

OLD WORDS FOR A NEW YEAR
Proverbs 22:17-21

Intro: Next Saturday, the Lord willing, we all will begin a

new year: 1994! I say, "the Lord willing," because

much can happen in a week. None of us can be sure that we will be around that long. The Lord could take any of us, or all of us, to heaven before then. And it ought to excite us to think that the Lord might come for us before the new year begins. We need to be ready to meet Him at any time, whether it be by death or by His coming. However, the Lord does not want us just to wait idly until He comes; we are to be busy doing the work that He has given us to do. And what is more important, we need to continue growing in the Lord. No child of God ever gets to the place in this life where he is as mature spiritually as he needs to be. We all need to keep growing in the Lord, and basic means of our growth is the Word of God. The Apostle Peter wrote those words which should be familiar to all of us, telling us how we are to grow. I am referring to 1 Peter 2:2 where we find these words,

As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word,
that ye may grow thereby.

Peter was not addressing himself just to those who had recently been saved when he used the words, "as newborn babes," but he was saying that we should never lose that desire for the Word of God which we had when we first came to know the Lord. One of the distinguishing characteristics of one who is truly saved is that he has a love for the Word of God. He wants to learn the truth. He wants to know more about God. It is impossible for us to grow spiritually unless we are feeding each day upon the Word of God. We need to read it. We need to hear it taught as often as we can. We need to understand it. We need to believe it. And we need to obey it -- doing what it tells us to do, and not doing what it tells us not to do. Perhaps it would be better to say, doing what God tells us to do, and not doing what He tells us not to do -- because the Bible is the Word of God. He speaks to us through His Word. We need to trust the Holy Spirit to teach us because He is really the only Teacher of the Word. And we need to pray for open hearts,

and that God will give us understanding. But the point that I am making is that we all need the Word of God.

That is why we here at Trinity Bible Church are committed to the teaching of God's Word. We are not here to entertain; we are here to instruct and edify, to build one another up in our faith. And let me say that there is nothing that gives us greater joy than to see the Lord's people growing. At the same time there is nothing that gives us greater concern and causes greater discouragement than to realize that some are not growing. Peter's last word in his second epistle (which was his last) was this:

But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and for ever. Amen.

Along this same line the Apostle John wrote in his third epistle, verse 4,

I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in (the) truth.

And the Apostle Paul made the same emphasis when he was speaking of the ministry of the leaders of the church. He said that the pastor-teacher is to be primarily concerned with "the perfecting of the saints." This means that every pastor is to seek the spiritual maturity of every believer to whom he ministers. We get very concerned about our children if they do not grow and develop in a normal way physically, but it seems that a person can be at a standstill in his relationship with the Lord, and very few, if any, are concerned about it. At a time in the world's history when a strong church is needed, I am afraid that we are often guilty of playing games instead of doing what the Lord wants us to do.

Let me ask you this morning, "What kind of a year has 1993 been for you spiritually? What place has the Word of God had in your life? Do you really love it, and do you have a desire to understand it? Have you been reading it daily? Has the Lord become more precious to you during the year? Where are you spiritually this morning?"

When Joshua took over the leadership of Israel from

Moses, the Lord gave him a very important charge. This is what He said to Joshua:

This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth;

but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do

according to all that is written therein:

for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success.

You see, the blessing of God upon Joshua in his life and his work was directly related to the place that he gave to the Word of God in his life. He was going to be a very busy man, but he must never allow himself to be so busy that the Word of God would be crowded out of his life.

All of us have to be concerned about sin every day. We have been delivered by Christ from the power of sin in our lives, but not from the possibility of sinning. How can we be kept from sin? The Psalmist gave us the answer in Psalm 119:11. Listen to what he wrote:

Thy word have I hid in mine heart,
that I might not sin against thee.

So, whether you read in the OT or the NT, it is very clear that we all need the Word of God, need as much of it as we can get, and need it daily, yes, even moment by moment.

I want to give you some encouragement today regarding you and your Bible.

As I have told you many times, in addition to our regular Bible reading, I read a Psalm every day, and a chapter from the book of Proverbs. This past week as I was thinking about my message for today, and feeling that it ought to be a new year's message, on Wednesday, December 22, I read Proverbs 22. As I got down to verse 17, I was especially struck with the words of that verse and with the verses down through verse 21. Now I don't read my Bible primarily for you; I read it thinking of myself and of my needs. But often that which impresses me, and which I need, I realize may also meet some needs which you have. And so this morning I would like to direct your attention to Proverbs 22, verses 17 through 21. And I would like for you to think about these verses as though they were written for you in preparation for the

coming year, and all of the time we have left until we see the Lord.

We know that Solomon was the writer of most of the proverbs in this book, and that he wrote them originally for his son. But this is more than a book composed by Solomon. This book is the Word of God. God gave Solomon the wisdom he had, and so when he wrote to his son about "the words of the wise," or "my knowledge," or "the words of truth," remember that he was speaking about the Word of God! And so this is not a book in which Solomon was giving his son the best knowledge that he had learned on his own, but he was giving his son the truth which God had given to him.

With this in mind, let me read these five verses to you: Prov. 22:17-21. (Read.)

It seems to me that in these five verses Solomon was doing two things:

- 1) How to approach the Word of God -- three things to keep
in mind (v. 17).
- 2) Six major reasons why the Word of God is important (vv. 18-21).

Let us see what Solomon had to say to his son.

I. HOW TO APPROACH THE WORD OF GOD (Prov. 22:17).

Whenever you complain that you are not getting anything out of your Bible reading, or that you are not getting anything from messages you hear, or that you do not enjoy reading good books which were written by godly people, one thing to think about is how you are approaching the Word of God. If you sit down, open your Bible, and begin reading, without any prayer, and really without thinking about what you are doing, it is no wonder that you profit so little.

Solomon told his son to do three things when he approached the Word of God.

A. "Bow down thine ear."

The Lord spoke about those who have ears to hear. Perhaps you came to church this morning without making sure that your ears were ready to hear. Perhaps Solomon was even suggesting that, if it is

possible for us to do so without bothering others, we ought to read the Word aloud. I won't press that point, but you might give it some thought.

But the one thing that seems obvious from this statement is that you and I need to approach the Word humbly. Bowing down is always meant to convey the idea that we are humbling ourselves before whatever we bow before. And so when we read, or when we are about to hear the Word preached, we need to humble our ears before God, expressing a willingness to submit ourselves to His Word even before we hear what it says. Proud ears cannot hear. Pride closes the door on more blessings than you and I can possibly realize.

B. "Hear the words of the wise."

When we read the Bible, we are reading "the words of the wise." The people who wrote the Bible were wise because they had been taught the wisdom of God. They were schooled in divine wisdom, not in mere human wisdom. Make sure that you are hearing what they say. It might be necessary to re-read a verse, or verses, or even a chapter, but, if that is necessary, do it! And when you get through reading a chapter, stop and ask yourself, "What have I just read?" Make sure that you are hearing.

C. "Apply thine heart unto my knowledge."

When Solomon spoke about the heart, he was not speaking about the organ by that name which beats in our chests. He was speaking about your inner person, the real you. He was emphasizing what you are going to do with the Word which you have heard.

Although I think we all know what it means when we talk about applying the Word, yet I looked it up and discovered a thought which might make this idea clearer to us. If you are going to apply your heart to the Word of God, it means that you need to bring your heart to the Word, and put the Word on like you would a garment.

Perhaps you got a gift of some clothing for Christmas. Now you do not need me to tell you that the only way you are going to benefit yourself from that clothing, is by putting it on. The difference between clothing and what Solomon was talking about

here is that he was talking about something which you put on inside of you, not outside.

We need to humble ourselves before the Lord, make sure that we are hearing what He is saying to us, and then put it on! Just as you put your clothing on when you get up each morning, so you need to have the habit of getting clothed spiritually as you read the Word each day. Get the Word into your heart so that it will do you good. The Lord will help you. In fact, you can't do it without Him. But the important thing is that you need to do it.

Now, as incentives to do what Solomon was telling his son, let us see the six things Solomon mentioned to encourage his son to do what he said in verse 17.

II. SIX MAJOR REASONS WHY THE WORD OF GOD IS IMPORTANT FOR US (Prov. 22:18-21).

The first reason is:

A. "For it is a pleasant thing if thou keep them within thee" (v. 18).

You can have Bibles all over your house, one in every room, but they are not going to do you any good unless the truths of the Bible get "within thee." That is why even reading, or going to church to hear a message from the Bible, is not enough. It has to get in you; it has to get in me. And if it does, we find that it is "a pleasant thing," it is delightful. This is what Jeremiah found in the midst of all of his troubles. He said,

Thy words were found, and I did eat them;
and thy word was unto me the joy and
rejoicing
of mine heart: for I am called by thy name,
O Lord God of hosts (Jer. 15:17).

Do you wonder how the Psalmist could say, "O how love I thy law! it is my meditation all the day long"? (Psa. 119:97). It was because the Word was in him, changing his life, making him more acceptable to God. And so he added a few verses later, "How sweet are thy words unto my taste! yea

sweeter than honey to my mouth!" (Psa. 119:103). In Psalm 1 we learn that the truly happy person is the one who delights himself in the law of the Lord. It makes him happy when he applies it within him.

But notice one more thing about this statement. Solomon said, "If thou **keep** them within thee." He was not speaking of occasional obedience to the Word, but constant. You and I all fail the Lord, but when we do, let's get back to the Lord and the path of obedience as soon as we can.

Notice the next thing:

B. "They shall withal be fitted in thy lips" (v. 18).

"Lips" are used in Scripture to mean the same as the tongue and the mouth. When we delight ourselves in the Lord and in his Word, one result is that the Lord's Word, and the truth of that Word, will suddenly be easier for us to talk about. They will be "fitted" to our lips like they belong together.

How often have we rebuked ourselves because we have not spoken to others about the Lord, or about some appropriate thing from his Word, when we know we have had the opportunity to do so? Solomon was indicating that we will not only speak of the Word, but it will be in such a natural way that it will seem like our mouths and the Word of God were made for each other. This will not be the act of a hypocrite, but a genuine response for God's glory.

C. "That thy trust may be in the Lord, I have made known to thee this day, even to thee" (v. 19).

Solomon seems to have placed special emphasis upon this, speaking of "this day," and also after saying "to thee," he added, "even to thee." The NASB renders this statement, "I have taught you today, even you."

Solomon was concerned that his son would learn to trust the Lord, not just when things were going well, but when they were not going well. Without

faith it is impossible for us to please God. Where do we get the faith to trust Him. The Lord Jesus is the Author and Finisher of our faith, but faith comes by hearing and hearing and hearing the Word of God. We will never trust the Lord as we should if we are neglecting the Word. But if we humble ourselves before God and His Word, being careful to hear it, and then applying it to our hearts, our faith will be strengthen and we will know the peace that comes from being able to trust the Lord. Yes, even we can learn that.

Verses 20 and 21 form one question, but there are three encouragements for us to be faithful with the Word of God -- one in verse 20, and two in verse 21.

D. "Have not I written to thee excellent things in counsels and knowledge...? (v. 20).

The book of Proverbs is full of counsel and knowledge. There is no more practical book in the Bible than the book of Proverbs. We have advice here. We are told how to behave in any situation that might arise. We have information most wonderful. In fact, Solomon described it as excellent.

There has been much disagreement as to how this word should be translated. But in the light of what Solomon was saying here, it seems that excellent is a good translation. It is the word that you would describe the best men in an army, or the best athletes on a basketball team. So when you apply this to the Scriptures it means that the Bible not only gives us "counsels and knowledge," but it gives us the best that you can find anywhere. Nothing can possibly surpass the advice and knowledge that you find in your Bible because it is the Word of God.

Always remember that when you come to the Scriptures. We don't come to the Scriptures to question and argue about what we find there. We come to learn, to believe, and to apply the truth to our hearts. Here in God's Word we find the best. And beware of any counsel or counselor where the counsel is not in full agreement with the Word of God. Why go elsewhere, Solomon would say, when

you have the very best here?

E. "That I might make they know the certainty of the words of truth" (v. 21).

The idea which Solomon was conveying here is that in the Word you will always find that which is true and righteous; you will never be led astray. You will never follow the Word of God only to learn later that you have made a bad mistake. The Bible carries its own conviction with it, applied by the Holy Spirit. It never needs to be changed from one generation to another, nor from one nation to another. It is right and absolutely dependable year in and year out, generation after generation.

And finally, the last point:

F. "That thou mightest answer the words of truth to them that send unto thee" (v. 21).

Doesn't this verse remind you of 1 Pet. 3:15? "But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts..."

I have said that it is important for me to read the Word for myself, not thinking of others who need what I'm reading, or reading to find something to preach about. My messages often come out of my Bible reading, but that is not to be the main reason that I read my Bible. And I can often see things in my reading that will help others, but I have to apply the Word to my own heart.

However, the person who faithfully reads the Word, seeking to understand it and to live by it, is the person who is going to have others come him, or her, seeking help and counsel. And often they will come asking for it before we try to seek them out. And what will you give them? You will give them what God has been teaching you from His most precious and holy and infallible Word!

One of the tragedies of our day is the abundance of counselors we have who are not grounded in the truth of the Word of God. And so many Christians who need help are being misguided because they themselves do not know enough truth to give the right kind of advice.

Concl: I think it was at our last men's prayer meeting

before the holidays began that I spoke to the men about the Lord Jesus as a "Wonderful Counsellor" (no comma between those words). There is no counsellor greater than He is. And He wants us to learn from Him through the Word because there always have been, and always will be, people who need guidance. We need to learn for ourselves so that when the time comes that we can help others, we will be able to give them the truth of God's Word.

Therefore, let me urge you to be faithful in 1994 in reading the Word from cover to cover, and praying for understanding that you might apply it to you heart so as to be and to do and to speak in agreement with God and His Word. That is the way to glorify God, find blessing ourselves, and be a blessing to others who need to know the Word of God.