

Determined by God

Proverbs 16:1-9

The first time I ever got towed behind a boat was as a teen.

My friend invited me out on his dad's boat for an afternoon of knee boarding.

It's a small board and you start out on your stomach and as the boat is moving you pull yourself up to your knees and get pulled along.

It took me many tries and a couple of injuries but I managed to make it up and steer the board.

A number of years later I tried wakeboarding.

In wakeboarding the board is strapped to your feet and when the boat starts pulling you try to get to a standing position and ride it much like a skateboard behind the boat.

It took me many tries and a lot of water up my nose but I managed to make it up and steer the board.

Many years after that I tried water skiing.

Again after several tries I managed to make it to a standing position and steer the skis enough to move along with the boat.

Along the way I have also tried tubing behind a boat.

The upside to tubing is that there isn't much to learn. Essentially all you have to do is hang on.

The downside to tubing is that you almost no ability to steer the tube at all, you are pretty much at the mercy of the person driving the boat and if the driver knows what they are doing they can really whip you around on that thing.

I remember the first time I tried it I was determined to hold on.

Well the driver knew what he was doing and he sent me skipping along the water at what felt like an incredible speed.

It wasn't long before I was off the tube and in the water.

No matter how much I wanted to hold on I was at the mercy of the driver of the boat.

[Have you ever felt like that in life? Have you ever felt like you have almost no control and you are at the mercy of someone or something else? I think it is safe to say that most of us have felt like that at one time or another and the bible has some important things to say to us about who is really in control of things. Our passage this morning **Proverbs 16:1-9** reminds us of one of the most foundational truths of a biblical worldview. I reminds us that the LORD is in charge and that things are ultimately determined by Him. Now I know full well that some of this is very difficult to accept and I would suggest that some of it is even beyond our understanding, but I am equally convinced that it is true and the Bible tells us about these things for our good. With that in mind I want to encourage us to do all that we can to listen well to what this text has

to say, because there is wondrous blessing and peace here for us if we will have ears to listen and hearts to trust what God's word says. The first and most basic thing that this passage invites us to realize is that...]

Point #1 – Independence from God is impossible. (Verses 1-3)

Human beings unlike any other creature have a capacity to willfully ignore our need of the LORD, but denying His power over everything does not change the reality of it.

The proverb, that is a short saying that points us in the right direction, in **verse 1** starts us off with this...

When the bible speaks about 'the heart' it has in mind something more than a muscle that circulates blood in our bodies.

The heart, biblically speaking, in the centre of our will and our desires.

Everything that turns into some kind of action begins in the inner workings of our hearts.

According to this proverb, those things belong to us.

That means God is not, as some might think, controlling people like robots.

At the same time, He has ultimate control over what our desires produce in this case the words that come out of our mouths.

That can happen in two ways. One way that happens is when God enables us to speak with clarity and power beyond ourselves.

The other is when the LORD simply permits or forbids us to say what we want.

It is an easy thing for God to rob a person of the ability to speak either for a moment or permanently.

So in that sense the only reason anyone is allowed to say anything is on account of God.

Verse 2 adds this...

Human beings have an amazing ability to think of ourselves as being in the right.

We can very easily develop our own ideas of good and bad and evaluate ourselves as being good based on our own rules.

But, it says here, "the LORD weighs the spirit."

The idea of weighing here is one of testing, proving, or examining.

In other words people can think of themselves however they want but they are going to be measured by the LORD's standard rather than their own.

That being the case the only reasonable thing to do is to listen to the proverb in **verse 3**.

Your heart may be opposed to God, but He still has the final say over your life.

You may think you can live however you want and see it as good, but you are still accountable to how God sees things.

Because that is true the best thing that anyone can do is be committed to the LORD rather than trying to live independently of Him.

[How silly would it be for a water skier to think that the little bit of steering they can do with their skis means they can go somewhere other than where the boat is going? The only reason they can ski is the first place is because the boat is pulling the rope. In the same way independence from God is a delusion. I know full well many people are living that delusion, but they can only do that because the LORD has allowed them the ability to live, think, and feel. It is impossible to actually take the LORD out of the equation of your life. That said, there is a big cost to living like you can live without God. We see that is the next two proverbs given to us in verses 4-5. These verses show us that...]

Point #2 – Seeking independence from God is destructive. (Verses 4-5)

The heart of denying our need of the LORD is pride which produces idolatry (worship of false gods) which is a rejection of the very purpose of our creation and therefore puts us at war with the King of the Universe.

Admittedly verse 4 is a hard verse to hear, but we must hear it and we must strive to think rightly about it.

I can see how a person might read this and think, “God made wicked people for the purpose of punishing them.”

We need to keep at least two things in mind. When the LORD first made human beings He made them good not evil.

It was Adam’s willful choice that corrupted his nature which is passed to all of his children and in that corrupted nature we choose to follow Adam’s example of doing evil things.

The LORD never forces anyone to do evil against his/her will. He does however create people knowing they will choose evil and knowing exactly what particular evil they will choose and He permits and restricts those choices according to His plans and purposes.

The second thing that we must keep in mind is that the bible tells us that the LORD “*does not delight in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked would turn from his way and live*” (Ezekiel 33:11)

That said, He does deal with the wicked justly and he permits what He does for a reason.

The phrase 'day of trouble' at the end of verse 4 is probably not a reference to the final judgement of the wicked, but rather the LORD's use of evil actions to accomplish His purposes in the world.

We see this worked out in the Scriptures. Think of how God uses the Assyrians and the Babylonians to bring judgment on the idolatry of Israel.

Time and again we see in the Bible that the forces of evil, though they desire to throw off the rule of God, they end up bringing about His will in the world.

The fact that God allows such actions for a purpose does not make the evil of the wicked good which is why it says this in **verse 5**.

What does it mean to be 'arrogant in heart'?

It means to think of yourself as far more than you are.

To be full of yourself.

People who are 'arrogant in heart' are people who think they don't need to listen to God, they are people who think they don't need God at all.

This verse says that 'is an abomination to the LORD'.

That is a word we don't use all the time. It means to find something extremely offensive or disgusting.

The LORD finds 'arrogance of heart', that is people thinking/feeling that they have no need of God, offensive in the greatest degree because it is the exact opposite of the purpose for which we have been made.

God made us in His image for His glory and to think and act as though He is unnecessary is to both deny and hate the reason He created us.

It is to ask God to accept the idea that the goodness of Who He is should be denied.

It is impossible for the LORD to cease being as amazing as He is and it is impossible for Him to deny His greatness because He always does what is right.

Because He always does what is right the only response He can have to those 'arrogant in heart' is to bring upon them eternal judgment if they persist in their sin.

[If a branch is cut from a tree it will die, if a fish is removed from water it will perish, and if a person denies the very reason for which he has been made it will lead to eternal destruction. There is another choice that can be made and it leads in the opposite direction. We can see that in the three proverbs that are given to us in verses six, seven, and eight. These proverbs show us that...]

Point #3 – Embracing dependence on God brings restoration. (Verses 6-8)

When we realize our need of the LORD we will discover that He has done everything necessary to make us right with Him and we find that life actually makes sense when we seek to live under His rule.

Verse 6 gives us an immovable foundation upon which to build hope in the LORD.

The words ‘steadfast love’ and ‘faithfulness’ translate the Hebrew words ‘hesed’ and ‘emeth’.

Hesed has the idea of faithful or unwavering commitment rooted in love.

Emeth means to be dependably true to a promise.

Now here is the big question that we need to answer in this proverb, “By whose hesed and emeth is iniquity atoned for?”

It can’t be ours, because our love is far too weak and we fall way short of the standard of dependability that is required.

It is the steadfast love and faithfulness of the LORD that atones for iniquity.

It was God who decided before the foundation of the world to send His Son Jesus Christ into the World.

He bound Himself to a promise to redeem people and Jesus faithfully succeeded where we all have failed.

Jesus loved God and loved people in perfect obedience to every single command of the LORD.

He used that perfection as an offering and took upon Himself the full punishment that our disobedience to God’s laws deserve.

The bible says that whoever believes and trusts in the Person and Work of Christ is forgiven. Their sins are atoned for and they are declared right in God’s sight on account of Jesus’ perfection and His sacrifice for us.

Receiving that gift requires complete dependence on God. It comes from realizing that we desperately need God for anything and everything that is good.

Another way to say that is that we have what proverbs calls the ‘fear of the LORD’ which as it says here turns us from evil and if we are turning away from evil it means we are turning towards what is good.

It is the love and faithfulness of God that forgives us and makes us into new creatures in Christ.

We see some of the fruit of that transformation in **verses 7-8**.

When we live a life depending on God’s grace and we start doing things that are pleasing in His sight, it means the LORD will act on our behalf for our good.

One of the things that God will do is he will deal with our enemies.

We can sure make a mess of relationships with sin can't we?

If we humble ourselves and go to people and say, "I hurt you and what I did was wrong, will you please forgive me?" God can work in the hearts of those people and our relationship can change from one of conflict to one of peace.

But what about enemies who are enemies because they hate God and therefore hate His people?

God will deal with them as well and there will come a day when they will no longer be able to do us any harm.

We can rest in that to the point where we can look at those enemies with compassion and a peace in our hearts that surpasses understanding.

When we are embracing dependence on the LORD we will love and delight in righteousness more than worldly things.

I'll tell you the gift of contentment is a powerful gift.

Seeing God as a greater treasure than stuff that we collect for a short time will dramatically change your life for the better.

Where greed and envy will eat at you like a cancer, finding satisfaction in God will bring healing and wholeness to your soul beyond measure.

[It is like going from a dried out dead tree branch lying on the ground, to being grafted into the tree of life and being renewed and restored. That is amazing. Now you might be asking, "How can we know that all of this is true and will happen? Why is dependence of the LORD necessary and life giving? The proverb of verse 9 points us in the direction of the Bible's answer, it shows us that...]

Point #4 – God prevails over everything. (Verse 9)

Nothing in the whole of creation can act apart from the knowledge and power of the Almighty.

The proverb of verse 9 is similar to that of verse 1 which focuses our attention back upon this foundational issue of the LORD's control over creation.

As human beings our hearts want stuff and those desires produce all kinds of plans about what we are going to do.

This again reminds us that the LORD is not forcing people to do things that they don't want to do.

On a regular basis I hear people objecting against God determining all things arguing that such an idea would mean that the LORD forces people to do things they don't want to do.

They have the idea, for example, that people want to do good and God takes control and forces them to do evil.

That is taught nowhere in the Bible and I believe is a very unfair representation of what I am teaching this morning.

What a man, woman, boy, or girl wills in the heart is theirs and both verse 1 and verse 9 clearly teach that.

The second half of verse 9 is also true, “The LORD establishes his steps”, the NAS and the KJV says, “...directs his steps”, and the NIV says, “...determines his steps”.

How can both of those things be true? How does that work?

I will be the first to admit there is a certain level of mystery here, but I think the bible does give us at least a surface level understanding of it.

One way in which the LORD ‘establishes’ (determines) the where we go and what we do is simply by either allowing us to proceed with the plans of our hearts or stopping us in our tracks.

[Parents do this all the time with their children. A child wants to wander into the street and the parent take them by the hand and points them in another direction. In another case a child doesn’t want to study for a test and the parent lets them fail and receive the consequences for the choice that was made.]

Another way in which God can ‘establish steps’ is by acting towards us in a way that produces a desire in our hearts that leads to doing something.

[I don’t know too many kids that volunteer to do chores around the house because they woke up in the morning with a deep desire to do laundry or cut the grass. But I have noticed that when money is offered all of the sudden there is a desire in their heart to do the work.]

Now, if we can act in ways that create desires in the hearts of other people, how much more is God able to do the same?

Because God is all-knowing, all-powerful, and present everywhere He makes a choice about how He is going to act towards everything in all creation every second of everyday throughout all eternity and therefore He has the final say over everything that happens.

I know that is a lot to take in and I know for many it is a hard thing to accept for all kinds of reasons.

The idea of God determining everything raises many questions and I would be happy to talk with anyone about any question they might have, but time only allows me to emphasize the importance of what the bible is teaching us on this matter.

Everything and everyone being under the authority of Almighty God is the basis upon which we can trust the Bible.

You see if there was even one atom in the universe, as RC Sproul puts it, that was outside of God's control then that atom would have the ability stop God from doing what He wanted to do and make God's ability to do what He says an open question.

But the LORD never says, "I will do this or that if I can."

No, the LORD says, "*I am God and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done, saying, 'My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose.'*" (Isaiah 46:9-10)

The rule of God is absolute brothers and sisters, we cannot change that.

The only thing we can do is choose to reject it or accept it.

Rejecting it doesn't change it and we are the only ones who get hurt by going that direction.

Accepting it brings restoration, satisfaction, and certain hope of an eternal future in glory with our wonderful Saviour.

No one can keep us from the enjoying the promises of the LORD because nothing can keep Him from doing all that He says.

May you find rest today in the amazing truth that everything is determined by God.