up to the top of this mountain and my father's going to do a wonderful thing. How many of you all want to come up? He told nine of the 12, stay down here. Always including Judas in that group, by the way.

Peter, James, and John go to the upper room. Peter, James, and John go to the Mount of Transfiguration. It's exclusive.

Who goes with him to the Garden of Gethsemane? All 12? The same three. Peter, James, and John. It's exclusive.

It is selective. It is discerning. It is discreet.

We are to be the same. Identify those who cause strife. Identify those who create a thorny and painful way because they are lazy and because they are perverse and get the hints.

Create a separation. Stay far away. It's the Word of God.

So helpful, by the way. Makes it quite a lot easier to sort our relationships and our associations with this very clear guidance from the Word. Well, we're going to pause here and take our break.

When we come back, we will pick up here in verse 19, and then we're going to start a new

section of this part of Proverbs in verse 20. But we'll pause here and take our break.