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Proverbs: God Conscious Living (Part 1)



Proverbs - Steve Gregg

In this segment, Steve Gregg delves into the concept of "God-conscious living" in the book of Proverbs. He emphasizes the importance of the fear of the Lord, which involves being reverent towards God and acknowledging His ultimate authority. Gregg explains that God's sovereignty does not mean that He meticulously controls every aspect of life, but rather that He has the power to discipline and judge His creation. He cautions against interpreting events as clear evidence of God's involvement, and encourages a deeper understanding of God's providence.

Transcript

Well, after a dozen or so introductory lectures on Proverbs, we're now going to come to our main consideration of its principal section, which is those chapters that make up basically collections of individual sayings about various topics. And we might have appreciated if these sayings had been gathered into topical arrangements for us, because when you're thinking about a given topic, it's kind of, at least the way our minds work, we like to synthesize the information. We like to get the whole picture on something rather than get a little piece of it, and then look at several other subjects, and then eventually get another piece of that topic, and have just sort of a patchwork of different sayings that are kind of not organized in any logical fashion.

And yet that's how Proverbs has come to us, and that's one way it could be studied. We could go verse by verse through it, and just keep returning to certain subjects over and over again at random points where they appear. I think, however, though, to gather the wisdom in that section would be, in many ways, more profitable to just look at it in topical arrangements.

There are certain subjects that we can take all the verses in Proverbs about, and see the whole teaching of Solomon, the whole wisdom of Solomon on that topic. And so in your notes, I have given you sort of a topical arrangement into major themes, the first of which is entitled Wisdom, and there it says, see separate sheet number one on your notes. There is a separate sheet number one, but I'm not going to give it out because we're not going to take this, because we basically looked at most of the matter when we

went through very much detail in chapter nine.

There is more, but in a sense all of Proverbs is about the subject of wisdom, but the first nine chapters focus on that as a principle itself, and what we would have covered in sheet number one has almost all been covered in our earlier lectures. So, we're going to skip that. Not so much skip it, but consider it to be already covered.

And the second theme in my notes is God-conscious living, which is divided into many subtopics, as we shall see. And the third general theme is one of attitudes and mood management. So, the inward life, things like anger, envy, jealousy, resentment, depression.

Those are subjects that are addressed, and we'll look at those separately. Then, of course, there's a lot of Proverbs about human relationships, parent-child relationships, husband-wife, servant-master, ruler-subject, friends and brothers, enemies, neighbors. Lots of Proverbs on those things we'll be looking at.

And then there's the rest of it that I want to talk about when we get to it, and that'll be, of course, many lectures hence, will be on avoiding the world's traps, which are the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life. Now, Solomon doesn't list them that way. John does in 1 John 2, but we do find that those are the things that he addresses.

There's quite a bit there about the lust of the flesh, which includes food obsession, drug or alcohol abuse, sluggardliness, or sexual temptation as well. The lust of the eyes is about greed. We'll have a separate sheet on that.

And then the pride of life, the whole issue of pride and arrogance and its relationship to one's relationship with God and people. Anyway, those are the various things we're going to look at. You can see that almost all the realms of life are covered, but the first we are going to cover is the first that is introduced, which is God-conscious living.

I say it's the first one introduced because right at the very beginning of the book of Proverbs, in chapter 1, verse 7, it says, the fear of God is the beginning of knowledge. So, to live a wise life, Solomon believes you must first of all live a God-conscious life. And when we say God-conscious, this does not mean simply that people believe there's a God.

The majority of people in the United States, when they're appalled, tell us that they believe there's a God. But do they believe this God has any involvement in daily decision making? Do they believe that God is watching everything, listening to everything, that the hairs of your head are numbered, that every idle word you speak he's recording for a later reckoning? How involved is this God? How near or how far in the thoughts of the individual? Solomon indicates that the wise man is one who is God-conscious in all his

life. He says to be in the fear of the Lord all the day long.

And so, it's not just a matter of believing there's a God and not being an atheist. Many people are not atheists in their stated beliefs, but they are practical atheists because day by day they live their lives, they make their decisions, they contrive, they worry, they have all kinds of reactions to their environment in which God does not come into consideration. God is not in all their thoughts.

So, Solomon, of course, believes there is a God, and yet it's not enough just to know there's a God. You have to be aware of God. You have to have the knowledge that God exists impacting all of your thinking.

That's the God-conscious life. Many people who are Sunday's, he's brought to their attention again. But during the week, he's really not in their thoughts.

And I was talking to somebody not long ago, I don't remember who it might have been one of you here, I don't remember, but they were saying that they were among some Christian businessmen. And those businessmen were simply saying that, maybe it was Gary or somebody, that they did not, they separated their Christian convictions from their business life. And they considered that their business life needed to be run by different principles of wisdom and prudence than their Christianity.

And that meant they didn't conduct themselves entirely honestly or in a principled manner in business. And it's obvious that these men believed in God, they were in a Christian fellowship of business people. But they did not consider that God had to be in their reckoning, in their daily activities of business.

They lived as practical atheists, and then would come and remind themselves about God on occasion when they go to church. That is not wisdom. That is foolishness.

Now, there's many aspects of God consciousness that Solomon wants to advocate. The first of which, as I mentioned, is the fear of the Lord. And there are a number of proverbs that deal with or bring this matter up.

The first of which we have seen, and I've already mentioned even today, it's in Proverbs 1, 7, where he says, The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and instruction. Despising wisdom and instruction means you're not teachable. You don't want to be corrected, even if you're wrong.

But if you fear God, you don't want to be wrong. You might not enjoy being instructed and being told you're wrong. It's humbling.

But on the other hand, you'd rather experience that humiliation than continue to be wrong, because if you're in the wrong way, you're courting disaster because God wants you to go the right way. If you fear God, as I said earlier in one of the earlier lectures,

fearing God doesn't mean you live always terrified about God, thinking that he's against you and that he's your enemy and that you have to be beware of him at every moment. But rather, you live with the consciousness that God is powerful, that living in harmony with him is the only safe thing to do.

And it's a it's a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. It's a fearful thing to be on the wrong side of God, but it's not necessary to be on the wrong side of God. You have a choice about that.

So as I was saying about traffic, I'm not afraid. I'm not afraid of freeway traffic as long as I'm in harmony with it, as long as I'm in the right relationship with it. If I'm going the same direction as the traffic, I hardly give it a thought.

I don't live in fear. But let me hit the patch of black ice on the freeway, as I have done on occasion. And my car starts sliding sideways and turns around.

I'm facing the oncoming traffic for a moment. I slide around and there's no control here. I don't have any control over my relationship to the rest of traffic here.

That makes your heart beat fast. You know, once you come safely to a stop from that, if you're fortunate enough to do so, you realize for the first time how fast your heart is beating, you know, like, wow, that was terrifying. I didn't realize it.

But you see, you're driving along without any fear at all most of the time. But when you find yourself not in right relationship with the traffic, then you realize what a terrifying thing it is, how powerful traffic is to destroy, if it is not the case that you and traffic are on the same path. And that is how God is.

He's powerful to destroy. And a person who follows God and is on the right relationship with God can do so without fear. But the thought of maybe being doing the wrong thing and making God upset with you or being on the outs with God, that's a terrifying thing.

It should be anyone who doesn't who doesn't fear God is not in touch with reality. They don't know what's going on. It's the beginning of knowledge.

And that's the first thing about God conscious living is that we have to live with the fear of the Lord as our awareness in Proverbs 8, 13. Solomon said the fear of the Lord is to hate evil. Now, the fear of the Lord is to hate evil.

Why? Because when you know and fear God, you realize that evil is the thing that puts you in the wrong relationship to become an evil person is to is to basically invite God to be your enemy. It says that in the book of James, it says whoever will be the friend of the world will be the enemy of God. Nobody who has any intelligence wants to be the enemy of God because you've got an enemy who can overwhelm you easily and destroy you.

So you hate evil because you see evil as that thing which offends God. You see the evil as that thing that puts you at odds with God. And so the fear of God caused you to when you contemplate the thought of evil to hate it.

And it's obvious then when Christians actually succumb to sin knowingly, if they do that, if they know the thing they're doing is wrong, then at that moment, they're not fearing God as they should. By the fear of the Lord, we will find men will depart from evil as well as hate it. In chapter 14 and verse 26, Solomon said, the fear of the Lord, in the fear of the Lord, there is strong confidence and his children will have a place of refuge.

The fear of the Lord is a fountain of life. Verse 27 says to avoid the snares of death. So a person who actually has the fear of the Lord is not intimidated and fearful and insecure.

The person who has the fear of the Lord is actually very secure because by the fear of the Lord, they avoid evil and therefore they know that they're on good terms with God and that makes them not fear what men will do to them. In chapter 16, verse 6, Solomon said, in truth, in mercy and truth, atonement is provided for iniquity. But by the fear of the Lord, one departs from evil.

As the fear of the Lord, of course, inclines one to hate evil, it also inclines one to depart from evil. And this, of course, is talking about departing from a lifestyle of evil, departing from a life of rebellion and hostility toward God and one that invites his hostility. You fear God adequately.

You're smart. You depart from that way of life that's going to bring his wrath upon you. In chapter 23 and verse 17, he says, do not let your heart envy sinners, but be in the fear of the Lord.

All the day long. So, again, this is something that many people are not wise enough to do. They think of God occasionally, but the fear of the Lord should be on your mind, at least governing you, perhaps not in the forefront of your mind.

You're not always thinking about how much you fear God, but it's always there as a gyroscope to keep you from getting off of the tightrope, getting off the narrow way, realizing that I'm not afraid as long as my feet are where they're supposed to be. But a misstep could be disastrous. And that is in the back of my mind all the while.

And that keeps me all the day long seeking to do the thing that will avoid those things that are fearful about falling into the hands of God, avoid those sins that will make God feel like he must discipline me or judge me. In chapter 28 and verse 14, Solomon said, happy is the man who is always reverent. In the King James, who fears always in the word reverent, there is the word fear, reverence and fear.

A lot of translators want to translate the fear of the Lord as reverence, because obviously reverence is an aspect of that. If you fear God, you hold him in awe and in reverence.

But actually it says here, happy is the man who fears always.

The New King James says, who is always reverent, but he who hardens his heart will fall into calamity. So always fearing God, always reverent toward God. This is a daily, all day consciousness of God in the life.

And this particular aspect of our awareness of God is that which that appreciates the danger of offending God. And though we are saved by grace and we know that God loves us and we're justified by faith and all of that, and although we therefore don't live in constant fear of losing our salvation, I don't think we do. Although frankly, if we ever contemplate abandoning Christ, that fear of loss should be something that catches us before we go far in the wrong direction.

But we don't live our lives fearing that we'll lose our salvation, but we do know that God is a father who disciplines. A child often fears his father's anger without fearing that his father will disown him. Many times he knows that when he does wrong, his father, when he gets home, is going to take him out and give him a sound beating.

Not so much anymore. It used to be the way in ancient times and even relatively modern times. People don't spank their kids so much anymore.

But a child who knew that his father was going to bring discipline on him when he got home was fearful. And in many cases, children have contemplated doing things that they knew were wrong and decided not to, because they knew that their father would be angry. And although it's not being disowned that they fear, it's the fact that he is not going to disown them and he's going to take them up as a project to correct them and discipline them.

That's what they fear. And so we also, our fear of the Lord is not so much that we're afraid God's going to reject us or disown us or send us to hell. Almost more terrifying is that he's not going to do that and he's going to work on us.

He's going to shape us. He's going to discipline us. He's going to, he scourges every son that he receives, it says in Hebrews chapter 12, not the ones that he rejects.

The sons that he doesn't reject are the ones he scourges and chastens. So the Christian's fear of God is not so much, you know, fear of hell. Though there is that in the extreme, if a person decides that they're thinking about just abandoning Christ and doing their own thing, going back to their life of pre-conversion, you know, narcissism, well, the fear of hell should be a consideration.

But even a good Christian who isn't even, would never consider abandoning Christ, often is tempted to do things that are wrong. And it is that awareness that God will discipline his children. And it doesn't always, it's not always fun when he does.

In fact, no discipline for the pleasant seems joyous, but it's grievous. Hebrews 12, it says afterward, it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness and those who are exercised by it. But at the time it's grievous.

And the fear of being taken to the woodshed, so to speak, the fear of being, you know, facing your dad, who's going to discipline you for your misbehavior, that fear should be in you all the time, always reverent toward God. That's the mindset that should be 24-7. If a person is to have a God conscious life, they are among the things the person is conscious of is God's commitment to end evil in our lives.

And if we side with evil, then we are siding against him and looking for some serious trouble. Now, he also talks about the knowledge of God, and this is connected with the fear of God. The two are connected in Solomon's mind.

If you don't fear God, you don't know who God is. And the knowledge of God, as we've said before, is not the same thing as knowledge about God, just like the fear of God or the consciousness of God is not just, you know, having a theological belief and a proposition that there's a God, but it's a knowledge that God is there, that he's involved and you're involved with him, that in all of life, God is present and every detail of life is a matter of his interest. So also the knowledge of God is not just knowing about God and having theological opinions that are correct about God.

That is never brought up in Proverbs as a priority. Not that it is, you know, not important, but I think Solomon assumed that most of the Jews who believed in God had the same belief in God that he had, you know, the God of Moses, the God that was revealed through Moses and through the Pentateuch and the Torah. So that God, they know who he is.

Their theology is not the problem. The question is, do they know him personally? Are they in a relationship with him? And knowing God has to do with getting acquainted with God as a person, not simply becoming acquainted with the facts about God as a subject of study. And so in Proverbs 2, and we saw this passage in an earlier lecture, verses one through five, he said, My son, if you receive my words and treasure my commands within you so that you incline your ear to wisdom and apply your heart to understanding.

Yes, if you cry out for discernment and lift up your voice for understanding, if you seek her as silver and search for her as for hidden treasures, then you will understand the fear of the Lord and find the knowledge of God. Understanding and finding the fear of the Lord and the knowledge of God. Now, some people find it easier than others to fear God.

Some people actually are kind of just fearful of God almost from their childhood. Not very many, perhaps, but there are some who are. The fear of the Lord is not always hard to find, but it may be hard to understand what it involves.

But finding the knowledge of God is something that is not the easiest thing in the world, because knowing God means you cultivate a relationship with him. And just like you would cultivate the relationship with a friend or with a spouse or with your parents or your child, with another human being. Now, God is not another human being, and that's what makes it difficult.

It's hard enough to cultivate a relationship with another person, especially if they're a person who wants to be involved in every aspect of your life and one who you wish very much not to cross or to offend. Somebody whose, you know, happiness is at the center of your concerns. You make it a project for life to discover how to make such a person happy if they're your spouse.

And so that kind of knowledge of a person is a lifelong project. It's demanding. And it's made the harder by the fact that God is invisible.

And he doesn't always speak audibly. And knowing God, getting to know God, has its challenges that even are greater than getting to know a person. That is a human person.

God is a person. But the idea here is that it takes some kind of determination. You have to cry out for wisdom.

You have to seek for her as for silver or for hidden treasures. If you have that kind of determination, if you have that kind of priority that you give to knowing God, then you will find the knowledge of God. God is findable.

God is knowable. Now, agnostics are people who say they don't know if there's a God or not. They're unaware.

But some agnostics go so far as to say no one can know, in which case they're not really ordinary agnostics, they're ornery agnostics. An ordinary agnostic just says, I don't know if there's a God. That's what agnostic means, just don't know.

But an ornery agnostic says, I don't know and you can't know and no one can know. But I would dare say they simply have given up on the inquiry too soon. To say, I don't know and you can't know, you're saying, well, I haven't put out the effort to find God.

And you can't find him no matter how much effort you put out for yourself either. But how do they know that? It's very clear that they have not sought for him with all their heart because God has promised in Jeremiah, you will seek for me and you shall find me when you search with all your heart. That's what Solomon is saying very clearly in chapter two.

You want to have a God conscious life. This is easier to do once you have gotten acquainted with God. If you simply have a theology that there's a God there and even then he's going to judge and so you fear God all day long, but you never really get

acquainted with him.

You just know there's a danger out there of doing the wrong thing and there's a God who somebody will smack you for it. That's better than nothing in the sense that you're at least not an atheist. You at least have the good sense to try to not do the kinds of things that are going to bring harm upon you and because you've caught disaster and enmity with God.

The fear of God is a good thing, but you need to get to know him too. And of course, once you get to know him, you find that God is love and we love him because he first loved us and perfect love even casts out fear. That is the sense of being afraid is eliminated by the fact that we know that he loves us and that we are loving him and that we are therefore in a relationship harmonious with him.

And we have an acquaintance with him like we have with a father or with a spouse or with somebody who's a good friend. That is something that not everybody has and it does not come without giving it a priority. We must give time to God.

We must make that, we must define the pursuit of God as our chief value and chief goal. That's what certainly Solomon says in these verses in chapter two, verses one through five. You need to treasure the knowledge of God and then you'll find it.

God is not so easy. He's not cheap as to just throw himself at somebody who has a casual interest. He's worth more than that.

He knows it. And anybody who doesn't value him that much, not going to find him. But a person who loves him and loves the truth and desires to know him and makes that the priority of life, then they will find the knowledge of God, Solomon said.

And in chapter nine and verse ten, again, the fear of the Lord is connected with the knowledge of God here. Proverbs nine, ten says, the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding. So you begin to have wisdom and understanding by fearing God.

But when you come to know him, then you really have understanding. You really do know what's going on. In a sense, you see the world through a different lens.

It really does change everything in the way you look at everything. You understand the world differently when you know God than when you don't. You're trying to figure things out without God.

Solomon himself went through a season where he tried to figure it all out without God. And that's what the book of Ecclesiastes documents. He spent years of his life seeking the chief good of man, considering only things as he puts it under the sun, that is, earthbound considerations, not things above the earth, not God.

But just some earthbound considerations. He looked into virtually everything that promised to have meaning and that promised satisfaction, whether it was sensual pleasure or philosophy or money or whatever. He tried it all.

And he said again and again, this is the emptiness. This is just nothing. It's hollow.

It's like striving after the wind when you look for the meaning of life in these things under the sun. But of course, he came through that period of time and realized that, as he said at the end of Ecclesiastes, what is the conclusion of the matter? Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. So fearing God, knowing God, that's where understanding of things comes from.

When you're trying to understand the world without God as the focal lens through which you're seeing it, then you don't understand. But the knowledge of God is understanding. And so the God-conscious person has begun by fearing God and has proceeded to get the knowledge of God.

Now, when you know God, that means you're going to know a number of important things about God. And this knowledge about God is going to color your behavior, just like as you get to know your husband or your wife or as a young child grows to know his parents, you become aware of what things, what they're like, what their predictable reactions are going to be to certain things. And you adjust your behavior according to what you know offends them or what you know pleases them.

And so Solomon has quite a bit to say in terms of what we know about God as we know God. See, I made a contrast between merely knowing about God and being acquainted with God. It's the same contrast as if you read a biography on our president but had never met the man.

You would know a great deal about him. You might even say, I know this man very well. I've read three biographies of him.

I actually, I've read like, I think, five biographies of George Mueller. I feel like I know him well, but I've never met the man. He died before I was born and he doesn't know me, you know, and I wouldn't recognize him on the street probably.

I guess I might. I've seen pictures of him. But the point is, he's not really a friend.

I just know a lot about him. And there's a difference between knowing a lot about a person and knowing that person so you're actually in communion with them and they are drawing from, and you are drawing from that relationship, mutual satisfaction, mutual edification. That's a different kind of knowing.

Yet that second kind of knowing is not without the first kind. That is, if you're acquainted with someone, it's not like you don't know about them. That's when you get to know

someone, you want to know everything about them.

When you want to have a harmonious relationship with someone, you want to discover what makes them tick. You want to know what's going to make them happy. When you fall in love with somebody and think about having a life with them, you want to get all the facts you can about maybe their background, their dreams, their values, all these things, because this knowledge about them simply fills out the content of your knowing them as a person and informs your knowledge of how to relate with them.

And so in Proverbs, there's a number of Proverbs that tell us things about God, which are part of the mental furniture of somebody who knows God. He knows about God in ways other people would not. The first thing, of course, is the idea of the sovereignty of God.

And there's a number of Proverbs that talk about the sovereignty of God. Quite a few of them are in one chapter, and that's chapter 16. Now, when we say the sovereignty of God, this term means different things to different theologians.

What the term means at its root, sovereignty means the one who's in supreme authority. Supreme authority. And what that means is that they answer to nobody.

The person who's sovereign does what he wants to do, and he never has to answer to somebody who says, now, why'd you do that? He's not accountable because he's sovereign. He's at the top of the food chain. A king in a society, a lord over his household, a father over his children are examples of persons who are at the top of the authority structure and essentially makes decisions for the rest without having to consult others.

Now, obviously, I say without having to, in many cases, the Bible advocates that a king ought to seek counsel, and certainly a man should seek counsel from his wife and so forth. But the point is, his position is such that he can act unilaterally if he wishes. He's in the role where he has that right.

If he's wise, he won't act hastily without taking counsel from other concerned parties. But at the same time, he can. That's what his position means.

That's what a sovereign is. He's the absolute authority. Now, the Bible doesn't use the word sovereign in speaking of God, although some translations, when the word Adonai Elohim, or I'm sorry, Adonai Yahweh are used in the Bible, they translate it as sovereign lord.

But that's just a translator's use. It really means Lord Yahweh, is what that term means. But sometimes, some translations, you'll find the expression sovereign lord used of God.

But that's not really translating any particular word in the Hebrew that means sovereign. The word sovereign, as we use it, is not found in Scripture, but the idea certainly is. The

idea that God is the ultimate authority.

Now, I said there's different ways different theologians understand sovereignty, because there are some who add to that basic meaning another another layer. And they say the word sovereignty means that he ordains all that occurs. He's in absolute control.

In fact, one might argue the way some people say he's not only in control, he's almost a control freak, that he has to control every detail. You know, there's not a single molecule of the universe that he's not proactively directing where it's going. Now, God could do that if he wants to.

Certainly, the Bible makes it clear he has the right to do whatever he wants to. He's God. He made it all.

If he wants to govern every atom and every molecule, no one can say that isn't okay. If he wants to foreordain everything that people do, so they act out their lives as actors following a script, and he's like the puppet master who pulls the strings, makes sure they do everything that he ordained. Well, no one can complain about that.

God has the right to do that if he wants to. But that's not inherent in the meaning of sovereignty. Sovereignty just means he has the right to do what he wants to do.

He has to answer to no one. It doesn't tell us how many things he chooses to do, and how many things he might choose to leave to others to do. A king, if he's the sort to do so, might wish to micromanage all his subjects lives in every detail, or not.

He might decide to let his subjects have some freedom. That is freedom to choose who they'll marry, how many children they'll have, what they'll do for a living, when they'll get up in the morning, what they'll have for dinner. A king doesn't have to micromanage all of his subjects everyday lives in order to be sovereign.

The main thing that determines whether he's sovereign or not is if he is making the decisions about whether they will have that freedom or not. That is, if the servants revolt and have a revolution and overthrow him, and then they do what they want, then he's no longer sovereign. But if he gives them freedom, because that's his sovereign decision, he knows he could do something else.

He knows he could control every aspect. That's not his preference. It's like a father in a household.

A father has the power and the right to micromanage his children. But it may not be wise to overly micromanage, and it may not even be desirable. It may not be what the father wants.

He might actually want his children to bear some responsibility for some tasks, even

giving them the opportunity to make mistakes so they can learn. He may want his children to become somewhat independent thinkers and able to make their own decisions. If he wants to and he gives his children that right, he doesn't surrender his sovereignty.

His giving of that right to them is a sovereign decision on his part. He has the right to make it if he wishes. And really, those who believe that God must ordain everything that happens or else he's not sovereign.

They are the ones who are in fact limiting God's sovereignty. They're the ones that are saying God isn't so sovereign that he could give free will if he wanted to. He's only so sovereign as he has to behave as we think he should.

Namely, he should ordain everything that happens, not leave anything uncontrolled by him. Well, then we're the ones acting like we're sovereign and making our own definition of sovereignty. We're the ones who get to decide what God can and cannot do as the sovereign.

No, he's the sovereign. He's free to do what he wants to, including if he wants to, to get free will. He's actually even free to take his hands totally off everything if he wanted to and do nothing.

That's his sovereign right. That's not what we believe he has done. But we have to understand that when we talk about God's sovereignty, what we're talking about is his right to do whatever he wants to.

When we then move to the subject of his involvement, his management of the world that he governs, how much he gets involved, how much he leaves to others and so forth, how much he micromanages, that's not a question of his sovereignty, although many people talk about it as if it is. That has to do with his providential activity. Those who think that God ordains everything that happens believe in what I call meticulous providence, that God providentially is involved meticulously in every detail of everything.

The doctrine of meticulous providence is really the doctrine that Calvinists call sovereignty. But that's not the only way that sovereignty can be exercised. And yet God does get involved in things, sometimes more things than we would think he needs to.

But that's his business. He's sovereign. And in Proverbs chapter 16, there's a number of places and other places in Proverbs too, that talk about how God does providentially get involved in his sovereign right to do it.

It does not say that he micromanages everything that happens, but it does say that he's involved in things that happen. Maybe not everything because he might leave some things to chance or to the choices of people, but he has the right to stick his hands into the things of the earth anytime he wants to. The Bible does not say how often he wants

to necessarily, but he has the right to, and we see that he does so at times.

In verse 1 of chapter 16, it says, the preparations of the heart belong to men, but the answer of the tongue is from the Lord. Now, the answer of the tongue, here the answer, what a man speaks is coming from his heart. But what's in his heart is more private.

What he speaks is more of his public expression of what's in his heart. His speech or his actions flow from his heart. Now, it says the preparation of the heart belongs to man.

What actually ends up happening really is God's prerogative. Now, God doesn't make everything happen, but he either allows or disallows everything that happens. This is something we have to remember, that when things bad happen, it doesn't mean that God is necessarily doing them, but it is clear that he's not preventing them because he can prevent anything he wants to.

If somebody wants to hurt you and God doesn't want them to, he has all the resources he could wish to use to protect you from any harm at all. And therefore, if he does not protect, it is because he has chosen not to intervene. It doesn't mean that he has brought the evil upon you.

It means he simply has not prevented that evil, which has been initiated by other actors. He's prevented it from coming upon you. The reason that Job was so rich and immune to trials for so long was not because God was not involved in bringing judgment, it was because God was involved in keeping judgment away, or hardship away, that Satan wanted to bring.

Satan complained and said, God, you put a hedge around him, I can't touch him or anything he has, but if you just remove the hedge, that'll change things. What God did was remove the hedge, somewhat. Then the devil was able to do what the devil wanted to do, in measure.

But the trials that came on Job were not God's direct action, but they were his choice, in a sense, to allow the devil to do what the devil was directly wanting to do. God could have prevented it, and did prevent it for a very long time, and could have continued preventing it as long as he wished. So that in that story we read, bad things happen to us because of the malice of Satan.

But Satan isn't sovereign. Satan doesn't get to do whatever he wants to do. Only what God permits him to do, what God does not prevent him from doing.

So there is God's governing of things. You may plan to do something, but it's not necessarily going to happen if God doesn't plan to let it happen. The very same thing is in verse 9, Proverbs 16, 9, a man's heart plans his way, but the Lord directs his steps.

Now what it's saying is that man really does have freedom to make his own plans, but he

doesn't always have the freedom to carry them out. It depends on whether man's plans are in accord with what God really is willing to let happen or not. Sometimes things God does not really like, he allows them to happen anyway, because ultimately he can use it for his good.

Other times he just says, no, I'm not going to let that happen. And so he just stops it. The man makes his plans, and man becomes culpable of sin because of his own sinful plans, whether he carries them out or not.

That's why Jesus said, even if you hate your brother in your heart, it's a similar murder. Or if you're angry at your brother for another cause. Or if you look at a woman to lust after her, you've committed adultery in your heart.

The heart is where the sin takes place. It may actually erupt in sinful action too, but if that is prevented from happening, you've still committed it, you're still guilty. If a man is lusting and conniving how he might take advantage of another man's wife, but it never happens because he never has the opportunity, because God doesn't let it happen, the man is still guilty because the man had all his evil thoughts on his own.

He made the plan. The fact that it wasn't carried out was maybe God's intervention prevented it. And if God had not prevented it and the man actually did carry out the deed, it's still the man's responsibility.

God is not obligated to stop us from doing anything. He will stop us when it is his good pleasure to stop us. And it's his business when he stops us and when he doesn't, but the plans are man's responsibility.

And this is something that I believe has to be part of our understanding, that many people have the wrong opinion. That not only the actions, but also all the plans and thoughts of a man are ordained by God. But Solomon says, no, there's two categories.

There's what a man prepares and plans in his heart. That's man's doing. Then there's what actually transpires.

That may in fact be man's doing, but it only occurs because God does not prevent it. And if God didn't want it to happen, he would certainly be able to stop it. And therefore, the ultimate outcome remains in God's power.

God still has the right to veto anything man does and not let it succeed. And so, Proverbs 16.1 and 16.9 both make the same point, it seems to me. In the same chapter in verse 4, it says, The Lord has made all things for himself, yes, even the wicked for the day of doom.

This is a difficult verse because it's, well, it's not exactly clear what he means. It's a very good verse for Calvinism. And they definitely see this as part of the case for their idea of

sovereignty, that God ordains everything that happens, including that a person will be wicked.

God has made people wicked so he can doom them. It is part of the Reformed or Calvinistic theology that in God's purposes, he desires to glorify himself both in the salvation of the elect and glorify himself in the destruction and damnation of the reprobate. And that he's the one who decides who would be what.

But he just decided he's going to be glorified in two ways. One is by saving some, and other is in destroying others. And then he'll show his wrath and his power and his justice in the one case, and he'll show his mercy and his grace in the other.

And so, the idea that some people have, that God has just decided it's his good pleasure to condemn certain people because he made them for that purpose. There are vessels made for dishonor, vessels doomed for destruction. That's what they're made for, as a potter makes a clay pot for whatever purpose he wants to.

This is how the Calvinist understands things. And this verse here is a very good verse for that point, if they want to prove it. Because it sounds that way.

It says, the Lord has made all things for himself, even the wicked he has made for the day of doom, that he's made them just to destroy them for his own purposes, his own glory. He just made some wicked people so that he could knock them down and show how strong he is. To tell you the truth, I'm not sure why that would really glorify God.

You know, if I go find some two-year-old who can hardly walk and knock him down, and say, see how strong I am, everybody? I hope you appreciate me. How do you like those guns, man? You know, I knocked over this two-year-old. Well, I don't say I'll ever be impressed by that.

And if God makes a whole bunch of humans that are no bigger than ants to him, and he just squashes all the ones he wants, and says, see how big I am? You appreciate me? Aren't I glorious? I don't know that that really makes God look all that great. In some people's minds, I guess it does. But I don't know that, I hardly think that God himself would see that as, you know, a real proof of how great he is.

That he can just squash people like bugs. You know, even people that he had no chance, because he never gave them any opportunity. He didn't choose them to do better.

I don't think that's how the Bible depicts God in general, or even in specific. But this verse kind of sounds that way. He's made the wicked for the day of doom.

But I think it doesn't have to be understood quite that way. I think what it means is that God has made, and therefore has, the prerogative and the control over everything he wants to. Even the evil person was created by God.

That doesn't mean that God made them evil, or that he created them to be evil. Every man has been made by God. Even the evil man was made by God, and therefore is subject to God.

Anyone that God has created is subject to his judgment. And even the wicked man is a creation of God. And he's, you know, God has allowed that man to make that choice, to be a wicked man.

And God has the final word in it. He's, you know, that man's destiny is to be doomed. No one can rebel against God and get away with it.

The man that is wicked and rebelling against God is not successfully throwing off God's sovereignty. Because God, the sovereign, still has the day of doom in mind for those people who do that. And he will have the last, I was going to say the last laugh, but I don't think that God's going to laugh.

I think he's going to weep over his loss. But the point here is that a king makes the laws. He does not determine which of his subjects will obey and which of his subjects will disobey the laws.

But because he is king, he can rightfully punish those who choose to disobey. If you find in a man's kingdom that many of his subjects are rebelling against him, that doesn't mean he's not sovereign. It means that they are making some choices that they're going to have to answer for, because he is sovereign.

Because he is sovereign, he will have the final disposition of their case. He doesn't decide whether they will rebel or not, but he decides what will happen to them if they do. And I believe that's essentially the thought that Solomon has in mind here.

All things, all people, good and bad, they're all made by God. And that means that even the evil ones who appear not to be subject to God because they're choosing to go the wrong way, yet they too were made by God. And their destiny is in his hands as well.

And that is, he's ordained a day of doom for people like that. And that is what I think Solomon is saying. I can't prove that that's what he means, because obviously different theologians would have different takes on how God is involved in all this.

But I would say that the idea, which strikes me as radical, that God just wants to glorify himself by wiping people out. So he made certain people, gave them no opportunity to be good, and then decided to show how strong he is by smashing them. I don't think that's a God that the Bible describes.

And therefore, I'm not inclined to believe that Solomon is seen it that way either. And since there is a somewhat less radical, less bizarre way to understand it, I think that we would be best to take the way that is more consistent with what the Bible teaches about

God in general. In verse 7, it says, When a man's ways please the Lord, he makes even his enemies to be at peace with him.

And this means, of course, that God can control those who are your enemies if he wishes. If God is on your side, he can keep you from harm from your enemies. The enemies may plan things against you, but if God doesn't wish for it, they will not be able to bring harm to you.

And so that is, you know, that's good to know. God can even prevent people from attacking you and hurting you who want to do so or would otherwise want to do so. And or even he can even make them not want to, in a sense.

He can placate their anger in many cases. So we see, for example, in the case of Shechem, where Levi and Simeon went and slaughtered all the men of Shechem. It's three days after they've been circumcised and while they're somewhat disabled.

It says that Jacob was afraid that as a result of this, all the Canaanites would come together and attack him. But as he and his family traveled, it says, God put the fear of the Lord on all the surrounding nations, so they didn't attack him. You know, there was reason for the nations to want to attack him, but God didn't allow that.

God caused his enemies to be at peace with him, at least not at war with him. And so God is in control of our well-being and our circumstances. And as long as we're on his side, our, you know, our safety from our enemies is a matter of his sovereign choice.

And he has the ability to deal with it. In verse 33, this verse is sometimes quoted as a proof of meticulous providence, that God makes everything happen, even things that would seem to be chance things. In talking to Calvinists about their idea of sovereignty, they will often bring this verse up and a few others that suggest that God meticulously controls everything, even things of chance.

Like there was a time when Ahab was at battle and the prophet Micaiah had said that he was going to die in battle, but he went anyway. And King Ahab was out in his chariot in the battle and it says an archer, he was in disguise, so the enemy didn't know who he was in the battlefield, so they wouldn't target him. But it says a certain archer at random, it says, at random fired an arrow and the arrow hit Ahab in the joints of his armor and killed him.

So that God's will was done. This is an example of how God controls random things. In verse 33 of Proverbs 16, it says, the lot is cast into the lap.

Now, casting of lots is like throwing a dice or throwing straws. It's a matter of chance, you'd think normally. But it says, but it's every decision is from the Lord.

And this is thought to teach that every chance thing that happens is not really chance at

all. It's God's doing directly. God is making the decision through the casting of the lots.

Now, of course, a person who does not necessarily buy the idea of a meticulous providence does not have to see these verses in light of such an idea. The chance arrow that hit Ahab was certainly not chance. God directed that arrow.

God had predicted the man would die. We have no problem suggesting that that which was in the mind of the archer, a chance shot at an unspecified target, that God directed the trajectory of that arrow so it hit the mark that God wanted it to hit. That's not a problem to affirm.

It does not mean that every arrow shot by every warrior in that war was directed exactly to the targets that God wanted. God had decided that that man, Ahab, was going to die. And so God directed the arrow to hit him.

That was God's determination. That God acts in time and in history in providential ways like that in important cases doesn't necessarily extrapolate legitimately to the idea that every random thing is what he's doing. It's like when Joseph's brother's sin ended up causing him to be sold into slavery in Egypt.

And that ended up being a good thing so that Joseph said, you intended evil to get through to God, meant it for good. Or when Caiaphas and Pilate and Judas and others conspired to kill Jesus. That's an evil thing, but it says that that was something that God had foreordained should be done to Jesus.

Again, those who believe in meticulous providence say, see, this proves that every sin that people commit is ordained by God. It doesn't prove any such thing. It proves that in one case, when God wanted Joseph to end up in Egypt, he manipulated his brothers in such a way to get them to sell him there.

And in another case where he wanted Jesus to die, God manipulated the historical circumstances and the characters so that Jesus got himself condemned and crucified by the Sanhedrin and by the Romans. True, God was in those things. But those are not your ordinary, everyday things necessarily.

The salvation of Israel by Joseph's mediation in Egypt and the salvation of the world through Jesus' death are not your garden variety events. When God has a special purpose to fulfill, he has every right and every ability to reach in and just shape things to make the thing happen that he wants to happen. But the Bible does not necessarily say that he must, you know, be doing that every time people make a decision.

And like that arrow that hit Ahab, God certainly directed that arrow. But that doesn't mean that every arrow fired was directed by God to whatever target it hit. Maybe it was, but we can't determine it from that one case.

We would need more information, other information to decide that. Likewise here, when it says the lot is cast into the light, but every decision is from the Lord. This is not talking about every time you throw the dice when you're playing, you know, Parcheesi, you know, that the dice are going to fall in such a way that you're going to land on the square God foreordained before the foundation of the world that your green piece would be landing on and sending that red piece back to home.

It's not like God was meticulously doing all of that. The casting of lots in Solomon's light is something that was done on somewhat rare occasions. On occasions when Israel or later in the early church, the apostles were trying to make a very important decision that had to do with seeking the mind of God about it.

It was not, shall I have waffles or fried eggs for breakfast? It's which apostle is going to replace Judas for the rest of his life and for all eternity to be the twelfth apostle in the foundation stone in the city of God. You know, which tribal boundaries shall this tribe have for the rest of the nation's history? Important things with longstanding consequences where God would have an interest in making his will known. Those are the kinds of things that they would cast lots for.

And what is suggested here is that God makes his will known in those cases through the casting of lots. It may seem that casting lots is mere chance, but certainly in the cases where Israel casts lots or the Christians, these were cases where they're deliberately speaking the will of God as when they would consult the urn of the fulm or something like that. And that's the casting of lots becomes in those cases a reliable choice.

But not every time someone throws the dice. I mean, now I might say if meticulous providence is true, then every time people do throw dice in a board game, well, then that is God's ordination. It lands in just the numbers he wants it to.

But that doctrine would have to be established upon other passages in this. This passage is simply saying that I mean, the context of a person speaking when maybe the high priest or the king. Or the apostles are seeking the mind of God about some important thing, or Joshua is about how to distribute the land.

Then the casting of lots becomes a legitimate God ordained means by which God gives it its proper decision so that his will is properly discovered. So it need not be understood to mean more than that. In chapter 19, verse 21, it says, There are many plans in a man's heart.

Nevertheless, the Lord's counsel that will stand. And this agrees with those two verses in chapter 16, verses one and nine, that the man makes things makes the plans of his heart. And it may be that he successfully carries them out.

But only if God is not opposed to it. That is not only only if God does not wish to

intervene and stop it. God might even object to the plans in principle, but not have an interest in jumping in and stopping it.

If God jumped in and stopped every time someone's going to do something wrong, then he'd be micromanaging everything. And some people think God does that. But if he doesn't wish to micromanage, he might pick and choose the time when he wants to jump in and prevent something.

So a man's plans might, in fact, if carried out, thwart some other purpose that God wishes to see materialize. And so God can prevent it from happening if he wants or allow it. But whatever God's counsel is, that's what's going to stand.

That's what's going to happen. Not what man necessarily decides. And that's why we don't need to be fearful any more or less when we hear about conspiracies.

You know, international bankers who are trying to bring about a one world government and so forth. I hear these things. I think, well, that's probably true.

I don't have inside knowledge about it, but it certainly is a realistic scenario. I don't have any problem believing it, but I don't get alarmed by it like some people do, because it's no more or less scary than if there was no such conspiracy. What God's counsel has determined is that that's going to stand.

My fate does not lie in the hands of international bankers or tyrants or anything like that. If I suffer at their hands, it'll be only because God has allowed that to happen. If he doesn't want it to happen, then I won't.

The conspirators have no power to thwart the will of God. If God wants them to succeed, they will. If he doesn't, then they will make their plans in vain.

In chapter 20 and verse 24, it says a man's steps are of the Lord. How then can he understand his own way? We don't understand certainly the future, the path ahead of us. But God is going to ordain our steps, assuming that we are, of course, his people and he's guiding us.

The Bible says as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God. In Romans chapter 8, in Philippians, Paul said, God works in you to will and to do of his good pleasure, as in the Christian. He's talking to Christians.

You have the Holy Spirit in you. God is at work in you, directing you to will and to do of his good pleasure. God works sovereignly through these means.

In chapter 21, one, the king's heart is in the hand of the Lord. Like the rivers of water, he turns it wherever he wishes. And again, some people think that this means that every decision of every government is God ordained.

Maybe, but not necessarily. What it means is that God holds the king's heart in his hand. And as he wishes to turn it, he is able to do so.

It doesn't mean he always is doing so, any more than he's always directing the rivers. God can change the course of a river if it pleases him. But that doesn't mean the laws of nature don't normally determine the way the river runs.

Erosion and hydraulics and laws of nature normally determine the course of a river. But God has the power, if he wishes, just to change its course any time he wants to. Same thing with the king.

A king may make many decisions without God's intervention. But if God determines that a king should make a certain choice, that's what's going to happen. God can intervene and even contravene a man's otherwise free choices.

Also, chapter 21, 31, our final verse today, there is, it says, the horse is prepared for the day of battle, but deliverance is of the Lord. And again, this applies this idea of sovereignty to the matter of national security. God will decide whether a nation remains safe or not.

It doesn't matter how many horses and chariots they prepare for battle or nuclear weapons, for that matter. No matter how much preparations the nation makes for its own safety, it will remain safe only insofar as God prefers for it to. A nation with superior forces can lose in a war to a nation with inferior forces.

Think of Gideon. Gideon's killing tens of thousands of Midianites and having only 300 men. Because why? Because God intended to judge Midian.

The nation's fate is not determined how many armies, how many weapons they have and soldiers. It's whether God wants to keep them safe or not. If God wants to destroy a nation, he could wipe them out with a single Samson.

A thousand of them could be wiped out by one man or three thousand of them in a single event. If God wishes, it's not a matter of outnumbering, it's not a matter of being militarily prepared or militarily superior. The question is, does a nation's ways please God? If so, he'll probably preserve it.

If the nation's ways do not please God, he probably won't preserve it for long, no matter how strong their armies are and their weapons. It's God, not nations, that decide the outcome of the geopolitical map. And that is what Solomon is telling us here.

So this is just broaching the very beginning of the subject of a God conscious life. A God conscious life fears God, seeks to know God intimately and is aware of God's sovereignty, God's right to do what he wants to do. So that Job, when things went badly for him, said, Well, the Lord gives and the Lord takes away.

That's his prerogative, isn't it? Blessed be the name of the Lord. When his wife complained, he said, You talk like a foolish woman. Shall we receive only the good things from the Lord and not the evil things also? In other words, doesn't God have the right to give us both, not just one? We like it when he gives us the good things.

We don't like it when he gives us the bad things. But isn't God kind of in this position of making those choices legitimately any time he wants to? Shouldn't we receive both from him? That's God consciousness, awareness that God is the one who's in charge. He can make whatever decrees he wants to.

If he wishes, he can get involved. He can do things that we don't even like. Or he can do things we like when it looks like it would be impossible for them to happen because he's the one who really is in charge.

So we live, in a sense, under the shadow of an awareness that God is really in charge of everything. Not everything that happens necessarily is proactively ordained by him. But whatever happens is something he did not in that moment choose to prevent when he could have.

And therefore, we can accept whatever comes to us as part of God's providence and part of the testing that we're to face and so forth. But we have this whole different perception of what life is when we're conscious of God's sovereignty and of God's justice and so forth. And there's more things about God that are part of this general category.

We'll talk about those next time. At this point, we have run out of time.