

The Text for 2011

Proverbs 22:4

The Secret of Prospering in the New Year: Humility and the Fear of God.

For many people the New Year is a time to reflect on what is important. It is a time to improve on the quality and meaning of their lives. Some people resolve in the New Year to make more money. They strive to climb the corporate ladder and achieve financial success and honor. Others search for that special person in their life to love and cherish. Still others determine to live a healthier lifestyle. Wealth, health, honor, and love just may be the top four New Year's Resolutions people make.

One man who understood a great deal about the obtaining of wealth, life, honor, and love was King Solomon. He is perhaps best known for the building of God's temple and his Proverbs that we have in our Bible. The book of Proverbs teaches us to have God's insight on how to live lives that will glorify Him; how to build up others; and how to be at peace with ourselves.

Following its precepts will bring success in business and in the home. Through heeding its advice, we can avoid those regrettable pitfalls that can make life so difficult. If we listen to God's wisdom, we will experience joy and laughter rather than feeling the sorrow and despair that are so much a part of those who heed the "spirit of the age."

Proverbs speaks to every area of life we will ever encounter. No stone is left unturned; no path not taken. The only issue in question is whether we will consider its ways and follow what God says.

We read in Proverbs 22:4, "By humility and the fear of the Lord are riches, honor, and life." Here Solomon tells us the secret of prospering in this life. It is not a hard concept to understand or a complicated formula to figure out. It is actually very simple. **By humility and the fear of the Lord** are riches, honor, and life.

Humility and the fear of the Lord are the pillars that make for a full and prosperous life. Humility leads on to the fear of the Lord; He that behaves humbly towards man comes at length to fear the Lord, though these are rather to be considered as the graces of the Spirit of God, which go together where there is one,

there is the other; he that is humbled under a sense of sin, and his own unworthiness, fears the Lord; and he that fears the Lord, and his goodness, will walk humbly before him; they both flow from the grace of God.

But how many people today tread the gracious path of humility and the fear of the Lord?

Many rather choose to go down the destructive path of pride and self-sufficiency in their pursuit of prosperity and riches.

A wise man once observed, “You may have much gold and grandeur, yet by God be reckoned poor; He alone has riches truly who has Christ, though nothing more. Discontentment makes rich men poor; contentment makes poor men rich!”

Can you truly be rich without Christ? Can you truly be happy without salvation? Can you truly know honor, life, and lasting peace apart from knowing Jesus Christ as your Savior and Lord? The answer is a resounding NO you can't!

Becoming rich and famous does not guarantee contentment. If it did, multimillionaire athletes would not jeopardize their careers by using illicit drugs. If it did, wealthy businessmen would not tearfully confess that they would gladly trade everything they had for a change in the behavior of their sons. If it did, the occurrence of multiple marriages among celebrities would not be commonplace. Obviously, contentment must come from a source other than wealth and fame.

As we enter a new year, we are presented with new challenges and opportunities. Some people look at the New Year as a new beginning and a fresh start. Proverbs 22 tells us how to discover the secret of prospering in the New Year. The title of my message today is, ***The Secret of Prospering in the New Year: Humility and the Fear of God.*** What can we learn from Proverbs 22:4 that we can take with us and apply in our lives?

1. Humility leads to honor. “By **humility** and the fear of the Lord are riches, **honor**, and life.” How can someone who is humble receive honor?

Consider Jesus Christ. He humbled himself and became a servant.

We read in Philippians 2:5-8, “Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.”

Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus. The object of this reference to the example of the Saviour is particularly to enforce the duty of humility. This was the highest example which could be furnished, and it would illustrate and confirm all the apostle had said of this virtue. The principle in the case is that we are to make the Lord Jesus our model, and are in all respects to frame our lives, as far as possible, in accordance with this great example.

The point here is, that he left a state of inexpressible glory, and took upon him the most humble form of humanity, and performed the most lowly offices, that he might benefit us.

Matthew Henry writes, “ He became like us in all things except sin. Thus low, of his own will, he stooped from the glory he had with the Father before the world was. Christ's two states, of humiliation and exaltation, are noticed.

Christ not only took upon him the likeness and fashion, or form of a man, but of one in a low state; not appearing in splendor. His whole life was a life of poverty and suffering.

But the lowest step was his dying the death of the cross, the death of a malefactor and a slave; exposed to public hatred and scorn. The exaltation was of Christ's human nature, in union with the Divine. At the name of Jesus, not the mere sound of the word, but the authority of Jesus, all should pay solemn homage.

It is to the glory of God the Father, to confess that Jesus Christ is Lord; for it is his will, that all men should honour the Son as they honour the Father, John 5:23. Here we see such motives to self-denying love as nothing else can supply. Do we thus love and obey the Son of God?”

Albert Barnes adds, “Humiliation was a constant characteristic of him as a man. He did not aspire to high honors; he did not affect pomp and parade; he did not demand the service of a train of menials; but he condescended to the lowest conditions of life, Luke 22:27, “For whether is greater, he that sitteth at meat, or he that serveth? is not he that sitteth at meat? but I am among you as he that serveth.

The words are very carefully chosen by the Apostle Paul in Philippians 2. When Christ became a man, he "emptied himself," or laid aside the symbols of his glory; now, when a man, he humbled himself. That is, though he was God appearing in the form of man--a Divine Person on earth--yet he did not assume and assert the dignity and prerogatives appropriate to a Divine Being, but put himself in a condition of obedience.

Christ shows by His example that humility leads to honor. That's what the Bible teaches. The way up in the kingdom of God is down.

Listen to the humble words of John the Baptist in John 3:30, “He must increase, but I must decrease.”

John is saying in essence that the purpose of my ministry is to point men to Christ. When that is done my work is done. I came not to form a party of my own, nor to set up a religion of my own; and my teaching must cease when he is fully established, as the light of the morning star fades away and is lost in the beams of the rising sun.

This proved John's humility and willingness to be esteemed as nothing if he could honour Christ. It shows us, also, that it is sufficient honour for man if he may be permitted to point sinners to the Lord Jesus Christ. No work is so honorable and joyful as the ministry of the gospel; none are so highly honored as those who are permitted to stand near the Son of God, to hear his voice, and to lead perishing men to his cross.

How about you? Are you frustrated or satisfied in your life? Paul wrote that we are "not to be haughty, nor to trust in uncertain riches but in the living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy" (1 Tim. 6:17). Only when we trust in the Lord will we find true and lasting satisfaction.

Let us ask the Lord to humble us and keep us humble in 2011. Let us never lose sight of the Cross in this New Year!

2. The Fear of God leads to life and riches. “By humility and **the fear of the Lord** are **riches**, honor, and **life**.”

What does it mean to have the fear of God?

For the unbeliever, the fear of God is the fear of the judgment of God and eternal death, which is eternal separation from God (Luke 12:5; Hebrews 10:31).

For the believer, the fear of God is something much different. The believer's fear is reverence of God.

Hebrews 12:28-29 is a good description of this: “Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear: For our God is a consuming fire.”

This reverence and awe is exactly what the fear of God means for Christians. This is the motivating factor for us to surrender to the God of Heaven.

Proverbs 1:7 declares, “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge.” Until we understand who God is and develop a reverential fear of Him, we cannot have true wisdom. True wisdom comes only from understanding who God is and that He is holy, just, and righteous.

Deuteronomy 10:12, 20-21 records, “And now, Israel, what doth the LORD thy God require of thee, but to fear the LORD thy God, to walk in all his ways, and to love him, and to serve the LORD thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul, Thou shalt fear the LORD thy God; him shalt thou serve, and to him shalt thou cleave, and swear by his name. He is thy praise, and he is thy God, that hath done for thee these great and terrible things, which thine eyes have seen.”

The fear of God is the basis for our walking in His ways, serving Him, and, yes, loving Him.

A Bible commentator adds, “Some redefine the fear of God for believers to “respecting” Him. While respect is definitely included in the concept of fearing God, there is more to it than that. A biblical fear of God, for the believer, includes understanding how much God hates sin and fearing His judgment on sin—even in the life of a believer. Hebrews 12:5-

11 describes God's discipline of the believer. While it is done in love (Hebrews 12:6), it is still a fearful thing. As children, the fear of discipline from our parents no doubt prevented some evil actions. The same should be true in our relationship with God. We should fear His discipline, and therefore seek to live our lives in such a way that pleases Him."

Believers are not to be scared of God. We have no reason to be scared of Him. We have His promise that nothing can separate us from His love (Romans 8:38-39). We have His promise that He will never leave us or forsake us (Hebrews 13:5). Fearing God means having such a reverence for Him that it has a great impact on the way we live our lives. The fear of God is respecting Him, obeying Him, submitting to His discipline, and worshipping Him in awe.

J. Gresham Machen observes, "Even the Christian must fear God. But it is another kind of fear. It is a fear rather of what might have been than of what is; it is a fear of what would come were we not in Christ. Without such fear there can be no true love; for love of the Saviour is proportioned to one's horror of that from which man has been saved. And how strong are the lives that are suffused with such a love! They are lives brave, not because the realities of life have been

ignored, but because they have first been faced — lives that are founded upon the solid foundation of God's grace. May such lives be ours!"

Duncan Campbell lived from 1898 -1972. He was a fiery Scottish preacher, who was a leader in the great Lewis Awakening, a mid-20th century religious revival in the Scottish Hebrides.

Campbell said quote, "Now, I wasn't in the island at the time. I was in another area when word came asking me to come to Lewis for ten days. I had other meetings scheduled and wrote back that I would put Barvas on my calendar for the following year. However, do to circumstances I won't go into, my other meetings were canceled, and I found it possible to go to the islands as requested. Arriving by boat, I was met by the minister of the church and one of his office bearers. As I stepped ashore, the office bearer came to me and said, "Mr. Campbell, may I ask you a question? Are you walking with God?" I was happy to be able to respond, "I can say this at any rate, **I fear God.**"

What a treasured possession to have the fear of God. The fear of God works as our moral compass, convicting us of our sins and convincing us of the

love of God found only in the person and work of Jesus Christ.

The fear of God can not be manufactured by men or cultivated in the right religious climate. It is a gift; a grace produced in our hearts by the working of the Holy Spirit.

In closing, we have seen that humility and the fear of God lead to true riches, honor, and life. Therefore, the secret of prospering in the New Year is humility and the fear of God. May the Lord teach us more humility and fear of God in 2011 so that we may experience true and lasting prosperity. Let us pray!