

I. Introduction: God's Invitation in Proverbs 8

If you have your Bibles, I want to invite you to turn back to where we have been for the last couple of weeks, Proverbs chapter 8. Last week, if you were here or you listened to the tape, you know that we laid out probably the most incredible passage in all of the Bible, a passage that, without a doubt, deals with the very core of the theme and the issue of the Bible, and that is Christ's deity. If Jesus Christ was not God, then we are pretty much left to our own self, and that is the whole purpose of the Gospel and really the core of Christianity.

Proverbs chapter 8 is that deep chapter that goes way beyond just the surface of things and deals with the two major questions that almost everybody asks: who Christ is and where Christ came from, the eternalness of God. Today, we are going to look at the last couple of verses here, and again today we will see a great characteristic of God. There is no question in my mind that the greatest characteristic of God is His love for His creation. It is a tremendous thing that you see not only through the Bible, but you see all down through history, and if you look at your own life, you see it in your own life. His great desire and love for mankind whom He created.

As I read down through here, I see the trend of God, and I see this many, many times in the Bible. After He takes verses 20 through 31 and He talks about His Son, and He goes into great elaborate detail—as I have said, we laid it out the last two weeks—some of the most incredible detail and depth of God at the time of creation, and where Christ and how all that works, and what the purpose was, and God's purpose for stepping out of the Godhead in the person of Christ, that is some incredible stuff. But after He does that, He takes you behind the scenes and shows you and me how that God has come down in the fashion of a man simply to reach man.

Then He does in our text today what He always does. He then takes the last part of what He said and then He gives an invitation. That is simply what He does. He gives an invitation to man to receive all that God has done for him. That is exactly what He does here in this passage. It is so characteristic of God. You see it in great detail, as a great example is the book of Revelation. Throughout 22 chapters, God tells about the revelation that He gave to John, and all that He has done, all that He is doing then, and all that He is going to do. He talks about the church age in great depth. He talks about the rapture in Revelation 4. In Revelation 5, He talks about the judgment seat of Christ. Of course, Revelation 6 on up through Revelation 18 or 19, He talks about the tribulation period. He talks about the Antichrist in great detail. He talks about the great tribulation with the plagues and the vials and all of the judgments that fall. He tells in that great book of Revelation about God's dealing with Israel in Revelation 12, how she is the woman in travail that is in pain to be delivered, and how the devil, the great red dragon, goes after her to try to destroy her. It not only deals with the aspect of what is going on in the tribulation period, it shows you the panoramic picture of what has been going on down through history. He talks about the 144,000, 12,000 from each tribe that evangelize the Gentiles during the tribulation period. He talks about the great battle of Armageddon, that great battle where all of the Antichrist comes together and his forces to wipe out the nation of Israel. He talks about the Second Coming

in Revelation 19 when the Lord comes back in verse 11. He talks about the marriage of the Lamb when you and I as Christians are finally united with the Lord and we have that consummation of our relationship with Him. He talks about the millennium in Revelation 20. In Revelation 21, the new heavens and the new earth come down from God. Revelation 22 starts out talking about the great aspect of eternity.

Yet, in the book of Revelation, after all of that, after He lays out all of that stuff of what He has done, what He is doing, and what He is going to do, He gives an invitation in the last part of Revelation. It is the last invitation in the Bible. Again, one more time, He takes the last ten verses and gives man an invitation to find God through His Son. The final invitation in the Bible. Every time God seemingly lays out some great truth about Himself or something that He is doing, almost instinctively He comes back and it is almost like the Holy Spirit of God cannot wait; He has to give that invitation.

Without a doubt, for me, and I have been through Proverbs chapter 8 many, many times, and as I told you the other day, I found something in there last week when I was getting ready that changed my whole outlook on things in the Bible in some areas. It has always been a great chapter. But I have to tell you, for me, the greatest aspect of Proverbs chapter 8 and all that God says is not the deep truths of the Bible, though I cherish those and they are very, very important, but rather the simple, plain truth that shows me how much God loves us and wants us to be saved. It never ceases to amaze me how no matter what God is doing in the Bible, no matter how deep He is getting, no matter what great doctrine He is laying out, He never loses sight of the need that we have as men and women, and in this case, salvation.

The Bible says in 2 Peter 3:9 that God is not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.

1 Timothy 2:3-4 says:

1 Timothy 2:3-4

> For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour;

> Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth.

Even when God made hell in Matthew 25:41, I have told you this many, many times, the Bible says that hell was prepared for the devil and his angels. God never intended for man to wind up in a place like that. It is like the Holy Spirit of God cannot tell you about God or God's Son without extending an invitation for man to believe it and to accept it. This is what you have in the closing verses of Proverbs chapter 8, verses 32 through 36. After all that He has talked about the knowledge of God, the wisdom of God, the understanding of God, now He gives an invitation. Now He gives an invitation for man to choose and to accept and to believe what God has said. God extending Himself one more time to us, to man, His fallen creation who needs God so desperately to be saved and to walk in God's light and under the protection of all that God gives us. In these last five verses in Proverbs, it is like the Holy Spirit of God almost steps out of the scriptures to bring man to the understanding of how much we need God and all that God has done to give Himself to man.

II. God Expects a Response

Fundamentally, when you think about it, this is why an unsaved man cannot get saved, or maybe I should say, will not get saved. He is blinded. The Bible says in 2 Corinthians 4:4 that the devil, the god of this world, has blinded man that he cannot see the glorious Gospel light. He is blinded; he cannot see who Christ really is and the fact that he is lost. He cannot understand and grasp the simple truth, not only without understanding who God is or who Christ is, but what He has done for him. So he goes through life like a ship on a sea without a compass. He goes wherever the current takes him, but he has no direction in life. He has no purpose. He has no course set of where he wants to get to. The fact that he is lost and how he lives on the dead-end street of life and will never be complete without a relationship with God. This is fundamentally why an unsaved man cannot grasp the things of God, the fact that he cannot get who Christ is and he cannot get to the fact of what Christ has done for him.

Yet, I see the same thing many times with many of God's people. They are saved, but their life is totally opposite to what the Bible says the Christian life should be. I have seen Christians whose lives were absolutely totally dysfunctional, tragic on a scale from one to ten, or a fifteen plus. Their life is upside down. It is the worst that you have ever seen. Instead of the Bible getting them through life on a daily basis, they have to hold on to something else out there in life.

We talked about Thursday night, one of the great questions at 2 Chronicles chapter 16 was about King Asa. Somebody asked a question about the story in the Bible that King Asa was a good man. He did a lot of good things. The Bible says even his heart was perfect before the Lord. But then it comes to a point in his life where the Bible says that Asa got a disease in his feet, and when he got a disease in his feet, he had a choice. He could either go to God with that disease, but he chose to go to the physicians, the greatest medical minds of his day, instead of going to the Physician of physicians. And the Bible says that he died. I know that is a true story in the Old Testament. Asa is listed in the line of kings. I know the story is correct and I know the story is true. But from a practical standpoint, it reflects on your life and my life because the Bible says he had a disease in his feet. For me, that translates, that is a picture of a Christian who begins to have problems in his walk with God. We all struggle with things in our life. God's people many times, because their life is so tragic and their life is so much upheaval, it is simply because of the fact that they have a problem with their walk with God. Instead of coming back to the Bible and getting with God and letting God work through the problems and God give them the things that they need, they will not. They will go to the things of this world. They will go to psychiatry. They will go to a therapist. They will be put on Prozac or some other drug that will just slow down the process of your thinking but will never solve the problem because the problem is not a physiological problem, folks. The problem is your walk with God, and that is spiritual.

I wish there was a pill I could take when I get out of fellowship. Not only would I get me a big supply, I would buy all of you some. I would make you take one before you came in, like malaria pills like we used to take in the army. I wish there was something that I could take. I wish there was some medicine that I could take when I get a disease in my feet with my walk with God. But there is not because it is a spiritual issue. Just like an unsaved man cannot find God for his salvation, many times a saved man or woman cannot find God in their problems because they

will not come back to that simple, fundamental principle found in the book of Proverbs and throughout the Bible of who Christ is and what He has done for us. We lose sight of it. We get depressed in life. We go through great struggles in life, a life without any life, because we have lost sight of that tremendous truth. For us as Christians, it simply comes down to the basic understanding of a very basic, simple truth: who Christ is in your life and understanding and acting on what He did for you. It is just that simple. And God's people either will or they will not do that.

In all of our lives, this is true of everybody. There have been people who have made a difference in our lives as we have grown up. I know there are men in my life that have done that. When I was in high school, there was one or two teachers that I had that really shaped the course of my thinking and direction in life. I know that when I was in the service, there were men who changed my outlook on things. There were teachers, I am sure, in your lives. Many times my mom and my dad, and they were not perfect Christians by any stretch of imagination, but they instilled in me things that changed me for the better, and I am sure you can look in your life. Sometimes it has been a pastor or a preacher or a youth worker. But there will be somebody in your life and a time in your life that they affected you. They affected you in the course of your life that helped mold you and shape you. I tell you, there can be people that will affect you badly, just as there can be people who affect you in a good way.

But when we meet Christ, when Christ becomes our own personal Savior, it should completely change who we are, completely. It is a transforming. Where others may mold you, others may conform you, others may inform you, others may misinform you, the Bible does something that humans cannot do. The Bible transforms you. That is a spiritual thing. That comes because there have been many people in my life that I have met who have changed me for the better. But there is one man that I met that changed me for all of eternity. And He is better than all the rest. That is the whole concept here. In every way, He changes who we are. But it does not, unfortunately, in many people's lives. Instead of letting God change them, they carry their former issues right on into their new life with Christ. And it just never seemingly gets you any better. They never really change on the outside. They just put God in their back pocket and go right on doing what they simply want to do.

In this closing of this great chapter, let us look at this invitation that God has extended to us. This is just as important as all the deep things that we have gotten so far out of this thing, probably more important. But let us look at this invitation that God has extended to us after all that He has given us about simply who Christ is and what He has done for us. We will look at these last six verses here.

Let me read it for you starting in Proverbs chapter 8, verse 32.

Proverbs 8:32-36

- > *Now therefore hearken unto me, O ye children: for blessed are they that keep my ways.*
- > *Hear instruction, and be wise, and refuse it not:*

> *Blessed is the man that heareth me, watching daily at my gates, waiting at the posts of my doors.*

> *For whoso findeth me findeth life, and shall obtain favour of the Lord.*

> *But he that sinneth against me wrongeth his own soul: all they that hate me love death.*

Father, thank You for these closing verses here of this great invitation for us to find You and based on what You have told us already in this chapter, all that You have for us. Help us today to come to the Word of God with an open heart and an open mind. Help us to look at these things and to see and understand exactly how they can impact us and they can change us in a lasting way. Lord, these are good people here today. They may have their issues, they may have their problems, we may not always do what is right and we may be away from You today. But Lord, if they are Your child here today, and I know You love them, and I know they love You, they may struggle with things at times, but Lord, I just pray that You will help us today, all of us. Do not let this message just be to them. Let it be through me, to me, to them. Help me, Father, in everything that we do to give You the honor and the glory and the praise in Jesus' name we ask it, Amen.

Verse 32 starts out with my favorite phrase in the Bible because it always helps me understand the context: "Now therefore." "Now therefore" always is the key to tie the verses and the passages together. When He says "now therefore," He is going to tell you something based on what He just told you. You want to always remember that when it comes to your Bible. It will help you immensely when it comes to figuring out the context. "Therefore," "now therefore," will always be a connecting rod to what He has just said to what He is now going to say. Many times it will be the conclusion of what He is going to put it all into an understandable format for you, and basically what He does here. He says, "Because what I have just told you, because of what you have just read and studied, I want you to understand something and I want you to do something." That is what He is saying here.

The first thing I want to say to you is, after all, we are talking about two aspects here now: who Christ is and what He has done for us. The first thing I want to start out today by talking with you for a few minutes is, after all that God has done for us, once you realize who He is and you realize what He has done to come down to man, I want you to know today that because of that, God expects a response to His coming to man. God expects something from us. Staying silent on a matter will never work. This is why nowhere in the Bible does God ever acknowledge a Christian that simply sits on the sidelines of life while people die and go to hell and God's plan unfolds itself. You cannot find anywhere in the Bible where it ever legitimizes a person who is just a nominal Christian. In the New Testament, in the book of Acts, they are either in or they are out. I have no idea where this came in our Christian world today. But the farther we get from the Bible, the farther that middle of the ground has become a normal thing, when in the Bible it is an abnormal thing. It has never been accepted.

I have a message that I used to preach. I do not preach it anymore because God's people are so sensitive. I preach messages today on your favorite color, what is warm and soothing to you. We do not have a relationship with Christ here in this church. We have an encounter. Anyway. But in the day when you could still preach, I mean, I still preach, but there was a time when I used to go

around all over the place and I will tell you what, it was Katie Barthedore. This is one of those old messages. I do not usually title my messages, but I put a title to help me with the impact of this message, and the title of it was "What's the Difference?" I would get up before the people and I would simply say, "I want to ask you today, basically, about something, what's the difference?" And I would build it on the verse over there in Luke 6:46, where it says:

Luke 6:46

> And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?

I would start with that and I would say, "I just, this is not going to be a long message tonight," though it turned out to be longer than they thought it would be. But I said, "I just want to ask you three or four basic, simple questions because I am confused today in the Christian world, and a lot of things have got me confused, and I figured that this was the church and you are all good, godly people. Certainly somebody here could help me with this answer. So I am going to preach a message and I hope that by the time I am done tonight and out of here, you do not shake hands or somebody will come up to me and give me the answer, but I want to question is, what's the difference? What is the difference?"

Here is where I would start. I had four points to it, and I preach it longer than I am just going to show you what I used to say. I would say:

1. What is the difference between an atheist who would not dream of financially supporting a church and a Christian who will not either?
2. What is the difference between a skeptic who does not believe the Bible and a Christian who does not read it either?
3. What is the difference between an atheist who will not step inside a church and a Christian who will not go to church either?
4. What is the difference between a man who lives in this world and a Christian who lives like the world?

My point was, when God did what He did for you, when God became man, manifested in the flesh, when God came down and took your place on the cross, He expects a response to that. He just did not do that because there was nothing else to do on Tuesday. He did that because He requires a response from us.

Take this home with you. If you did not get anything else of what I say, you want to get this. Take this home with you. In light of what I have just said and where we are going with this, the devil is more than willing to allow you to profess Christianity as long as you never practice your Christianity. That is where we are at today. That is exactly where we are at. You need to put that on your refrigerator, put it in your mirror, put it wherever you people put things that you can see them. The devil is more than willing to allow you to profess your Christianity as long as you never effectively practice your Christianity.

III. Harkening to God's Ways

Look at Proverbs 8:32 here.

Proverbs 8:32

> Now therefore harken unto me, O ye children: for blessed are they that keep my ways.

The English language is a masterful language. Maybe not today because it is so corrupted today. But in all languages, languages reach a peak of their purity and when they are probably at their best. Of course, for the English language, it would be somewhere between 1600 and probably the latter part of the 1800s, somewhere in there. It was a masterpiece of language. The great literary classics of Hamlet or Shakespeare or all of those things that are held up as classics today. The thing that makes them as classic is the classic literary style of the English that they use. You take Shakespeare and put it in modern 20th century language, it would be worthless. It would be absolutely a disaster. But it shows you that in history there is an architecture to languages.

This is why we sell it back here, and if you do not have one at some point, you ought to get one. This is why we carry and sell that Webster's 1828 edition of the dictionary. Noah Webster was one of our founding fathers. He wrote most of the curriculum for the public school system and he is accredited with the first accepted dictionary. His 1828 dictionary is basically based on a King James Authorized Version. A lot of the words you find in there, he gets the definition right out of the Bible. He was a saved man. It makes his dictionary not only important for that, but it was written at a time when English language was still in its purest form.

It is a great day. You take the word "harken." He says there, "Now therefore harken unto me." You take that word "harken." It means more than just to hear something that somebody says. It carries a stronger connotation of not just hearing but giving attendance to, to heed to something, to regard something in a personal way, and then to respond to something in a personal way. "Harken" is not just, "Hey, listen to me." It is, "You harken to it. You take it and do something with it." So in Proverbs 8:32, He says, "Now therefore harken unto me, O ye children." What He is saying here is, "Hey, I came down and did all of this, Proverbs 8:1-22 for you. I did all of this. You now understand it. I have taken you behind the scenes. I have shown you everything, how I did it, why I did it. Now I expect a response from you. I expect you to harken to what I just said, therefore harken." What He is talking about is to hear what is said, I get that, but then also to change yourself toward what you have just heard. That expects us not only to hear what He says, but to also act on it by doing something with it.

In any church, you will always have people who go to church, but they never harken to anything that is said. That is true of any church. You will never find a church that you do not have that element in it. It is just the way that it is. They will take what they like out of a sermon, but they will never take what they do not like out of a sermon. That is just human nature of people who that is the way they are.

I want you to take this home. It is a two-for-one day today. Let me say this to you, and I know you probably know this because you are really sharp people, but let me say this to you anyhow. You do not get change in your life, I do not get change in my life, by the things that I like in the Bible. What changes me and what will change you is accepting and hearing and harkening to the things in the Bible that I do not like. That is what has to happen. But we have people all through our lives that we are going to meet in every church. It does not matter where you go. It does not

matter if you are a Baptist or a Charismatic or a Presbyterian or an Episcopalian or whatever in the world you think you are. You are going to find it in all areas of organized religion. There are going to be people who only want to take what they like from it and what they do not like from it they are not going to take. That will be a problem for you sooner or later.

You bring people to church and they will come to one of our services. They will go to other services. It is not just us. It is not just this church. It is any church. And they will hear something that they do not agree with or something they do not like and you will say, "Well, how did you like it?" And they will say something like this, "Well, it was interesting." "Well, it was, it was not what I expected," or, "You know," and sometimes there will be more even candid about it and say, "You know what? I just, that is, I really did not, I do not like that style of preaching. I do not like that style of ministry." Now, if you are ever going to get into ministry, you have to learn how to translate things. I do not translate the Bible. The Bible is as good a translation as you are ever going to get. But I have learned over the 40 some years how to translate what people say. Translation is, "I heard some things there about me that I did not like and I am not willing to change about me those things. So therefore I am going to blame it on whoever preached or this or that or whatever the case may be." We do not have to change. The things in the Bible that we like will never change us. It is the things that we do not like that we have to harken to.

Proverbs says that "he that is full loatheth an honeycomb; but to the hungry soul every bitter thing is sweet." You have to love it all. We have all seen people. I have seen them. You have seen them. I have had them all my life, and you have worked with people here. You have seen it too. They come in, and their lives are upside down. They have all kinds of problems. They have this. They have that. And we try to help them. We put them into a deal, and we try to get them to try to get them this, try to get them that, whatever they need, that is what we are here for. As long as they are talking about changing their life, everything is fine. It is the moment you start to put things in their life that they have to deal with that actually changes their life, you start to have a problem. You fundamentally do not want to change. Sometimes we do not want to change because it is, there is too much change to change. Sometimes we do not want to change because of the fact that really we like where we are at. We want to complain. How many times, I know this is true of me, so I know it is true of you, how many times have we complained about things that we did not like, but we were not willing to change what we had to change to change what we did not like? We are all that way. That is just the way we are. We are fickle. I am telling you, there will be times when you are going to find that everything does not work out that way. And you are going to find people who just are going to get caught up in those things and caught up in all of this stuff that goes along with it.

IV. The Two Ways: God's Way vs. Man's Way

Look at Proverbs 8:32, the last part of verse 32: "for blessed are they that keep my ways." There is one of the greatest studies you will ever take in the Bible. You like word studies, do you? The way man will go. In life, there are only two ways. There are only two ways. You may go to the store and there may be 600 different shades of lipstick you have to choose from. You may go to a liquor store and find out there are 45 different things of beer you have to choose from. I hope you

do not. You may go in life and go to buy a car and find out there are 45 different variations of that car you want to adopt. But I am telling you, in life there are only two ways you can go. You are going to go God's way, or you are going to go your way.

In Proverbs chapter 8, in His invitation, He is asking, "Hey, look, are you not tired of your way? Has your way really produced anything meaningful in your life?" He is looking at this thing and He is saying, "You know what, after I came down and I left the glory of heaven, came down and died on the cross, did what I did, God becoming man and coming down because I loved you to give you My salvation, I expect a response from you." And He is saying, "Harken to My ways for blessed are those that keep My ways."

You know what the real problem is with us folks, this is a very practical message today, but you know what our fundamental problem is, if we are saved this morning, and this is true of me just as much as it is you, because those two ways, God's ways and man's ways, can never coexist to any value in life. It has to be one or the other. We as God's people spend our whole life trying to reconcile these two ways to make them work together. And it simply will not work that way. This is why God's people have the issues that they have. It is not complicated. You have your way and God's way. I am not willing to let my way go. I am not totally willing to go God's way. So you know what I will do? I will just get 50-50, 50 over here, 50 over there and match them together. It will never work.

Amos 3:3

> Can two walk together, except they be agreed?

It is not going to work. You can never organize your way with God's way.

Genesis 24:27

> And he said, Blessed be the LORD God of my master Abraham, who hath not left destitute my master of his mercy and his truth: I being in the way, the LORD led me to the house of my master's brethren.

John 14:6

> Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.

Psalm 5:8

> Lead me, O LORD, in thy righteousness because of mine enemies; make thy way straight before my face.

Psalm 37:5

> Commit thy way unto the LORD; trust also in him; and he shall bring it to pass.

Psalm 119:27

> Make me to understand the way of thy precepts: so shall I talk of thy wondrous works.

Psalm 27:11

> Teach me thy way, O LORD, and lead me in a plain path, because of mine enemies.

Nothing complicated about it. Nothing at all. A plain path.

Psalm 37:34

> Wait on the LORD, and keep his way, and he shall exalt thee to inherit the land: when the wicked are cut off, thou shalt see it.

Psalm 119:33

> Teach me, O LORD, the way of thy statutes; and I shall keep it unto the end.

You see, when we harken to what God says and we just do not hear it but we allow it to change us to the point where we leave our way and go God's way, He says, "blessed are they that keep my ways."

I can tell you one thing from personal experience. A lot of things I preach in the Bible I do not have any experience on, so I just have to rely on the Bible's experience. But there are a lot of things in life in the Bible in my 64 years I have got some experience with. I can say one thing about this for personal experience. If you want a blessed life, if you want a content life, if you want a life with inner peace, and I am not saying you are not going to have any struggles. I am not saying you will not have issues that you have to deal with, and you have to deal, I am not saying that. But if you want a blessed life, a content life, a life of joy and fellowship on an equal, an unparalleled level that will override all the issues of life, just get your life going God's way and not your way anymore. That will solve just about every problem you have.

I have had people tell me all the time, I hear this all the time, "Bob, the Bible does not work for me." No, I have them tell me, I understand where they are coming from. They will say, "You know, the Bible does not work for me. You get up there and you preach about perfect peace and a peace that passes all understanding, and I hear all that stuff, but you know what, my life is a living hell." I tell them, I try to get them to see. The reason for that is because you simply want to try to tie in your way with His way. You simply want to bring in the things that you want to do with the things that He wants you to do and try to make those things work. And it will never work that way. Bible principles and all that you do in life, a principled life, organizing everything that you do based on how God views it, based on what God thinks about it, that is where the blessings of God lies. Trying to get there another way and trying to keep some things in your life that you want to do and then bring in other things over here that God wants you to do so you can have the best of both worlds, it is not going to happen. You cannot have an unsaved boyfriend or girlfriend and put in the principles of God and be happy. You cannot live like the world on this side and then go to church on Sunday morning on the other side and be happy. You may think in your mind it will work. I am telling you right now by personal experience, it will not work. The two are not conducive. They will not go together. So you go through your whole life and you struggle and you have bad marriages, bad relationships, bad everything. You go nowhere in life

spiritually and then if that was not enough, you pass those things right on to your children and off it goes. You cannot go your way and His way and put it together and have it work.

V. Hear Instruction and Be Wise

Proverbs 8:33: "Hear instruction and be wise and refuse it not." Here is another good word if you like word studies. It is the word "instruction." Here it is a phrase, "hear instruction," but the word "instruction" itself. I do not know if you know this or not, but the word "instruction" is found 33 times in your Bible. Twenty-five of those times it is found in the book of Proverbs. I cannot speak for you, but once I see that, do you know what I take from that? I take that the book of Proverbs is my handbook on God's instructions on the issues of life to me. I mean, who would not deduce that? We went through Proverbs chapter 1 when we started way back in the first five verses.

Proverbs 1:1-7

- > *The proverbs of Solomon the son of David, king of Israel;*
- > *To know wisdom and instruction; to perceive the words of understanding;*
- > *To receive the instruction of wisdom, justice, and judgment, and equity;*
- > *To give subtilty to the simple, to the young man knowledge and discretion.*
- > *A wise man will hear, and will increase learning; and a man of understanding shall attain unto wise counsels:*
- > *To understand a proverb, and the interpretation; the words of the wise, and their dark sayings.*
- > *The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge: but fools despise wisdom and instruction.*

It starts with receiving instructions. But Proverbs 1:7, just a little bit farther down, says, "but fools despise wisdom and instruction." "Nobody is going to tell me what to do?" Now you are right.

2 Timothy 3:16

- > *All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness:*

Why?

2 Timothy 3:17

- > *That the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works.*

So He says down through here, "Hear instructions. Do not refuse it." Proverbs 8:33 says last part, "be wise and refuse it not." The book of Proverbs is God's book of instructions to His son, you

and me, simply about a wise man and a foolish man. The whole Bible is built around those two concepts.

In dealing with people and people in my life, I never, never, never, I never hold anything against anybody that they did. It does not matter to me simply because now it may alter your life to a place where it is completely different. But on my side of the fence, all sin is sin. On my side of the fence, if you knew what I knew about me today, you would not even come and hear me preach. And if I knew what you knew about you today, I would not show up to preach to you. You see, the bottom line is that we are all fallible. Christians really bug me that have this self-righteous attitude about the fact, "Well, you sin, so therefore I do not sin," or "I do sin, but not sins like that. So you are over here and I am over here." That is crazy, man. We are all no good. The fact that I am standing up here in front of you is just illustrating the point that I am no good, worse than you are. You can look at me. I cannot look at all of you at the same point in time. We all have problems. We are all in a mess.

But the difference is that a wise man, the Bible is about a wise man and a foolish man. It is not about the mistakes we make. Now I will give you, the longer you get in the Word of God, the less mistakes you can make. I understand that, but you are not going to be mistake-free, nor am I. But the difference is that a wise man will make his mistakes, but he will harken to instruction and he will grow through that mistake, where a fool will make the same mistake, but then he gets prideful about it, he justifies himself, and he refuses to take instruction so he will never learn anything in life. So the one guy learns from his mistakes and grows through it, the other one refuses to grow through it, will not take instruction, so he goes through life repeating them over and over and over and over again.

VI. Blessed is the Man

Look at Proverbs 8:34.

Proverbs 8:34

> Blessed is the man that heareth me, watching daily at my gates, waiting at the posts of my doors.

"Blessed is the man." I would think that if I would just, I will save the time of doing this, but if I would start here with Barb and work all the way through here and come around over here and up through here and get Crystal and everybody back through here and over there and start with Zach and go down through here, get Maddie and all the way, get Kelly and all through that, get all these guys over here, go and get Joe over here, get John over here and all those over here. And I will ask you the same question. If you want to be blessed of the Lord, everybody would say yes. I have never met a person in my life who said, "I do not want God's blessing." Why, even unsaved people want blessings of God? They do not get it, but they want it.

Now I am a simple kind of guy. I wish there was more depth to me. You would appreciate me more, but I am just a stupid little guy. I just look at things at life and I try to make them as uncomplicated as I can make them because I am not very complicated. I learned a long time ago.

I am good at taking things apart. I am terrible at putting them back together. But I just look at things. And I just, I mean, it says here, "blessed is the man." And I know I want to be blessed. And I know everybody here wants the blessings of God in their life. But do you know how you have those blessings in your life? I mean, I think most of us have a mindset of what I call a clipboard Christianity. You get saved, you go to church, you do things you are supposed to do, do not do the things you are not supposed to do. And then suddenly, somewhere after one or two, three years on that big golden clipboard up in heaven, your name is on the top of the list. Now you have paid your dues. You have been to church long enough. Now you have, so your name comes up on the big golden clipboard. And the angel looks at that and the Lord says that today, Bob Alexander is on the top of the list. He is going to get wisdom today. He has been there long enough now. He is going to get this. He is going to get that. And he is going to get the blessings of God. We are going to put him now. His name is up on the clipboard and we are going to go right down that list. And this list goes for the next two months. So everybody on there, buddy, and the next two months are going to have it. That is how people think it happens. It does not happen that way.

Do you know that the term "blessed is the man" is found 12 times in your Bible? Throughout the Bible, 12 times? No, I do not know. Maybe it is just me. I would think that if I really wanted the blessings of God, the first thing that I would have to find out is how to get those blessings. So the first thing I would do is find out in the Bible where these 12 things are that says that "blessed is the man" because He did not just put that in there because they had some space to fill it up. So He said, "Write this down." He is telling you and me that if you want to have the blessings of God, you find these 12 things that He said, "blessed is the man," and you work at putting them in your life, guess what? You will have the blessings of God in your life. Now, how simple is that? That is not complicated. That is not hard. I did not even go to the Greek. "Blessed is the man" is found 12 times in your Bible. 12 different things He tells you and me to do to put in our life, and if we follow in life, they will lead to those blessings of God in your life. And yet, God's people will not take 20 minutes in a concordance to find out what they are. I am predicting right now, Thursday night Bible study. Somebody will raise their hand and ask me, "But what do those 12 things that blessed is the man is all about?" If I really wanted the blessings of God, I would not wait till Thursday. I would get me a concordance, and I would find out what they are. It is no wonder that there are 12. The Bible says salvation is of the Jew. All the blessings that you and I have as New Testament Christians are found in Abraham, father of the Jews, the 12 tribes.

Look at the last part of Proverbs 8:34: "watching daily at my gates, waiting at the posts of my doors." Getting up every morning, expecting God to do something with you that day. Watching for God to do something with you that day. Watching for God to use you some way, somehow. Getting up in the morning with the pure anticipation of being right there when God makes His move, and you are going to be part of it.

Now allow me to get warm and fuzzy with you for just a moment here, because I know I am going to ring a lot of bells here. I am a dog lover. I have always had a dog by the time I was that big. I lost two of the best three labs that I had here a while back, and I made a vow that I was not going to get it anymore because it is just too hard when you have got to lose them, because I get

attached to them. This is stupid, I know, but at least I get something out of it. You will not get anything out of it probably. But it lasted about, I do not know, four or five months, and I had to get two more. But believe it or not, I have learned so much about my relationship with God from those little guys and my relationship with them. I think it is probably true of most people who love dogs and love animals. I have to be dogs, but dogs are what I am most familiar with. But you know what? When it comes to those two dogs I have back there at home, I am all they care about. They do not care about you. Well, they may wag their tail and come over, but at the end of the day, it is me. They look to me for everything. They are dependent on me for everything.

I have a big 110-pound male lab, and they love these little bones, and he is so goofy that bone, that bone, they say that bone, they plan around. He just walks around, throws it down. I do not know what he is thinking he is doing. He just picks it up and throws it. I mean, it is just over and over again. But that thing will slide over, and if it gets that far under that chair, for whatever reason, he will not get it. You know what he does? He turns around, looks at me, and barks for me to get it for him. I will be in the middle of the deepest thought of my message for Sunday. That is why sometimes it goes off track a little bit. I will be in the deepest part of putting something together, and he is barking. There is a bone right over there, over there, down there, and he will not get it. I mean, his neck is long enough to get it. He could route that chair over if he wanted to, but he simply will not do it because he looks at me and he says, "Hey, I am dependent on you to get what I need." So, yeah, I get up and I get it. There are times I have heard him bark on the other side where I cannot see it, and I know the bark. I know the bark between somebody is here and get my bone. And I know if I just say to him, "Shut up," he will just keep barking. So I just get up and get it, and sure enough, I will walk around here and I will say, "Where is it?" And he will be standing right at it, looking at it, and looking at me, looking at it, and I see it.

They love me no matter what I do. They love me unconditionally. I will tell you, I love my dogs, but I whack my dogs sometimes. Now, my big male has got a two-ticket rear end. I mean, it is about that wide. And you hit him with your hand, it hurts your hand a lot more than it hurts him. But I have. They have been out there some time, and sometimes, you know, you are in a hurry, and they are out there, and they are just dinking around, and they have got to smell everything, and they have got to check everything out, and I am over there going, or they will do something really dumb, or they will get something. I have, until they get past that chewing stage, I do not know how many phone earbuds I lost. It is my own fault I would leave them and understand. TV remote controls, I order them by a case. I got the website, so I could just buy them, because they would chew them up. And I would get so mad. It is my fault, but they ought to know better. And I would smack that, one time I came down to my, my only remote was gone. And I cannot operate the stupid television, because I am technology without the hand deal. Whatever happened to two rabbit ears and just twisting the dial, man? And I know I was wrong, and you can turn me into PETA if you want, and all that crap, but I whacked that dog, man, I said, "What are you doing?" Now I whack that dog. Went over there, looked at that thing in pieces, and I swear, on everything I know is holy, I heard that one dog say to the other one, "Job 13, yet though he slay me, well I trust him."

They cannot stand to be out of my sight, or be out of theirs. Every once in a while, I will take them out in the backyard, take them off their leash, close it up there, and they just run around, and they are playing, and I am standing there, and then I will get preoccupied, I want to check something, and I will walk around the side of the house, and I know they cannot get out, and I am walking around the side of the house, and next thing I know, I am looking down, there are two dogs. "Where did you go? Where are you?" At home, when they crash and sleep, when I am working at my desk downstairs, they will wrap themselves around my chair, so if that chair moves, they wake up. They do not want me going anywhere without them. They do not want me making a movement. If they are sitting on the couch over there, and I am working, we are about from where these kids are from here, and I am working on something, and I will turn around looking, they are both standing, just looking at me. Or when they lay down on the floor, they will lay facing me with honest to goodness, one eye is open. I am not kidding you, I do not know how they do it, I cannot do it. I tried sleeping that way one night, I stayed up half the night, because I had half the eye open. Any movement, any scratching of my head, any getting up, and both hands are up, boy. I cannot tell you the times that I have sat on that couch with those two little guys in my lap, looking my face off, and wanting to be next to me, and I would say, "Oh God, make me just like them with You. Lord, make me just like them with You. Make me like them that any movement You do, any change, any direction, any opportunity, any place You go or do, let me not miss where You go. God, let me wrap myself around Your chair that whenever You move, or whenever You scratch Your head, or whatever You do, it wakes me up and alerts me, and let me stay focused on You, Lord. Let me be at Your gates, waiting at the post of my door for what You want me to do." That is what He is talking about.

VII. Finding Life and Favor

Proverbs 8:35 says:

Proverbs 8:35

> For whoso findeth me findeth life, and shall obtain favour of the LORD.

Now there are the two aspects of life that everybody wants, even when they do not totally understand it, whether you are saved or you are lost. You want a quality of a good life, and you want favor of the Lord. The Bible principles I give you here, when you apply them, they will bring a quality of your life that is unbelievable. They bring a quality of life that the world simply does not have. Now you have the ability to have an answer to 98% of what comes your way, and when you cannot get the answer, you just rest in the fact that God does have the answer. Favor of the Lord. Not that you do not have issues in your life, you will have tremendous issues.

2 Timothy 3:12

> Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.

But the favor and the principle is found, if God is for you, who can be against you? The principles in 1 John 4:4 is:

1 John 4:4

> *Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them: because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world.*

Listen, when God's hand is on your life, there is no weapon of war that is prepared against you that will prosper.

Isaiah 54:17

> *No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper; and every tongue that shall rise against thee in judgment thou shalt condemn. This is the heritage of the servants of the LORD, and their righteousness is of me, saith the LORD.*

VIII. The Final Warning: Loving Death

Look at Proverbs 8:36.

Proverbs 8:36

> *But he that sinneth against me wrongeth his own soul: all they that hate me love death.*

Now here is the final warning, and it is a strong one. I always think of something like this, I think about that verse over in Job. There are some verses that you hear in life that when you find yourself in situations or you deal with people, those verses pop up because the people represent those verses. I hate to go to funerals where people are probably lost when they died. And I do not enjoy it. I go for the families and try to be of some support, but it always bothers me when any person, whether I know them or not, any person dies and goes to hell. But I want to tell you something, I read that story over there in Luke chapter 16, a thousand years ago when I just got into this thing, and there is a phrase in there that just sticks with me, that every time I go to the funeral, and I know the person was probably lost, as I sit there, I sit there, and no matter what I say, or whether I smile or who I hug or how I say I love you, or I preach what I am currently in, in my mind that verse comes up, "and in hell he lifted up his eyes." That thing is a powerful thing to me. There are certain things in the Bible that people, when they do them or who they are, illustrate that.

Proverbs 8:36 says that "he that sinneth against me wrongeth his own soul, and all they that hate me love death." The final warning here, and I see this all the time, I have seen people in my life that I have worked with, or I have seen them or I know them, and they go through struggles in life, and to me, just like that verse over there about Luke 16, Job 9:4 comes into my mind.

Job 9:4

> *He is wise in heart, and mighty in strength: who hath hardened himself against him, and hath prospered?*

All I think about when I see somebody or I deal with that, they may be walking out of my office and it was not a good meeting, they may be going someplace and doing something else, or what they want to do, it does not matter. But in my mind I see that, and I think of that one last part of

that verse, "who hath hardened himself against him and prospered." You will not. You simply will not.

That one verse there in Job 9:4 is for a saved man and a lost man. It is the single simple reason our lives are in tremendous messes sometimes. It is not that we do not go to church. It is not that we do not read the Bible. It is not that we do not read the right Bible. It is not that we do not do some things for God, and it is certainly not the fact that necessarily we are a bad person. But it is just a simple fact that you refuse to take His instruction and harken to them. It is a simple fact that we do not let the principles of God run our lives His way. We always try to get to run it our way. And until we face that and change that, we will never prosper no matter how bad we want to or how bad we hurt. We think that God has a hurt scale. When we reach 12, He does something. No, He does not. We get into the things we get into because we decide to go our way. We will not harken to the instructions, and then we want God to bail us out, and God will forgive us and God will do some tremendous things for us, but it does not necessarily mean that God is going to come down and bail you out. You can live a promiscuous life and do everything that you want to do out there with the world in a sexual context and wind up and get AIDS. You can cry to God and God will forgive you. God will wipe and put her under the blood, but He will not take your AIDS away. There are consequences to things that we do. There will be no quality of life and no favor of the Lord, just an endless life of heartache and trials and troubles and anxiety and stress and depression and problems, empty promises and endless misery.

It is no wonder, and it is hard for me to believe this, but it is no wonder that God's people get to the place where they will take their own life and commit suicide. I mean, I can understand the unsaved man doing it. I do not suggest it tonight. It is a terrible thing. But I have never understood, yet I understand, why a child of God who is saved, has the Holy Spirit of God living inside them, would get so desperate in their life that they would think that there is no other way out than ending your own life. And yet God's people get to that point in their life. You know why? Because suicide is just the final end of you going your way instead of His way. That is all. That is all it is. Seven suicides in the Bible. People's ministry this year, we are going to hit them about the second phase. We will get into the second month. We are going to go through all seven of them so you understand it.

Then the last part of Proverbs 8:36, "but he that sinneth against me wrongeth his own soul. All they that hate me love death." Now, I must say that is a very strong, opinionated verse there, that everybody that hates God loves death. When I read something like that, I know that He is saying something here, but probably not exactly what He is saying here, so you have got to look for what He is saying here somewhere. Let me show you. It is better to show you how this thing works. I have never met a sinner, no matter how vile he or she was, that ever did not prefer to live over dying. I mean, I just never have. So let us see what He is saying here. I think the New Testament will put it into the right context.

First thing I want you to do is I will read it again. "but he that sinneth against me wrongeth his own soul. All they that hate me love death." Now, take your Bible to Romans 6:23. Look what it says here. He said up here that all they that hate me love death. All right, look at verse 23.

Romans 6:23

> For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

All right, the first thing we see is that the wages of sin is death. In the Bible, you have a lot of good character studies, and character studies tend to not only teach you about the person, but many times they will define things for you in the Bible. One of the most wickedest men that you will ever study in the Bible is a guy found in the book of Numbers whose name was Balaam. When you get into the New Testament and you do a study on Balaam, you will find the Bible says three things about Balaam in the New Testament.

5. The first thing you will find in Jude 1:11 is it talks about the error of Balaam. The error of Balaam, the mistake that he made in the story back in Numbers, that he forgot the covenant that God made with Abraham with Israel. That is what he forgot. That was the error of Balaam.
6. Then in Revelation 2:14, you are going to find the doctrine of Balaam. The doctrine of Balaam is defined for you there in Revelation 2:15, is that he taught the children of God to eat things sacrificed unto idols.
7. Then the third one, it is the way of Balaam. We have been talking about going God's way, going your way. Balaam did not go God's way. Balaam went his way. In the way of Balaam in 2 Peter 2:15, it says this:

2 Peter 2:15

> Which have forsaken the right way, and are gone astray, following the way of Balaam the son of Bosor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness;

It says that the way of Balaam was that he loved the wages of unrighteousness. He loved the wages of sin. So when the Bible says that "all that hate me love death," He is not necessarily saying that if you hate God, you really love to die. He is saying that when a man loves the unrighteousness of this world, he also loves the byproduct of loving sin, which is death. And death in the Bible is separation from God eternally. Because that is what the unrighteousness will produce at the end, death, separation from God. So when you love the wages of unrighteousness, when you love the wages of sin, then you love death. Because that wages of sin like Balaam and the wages of unrighteousness that Balaam committed is going to lead to eternal separation from God, which is death in the Bible, spiritual death.

IX. Conclusion: The Invitation to Change

In closing this great chapter, we now understand that the first part of that chapter has been an incredible, absolutely incredible laying out of material around the two issues about Jesus Christ. Who He was, God coming down and becoming man, and God separating Himself from His Son on the cross for you and me. And God therefore requires a response to that. So He goes through that and He lays the whole thing out, and then He takes the last five or six verses that we have looked at today. And you know what He does? He does what He always does. He gives you an invitation to accept His instructions. Because God is not willing that any should perish. He gives

you, if you are saved, the ability and the invitation to come and put those things in your life that you need. To change your way, to harken to His instruction, to quit going your way and start going His way. To let God and the things of God change about you, to put you in the mindset that you realize that it is not the good things in the Bible that are going to change you. It is harkening to the things that you and I do not appreciate in the Bible. Every time you go out of a church and a preacher steps on your toes, you ought to thank God for it. You know why? Because that preacher's foot size stepping on your toes is a lot smaller than God's foot size when He steps on your toes. But because He loves you, He has chosen a preacher to tell you what you need to do so God does not have to come down and meet you at I-435 at two o'clock in the morning. But you have to harken to it.

It is a great chapter. Not only telling you what God is and who He is and what Christ did and all the things of who He was, but also giving that invitation to you now. That you can have the instructions of a Father. That you can have everything. You can have a blessed life. You now have all the tools in this little thing that I have just given you today that you could go home and you could find out how to be blessed. You could find out all the aspects of everything you need. And you can accept that invitation.