

Pursuing Wisdom and the Knowledge of God, pt. 2 (Prov 2.1-5)

I. REVIEW

- A. We live in a particular hour of human history where we are witnessing an increased assault against the things of God. We experience this in our generation through the widespread decay of public morality, the death of institutions, and the growing acceptance of immorality and deception on a global scale.
- B. The primary need for the church in this moment of history is to be filled with the *knowledge of God* (relationship with him) and *wisdom* (a life ordered by what God calls good).
- C. Daniel prophesied that in times of extreme trouble, it would be the people who *know God* who are able to stand firm and take action. These people will also possess the grace to bring others into understanding.

³²He shall seduce with flattery those who violate the covenant, but the people who know their God shall stand firm and take action. ³³And the wise among the people shall make many understand (Dan 11.32-33)

- D. The need to orient our lives in a way that God evaluates as wise is the call of Christian discipleship. In the midst of days where lawlessness increases, Jesus tells that love will grow cold. It is in the midst of these times that Jesus calls his disciples to be both *wise* and *faithful*.

¹²And because lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold. ¹³But the one who endures to the end will be saved... ⁴⁵Who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom his master has set over his household? (Matt 24.12-13, 45)

- E. Whether or not we live in a time of increased lawlessness one day each of us will stand before the judgment seat of Christ to give an account to what we did in our lives.

⁹we make it our aim to please him. ¹⁰For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil (2 Cor 5.9-10)

- F. The mercy of God is free forgiveness apart from our works. Our lives are marked by his unmerited favor and abundant mercy in Christ Jesus. He lavishes the power of his kindness upon us in him. Wisdom, however, does require that we experience greater *blessing* (reward) or difficulty in line with the choices we make and what we give our lives to (e.g., gambling, laziness, etc.).

- G. At the judgment seat, there will be Christians who *suffer loss* because they failed to pursue the depths of the knowledge of God and walk in wisdom. They will experience the infinite mercy of God's saving power in Christ, but they will experience real loss of potential blessing (eternal reward) by building with materials that do not matter in eternity.

¹²Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw — ¹³each one's work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done. ¹⁴If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. ¹⁵If anyone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire. (1 Cor 3.12-15)

II. THE PATHWAY TO THE FEAR OF THE LORD AND THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD

¹My son, if you receive my words and treasure up my commandments with you, ²making your ear attentive to wisdom and incline your heart to understanding; ³yes, if you call out for insight and raise your voice for understanding, ⁴if you seek it like silver and search for it as for hidden treasures, ⁵then you will understand the fear of the Lord and find the knowledge of God. (Prov 2.1-5)

- A. In Proverbs 2 we find an outline (or a roadmap) to pursuing the knowledge of God. God promises to grant the fear of the Lord (the starting point for wisdom) and greater knowledge of him to *any* who pursue this path.
- B. We must understand that growth in the knowledge of God and wisdom is not a *guarantee*. We must glory in the truth that our salvation is not conditional. We have received the unmerited grace of God in Christ Jesus by faith in him alone, apart from any work or righteousness in ourselves. While this is true, the New Testament always portrays the *outworking* of our salvation as having real effects on our behaviors, thoughts, choices, pursuits, etc.
- C. Growing in the grace of God in Christ Jesus in our experience, growing in the knowledge of God, walking in maturity, seeing victory over sin, and experiencing the fear of the Lord are *participatory* in nature.
- D. Proverbs 2 lays out four conditions to growing in the fear of the Lord and the knowledge of God. Each of these is a *pursuit* — meaning, they have real implications for our time, energy, affections, etc.

III. CONDITION #1 — TREASURING GOD'S WORD

- A. The first two exhortations of Proverbs 2 are the call to “receive my words” and “treasure up my commandments with you”. This speaks of possessing an active pursuit of filling our minds and hearts with God’s word in a consistent and intentional way.
- B. We must seek to grow in our love for God’s word by regularly feasting upon it. God’s word is alive and active, and over time the Lord will use his word to change and transform our hearts.
- C. It is only through the word of God that we can know God. We cannot possess the knowledge of God apart from a growing understanding of his word.
- D. We pursue growth in God’s word by:
 1. ***Filling our minds with God’s word*** — we do this through actively reading God’s word in a consistent and intentional way over time. This can be done in larger chunks (e.g., Bible reading plan) or more slowly (e.g., reading a few Psalms or a Proverb each day).
 2. ***Growing in understanding of God’s word through study*** — an important aspect of growing in the knowledge of God is learning to understand God’s word. There are many helpful resources that help us engage with understanding what God’s word is saying (whole Bible commentaries/study Bibles, individual studies on a book of the Bible, etc.).
 3. ***Meditation*** — to truly “treasure God’s commands” within us, we must learn to meditate upon his word. Biblical meditation is not seeking to empty our minds or clear our consciousness in order to achieve a state of peace. Rather, Biblical meditation is likened to “chewing” on the word of God. We do this by taking his word and turning it into dialogue with him in a spirit of thanksgiving.

¹Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; ²but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night. (Ps 1.1-2)

- a. We ***thank God*** for the truths he has revealed to us. (“God, thank you that you are my shepherd”).
- b. We ***ask him for more revelation*** of the truths of his character, his heart, his purposes, etc. (“God, would you reveal yourself to me as *my shepherd*”).
- c. We ***set our hearts to obey*** his commandments (“God, I set my heart to follow you as my shepherd”).

- E. The primary way we pursue communion with God is through seeking to abide in his word. Jesus instructs us to abide in him in relation to abiding in his word, and his word in us.

⁴Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me... If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. (John 15.4)

- F. Paul exhorted the Colossians to let God's word dwell richly in them. He says that this will happen as they *sing* with thankfulness both psalms and hymns with a spirit of gratitude.

¹⁶Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God (Col 3.16)

- G. One of the most profound ways to pray the word is to sing small segments of the word in our prayers. It does not matter if you have a beautiful voice, there is a dynamic power in singing the Bible to God in the place of prayer.

IV. CONDITION #2 — A HUMBLE SPIRIT OF OBEDIENCE

- A. The second pair of invitations deals with a heart that is set toward obedience to God's word. Throughout the Scripture, to *make our ears attentive* or to *incline our heart* speaks of disposing our hearts toward fully responding to God's word in humble obedience.

- B. The first aspect of possessing a humble spirit of obedience speaks of having a *teachable spirit* as we come to God's word. We assume that God's word is designed to confront us and our preconceived notions. God's word is eternal, true, pure, and infallible.

- C. We come to the word with a posture of receiving, believing that God's word speaks to us and changes us — not that we change or conform his word to our desires.

¹²For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. ¹³And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account. (Heb 4.12-13)

- D. There is a particular temptation in our current moment to “deconstruct” God's word and put it on trial. One of the devil's greatest tactics is to call into question the truthfulness of God's word.

¹[The Serpent] said to the woman, “Did God actually say” ...⁴But the serpent said to the woman, “You will not surely die. ⁵For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” (Gen 3.1, 4-5)

- E. The second aspect of possessing a humble spirit of obedience is a commitment to *pursue a spirit of obedience* in response to God's word.

- F. Throughout the word obedience is presented as the *primary place* that God has chosen for us to express our love to him (cf. John 14.15, 21, 23, 24).

- G. Obedience here is not about perfection. Rather, it is about faithfully and intentionally seeking to walk in a spirit of freedom that comes from a heart that seeks to obey. Even though this will be weak throughout our lives, it is sincere and genuine to the Lord.

⁵Therefore do not pronounce judgment before the time, before the Lord comes, who will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart. Then each one will receive his commendation from God. (1 Cor 4.5)

- H. We must intentionally and consistently seek to wage war against sin and ask God to release the *help* of his Spirit (i.e., grace) to walk in a spirit of obedience.
- I. To walk in a spirit of obedience consists of several elements:
 1. **Repentance:** we humbly acknowledge sin in our lives without excuses. We repent by turning toward God rather than away from him.
 2. **Setting of our heart:** we actively set our heart to walk in obedience as we are convicted with sin. This includes taking necessary (radical) steps to deal with places where we experience increased opportunity or temptation (cf. Matt 5.29-30).
 3. **Asking God for grace:** Jesus promised that whatever we ask in his name the Father will give to us. We ask for more grace to walk in obedience. Grace does not necessarily make obedience *easy*, rather it makes it “doable”.

V. CONDITION #3 — A PERSISTENT PETITION

- A. To grow in the fear of the Lord and the knowledge of God we must *continually, intentionally, and persistently* ask God to give this to us.
- B. Jesus commands his disciples to continually ask, seek, and knock as they pursue walking in a life oriented around his kingdom.

⁷Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. ⁸For everyone who asks receives, and to the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened... ¹¹If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him! (Matt 7.7-11)

- C. When instructing his disciples on *how* to pray, Jesus often tells parables related to a consistent, relentless pursuit of him in the place of asking.

⁵And he said to them, “Which of you who has a friend will go to him at midnight and say to him, ‘Friend, lend me three loaves, ⁶for a friend of mine has arrived on a journey, and I have nothing to set before him’; ⁷and he will answer from within, ‘Do not bother me; the door is now shut...’ ⁸I tell you, though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, yet because of his impudence he will rise and give him whatever he needs.” (Luke 11.5-8)

¹And he told them a parable to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart. ²He said, “In a certain city there was a judge... ³and a widow in that city who kept coming to him and saying, ‘Give me justice’... ⁴For a while he refused, but afterward he said to himself... ⁵because this widow keeps bothering me, I will give her justice, so that she will not beat me down by her continual coming.” ...⁷will not God give justice to his elect, who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long over them? ⁸I tell you, he will give justice to them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth? (Luke 18.1-8)

- D. To continually petition the Lord for greater revelation reminds us that we cannot grow in the fear of the Lord or the knowledge of God *unless* the Spirit of God moves upon us.

¹⁰these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. ¹¹For who knows a person’s thoughts except the spirit of that person, which is in him? So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. ¹²Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God... ¹⁴The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned. ¹⁵The spiritual person judges all things, but is himself to be judged by no one. ¹⁶“For who has understood the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?” But we have the mind of Christ. (1 Cor 2.10-16)

VI. CONDITION #4 — A COSTLY PURSUIT

- A. The final pair of exhortations are an invitation to *seek* after this and *search* for it more than we would search for treasures, gold, and silver.
- B. The reality of Jesus (his person, his character, his leadership, and his kingdom) is indescribably beautiful and valuable. Yet, many do not orient their lives around seeking, seeing, or valuing him and his ways.
- C. In Matthew 13, Jesus tells a series of parables that picture aspects of the kingdom of God and the nature of the human heart. Two of the parables portray for us a life that is devoted to the majesty and beauty of Jesus and his kingdom and is willing to give away everything in order to pursue it.

⁴⁴The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up. Then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field. ⁴⁵Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls, ⁴⁶who, on finding one pearl of great value, went and sold all that he had and bought it. (Matt 13.44-46)

- D. These parables demonstrate the surpassing riches of Christ's majesty, his worth, his beauty, and his splendor. The show us that seeking out the 'treasure' of the kingdom costs us everything (and is worth giving up everything to attain).
- E. Many do not ever see/find the treasure and simply walk through life as if passing over an empty field. To find the treasure, we must be intentional to search out God's beauty and his value throughout the days of our lives.
- F. Paul gave up everything ("sold all") because he was captivated by Jesus' beauty. It made the trials, difficulties, hardships, and pain of his life seem pale in comparison.

⁷But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. ⁸Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ ⁹and be found in him... ¹⁰that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share in his sufferings (Phil 3.7-10)

- G. To seek after growing in the fear of the Lord and the knowledge of God will mean that we say 'no' to other pursuits throughout our lives. This will be costly and will look foolish in the eyes of the world.
- H. Jesus tells a parable of a type of "hearer of the word" who grows up into a full plant but does not produce fruit because the love for other things choked out the life of the word in their lives.

¹⁸And others are the ones sown among the thorns. They are those who hear the word, ¹⁹but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches and the desires for other things enter in and choke the word, and it proves unfruitful. (Mark 4.18-19)

- I. Paul exhorted the Corinthian believers to practice self-control like a championship athlete whose eyes were focused on securing the prize.

²⁴Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it. ²⁵Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. ²⁶So I do not run aimlessly; I do not box as one beating the air. ²⁷But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified. (1 Cor 9.24-27)

- J. Many times, the costly nature of pursuit is tied to things that are not sinful and are "good gifts" but have a tendency to stand in the way and "crowd out" the first pursuits of our lives.

VII. THE PROMISE OF THE FEAR OF THE LORD AND THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD

- A. God promises that if his people pursue these four things that he will meet them. To possess faith means that we believe that God will meet us in accordance with his promises. This is the only way that our hearts will be sustained to pursue these things over time and through various seasons of our lives.

⁶And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him. (Heb 11.6)

B. *Promise #1 — the fear of the Lord*

1. In the Proverbs the fear of the Lord is said to be the beginning of wisdom.
2. The fear of the Lord is not related to being afraid of God, because the love of God casts out all fear (cf. 1 John 4.18). Rather, the fear of the Lord is a reverence for his holiness, his glory, and his majesty; and a sobriety that longs to be conformed to his reality.
3. Elements of the fear of the Lord

- a. Knowledge that **God sees all** things.

³The eyes of the Lord are in every place, keeping watch on the evil and the good... "Sheol and Abaddon lie open before the Lord; how much more the hearts of the children of man! (Prov 15.3, 11)

- b. Knowledge that **God cares** about our lives.

⁹For the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to give strong support to those whose heart is blameless toward him. (2 Chr 16.9)

- c. Knowledge that **God evaluates** our lives in accordance with his character and nature.

¹²So then each of us will give an account of himself to God. (Rom 14.12)

4. When we connect to these realities by revelation, our desire is to be *pleasing to him* in our lives.

⁹And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, ¹⁰so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work and growing in the knowledge of God. (Col 1.9-10)

C. *Promise #2 — the knowledge of God*

1. The knowledge of God speaks of growing in relationship with God through communion. It speaks of more than just knowing truths or information *about* God. It speaks of a living relationship that is experienced by faith in this life.
2. We gain access to the knowledge of God because of the perfect and finished work of Jesus Christ. He has — through his perfect life, sacrificial death, and glorious resurrection — made a way for us to approach God with boldness. He has also sent his Spirit to us in order to unite us to him.
3. The glorious reality of eternal life is communion with God. We experience this *now* in our lives through faith; and in eternity we will experience this by sight.

³And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. (John 15.3)