

Proverbs 24-12-18a

Greetings fellow members of Grace & Truth Bible Church. It is Wednesday the 18th of December 2024. We continue our study in Proverbs chapter 15 and we have come to a fascinating section here beginning at verse 20 where we have that introduction that is frequently used to start a new section referring to the father and mother in verse 20.

We have worked down to the latter part of the verses 20. So you have he who is greedy for gain in verse 27 and so forth. We are going to be picking up at that point tonight.

Let us ask God's blessing on our fellowship and study and we will begin. Father we are so grateful for another time and opportunity to fellowship, to be blessed by what your Holy Spirit does in the heart of each one that assembles and gathers with us. We thank you for your grace and faithfulness.

We thank you for the power that is contained in your word and the ongoing presence of your Holy Spirit to lead us, to guide us, to comfort us and to lead us into all truth. We pray that that will be the case this evening as we spend these few minutes looking together at this portion of your word. May the Holy Spirit find our hearts ready and teachable and we ask for a good memory and the perspicacity to see how we can put these things into application in the days ahead.

We ask it in Jesus name. Amen. Looking at our passage, if you pay attention, there is a sort of a physical theme, almost a bodily theme that begins to appear as you move into the latter part of chapter 15.

See if you can detect it as I read these verses out loud and I will emphasize the words that might be helpful in detecting this pattern. The beginning in verse 26, the thoughts of the wicked are an abomination to the Lord, but the words of the pure are pleasant. This is actually also the thoughts of the pure.

You notice words is in italics, but this is thoughts. Thoughts is our word there. Verse 27, he who is greedy for gain troubles his own house, but he who hates gifts, in other words, isn't angling for them, isn't trying to live his life to receive that kind of gain, will live.

So you have being greedy and hating there. Here's where you really want to pay attention. Verse 28, the heart of the righteous studies how to answer, but the mouth of the wicked pours forth evil.

The Lord is far from the wicked, but he hears the prayer of the righteous. The light of the eyes rejoices the heart, and a good report makes the bones healthy. The ear that hears the rebukes of life will abide among the wise.

He who disdains instruction despises his own soul, but he who heeds rebuke gets

understanding. The fear of the Lord is the instruction of wisdom, and before honor is humility. So I hope you were able to notice there that we have a number of references to bodily communication in terms of the thoughts, the attitudes, the heart, the mouth, the ears, the eyes, the bones, and why would this be important? Why would the text begin to use these terms in this cluster of proverbial sayings? When we see references to especially the eyes and the ears and the mouth, we use these to communicate both verbally and non-verbally.

It's a wonderful thing to have an insight into the world of the non-hearing and to see how important visual communication is for those who can't hear. And we know that what proceeds out of the mouth originates in the heart and is a reflection of our attitudes, what brings us joy, what we are clamoring for or seeking versus what we despise and hate. And so all of this together, if you think about it, just wad it all up in a big ball and look at it in its totality, this is our daily interaction with each other, both the one and others and those who are outside.

It strikes me when I'm in a crowd, and for me, a crowd is more than about three people, but to mingle with humanity, we are talking all the time, all the time. There's a constant undercurrent of conversation everywhere. Two people get together, we're talking.

And you think of the other denizens of the earth that are sort of semi-sentient, you look at animal life, and animals don't spend that much time communicating with each other. A dog will bark, other dogs will pick up the bark. Chickens will hear one cluck in a certain way, and that's the sound, and they'll all come running to look for it.

But as humans, we are almost uniquely set apart by the amount of communication that we do. What we communicate originates in the heart and is a reflection of our attitudes. We speak it with our mouth, our tongue, our lips, and it is either a blessing or not to those with whom we are communicating.

We are around others, and they communicate, and they share what is in their heart. And these things speak about the effect that we have on one another, and what that says about us in the eyes of the Lord. We can't always know what someone's motives or desires really are.

I'll share with you after the break something related to that subject in terms of how can we know the intentions or the purposes behind a given behavior or a given type of instruction. But in this chapter, you see everything from walking to hating to honoring. These attitudes that define our walk are spoken of here.

So the other thing we are going to see, especially in this next section in chapter 16, is we have an increasing reference to the role of the Lord, of God in heaven. You can go proverb after proverb and cover a half a page or three quarters of a page before you find a reference to the Lord. But in my Bible, starting on this page, you have the Lord more and more frequently referenced to the point that in the section coming up in chapter 16, every single proverb refers to the Lord.

And so, again, if you start with us living a human life on this earth that anyone can live, what separates you and me from the hoi polloi, the average person you might bump into out on the economy? It is our relationship to the Lord and the fact that that relationship ought to change, ought to define, ought to be a strong influence on how we think and what we say, the way that we employ our tongue, our lips, our mouth, our ears, our eyes, because it isn't just the effect we have on each other. Any two human beings, regardless of faith or lack thereof, can have an influence on each other. We are uniquely positioned to be an influence on others that reflects the Lord.

And we can think and act in ways that are either pleasing in God's sight or are an abomination in His sight. And that is critical. The view that the Lord takes of our thoughts and intents, of our motives, our purposes is so important, you can't think of anything more so.

It determines our future fate. It determines whether God can bless us in the present. It determines whether God can bless us to the hearts of other people, whether we can be a conduit and an avenue of blessing toward others.

So every time you see a reference to the eyes, or the ears, or the mouth, or the heart, or its attitudes, you say, well, this verse doesn't have a body part word. But you look at what it's talking about, and it is some aspect of human thinking, human motivation, human interaction. And this influence and presence and perpetration of the truth of God amongst people pretty much depends on us.

We, in this age, represent the Lord Jesus in His absence. And we are conduits for truth, or we are agents of distraction and destruction. We can be enemies of the cross, as Paul says.

So, if you pick up here in verse 26, the thoughts of the wicked are an abomination to the Lord. You can do a whole sermon on that statement and its inspired truth. The thoughts of the wicked.

God knows our innermost thoughts. Not only ours, not only those who claim Christ or who are related to God by faith, but everyone. The thoughts of the wicked are also known to Him.

This ought to do several things in our thinking. A. If you have concerns about personal security, well, what if I don't have a security camera? What if there aren't bright enough lights in my driveway for the nighttime? What if I don't have secure windows or adequate locks on my doors? What if someone's lurking in the bushes? What if some nefarious person is going to break and enter and do harm or scare the daylights out of me at a minimum? Stop and think. Look at this verse.

What does it say? The thoughts of the wicked are known to God and those wicked thoughts are hateful to Him. They are loathsome to Him. And if those thoughts are aimed at one of His children or a group of His children, a family of His children, any of us, what do you think God's response is going to be? Do you trust Him for that response? I can tell you that if I become

aware of a bad attitude toward those that are under my care and on my watch, I am going to be alert.

I'm going to take steps. It is a responsibility. It is an opportunity to be a demonstration of my love for them that I take care that they are secure, that they are safe, that they are at peace, not worried, not unduly concerned.

I take that personally because that's my job as husband, as father, as head of the household on the property and so on. That's my job. And to care for my loved ones is a very high priority.

Well, how much more so our Father in heaven? Don't think like they were saying to the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel. Remember when Elijah is sort of teasing them? They're dancing and trying to get Baal to do something. And he says, well, maybe he's busy.

Maybe he fell asleep. Maybe he's not aware of what you're asking. Surely if he was aware, he would act on your behalf.

And of course, because there is no Baal, they can dance and cut themselves and prostrate and do everything for hours. And there's no effect because there's no one there. When Elijah appeals to our Father in heaven and says, Lord, show these people who you are, he shows up and the top of the mountain disappears and the sacrifice and the wood on the altar and the altar itself and the water in the trench around the altar are all immediately blasted away by the glory of God because God is listening to Elijah.

God knows the confrontation he has with these evil men. In the same way, the Lord knows the thoughts of the wicked and he rejects them. He is not going to support them.

He's not going to encourage them. He's not going to allow them to fulfill their purpose. This is not to say that nothing bad will ever happen to a believer or a faithful believer.

But what it says is that to the extent that God chooses to preserve us, we are better preserved than any security system, any amount of ammunition and firearms, any amount of cameras and surveillance and law enforcement presence. If God is securing us, we are well and truly secure. I will lay me down in peace and sleep for thou, Lord, only makest me dwell in safety.

To the extent that something does happen and occasionally for God's own purposes, he will allow an intrusion. He will allow an incursion. You can see no better example of this than the Lord Jesus being arrested.

He could have called 10,000 angels. The Father could have sent the entire hosts of heaven and that would have never happened. God allowed it because he had a greater purpose in it.

You think about the two witnesses in Revelation when they are invulnerable for the duration of their ministry until a certain point and God allows them to be killed. Why? Did God get tired? The angels got distracted? The church got distracted? The church got distracted? The angels got

distracted? The church got distracted? The church got distracted? The angels got distracted? The church got distracted? The church got distracted? The angels got distracted? The church got distracted? The church got distracted? The church got distracted? The angels got distracted? The church got distracted? The church got distracted? The angels got distracted? The church got distracted? The church got distracted? Even the bad things that happen to us are designed by God for benefit. It is in our passage.

We are going to see it here in a few verses hence. But notice, it begins with God's knowledge of the thoughts of the wicked. They don't take him by surprise.

They don't do an end around. They don't outflank him. They don't surprise him.

They don't sneak past. They don't do something unexpected. God knows their thoughts and when he sees their thoughts, they are repulsive to him.

And when God is repulsed by a thing, it isn't going to be here very long. So, what will he do? Who is the most defenseless person in Israel? It's the widow. You picture an elderly widow.

Sons are grown and gone. Married and have families of their own. Maybe they've moved away.

The husband has departed. And so here's a widow. Because the Lord knows the thoughts of the wicked, he will anticipate.

He will protect. Look at the preceding verse. The Lord will destroy the house of the proud, but he will establish the boundary of the widow.

If we feel helpless, if we feel defenseless, if we feel vulnerable or shaky in our confidence. When I was a kid, I really did not like the dark. My imagination ran wild of what might be out there in the woods or behind the barn or whatever.

And I completely and utterly lost my fear of the dark when I latched on to the Word of God and realized how important it was. And learned about the love of God and the presence of God in my life. And I haven't been afraid of the dark from that day till this.

Because greater is He that is in me than he that is in the world. My Heavenly Father knows my every footstep. And nothing is going to happen to me that He doesn't allow, that He doesn't have a great purpose in.

Not to say bad things will never happen. But if they do, it is going to be for His glory and my benefit. It is always the case.

Always. Without fail. If God before us, who can be against us? Why should I fear what man can do unto me? I've got a Heavenly Father who knows everything.

Who is all-powerful. Who with a word can speak universes into existence. So, can I cast all my cares upon Him because He cares for me? Absolutely.

And with ever-increasing confidence as I walk a road of faith and endeavor to be qualified to receive the fulsome benefits of His promises. If I'm disobedient and apathetic and all of a sudden find myself in great danger and I say, Oh Lord, I'm turning to You now because I'm scared to death and I'm in bad need. How much better to day by day be communing with Him in prayer and in fellowship in His word and to be seeking His will in my life with confidence that He is really paying attention to those who place their faith in Him on a regular and daily basis.

And the more faithful we are, the more diligent we are, the closer we draw to God, the closer He draws to us. It isn't, God will draw near to you and then you will be close to Him. That's not what Scripture says.

It says, draw nigh unto God and He will draw nigh unto you. He has given us the opportunity. He has made by His grace this available, but it is up to us to be moving in His direction.

You will seek me and find me when you search for me with all your heart. And when we are seeking people, when we are confessing people, when we are praying people, when we are trusting people, walking by faith and not by sight, I have confidence, whatever may be tied. Remember the words of the song, be not dismayed, whate'er be tied, God will take care of you.

Under His wings of love abide, God will take care of you, through every day or all the way. And you can take that truth to the bank. Why? Because God knows.

I don't know what might be behind the tree in the dark, but God does. And that thing is going to trip and fall and land on a stob and get wounded before it comes anywhere near me. Because my Father is in heaven and has His plan and He's not going to be thwarted.

And the Lord knows the proud. Again, pride is an attitude of heart. And before anyone speaks, before anyone acts, before anyone puts on the dog or lifts their nose in the air, God will destroy the house of the proud.

That's their dwelling place. That's their security. That's their place of safety.

They're putting their faith in their house. But He will establish the boundary of the widow, not just preserve her house, but preserve her yard and preserve her field and preserve her boundary out to the very edge of what belongs to her by God's design. The thoughts of the wicked, they are known to God.

They are abominable to Him. But of the pure, and because those italics just scratch the italics out, it goes back to the last noun, thoughts. The thoughts of the wicked are an abomination, but the thoughts of the pure are pleasing to God.

Now think about this. You've got somebody that's wicked and they're abominable. You've got someone that we endeavor to be, those who are pure.

I'm not pure because I never sin. I am pure because I know how to pray through Psalm 51. I

know the truth of 1 John 1.7 and 1 John 1.9. I know that despite my failures and my fallen nature and my erring and coming short and failing again and again, by God's grace, I can wash my robes and make them white in the blood of the Lamb.

I can confess. I can ask for strength and insight to break bad habits, to depart from bad patterns, to anticipate and not fail in the same situation the next time. And when I am purged with hyssop and made clean, when I am washed and made whiter than snow, what am I? I am pure.

History doesn't count. God removes our sins as far as the east is from the west. And if I have a seeking heart and if I recognize my failures and bring them before the throne and ask forgiveness and cleansing, I confess them.

He is faithful and just to forgive our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If all unrighteousness is cleansed, what does that make me? Pure. What does God think of the pure? Our thoughts are pleasant to Him.

If I'm pleasing to God and the rascal wanting to do me harm is an abomination to God, who's going to prevail? It's a pretty easy equation to solve. But we have to believe and we have to have faith that God means what He says when He makes this kind of revelation to us. I could go on for the rest of the night just on this one set of Proverbs.

It is meaningful. It is practical. It will change our heart, change our attitude and instill in us great humility because we're like the widow.

We can't defend ourselves from the slings and arrows, the wiles of the devil and the roaring lion that He is represented to be. But it isn't I that am greater than Him. It's the one who is in me that is greater.

And I like that to be all three members of the Trinity. I want the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. If they're in your fort, your fort's not going to fall.

That's for sure. But you move forward here to verse 27. He who is greedy for gain troubles his own house.

When's the last time we saw the word house? Look up in verse 25. The Lord will destroy the house of the proud. But notice what happens if you're greedy for gain, you trouble your own house.

You're the one swinging the sledgehammer and making cracks in the foundation. Why? Why do people pursue gain? In many cases, it is for security. I don't want to be a burden or starve or be in humble circumstances in my old age.

I don't want to not have things. I don't want to be viewed as poor or insufficient or unsuccessful. So I want gain because I want to impress.

I want to secure. I want to lay a foundation of wealth or possessions or other collections of things that bring me some sort of satisfaction. All of that stands in the way of and in the place of relationship with God.

You cannot serve both God and what? Mammon. Mammon. Mammon is greedy gain.

I want more stuff. I want a bigger bank account. I want nicer things.

I want to impress. I want to secure. I want to entrench and protect myself with a wall of great stuff.

You cannot serve God if that's your attitude and you trouble your own house. The very act of accumulating these things creates trouble. People who've gotten a lot of wealth many times split their families wide open out of greed.

Watch what happens when a rich man dies or a rich man tries to change his will as happened recently. There are endless examples of people who win the lottery or who otherwise have a sudden accumulation of wealth or even a gradual accumulation of wealth and people in their periphery and around them suddenly want to get their clutches on it. He who is greedy for gain troubles his own house.

You think this is going to be an advantage. It is a disadvantage. This is the way that seems right, but its ends are the ways of death.

This is human thinking, not divine thinking. You are never more rich than when you divest yourself of any interest in material things because now you're focused on your treasure in heaven, on what's going to happen in the eternal future, not the next few weeks, months, or years. He who is greedy for gain troubles his own house.

You do it to yourself. There are some things where it says God will destroy. God will destroy the house of the proud.

You get out there and start fanning about as they say in Britain. You start lifting yourself up and attempting to promote yourself in the eyes of others. God will come and knock your house down.

But if you pursue greed and that becomes a priority, the acquisition and the possession of stuff, you are going to make the trouble yourself. You are going to become a troublemaker, not a peacemaker. You are going to be a divider, not a source of unity.

We are called to be unified and to be agents of peace. To the extent that it is up to you, live peaceably with everybody, whatever level of love they qualify for. To the extent that it is up to you, Jesus said, I'm giving you my peace.

The world can't give you this kind of peace, but my peace, I leave with you. My peace, I give to you. The world can't touch this kind of peace.

How awful to fritter that away, to lose your grip on it and substitute trouble because you get your eyes on material things. This doesn't have to be a great pile of gold coins. This can be just a focus on, I want a particular thing.

I want a particular kind of thing. And it is just materialism in any form, large or small, collective or individual, one thing or everything. It doesn't matter.

It is the attitude that I'm going to put my trust in stuff. Cursed is the man who puts his trust in man. Cursed is the man who puts his trust in stuff.

He will trouble his own house. But it says, this is the perfect verse for Christmas time. He who hates gifts, it says, bribes, scratch that out.

The word in Hebrew is translated gifts. He who hates gifts will live. I think I'm going to make a little Christmas ornament, maybe several hanging on the Christmas tree.

He who hates gifts will live. So if there's not much under the tree, you know why? I hate gifts. Hate giving them, hate getting them.

That's not actually true. What does this mean? He who hates gifts will live. Remember in the Bible, so often love and hate are policies.

They are persuasions. They are priorities. Jacob have I loved, Esau have I hated.

God never hated Esau in the traditional sense ever. God loves the world, right? What does it mean I've loved Jacob and I've hated Esau? This is how interested am I in investing in this person or this project? How invested, how interested, how much attention am I going to pay to it? This kind of love and hate, you could almost translate colloquially. Jacob, I have paid attention to.

Esau, I don't pay attention to, right? And that concept, when you bring it to this verse, he who doesn't pay attention to gifts, gifts don't influence me. This is why the King James translators put bribes here. This is a gift that can potentially influence your decisions.

How many times do you see in public life people get in trouble because they've taken gifts and they're accused of a conflict of interest? Well, the reason you're lobbying for Ukraine is you got a lot of financial gain in Ukraine. Financial gain in Ukraine is mainly in the plane or something, but you are looking at the gift in the way that we just previously saw where material gain becomes a priority. It affects your goals and your values, how you choose what you say and do.

So if you pay no attention, this is hate in the sense of pay no attention to. And you try that out in a lot of the love and hate passages where they are policy, like the Jacob and Esau idea. And you'll see that you get close to the Hebrew idea here.

He who pays no attention to bribes will live. No attention to gifts, no attention to what the material outcome is going to be. I could do my taxes a certain way.

I could shade what I did over the past year in a certain way, and my tax burden will decrease. That's a gift. That's a bribe.

That is a material advantage. But if I have no interest in that, if I know that God is going to supply all my needs according to his riches and glory, and more so if I am honest and faithful and a worthy reflection of his righteousness down to the smallest detail, I don't even take U.S. government pens home from work. If I'm careful to reflect integrity and, oh, look, bank error in your favor, collect \$200.

When I am playing Monopoly, which I haven't done in a while, but, you know, bank error in your favor, well, was that my money that they lost and then found, or is it an error that they made, and I'm getting money that isn't mine? If I get a card that says bank error in my favor, I want to go down to the bank and be sure that what is happening is fair and honest, and that I'm not getting the benefit that is going to cost somebody else something. You find any quantity of money. You find someone's purse or their billfold.

It doesn't matter how much is in it. Do you want to keep it? Are you tempted to keep it? You don't. You are not motivated by the material gain aspect of any situation.

Do I benefit? Will I get a free this or an extra that? Well, I'll open my account at this bank because I get a toaster. That shouldn't be the basis for choosing a bank, right? Really? You're going to choose that bank because they gave you a cheap toaster? Where's the thought? Where's the meditation? Where is the presenting something before God in terms of stewardship and character and wanting to represent those who are thoughtful and prudent and wise in the world? So, greedy for gain, you'll trouble your own house, but if you remove the motivation that material things often create, you'll live and not just survive death. This is life in abundance, life in its fullness.

This is what they refer to when they say, man, that's really living. You will have a kind of prosperity and a kind of security that those material things can never offer, much less provide. Verse 28, the heart of the righteous studies how to answer.

What does that mean? If somebody says a thing, whether it's a statement or a question, am I waiting for the last word so that I can immediately respond? I don't want there to be any dead air between their last word and my first word. I may even step on the end of their sentence because I am so anxious to respond, to reply, to speak, to opine, to baffle, whatever it might be. The heart of the righteous studies how to answer.

I take a beat. I have an answer and I believe it's right, but what effect is this answer going to have on the person I'm speaking to? Am I going to drive them away with my rightness? You can be right in a very grievously wrong way. It isn't enough to be right.

How are you right? For what purpose are you expressing this correct view? Is it, let me tell you what I know, let me impress you with my research, let me overwhelm you with my facts, let me

elevate myself while I kind of push you down in my reply. This is why someone who is righteous, they consider the answer in their heart before it comes out their mouth, and they study. That takes a little time.

I wish studying could be done in like six seconds. It never is. You got a big exam coming up.

You might study all night. You might study for days. You might study for weeks getting ready for a certification exam or whatever.

The heart of the righteous slows down and thinks about an answer, which means somebody else has confronted us with a claim, a statement, a question, a comment. It's been initiated from the outside. It doesn't say the heart of the righteous studies how to go out and make speeches or how to go out and influence the public or win the country back for God.

It's an answer. We are here to answer. Be ready always to give an answer when people ask, but it needs to be studied out.

We need to think about it. And in the thinking, it's a great time to pray about it. Lord, bring to my mind the wisdom, the truth from your word that I need to give a soft answer, that turns away wrath, to give an answer that does not cause offense, doesn't turn into grievous words that harm the hearers, doesn't create contention and strife and division, where I can gently offer a truth if I need to speak at all.

Sometimes after you study how to answer, you think, you know, the best thing is not to say anything. It takes great self-discipline. Bridle the tongue.

Everything else is going to be okay. You have your whole body under subjection. By the way, remember the walk and the ears and the eyes and the mouth and the lips and so on? That's bringing your whole body into subjection, as James says.

So the heart of the righteous studies how to answer, but the mouth of the wicked pours forth evil. Notice, it's like it doesn't even reach the thought process. The ears hear something, the mouth pours out an evil response, and there is no heart involved.

Certainly no studious, prayerful consideration given. Nobody will complain if they make a comment or ask a question and we say, let me think about that for a minute. Let me make sure I understand your question or your comment.

Give me a second to ponder that. I want to give you a good answer. I want to be sure I'm answering the question you're asking.

I want to be sure I'm addressing the point you're making. Nobody minds a thoughtful person who is endeavoring to produce a quality response. Nobody minds.

So why would we rush to judgment and rush to comment instead of taking a beat and doing what we should? Well, this leaves us at the threshold of verse 29, and that's where we'll pick up

when we come back from the break.