

SUMMER 6 - Wise Living 1

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[0 : 00] Well, as we heard Proverbs chapter 10 tonight, and the next two weeks, chapters I think 14 and 16, and then the fourth of this series, I thought something slightly different.

We do the themes of poverty and wealth in Proverbs, even though we'll inevitably touch briefly on that in the first three weeks as well, but to try a different format of looking at some of the Proverbs in this book.

There are various things I probably ought to say by way of introduction to a series on Proverbs, some of which I did say a couple of Sunday nights ago, so apologies to those who are here for that sermon on Proverbs 1 and 2.

But we're dealing with a particular type of writing within the Bible, and there are various things that we ought to pay attention to and understand before we get into it.

The book of Proverbs is part of what's generally called in the scholarly circles the wisdom genre or style of writing in the Scriptures, along with the books of Ecclesiastes and Job in particular, some of the Psalms, some would say the Song of Solomon, and maybe other bits and pieces here and there, mainly within the Old Testament.

[1 : 17] There's little within these books to do explicitly with the nation of Israel, the promises made to Israel, and at least to its founding father Abraham and to Moses and to David.

There's little about the king, there's little about the land of Israel, about its enemies. There's little, in effect, about the history of Israel and the people of God as they are facing it or have faced it or will face it.

So, in that respect, the wisdom literature is quite distinctive because virtually every other thing that you get in the Old Testament, at least, has very much a firmly rooted historical context.

That is, you get books that tell you the history, you get books of prophets that are rooted in history and the historical events and twos and threes and kings and enemies and so on, and even the laws that are given are given within a fairly clear historical context as well as in the context of the promises of God for the people of God, the nation of Israel.

So, when we get to the book of Proverbs, Job and Ecclesiastes in particular, we're dealing with something quite distinctive from the rest of the Old Testament scriptures. We're also dealing with a type of thinking and writing that is quite different from what we're more familiar with in, say, the laws of God in particular.

[2 : 39] It's worth making a comment about this because I think often the book of Proverbs in particular is misunderstood as though it's a list of laws or promises from God.

In, say, the book of Exodus, God gives various promises to the people, he gives various laws to the people about what they ought to do or ought not to do, and his promises that apply to them are either unconditionally or, at times, conditionally on their obedience.

What we get in the book of Proverbs is more to do with a reflection on life, a looking at the experience of people, a generalising about what often happens, though not necessarily what always happens, as a way of motivating and encouraging the reader to be wise and to live wisely.

But we're not dealing with laws from God or promises from God directly. So we have to be very careful.

Hopefully I'll demonstrate that as we go through some individual Proverbs in chapter 10 and the next couple of weeks as well. But when, say, a proverb says, such and such happens for this group of people, the diligent are rich, it is not necessarily a promise from God that every diligent person will become rich.

[4 : 04] It's an observation that, generally speaking, diligent people, in contrast to the lazy, slothful people, prosper. But it's not a promise of God. And so we have to be very careful, I think, practically.

We're not going to deal with every proverb in the course of these three or four weeks, obviously. But sometimes I've heard it said that train a child in the right way and he'll be, you know, grow up okay, as though that's a promise from God.

It's not a promise from God. It's a proverb about what is usually the case. And I'm sure there are plenty of you who are parents or grandparents who've trained up your children in the right way and yet they're not followers of Jesus Christ.

Has God broken a promise? Well, no. But generally speaking, train up a child in the right way, etc., the right outcome will occur. That is, the book of Proverbs is full of generalisations about a situation and the usual outcome.

But it's not a promise from God that that is always the outcome in every case. So we have to keep that in mind, I think, when we read the book. And I say it because, pastorally, I think that's very important. Because if we think that we're reading a promise from God and, of course, our situation is different, then it can do damage to our faith because we think that God has broken a promise.

[5 : 23] Whereas it seems to me, the real case is that these are not promises. They're observations from a wise person who understands the world and the generalisations within the world and sees that a certain situation usually leads to consequence A and situation B will lead to consequence B and so on.

But there are exceptions to those rules and even within the book of Proverbs we find those exceptions. Answer a fool according to his folly, dot, dot, dot. Don't answer a fool according to his folly, dot, dot, dot.

That is, it's not a promise about what happens if you do or don't answer. It's saying that there are times when you do answer a fool and there are times when you don't. And the wise person is not the person who remembers the proverb.

The wise person is the person who knows when to answer a fool and when not to. So we must keep in mind what we're dealing with here. By and large, observations on life, but they are not just observations to describe.

The book is to train, to persuade, to motivate us to be wise and to live wisely. So there is often a value judgment built in to the observations that are going on.

[6 : 34] For example, when it tells us that a diligent person will usually prosper, but a lazy person won't, it's not just saying, well, look around you, that's what you see.

Take your choice. It's actually urging us to be diligent, not lazy. That is, the book is there to motivate, persuade, to encourage us to live wisely and to be wise.

Now that's made clear at the beginning of the book, which stands as an introduction and a purpose for the whole book. We're told in verse 2 to 6 of chapter 1 why this book is here.

It is for, verse 2 begins, that is, for the purpose of learning about wisdom and instruction, for understanding words of insight, for gaining instruction in wise dealing, righteousness, justice, and equity, to teach shrewdness to the simple, knowledge and prudence to the young, let the wise also hear and gain in learning, and the discerning acquire skill to understand a proverb and a figure, the words of the wise, and their riddles.

That's why the book is here, to teach, to train us, not just intellectual education, mind you, that it's not just to fill our minds with understanding and knowledge, it is about behaviour as well, so that what fills our minds will flow into filling our behaviour in our lives as we live.

[7 : 59] So those words of opening, about being wise, the word wisdom, has got a very practical connotation. For us, we often tend to think of wise people as being in ivory towers, long beards, lots and lots of books, and that's about it.

But wisdom is much more practical in the meaning of the word, in the Hebrew and in the Old Testament. It's about skilful living. It's about the intellect forming the behaviour.

And it has a moral characteristic to it as well, so that the wise liver is one who lives morally as well.

And we'll see some of that illustrated in chapter 10. We also ought to bear in mind that this is a book for everyone. Some of you may be young in the faith, not necessarily meaning it's only a few days since you became a Christian, but you may yet be relatively, to use the words here, simple in the faith.

This is a book for you, to become wiser in the faith, to become wiser under God, to teach shrewdness to the simple, verse 4 says. But just so that you don't, some of you don't feel too conceited, those of you who are mature in the faith, and perhaps already wise in the faith, and wise about this world, and the ways and purposes of God, let the wise also hear, verse 5 says of chapter 1, and gain in learning.

[9 : 20] That is, the wise person, as again we'll see illustrated in chapter 10, keeps on learning. So this is a book for all of us, whether or not you're already wise. We all need to keep growing in wisdom.

And the beginning of how to become wise, is also made clear in chapter 1, verse 7. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, fools despise wisdom and instruction.

So the person who is to be wise, begins by fearing the Lord. Not a terror, like a fear of spiders or heights, or something like that, but fear as in reverence and awe, an acknowledgement that God is God, and that we are not.

A fear that is a positive thing, is also a relational term. To fear the Lord is to actually be in a relationship with the Lord. It's not to fear something that's unknown, or unknowable, or remote, or aloof.

But rather to fear a God who is known, knowable, and with whom you're in a relationship. It's the fear of Yahweh, the Lord, L-O-R-D in capital letters in our English translations.

[10 : 26] That is not the fear of God, using a much more generic term, but the fear of the covenant God, who's already established a relationship with the people of Israel. That is, in a relationship with him, acknowledging he is God.

That's where you begin to be wise. Now I draw attention to that verse, because it's the foundation stone for the rest of the book. And even though you don't get many references explicitly to the Lord, though there are some throughout the book, it is nonetheless the foundation on which the book is built.

So the observations of life, the reflections on meaning and purpose, and why this event leads to that, and so on, all presupposes that we're in a relationship with the Lord.

He is sovereign. He's a sovereign creator, and also the one, as we see today, who ultimately is the judge of all. Much of the book, not all, but much, purports to come from the hand of Solomon, king of Israel.

He was king after King David, David's son, and he became king of Israel in about 960 BC, for about 40 years, to about 922 probably.

[11 : 35] And he was a great king, wealthiest of all Israel's kings probably, the one who had the greatest land extent of any of Israel's kings in the Old Testament, in many ways actually quite a significant power for a brief time in that 10th century BC.

He is the one who built the palace, the temple rather, as well as his own palace, which was perhaps even grander than the temple. He had many wives and concubines, and lots of horses.

There were lots of good things about Solomon, though lots of compromising things about him as well. But in the story of Solomon, in the early chapters of 1 Kings, it's clear that one of the features of Solomon is that he was wise.

He asked for wisdom, he was granted wisdom. And so here comes part of the fruit of his wisdom, much of this book of Proverbs. When we turn to chapter 10, which we're looking at today, we see again another heading, the Proverbs of Solomon.

Chapters 1 to 9 come from him. They have their own character and feel. They're not a list of individual verses saying one proverb after another, sometimes with little connection from the previous verse.

[12 : 43] It's more of an extended discourse about the pursuit of wisdom and the need to avoid folly and the temptations of folly. Now from chapter 10 through to 22, we get the Proverbs of Solomon.

There are more Proverbs of Solomon later, but indeed some of the later chapters of the book come from other sources and other places and people, not from Solomon himself. And so we come then to chapter 10.

The last introductory comment I want to make is about the key stylistic feature of chapter 10, in fact chapters 10 to 15. I don't want to be technical, but I think it's important that we understand this sort of way of writing in order to understand these Proverbs.

What we get in chapter 10 and through to 15 is by and large, with a few exceptions, each verse contains two lines and the first and the two lines are in contrast with each other.

That is line one says A and then line two will say not B, which means it's supporting A. Let's see verse one and I'll illustrate the point.

[13 : 51] A wise child makes a glad father, but a foolish child is a mother's grief. Now in effect, the two lines are saying the same thing, one positively and one negatively.

Now the word for this type of writing, not wishing to bamboozle you, is called antithetical parallelism. Parallelism because you get two lines saying the same thing that are related, but it's antithetical because one's positive and one's negative.

Elsewhere in the scriptures and indeed occasionally in Proverbs, you get different types of parallelism. Now it's actually, you might think, oh this is a bit too technical, but it's actually important to understand because verse one is not telling us that for some reason a wise child leaves the mother gladless or that a father doesn't care about a foolish child.

You see, mother and father, it's really standing for parents together. The two lines fit together and for the sake of variety and contrast, you get mother or father in the first line and mother in the second.

But it's not telling us that a foolish child does not bring grief to a father but only a mother. Indeed, both parents, we assume, would be grieved by a foolish child and both parents would be glad with a wise child.

[15 : 07] That's the point of it. Now the point of the device is to often make some striking contrasts. I mean, in one sense, verse one is a bit obvious and straightforward to understand, but sometimes later on, we'll get some contrasts that are quite striking.

For example, we get sin and life contrasted. Now we might well think, oh well yes, we can understand that, but it's actually, in a fairly striking way, saying something very negative about sin when line one uses the word life and line two uses in its contrast the word sin.

We'd expect it to use death. But by using the word sin, it's loading the term sin with death connotation because it's in contrast to life. So the device actually is a very pithy way of making some very striking points of observation about life.

Now, I hope I haven't confused you in saying that, but it's actually a very important device to understand what's going on because otherwise, we can make too much of and the wrong thing of, say verse one, a wise child makes a glad father and ignore the mother in the first line of verse one.

Basically, throughout chapter 10, this collection of 32 proverbs, sometimes the content moves without any obvious movement from one topic to another, is contrasting the wise person and the foolish person, or sometimes they're called the wicked person and the righteous person.

[16 : 38] It's the one and the same contrast. The wise person is righteous, the foolish person is wicked, showing us that wise living is moral living, righteously. It always has in Scripture a moral component.

In our society, the people who are looked up to to be wise are often far from moral. In Scripture, that would never be the case. The cleverest people may not be wise if they are not moral, but in Scripture, the wise person is clearly righteous or moral in their behaviour and in their words.

and attitudes and so on. And this chapter is painting a picture of what a wise person is like, what a foolish person is like, but it's doing it to persuade us to be wise.

That it's motivational, you see. It's not just a description. It's motivational so that we might be wise. And here in verse 1 you can see a sense of that. A wise child makes a glad father.

A foolish child is a mother's grief. It's pulling a little bit on the heartstrings, but it's wanting to encourage you to be wise so that you bring joy to your parents and not grief by being foolish.

[17 : 46] So it's motivational. Yes, it hints at the importance of family relationships, something that keeps cropping up in the book of Proverbs as well as indeed throughout the whole of the Scriptures. Verse 2, a similar antithetical parallel verse.

Now the two lines are not in one sense totally obviously contrast with each other like verse 1 was.

But it is a contrast and so it's telling us that righteousness is great treasure. It's pointing to the great value of righteousness. But righteousness is also in contrast to wickedness.

So what righteousness is treasure gained rightly and it actually is profitable because it delivers from death. That is, it brings life.

Now we probably shouldn't have too much of a built-in theology of life after death, resurrection from the dead and so on. That really is New Testament doctrine with just occasional glimpses in the Old.

[18 : 55] But clearly death is regarded as a bad thing usually in the Old Testament not always. And here clearly death is the fruit or result of wicked behaviour. But righteousness delivers from death.

So it's telling us to be righteous. It's motivating us to be righteous so that we can avoid death. So that we actually pursue something that's profitable. That we're actually pursuing something that is great treasure.

Indeed something the writer Solomon has already told us at more length in chapter 3 that wisdom is actually greater than any money or any wealth, riches, rubies, gold, silver, etc.

that we can find on this earth. Also I guess implicit in this is an acknowledgement that the righteous person does face in a sense ultimate justice slash reward from God.

That is behind these proverbs is not just a sort of naturalistic thing that somehow if you're righteous you're going to avoid death or live a long life. But there's the acknowledgement that God's sovereign hand of justice is over this universe still.

[20 : 06] And even though perhaps in isolated situations and day by day sometimes the wicked prosper and the righteous suffer, proverbs acknowledges that ultimately there is meaning because God is the sovereign judge.

And so the righteous will be delivered from death ultimately. the righteous person of course is somebody who adheres to God's laws and commandments not that they're mentioned there in greater detail of course but that's the implicit statement.

We move on to verse 3 same thing again an antithesis between verses 1 aligns 1 and 2 in verse 3. The Lord does not let the righteous go hungry but he thwarts the craving of the wicked.

And there we see a contrast between how God responds to the righteous and how he responds to the wicked. He does not let the righteous go hungry but rather than just saying go hungry he lets the wicked go hungry he actually the writer of this proverb in a sense packs more of a punch.

He thwarts the craving. So it's not just that the wicked person is hungry but there's a sense in which he's craving something but his craving is not satisfied it's thwarted by God.

[21 : 21] So do you see how in effect painful that way of expressing it is? How much it's urging us not to be wicked because our cravings will be thwarted. You know that overwhelming desire for a drink when you're parched with thirst or whatever and that craving is thwarted.

That's a painful sort of experience and that's what we're being told here. Now here's a good example of what I said before. This is not a promise from God. God saying I will never let the righteous go hungry.

What about the righteous Christians who are in the Sudan or Ethiopia or even rural Australia perhaps at the moment with a drought? No this isn't a promise from God.

It's an observation about what is generally true but there are exceptions but ultimately it will be fully true of course as well. It's acknowledging the Lord's activity directly.

Sometimes in Proverbs you might get something that would say something like the righteous don't hunger and the wicked's cravings are thwarted but no mention of God.

[22 : 29] Almost as though it's just a natural consequence. But never is that I think in the mind of the writer of Proverbs. God is the one whose hand is behind everything even if God's name is not mentioned in other places though it is here exactly.

it may well raise the question for us. What happens when this doesn't occur? Like the righteous people who do suffer and do go hungry. In some ways the book of Job is one answer to that sort of problem.

The writer of Ecclesiastes tried to play around with that sort of problem a little bit as well. And we see instances of times in the scriptures where righteous people do hunger from time to time or suffer certainly.

Proverbs you see is not concerned with the exceptions to the rule. It's concerned with the generalisations that are true and urging us therefore to be righteous. No proverb says it all.

We have to be aware of that and not make a proverb say more than what it's saying. Well moving on. Verse 4 A slack hand causes poverty but the hand of the diligent makes reach.

[23 : 35] Very clear Antipassus lines 1 and 2 saying the same thing warning us and persuading us in a sense. in the two lines. It's urging us not to be slack so that we're not poor.

It's not saying that all poverty comes from slackness or laziness. It's not blaming the poor for being poor but it is blaming the fool or the wicked person who is lazy.

It's a sign of foolishness or a sign of wickedness in effect. It's not a blanket promise for every diligent person that the hand of the diligent makes rich.

See there it looks as though it's a natural outcome although later on we'll see that it's the Lord who gives riches. It's not a blanket promise or generalisation. It's not always true. There are plenty of diligent people who are not rich perhaps, who are indeed poor despite their hard work.

Well certainly laziness is one of the themes that runs through the book of Proverbs and it ought to be a warning to us I think. Laziness is foolishness. Laziness is wickedness.

[24 : 40] That's very clear in the book. We ought to be asking ourselves to what extent are we lazy? Am I really a hard worker? Am I really diligent?

Or am I perhaps lazy? They're the sort of questions we ought to be asking as a result of reading this. Because if we are to be wise, then we are at least to be diligent.

Well verse 5 says a similar thing. A child who gathers in summer is prudent, but a child who sleeps in harvest brings shame. Again it's urging diligence rather than laziness.

You don't sleep through the harvest. You miss your opportunity. Verse 6. Blessings are on the head of the righteous, but the mouth of the wicked conceals violence.

I think implicit is that God is the one who blesses, though his name is not mentioned there. But it's saying that generally speaking the righteous receive blessings. And certainly blessings are promised by God to the people of God when they are obedient.

[25 : 46] And we see abundant promised blessings say at the end of Leviticus and Deuteronomy earlier in the Old Testament for those who are obedient to the covenant laws. miracles. But notice the contrast, because it's not quite such the straightforward contrast that we might expect.

We might expect blessings are on the head of the righteous, but curses are on the head of the wicked. But no, now it's actually the wicked who are the subject of the second line, and the mouth of the wicked conceals violence.

Well, clearly the contrast is meant to tell us that they are being cursed by God. it's clearly contrasting the wicked and the righteous. And here we have a contrast between the head of the righteous, covered with blessing, and the mouth of the wicked, which actually conceals violence.

Again, they're very loaded expressions, because it's actually saying quite a lot about wicked people. It is saying that they speak, but their actual speaking conceals violence.

That is, what they speak is clearly deceitful, hypocritical, lies. And beneath it all there is violence. So do you see in that little tiny expression, we're actually getting quite a strong description of what a wicked person is like.

[27 : 01] Not only are they evil, violent in their behaviour, but they are deceitful as well. And that's something that chapters 1 to 9 drew out very clearly, that if you've got two paths to follow, the path of wisdom or the path of folly, and the path of folly is full of deceit, it looks alluring and tempting, it's trying to beckon you to come after it, but what it promises it never delivers.

And here is another description of that sort of wickedness that is deceitful. It isn't quite what it looks to be. So, the wise person, you see, not just the person who hears what a wicked person might say, but actually in a sense can see beneath what's being said and see the violence that is being concealed by whatever words they're saying.

Well, picking up on the theme of blessing, verse 7, the memory of the righteous is a blessing, but the name of the wicked will rot. Again, that's an appeal implicitly to the judgment and justice of God in the end.

If day by day justice doesn't seem to be done, in the end it will be. And in God's eyes, ultimately, blessing will be seen in the memory of the righteous, but the name of the wicked will rot.

And I think it's probably saying more than just that we'll forget the name of wicked people, but it's actually saying what will happen to the wicked person, him or herself, will rot. Verse 8.

[28 : 26] And again, you see, there's motivation there. It is motivational for us to be righteous, not wicked. Who wants to rot? Well, verse 8, the wise of heart will heed commandments, but a babbling fool will come to ruin.

That's an interesting contrast. Notice how the contrast is between the heart in verse line 1 and in effect the mouth that is babbling in line 2 because often the mouth and the heart are actually very similar in effect.

What comes out of the heart is expressed in speech. Notice too that it's the wise of heart that heed commandments. That is, our obedience is something in the Old Testament as well as the New that comes from our heart.

It's not just an external way of doing the right thing. obedience to God's laws comes from the heart or not at all. And the Old Testament is very clear about that.

Heartfelt obedience is what God is after. But the striking contrast here is that the fool is just babbling and will come to ruin. Clearly the contrast is suggesting that the wise of heart who heed commandments don't go to ruin.

[29 : 42] and they actually live or live long or receive joy, riches, blessing, whatever. Whatever is the opposite of ruin. Notice how the fool is babbling. One of the things in this chapter as well as a couple of other chapters, 15 in particular, is to do with speech.

The wise person's reticence with words, the fool's babbling of words. Lots of words. All over. Demonstrating his foolishness or her foolishness.

As James chapter 1 says, be quick to listen, slow to speak. And the fool's babbling nature demonstrates their lack of wisdom. Well, we continue on.

Verse 9, whoever walks in integrity or upright, walks securely. But whoever follows perverse ways will be found out.

Again, a striking contrast because it's not quite the contrast you'd expect. We'd expect whoever walks in integrity walks securely. But whoever follows perverse ways will end up on an insecure path or something like that.

[30 : 47] But no, that's not quite the contrast it's painted. And you see why it's important to understand how lines 1 and 2 relate. Because the little unexpected bits in the contrast are meant to make us stop and listen.

These proverbs sort of jar a little bit. Oh, I wouldn't have said it that way. Oh, that's an interesting way of saying it. What is the contrast? That is, it's a bit like the opportunities or options in chapters 1 to 9.

If you do follow the path of wisdom, the path of God, your way will be secure. It doesn't mean it will be easy. It doesn't mean there won't be trials. But it means that throughout the trials, God is with you, protecting you, keeping you secure along the way, making your path straight.

whoever follows perverse ways, sinful, wicked ways, deceptive ways, upside-down type ways, then their path will not be secure.

That's implicit in the contrast. But they will be found out. Suggests that the people who follow perverse ways try and do it secretly, as though they can get away with it. This is saying God's eyes are everywhere.

[31 : 56] You will be found out if you pursue a perverse path. don't think you can get away with it from God because you can't. Same sort of idea is found, I think, in the New Testament as well, isn't it?

1 Timothy 5, 25, so also good works are conspicuous and even when they're not, they cannot remain hidden. God's ways, God will find out our ways.

He searches out. We can't escape him. Verse 10, whoever winks the eye causes trouble. Well, this is not telling us never wink at somebody. But the one who rebukes boldly makes peace.

Clearly the connotation is that winking the eye is slightly deceptive or unclear communication. I was not talking about winking the eye as a little joke or whatever.

But it's sort of somebody who's doing one thing but meaning another. Or they're just winking because they're not going to say the truth or something like that. It's a deceptive way of communicating. Notice how it's contrasted with rebuking boldly.

[33 : 00] To rebuke someone does take boldness. Not least if we rebuke a friend or family member. But notice too that the one who winks the eye might seem to be just sort of very casual and trying to keep the peace.

But actually it's the one who rebukes boldly that makes peace. That is real peace. Peace between people who are on the right path. And not a pretend peace.

So it's commending straightforward communication. Rebuking is not easy. But it's something that nonetheless with courage and boldness and straightforwardness ought to be practiced.

Rather than the sort of deceptive communication or sinful intention of the winking of line 1 of verse 10. And this idea of communication continues in verse 11.

The mouth of the righteous is a fountain of life but the mouth of the wicked conceals violence. Again the idea of straightforwardness because the wicked person conceals violence.

[34 : 06] Same idea he got at the end of verse 6. The mouth of the righteous though not only is straightforward but actually is a fountain of life. That is it suggests that it provides life for others.

That is if you're a righteous person you have a social responsibility for the benefit of other people to practice that righteousness through right speech for their benefit. Most clearly I guess in the New Testament we see how the people of God are to speak clearly the words of the gospel for the benefit of other people.

Here probably it's a broader understanding of speaking truth and speaking love and so on. And speaking what is honest and straightforward by contrast to the deceptive concealing of violence in the second half of verse 11.

And then picking up on this peace and violence type of ideas from the previous verses. Hatred stirs up strife, relatively obvious, but love covers all offences.

This is not a weak love that turns a blind eye to wrong in the sense of trying to maintain peace. The idea of covering all offences is probably to do with forgiving.

[35 : 12] Not turning a blind eye and pretending it never happened, but acknowledging the offence, dealing with it properly so that there is indeed harmony and not strife as in line 1 of verse 12.

And that's actually a verse, the idea of love covering all offences that of course is quoted by Peter in 1 Peter 4 and James in James 5 and similar ideas of course in 1 Corinthians 13 as well.

Well verse 13 is a bit different, not quite the same contrast in lines 1 and 2 that we've found. On the lips of one who has understanding, wisdom is found, but a rod is for the back of one who lacks sense.

Well there is a contrast between wisdom and lacking sense. On the lips of one who has understanding you find wisdom, but for the one who lacks sense, there's a sense in which they create a rod for their own back.

Some say that it's punishment, but it may be just self-inflicted burden of their lack of sense and lack of wisdom. Their own folly makes life difficult for themselves.

[36 : 21] Verse 14, the wise lay up knowledge, but the babbling of a fool brings ruin near. Again the theme of speech is important. Just as we saw last year in James, wise people speak wisely.

And here the contrast is about storing up, laying up knowledge rather than babbling it all out compared to the fool who just babbles and thus brings ruin near.

That is, their folly means that they're coming closer and closer to destruction or to ruin by the way their words just babble out. Notice that the wise person lays up knowledge.

So you're not wise naturally. It's an acquired wisdom. That's why this book is written of course. And knowing when to speak and when to be silent is a mark of being wise.

The contrast is not between a person who babbles, that's the fool, and a wise person who's silent. God doesn't want wise people to be silent. He wants them to speak wisely.

[37 : 29] That will probably be, in a sense, with fewer words than the babbling fool, but it doesn't mean being silent. That's not the contrast that's being implied. The wise person's words will be well chosen, well spoken, and well valued.

But they won't be silent. And that's a theme that runs through Proverbs as well. And I think in some respects, Job, the story of Job, is a good reflection on that.

The friends who admittedly were silent for a week, hard to imagine, but then they seem to just babble out all their pent-up thoughts over the next 40 chapters or nearly 40 chapters.

Well, we move on. The wealth of the rich is their fortress. The poverty of the poor is their ruin. That's a dangerous verse. It's probably just an observation about what is true without particularly a moral weight about what is right or wrong or commendation necessarily for being rich compared to being poor.

There is a sense in which we've got to keep Proverbs in balance with each other. And later on, there is, in a sense, a warning that the wealth of the rich being their fortress, ultimately God is the fortress, the strong tower.

[38 : 44] So we have to be careful not to weight this too much. You can look up chapter 18, verse 10 and 11 to see that balance and contrast. But when you look around this, the person who is rich does have, in a sense, a bit of an immunity from the calamities of life.

Not totally, but some. Whereas the poor does not. And the poverty of the poor can be their ruin or is their ruin. It's not saying, it's not blaming the poor for being poor.

It's an observation about what is the case. Remember, we've got to keep it also in balance with the emphasis on not being lazy that creates poor, but being diligent in order to be rich. We're moving on to verse 17.

Whoever heeds instruction is on the path to life. But one who rejects a rebuke goes astray. Notice there the contrast.

Because it's actually telling us that if you are heeding instruction, that will involve being rebuked. That is, going on the path, doing the right thing every step, is not natural.

- [39 : 50] There will be times when the instruction from God or God's people in some way will be a rebuke. Heeding the rebuke keeps you on the right path to life. But not heeding the rebuke means that you go astray.

Well, of course, not heeding a rebuke is usually a sign of pride, and pride is one of the first things that the book of Proverbs tries to undermine in the opening chapters as well. And of course, the gospel undermines it as well.

So being rebuked is not an easy thing to be done, whether by the scriptures or by our fellow Christian brothers and sisters. Indeed, in many respects, I think it's one of the hardest things for us to do is to stand under a rebuke that is right and amend our ways and keep peace with the person who rebuked us.

Not easy to do, I think. But that's because we're so proud. But the scriptures are there to rebuke us. 2 Timothy 3.16, which tells us that all scripture is inspired of God, tells us that part of the function of that is to rebuke us, to correct us, to prove us.

If we don't heed the rebukes, we are going astray. That's a very severe warning, I think. Well, that's not a contrasting statement.

- [41 : 08] They're similar statements. That the wicked person, the foolish person, is one who lies, hates and slanders. Part of a package, in effect.

Verse 18. But again, the emphasis on speech. Speech that is right. Verse 19 continues the theme of speech. When words are many, transgression is not lacking.

But the prudent are restrained in speech. Not silent, as I said before. Restrained in speech. Say too many words and inevitably folly will bubble to the surface.

Now again, the idea there is not inconsistent, of course, with the New Testament. James warns us about a loose tongue.

Colossians 4 and Ephesians 4 both warn us about having, or encourage us, to have gracious words, seasoned with salt. Words that are right and upright, not full of anger and hatred and malice and so on.

- [42 : 05] No different in many respects from what's being urged here as well. Again, the theme of the tongue and speech continues in verse 20. The tongue of the righteous is choice silver.

The mind of the wicked is of little worth. Notice again the contrast mind and tongue. Actually, the word mind and heart are the same word in Hebrew. So sometimes, for some reason, it's translated mind, sometimes heart.

It's all the same thing. In our thinking, heart is a bit more emotion, mind and more intellect. In the Hebrew, it's all part of the same package. So it's why when they were told to love the Lord with all your heart, soul and strength, Jesus said it, love the Lord with all your heart, mind, soul and strength.

Not because he's changing the Old Testament, but because in the Greek world in which he lived, like ours, heart and mind in a sense convey slightly different things which the Hebrew word for heart combine together.

So here, heart, mind, same thing, the seat of our will as well as our emotions, the seat of our intent and therefore, a reflection, it's reflected in our speech as well.

- [43 : 11] So we're looking at verse 20 and of course, that's what Jesus refers to as well in Matthew 15 and other places. Matthew 12, out of the overflow of the heart, the mouth speaks. So heart and mouth go together all too often.

And of course, when you babble away with lots of words, inevitably, you betray your heart as well. But notice there the treasuredness of the tongue of the righteous. It's choice silver.

That suggests that it's not actually that common. This is something to be desired and pursued by all of us, no matter how experienced we are as Christians. Our words are often our undoing.

How often human relationships are broken by bad, stupid words, unintentional or intentional, not thought about, but not carefully chosen.

I know I've been a perpetrator of that and probably a victim of it as well. I'm sure you have as well. In Christian fellowship, we can't afford to be babblers and fools.

[44 : 11] We must be pursuing a tongue that is choice silver. The lips of the righteous feed many, verse 21 says, but fools die for lack of sense.

Again, the sense of the importance of having the right lips, tongues, speech, words. They feed many. That's why it's so valuable. Because if you're a righteous person, your choice words will actually benefit other people.

It's not on about you being righteous yourself, wise yourself, independent of anyone else. There's a social responsibility as a wise person under God to bring life and benefit for other people.

That is all of our responsibility. This is addressed to every person, not to Christian leaders or preachers or speakers or teachers. All of us have that responsibility to use our lips, that is our words, to feed many people.

But fools, they can't even feed themselves for they die for their lack of sense. This is the second half of verse 21. The blessing of the Lord makes rich, but he adds no sorrow with it and he adds no sorrow with it.

[45 : 18] That is a pure richness. Notice that the blessing of the Lord makes rich. Yes, earlier on it said a diligent person will become rich, but ultimately it's God's hand behind it that produces wealth and richness.

Doing wrong is like sport to a fool, but wise conduct is pleasure to a person of understanding. Well there again, I think a contrast that is vivid in what it's saying.

It's not just saying that a wicked person does wrong. It's saying that a wicked person delights in doing wrong, and they find it to be sport. That is entertainment to do wrong or to do evil.

Occasionally we might see that in descriptions on the TV news or in the newspaper of people who seem to take joy out of doing acts of gross barbarity and evil. But insidious in the heart of any wicked person is a delight in evil.

Our delight, our pleasure, is to be in doing good. Is that your pleasure? Or is there perhaps in you an indifference to good and evil?

[46 : 27] A secret flirting after some evils? Or is it as the scriptures both old and new tell us, do you abhor evil and delight in good?

That's quite a strong encouragement to us. That is, doing good is not just our duty. It is something that we are to delight in. Well, we continue on.

Verse 24, what the wicked dread will come upon them, but the desire of the righteous will be granted. We're not told exactly what the wicked dread, but in the context of what's being said here, it's possibly to do with the ultimate judgment of God and their eternal destination, perhaps from God.

But certainly it's telling us that the desire of the righteous will be granted. Now that may not be a blanket desire because I think the desire of the righteous will be a righteous desire and therefore something that will be granted by God, that is.

The passive verb at the end implies God is the one who grants their desires. Verse 25, when the tempest passes, the wicked are no more, but the righteous are established forever.

[47 : 37] Same tempest will confront both is the implication. One survives, one doesn't. Just like Jesus' story about the wise person building the house on rock rather than sand.

And then verse 26, a slightly different sort of proverb. There is more like this later on in the book, like vinegar to the teeth, like smoke to the eyes, so are the lazy to their employees.

It's the last of the three that's the key. Two similes bound together, quite vivid. They're not normally the sort of thing that you'd think about when you're trying to find a simile for a lazy person to their employee.

Smoke to the eyes? Not particularly pleasant, a great irritant, I would have thought. I've never tried vinegar directly on my teeth. Having read this, I'm not sure that I will. And then from verse 27 onwards, a few proverbs that mention some of the blessings that come on the righteous people to do with long life, blessing, joy, safety, as well as the land.

And a continuing contrast between wicked and righteous, which leaves the chapter ending with a very strong moral tone. For this little section begins with the fear of the Lord prolongs life.

[48 : 54] One of those little expressions that comes just a few times in this book, the foundation of it all, the fear of the Lord, that's what prolongs life. The right relationship with God. But in contrast, the years of the wicked will be short.

That is, if you fear the Lord, you won't be wicked. Now, of course, we'd have to say, well, there are plenty of wicked people who live to be very long and there are plenty of righteous people who die terribly young.

This is not a promise from God. Ultimately, though, God does seem to promise a long life in the land and blessing for those who are obedient to him. I think in the New Testament we find how those promises are actually added to and expanded upon so that we see an eternal life that is not only full in quantity but also in quality as the promise for those who fear the Lord.

The hope of the righteous ends in gladness but the expectation of the wicked comes to nothing. That is, it's completely unmet. They have expectations but they're unsatisfied and unfulfilled.

The way of the Lord is a stronghold for the upright but destruction for evildoers. That's a striking contrast. The way of the Lord serves in two ways here.

[50 : 11] The way of the Lord that is obedience to his commands and trust in his promises that is, one, a stronghold for those who keep those laws and trust the promises but for those who don't that same way of the Lord is actually destruction for evildoers.

It's similar in a sense to the preaching of the Gospel. It brings salvation to those who respond but the same preaching of the Gospel brings judgment and condemnation to those who do not respond with faith. So the way of the Lord here is if you like the benchmark.

Those who respond to it are right they find in it a stronghold but it's not a stronghold for those who don't keep those laws or trust those promises and follow that way. the righteous will never be removed but the wicked will not remain in it.

The wicked will not remain the promise of the righteous is that they live long in the land the promised land for us the promised heavenly inheritance land guarded for us as 1 Peter 1 says but the wicked will not remain in it.

They won't enter it if they're already not in it. The mouth of the righteous brings forth wisdom but the perverse tongue will be cut off. Again the theme of speech to finish the chapter again slightly odd contrast.

[51 : 27] The mouth of the righteous brings forth wisdom the perverse tongue brings forth folly. No it's actually going to be cut off. That's the judgment of God. It's God's hand that will cut it off is the implication of that.

And the lips of the righteous know what is acceptable what's right to say a word that is that is right in its time a word of truth of love of grace seasoned with salt and so on.

But in contrast the mouth of the wicked knows only what is perverse what's upside down not only what's just inappropriate but what is wrong and what is evil. Well there's a whole collection of stuff there I guess common themes of contrast wicked and righteous fool and wise common theme of speech running through many of those proverbs clearly words clearly words are a barometer to our spiritual health how many words do we say how wise are our words chosen and used how restrained or reticent are we to speak or how eager are we to battle and perhaps therefore not heed or listen words so what's your barometer saying pile all those proverbs about speech together and surely it must be making us look at not only our words but our heart from which our words flow words are important of course

I used to say sticks and stones may break my bones but names will never hurt me it's not true words often hurt much more than sticks and stones and God of course thinks that words are important because he reveals himself in words his words are always true he keeps every word that he makes he's no fool who babbles his words are careful and every word he speaks he keeps and means so we too must use our words wisely carefully with restraint there's a social responsibility for that so that others may receive life and benefit from our words if we're righteous proverbs doesn't urge silence but careful use of words well this chapter is encouraging us to be wise it's forcing us to reflect upon our lives wanting us to look in a mirror in a sense to see what is the state of my tongue my heart my laziness or slothfulness which path am I going down am I heeding rebukes and so on they're the questions that we must ask ourselves in the light of this chapter if we are to be wise it's not just about intellectual capacity at all much more to do with moral practice but also behind all this there is a confidence in an ultimately divine hand of justice in one sense perhaps in the Old Testament that was seen to be more immediate more this life in the New Testament we see the final day of Jesus' return as the day when justice will be brought about and the vindication of God's people will be complete

Proverbs seeks to motivate us and urge us that the ultimate blessings of that judgment day are worth pursuing the path of wisdom not folly the path of folly may promise lots of stuff in the immediate future it won't deliver it all the path of following God's way is not always easy but its end is worth life honour reputation ultimately true wealth and true wisdom as well well let's pray God we thank you that you have spoken to us so that we may be wise for salvation help us to take to heart these words that our speech may be right our behaviour may be right not only for our own sakes but for the sakes of others as well and in this we pray that you will reform us more into the likeness of

[55 : 37] Jesus Christ the wisest of human beings who perfectly walked your ways and whose words were always right and true Amen assume that Solomon wrote all this down before he married too many other wrong women and did evil things and so on and worshipped other gods we're not told when he wrote it it makes sense to say that but I guess even in the midst of people there is a mixture sometimes of good and evil and some of it may have been written down after that time may well have been written down by his courtiers or associates or so on later on in life rather than him personally writing it down he may have spoken them and others have written them I'm not really sure The question in case you didn't hear was Richard's got a couple of translations and sometimes there are different words that are used that may suggest slightly different meanings some of these verses are quite tricky and so I decided I would keep pretty much to what we've got here the NRSV partly for the sake of ease and clarity there are

I know a couple of verses here and there where words are disputed because there are a couple of ancient texts where one says one thing one says another and so on and sometimes words generally have slightly different meaning like the word cover is the same word where it says love covers over all offences in verse 12 in the previous verse it's the same word that says the mouth of the wicked conceals violence covers violence but they're actually meaning two different things although it's the same word so sometimes translators have to make a decision about which is the best translation they think will convey the meaning and over time there are all sorts of different translational rules as well I guess depending on which translations you're looking at I don't think we ought to worry too much sometimes the nature of Proverbs means that they are their pithy nature means that they are open to a couple of different possibilities the pithiness of us is probably deliberate in that occasion because it's and it's a debated one about

Proverbs how is this the word of God I would say to use that example you give that it is not a promise it is the word of God to exhort parents to bring up a child in the right way it is encouraging them by saying that generally speaking by observation we can see that they will continue in the right way but it's not a promise that we can rest upon so therefore it's still the word of God because it's exhorting us to bring up children the right way but it's not a promise that every time we bring up a child the right way they will continue in the right way therefore I think we can say it's the word of God it's urging us to right behaviour it's helping us see what is some sort of general consequence but not always the consequence Proverbs is not telling us every situation so I don't have a problem seeing that because I'm not I think belittling this is the word of God this is very clearly urging us to wise living it's telling us some of the outcomes that we can expect but they're not always in a sense they're not individually a promise of God that this is the outcome that you will expect

I think is a fair way of saying it Solomon to God's word I take it that this is God inspired wisdom that has come to us through Solomon and others later in later chapters it's God's word to us not as a law or as a clear promise but God's word to us to wrestle with the creation and the world the order that God has made in order to understand it so that we may live wise lives so it's still God's word to us but it comes to us in a different sort of way than a command that says don't kill do this don't do this I don't have a problem with that still being God's word to us because God's not on about a simple faith that just sort of do this don't do this do this as though we might become almost robotic he actually wants us to wrestle with the world in which we live to understand it and his nature and our nature and the created world's nature so that in all the vicissitudes and ups and downs of life we can live wisely speak wisely and so on and in some ways this sort of writing

God inspired is a way of complementing what we get in the law and the history and the prophets and so on they speak well every time or something to that effect but by giving us proverbs of speech he's making us wrestle with and think about and respond to individual situations maybe at a deeper level than just having a command speak well or speak wisely or something like that you sort of see the contrast he's actually wanting us to wrestle with wise living our father we recognize in this world so often the right path does not bring riches ease good health popularity all the blessings that it seems that you want to attach to those who are righteous and wise but we do know and we do trust that in your ultimate justice and wisdom every blessing in the spiritual realm is already ours in

[61 : 50] Christ and every blessing will be fulfilled for us when he returns and we pray that you may help us to grapple with these proverbs help us to wrestle and reflect upon our life on our world how we live how we relate how we speak how we work so that all aspects of our life are brought under your sovereign authority and our desire is always to live wisely so that you are honoured and other people may find life we thank you that you inspired the mind of Solomon and others to communicate to us in this way and we pray that we may see in these words your divine hand we pray that we'll be motivated that our hearts will be keen to experience the fullness of blessing but also that we recoil from the path of folly and wickedness and we know Lord

God that unless our hearts are changed by you they will indeed go astray after wrong desires and so we pray that your spirit will continue to change our hearts so that our words our lives our attitudes our intent is more in line with that of Christ to ridge ■ to forgive hurting and so we couldn't see