

The Lord's Sovereignty and Human Life

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[0 : 00] Let's pray. I want to ask God's help for our time around the Word tonight. Lord God, I pray for your help for myself, for my words.

Lord, that the preparation that has been put into this passage would be helpful to me and your people. May it point to your holiness and your greatness.

May it help us see more of you tonight. Help us to be encouraged and to be sharpened by your Word, Lord, I pray. Help us to be attentive and to listen.

And Lord, may you be glorified in our time tonight, we ask in your precious name. Amen. Amen. Our thought or the sentence title that I want to put over our passage tonight is this.

Righteous living before God results in the right life. That is, righteous living before God results in the right life.

[1 : 19] I'm going to say that a few times as we go through the passage to help connect back to that. But before we start, I just want to point out a couple things so that we don't get the wrong idea about what's being said.

When I say righteous living, I'm not talking about perfection living. Righteous living isn't accomplished in our strength alone. True righteousness is from God, so we need His help as we are responsible for working that out.

So we set aside our sinful desires and we seek after what God wants, knowing that we won't be completely righteous until we get to heaven. That doesn't take away our responsibility to work towards that.

Righteous living before God results in the right life. And when I say right life, I mean our correct life. The life, while it may not be easy, it's the right life that God desires for us. The best life we can have before God when we're living for Him.

[2 : 27] You might be saying, well, I can't have my right life now because I've messed it up. I've made some bad decisions.

And so I just don't think it's possible. And to you, I would say that we are all sinners. And we continue to sin, but that doesn't mean that we give up.

It's not too late for anyone to get serious about their righteousness, their life of righteousness. Your best life, your right life that God has for you comes from living righteously for Him starting right now. So whether you've been living righteously or you haven't been, there's an opportunity for us to live righteously for God now. I have a story to tell.

It's kind of personal. It popped up just this week. I didn't have one for this message, but God put it in front of me and it was pretty cool. So we have this fan at our house.

[3 : 33] We only have air conditioning in a couple of rooms, so we use fans often. We have this round fan. It's about this big and it sits on the ground. And, you know, we move it around to where we want it.

And so in the mornings when I have my personal time, if it gets hot, I set it beside me. I turn it on and I feel it. But it's difficult to get air out of it, or it has been.

You kind of have to put it at the right angle and turn it on high and get close to it, and you might feel some air out of it. And it has been a little aggravating for me. So I'm looking at the front of it.

Everything seems fine. The motor spins. It's a fan in all aspects of the word. And the other day I turned it around and I looked at the back side of it and saw that over years, I say years, we probably had it maybe three years, over three years of use, there's this buildup of dust that has built up.

And so it has no ability to pull in clean and pure and refreshing air because of all the impurities that are holding it back.

[4 : 42] And so I took it apart yesterday and I got out an old toothbrush and the vacuum cleaner and I went to town on it. And it is now the right fan.

The fan that I bought it to be. It works how I desire it to work. It's the right fan. It's the best fan because it does what it's supposed to do. So tonight as we're going to look at a few verses that hopefully will help us see that our right life comes as a result of our righteously living before God. So let's open up our passage, Proverbs chapter 16. We're going to be looking at the last three verses, verses 31, 32, and 33.

And then the first six verses of chapter 17. Verse 31.

Verse 31 says, There are many signs of old age, some of which we may not be looking forward to.

[6 : 58] Hair changes, body changes, strength, health, maybe even mental issues change as we get older. We know that gray hair, white hair is not the only sign of old age.

However, this verse is using gray hair as a picture to represent old age. Instead of listing everything, it lists gray hair. It's an outward sign of age.

Proverbs 20, 29 says this. The glory of young men is their strength, but the splendor of old men is their gray hair. The strength that it is talking about of young men is referring to all the aspects of their younger body, right?

Their strength, their endurance, their flexibility, resilience, their muscle tone and shape. All those things that a young person takes pride in, they are concrete signs of youthfulness.

So on the other end of that, right, there are signs of old age. Gray hair is one of those signs. But for the person getting old, those signs are not meant to be a sign of weakness.

[8 : 16] Those younger should not look at the older and disregard them, look down on them, or look for someone newer or stronger. Because throughout the Bible, what we see is age is honored and respected.

Leviticus 19, 32 says this. You shall stand up before the gray head and honor the face of an old man, and you shall fear your God, I am the Lord.

That's pretty strong. Several other verses that talk in the same way because we are commanded to honor and respect older men and women. So gray hair, other physical changes brought about by age are meant to be outward signs of true maturity.

Like this verse says, the gray head should be a crown of glory. Age should bring with it not only experience, but wisdom and righteousness and Christ-likeness.

Those are godly characteristics that this verse is talking about. The second half of this verse says that it is gained in a righteous life.

[9 : 32] Now we know that not all older men and women are righteous, but there's a lot of people with gray or white hair or signs of aging. Solomon is not speaking towards the unrighteous here.

He's saying that for those with wisdom who have sought to live righteously, then they are outward signs of age. Like gray hair becoming a crown, something to be proud of.

It's a sign of honor or achievement. But those signs are meaningless if the life doesn't back it up. If there's a life that was lived outside of God and for oneself, then that reminder of old age should be in a way a sign of shame.

A sign of wanting to live for oneself and not a crown of glory. A quick story I want to share. When I was in eighth grade, I was still going to a Christian school and living in South New Jersey.

Once a year they would have these science competitions. Or not science competitions, but just education competitions for all the schools in the area.

[10 : 49] So South Jersey and maybe some of Maryland, some of Delaware. Any Christian schools in that area would come together and they would have competitions for most of the subjects in school.

So, you know, the spelling bees and the history competitions. And I like science. I was asked to do a science project, so I did it. And come to find out, I won first place in science competition.

And it was pretty cool. I was happy about it. I got a little ribbon that said first place. And that would normally be a crown of achievement. Something to be happy in.

But in the back of my mind, I knew that while I did the project, like any typical eighth grader, things got pushed to the end. And things got rushed. And I didn't do the best that I could.

The explanations or the instructions for my project weren't exactly the best. But I still got first place. So I still got that ribbon.

[11 : 50] Come to find out, I actually was the only eighth grader that submitted something to the competition. So in my age group, I was the only one that was participating.

So I got first place regardless of what I did. But that really didn't affect me too much. It was just the fact that I had this ribbon that should be something more to be proud of.

But I wasn't because I didn't give it my best work. And gray hair in this verse is a symbol like that. It should be a badge of honor for those who live righteously. So for you, for those out there who may have gray hair or thinning hair, or if you do in the future, if your body slows down because of old age, God hasn't given that to you as a curse.

But rather, he wants it to be a sign for righteousness. So live for righteousness. And let those signs be a crown that you rejoice in in your old age.

[13 : 06] You might be thinking, I'm getting older and I already have some signs, but I'm not living a righteous life. Maybe you're listening to this message this morning and you don't even know God tonight.

I want to encourage you by saying that it's never too late because we have a good and loving and gracious God that is accepting and forgiving.

It's not too late to accept Christ. It's not too late to realize that your best life can start right now and continue on until your last day. So if you don't know what that is like, if you don't know who Christ is and you want to know more about it, then I would please ask that you reach out to me, to Sean.

If you're online, then email me. It's real easy. It's matt at trinitycambridge.com. I would hate for you not to reach out and take an opportunity to know more about Christ.

Maybe you're thinking, you know what, I'm a young person. As I look around, there are a lot of young people in here tonight. I'm a young person. I'm in the prime of my life. And you're talking about old age and gray hair.

[14 : 19] What does that have to do with me? It might not seem so right now, but your current way of living is shaping your future life.

That's what this verse is talking about. We don't live how we want now, and then all of a sudden we switch on to righteousness right before we get old. If you talk to any elderly person, most of the people you will talk to, if you ask them, when did you get old?

It's not a defining point. It's not a certain number. It's a progression. Let's dig into the rest of these verses.

Verse 32 says, Whoever is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he who rules his spirit than he who takes a city. There's planning and military power that is needed to capture a city.

However, Solomon is saying it is of greater importance to your life now and for eternity for you to have and practice self-control.

[15 : 32] We can look back into history and name examples of people who were strong and powerful and able to conquer and control and run their kingdoms.

But they were failures when it came to controlling their emotions. James 1, 19 and 20 says this, Righteous living is not possible when we are ruled by our anger or our emotions.

Or as this verse says, when we are in control of our spirit. Next we come to verse 33. It says, The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the Lord.

The casting of lots, as some of you will know, is similar to rolling dice or flipping a coin. When someone doesn't know what to decide or to try to keep it fair, they will cast lots.

Kind of like at the beginning of the Super Bowl. One of the teams needs to kick. Who should do it? Let's flip a coin. And that's what they do. Casting lots is not uncommon.

[16 : 53] And actually we find it several times in the Bible. Even to determine God's direction, we see that lots are cast. After losing the battle of Ai, the Lord used lots, the casting of lots, to point out Achan being the person responsible for the army's defeat.

Land allotments for the tribes of Israel were determined by casting lots before the Lord. And if we look at the New Testament, we also see that the apostles used lots to decide who would be the 12th disciple replacing Judas.

Now before we dig more into that verse, I just want to point out that I'm not saying that we should go home and cast lots to make decisions. I don't think that as Christians we're called to do that anymore.

The reason for that is for several reasons. One is we don't see a command in Scripture from Jesus saying we should cast lots. We don't see the casting of lots used as a way to determine God's

leading in any of the rest of the New Testament.

After it was done in Acts 1, in Acts 2, the believers are given the Holy Spirit. Right? And it's from that point on in the New Testament that we see that people are making decisions, listening to the Spirit and the leading of the Spirit and not casting lots to find out the outcome.

[18:27] Alright, so let's jump back to verse 33. The point of the verses is not to tell us whether or not we should cast lots. The point of it is to remind us that things that are seemingly random, like casting lots, they're not random at all.

They're chosen and directed by God. Matthew 10, 29 and 30 says, Are not two sparrows sold for a penny, and not one of them will fall to the ground from your father?

But even the hairs of your head are all numbered. So small things, things that seem random, are directed by God.

We live before a sovereign God who is always in control of all things, whether we plan them or whether we don't. How does that fit into where we're going tonight?

As we strive to live righteously before God, we realize that He is in control. If we look at that verse again, it says that the lot is cast into the lap.

[19:35] Another way to look at this verse could also be something that is laid in front of you, something that you didn't choose or necessarily want. The phrase, that was His lot in life.

Kind of pick up that idea that a situation was placed in front of someone and they had to deal with it. Seemingly random, oftentimes that's how people word it, all of God.

So, as we strive to live righteously before God, we realize He's in control. He knows what is right for us, and the right life that He has for us might mean something that we don't want or something we didn't ask for, something we didn't plan for, but it's from God and God knows what is best for us.

Let's move into chapter 17. The first verse says, Better is a dry morsel with quiet than a house full of feasting with strife. So, here in this verse, we have quiet being contrasted with strife.

Right? So, quiet here is not referring to a level of sound, but rather a state of peace. Strife is fighting and stressfulness, whereas quiet is peace and contentment.

[21:05] Proverbs 15, 17 helps us get a little bit full of picture of this. It says, Better is a dinner of herbs where love is than a fattened ox and hatred with it.

I don't know if anybody here has ever been at a meal where there's been strife or discontention or arguing. Cheryl and I had been to one when we were younger, and there was an argument that broke out, and the rest of the evening, even though we were in a very nice restaurant and the food was good, it was not enjoyable because the strife and the fighting that was there.

I would rather have peanut butter and jelly and have it in an enjoyable setting than the steak with the fighting, and that's what Solomon was talking about here.

Thank you. So we want to work toward peace and away from strife in our house or in our surrounding where we are.

And we've covered a lot of verses in Proverbs that speak to this point. So I just want to take a minute to get a little practical with pointing out some things that pull us away from peace and add to strife so that if these things are coming from us, there are things that we can work on, things that we can fight against through the power of the Spirit.

[22:37] Anger comes up a lot in Proverbs. A hot-tempered man stirs up strife. Quarrelsome or criticizing. Proverbs 21.19 says this, It is better to live in a desert land than with a quarrelsome and fretful woman.

Now, I will say that verse was talking about marriage, so I'm not saying that that is only about a woman. There are plenty of verses that talk about the quarrelsome, anger nature of a man, but it's pretty strong when it's better to live in a desert than to be with someone who's quarrelsome.

Bitterness is another area. Being discontent or not satisfied with what we have. A scoffer. That is someone who thinks that someone else's actions or ideas are stupid.

So there's a level of pride and arrogance in that. And Proverbs 22.10 says, Drive out a scoffer, and strife will go out, and quarreling and abuse will cease.

Foolishness in a child or in an adult will ruin peace and bring strife. Those are big ones. There are more. But those are areas that if they characterize us in the area of influence that we are in, then we need to fight against those things.

[24:04] We need to move more towards love and peace because that is how the life of a Christian should be characterized. Colossians 3.12 says this, Put on then as God's chosen ones,

holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another.

And if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other. As the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. And above all these, put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.

And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you are called in one body. What is best for our life? The Bible says that it's peace and love that comes about through our righteous living.

What else do we see that goes into righteous living? Let's look at verse 2. A servant who deals wisely will rule over a son who acts shamefully and will share the inheritance as one of the brothers. As we look at this verse, there are a couple things that we can pick out of. First is we can assume that the family has some money, right?

[25 : 24] They have servants. They have an inheritance that it talks about. We also see there's a wise servant.

His work as a servant is done wisely and righteously. So in this case, I think of Joseph. Joseph started out as a slave in Potiphar's house, but because of his work ethic, his honesty, and God's favor, he's given command underneath Potiphar over all that he owned.

The other thing we see here in this verse is a son who acts shamefully. And the idea here isn't that the son messed up once or twice. He did, he made some foolish mistakes, but the idea is that the shameful acts are ongoing, they're continuing, and he's living a life of shame, and it's bringing shame on the family.

Think of the prodigal son in this case, where he had wealth, he had responsibility in the family, but he didn't want that life. He wanted his own life. And so he acted shamefully.

So in this situation where we have a rich family, they have servants, they have an inheritance, typically the son, as he grew up, would be able to rule over the servant.

[26 : 46] He would take on that responsibility. And as the parents died, then he would share in the inheritance of the family's wealth that was left. However, this verse not only talks about how the son is unable to rule, and also how the wisdom and the close relationship of the servant actually puts him in the place of ruling over the son.

And we see the same thing with the inheritance, right? The son continues in shame, and he's cut off from the inheritance. The servant, who is wise and righteous in his doing, he actually is given the inheritance in the son's place.

He becomes part of the family. So there's a couple points in this verse. One of them is this, that being wise and being diligent can actually overcome disadvantages of birth, right?

There's people that we know who were born in a certain situation, but they didn't let that situation keep them where they were. And God blesses hard work and living for him with successes.

The other side of that is true also. We know people who had a lot of wealth, but through unrighteousness and foolish living, it brought failures.

[28 : 10] It brought missed opportunities. It brought wasted fortunes. But in this verse, there's a great picture of the family of God. Remember the Israelites, God's chosen people.

They were blessed, and they were given an inheritance. However, as we read through the Old Testament, we know that they turned away from God. They chose to live foolishly and shamefully before God.

So God allowed their inheritance to be taken away, and he allowed them to become servants for other nations. They were unable to live holy and righteously before God.

They failed it. But we're not going to be too hard on them because you know what? If we were there, we would probably fail as well. We fail at it now.

So what is our hope? Our hope is Jesus. Jesus is our true righteousness before God. So when we confess and we believe in that hope that Jesus gives us, that he gives us strength to live righteously for God.

[29 : 25] Not perfect, but able through Christ to live towards righteousness. We move closer towards it. We were once outside the family, and now because of Jesus Christ, we have been brought into the family.

We've been adopted, and we have been given an inheritance in that family, an inheritance of eternity. That's the gospel. 1 John 3.1 says, see what kind of love the Father has given to us, that

we should be called children of God.

And so we are. So verses 1 and 2, we just talked about.

They talked about godly characteristics that we want to be part of our life. Peace, contentment, wise living. We're going to look at verses 4 and 5.

They talk about what we don't want. Characteristics that will not help us in our righteous living before God. Right in the middle of those two, we see verse 3, right?

[30 : 33] It's this dividing line between the good and the bad. This verse is helpful because it reminds us of God's position in our lives. So when we think about righteous living before God results in our right life, that before God means that He is in control, that He is always watching, that He is going to be testing us, wanting to perfect us, and wanting to help us.

Verse 3. The crucible is for silver, and the furnace is for gold, and the Lord tests hearts. The crucible, as many of you know, comes in different sizes.

It's usually bowl-shaped and can be made of ceramic or graphite, something that can withstand extreme heat because its purpose is to be heated and melt what's inside of that bowl.

And in the same way, a furnace is used to melt things like steel or glass. In this case, in this verse that we're reading, to melt gold.

Once it is melted, any impurities would separate from the gold or the silver. And at that point, it becomes easy to tell if that gold or that silver is pure or how polluted it is.

[31 : 58] Right? Once it's melted, those impurities separate, and we're able to pull that off. So not only are we able to test its authenticity, but we can make it pure.

The end of the process of that should leave us with gold and silver that is more pure and more valuable than when it started. So the crucible and the furnace test the authenticity and the purity. The Lord tests the purity and the authenticity of our hearts. The Lord is desiring a people who truly love him and want to follow him.

And when life is easy and there is no problems, that's not a problem. Right? We actually have a lot of people who look like really good Christians when life is going really good.

But when the testing comes, that's when the truth comes out of what someone really is like. The rich young ruler, if you remember, looked like a very good follower of Jesus until he was asked to give up his wealth.

[33 : 03] And he said no. Instead, he followed his wealth and forsaked Jesus. Brothers and sisters, this is a big issue in the church. What do I mean by that?

We all read the Bible. We know to love one another. We know to encourage one another. We know to strive for peace. We know to forgive. We know we ought to be humble in our serving.

We know what to do. We know what it looks like. But when we're tested, that's when it gets hard. Right? That's when we have to move from knowing it to doing it.

And it's this step right here where so many people in the church fail. They weren't ready for the test. Or they weren't humble enough.

There was too much pride and selfishness to let go and make that right decision and do what God calls us to do. They're still Christians.

[34 : 02] Don't get me wrong. They haven't lost their salvation. But what happens is there's a failing of that test that instead of leading to repentance and seeking God to pass that test the next time, they become complacent in their failure.

Right? So instead of building up a stronger, more precious church for God, these walls of bitterness and judgment, complacency, stubbornness, they all began to be built up in its place.

Why? Because we didn't want to be humble. We didn't want to forgive. We didn't want to serve with humbleness. We didn't want to strive for peace. We didn't want to let something go.

And so we failed that test and we become, I don't want to say less of a Christian, but less of an effective Christian. Less, less pure of a Christian in the church.

So over time, what happens is you have a church that looks like a church on the outside. On the inside, it's really more like a religious club, right? That runs the way they want it to and not runs for God.

[35 : 14] And we have the same problem that happens in our own families, right? The same things that happen in the church happens in our family. We want to have a life before God that is the right life.

The life that is worth something to Him. Not just fool's gold that looks right on the outside, but inside is worth nothing. We want to be authentic and pure. That's the right life that we want to live before God.

So when you're tested, if you haven't been already, if you haven't been, you will be. You will be tested. Then first, praise God because He loves you enough to want to make you stronger and more purer for Himself because you are His child.

And then next, if you fail that test you've been given, don't waste it. And by that, I mean that use it for what God meant it to be for. To show you your weakness or to break down some idol in your life or to make you stronger for some future purpose.

So if you fail the test, repent. Pray for strength from the Holy Spirit and then get ready for the retake because it's going to happen. Okay, verses 4 and 5 come next and from that we see some characteristics that we don't want.

[36 : 37] There are things that aren't going to help us as we strive to live righteously before God. Verse 4 says this, An evildoer listens to wicked lips and a liar gives ear to a mischievous tongue.

There are two groups of people here. One who's evil and one who tells lies. And the point of this verse is simple. Don't listen to the evil person and don't give an ear to a liar.

Don't join in on deceptive plans. Don't listen to slanderous talk. As you know, gossip and slander can't spread if there's no platform that will listen to it.

That's why the gossip magazines and the grocery stores sell because it has a platform that people want to listen to. But our lives are lived before God.

We are always in His view. He sees how and what we listen to even if it's done in secret. He loves honesty. He loves a pure heart.

[37 : 43] He hates dishonesty and He hates wickedness. Proverbs 15, 9 says this, The way of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord but He loves Him who pursues righteousness.

That's what we want to do, pursue righteousness. So righteous living before God includes what we let into our ears. don't lend your ears to the spreading of lies and hurtful speech.

How about illicit flirtations? Gossip, backbiting. We should not be part of that at all. The other part of this verse is He who is glad at calamity will not go unpunished.

That is that is sorry I missed the first part of that verse. verse 5. The first part of verse 5 says whoever mocks the poor insults his maker.

He who is glad at calamity will not go unpunished. Don't mock the poor. That's pretty straightforward. Those who are less fortunate maybe with money but maybe it's something else.

[38 : 53] Maybe it's influence or intelligence. Maybe somebody has less than you in some way. Let me remind us all that we have what we have because God has given it to us.

So to mock someone else is to say that God's plan for that person is wrong and we're also mocking the person who was made in the image of God. So here Solomon says don't go there.

Don't mock that person. Also not to make fun or be glad at calamity. as Christians we should not gain any enjoyment from someone else's misfortune.

That is even when it happens to someone we don't like even when it happens to an evil person judgment belongs to God and not to us.

And so we should not take any enjoyment from someone else's pain or misfortune and we should constantly be grieved by knowing that wicked people are on their way to hell.

[40 : 01] Lastly we come to verse 6. It says grandchildren are the crown of the age and the glory of children as their fathers. right away we see an age connection between this verse and the first verse of our passage.

Gray hair in the first verse and grandchildren here. But it goes deeper than that right? As Christians our deepest identity is that we are children of God.

We are followers of Christ. That's our most important identity. Following that role who we are in our families plays a big part.

Right? Husband wife child brother sister parent grandparent we're all here at least one of those. We affect our family and we are affected by our family.

Our joy can be shared with them and theirs with ours. That's how it works. Here in Proverbs when Solomon talks about grandparents and parents and children unless it says so it is referring to those who are trying to live righteously before God.

[41 : 14] So for grandchildren who love God and are following after him they are a source of honor a crown of delight for their grandparents and those grandparents who love God who have sought his righteousness and wisdom who have lived for God and are now in their old age and parents who aren't foolishly living for themselves but living for God desiring to be righteous in their life those parents are a glory to their children.

Those children are blessed by God to have parents that way. That is the family. That is the generation that God is seeking.

So to close we aren't perfect and we can't fix other people. We can't fix people in our families that are hard to love.

Maybe we can't fix people in our families that aren't following God. But we aren't called to their righteousness. We're called to live righteous for ourselves before God for the life that he has for us. The right life because its center is Christ and because its purpose is for God. So we're going to end there.

[42 : 56] Take a minute just to think about that phrase that righteous living before God results in the life that God has for you. The right life.

Let's take a minute to think about that and then we'll have some prayer.