

SUMMER 7 - Wise Living 2

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[0 : 00] Almighty God, we thank you that indeed we stand in the power of Christ and that in Christ alone you have saved us and redeemed us and called us to be your children and you call us to be wise in this world, in our relationships and in our trust of you.

And so, Father, for the benefit of becoming wiser and wiser for salvation, we pray that you'll speak to us now, speak to our hearts and minds, that our lives may be changed for Jesus' sake.

Amen. There's lots of wisdom going around in the world. I thought I'd give you a couple of snippets of children's wisdom.

What is the secret of marriage? This is Proverbs chapter 32. If you're not aware of it, look it up. Alan, aged 10, says, The Secret of Marriage, you've got to find somebody who likes the same stuff.

If you like sport, she should like it, but you like sport and she should keep the chips and dip coming. The answer to the question, what do you think your mum and dad have in common?

[1 : 16] Laurie, aged 8, said, Both don't want any more kids. How can a stranger tell if two people are married?

Eric, aged 8, said, You might have to guess based on whether they seem to be yelling at the same kids. When is it okay to kiss somebody? When they're rich, said Pam, aged 7.

Is it better to be single or married? Anita, aged 9, says, It's better for girls to be single but not for boys because boys need someone to clean up after them. And finally, how would you make a marriage work?

Wiki, aged 10, said, Tell your wife that she looks pretty even if she looks like a truck. Well, there's some worldly wisdom for you from the lips, mouths of bulbs.

Well, I don't want to repeat a lot of all the things that I said last week by way of Proverbs as a book in general and the sort of style of material that we're reading. But it does need to be reiterated for those not here last week.

[2 : 22] We're not dealing with laws primarily, although there are some commands in the book. And we're not dealing with clear promises usually either. In one sense we are dealing with inspired observations, generalisations about life.

I was thinking about this in reflection of last week and some of the comments made. And we see the sign and the slogan, Speed Kills. In one sense it's a proverb.

And we know what it means. That is, if you drive like a lunatic, your chances of dying increase. But not every time you speed do you get killed. Well, you can only get killed once, but you know what I mean.

Otherwise I wouldn't be here. And maybe many of you wouldn't be either. But in a sense it's a proverb that is a warning, not to speed. It's a warning that's painted like a command, like a threat, and in some ways it's similar in style to what we get in the book of Proverbs.

In a sense observations that are generalisations that function then as warnings, motivations, encouragements, or keep your distance type stuff from this course of action. And in many ways what the book of Proverbs is trying to do, I think, unlike, say, the laws of God, is make us wise, to make us thoughtful, reflective, to respond in the right way to each individual situation.

[3 : 50] Now, there is a sense in which the laws of God are blanket, although some of them are actually for specific situations, and we simply can obey them in one sense without thought.

The book of Proverbs is trying to make us think. And I think one reason why we get in the book of Proverbs, we might even say a bit of a jumble of themes, is that it's wanting us to dart from one topic to another to another, trying to get us to think through some of the principles, the issues about living in this world, being wise in this world, how to respond to different situations, and so on.

Theological correctness is right. We must be theologically correct, not least for ministers, but there's more to being right for Christians.

And obedience is right, non-negotiable for Christians, to the laws of God that apply to us. Theological correctness, obedience, non-negotiable, but God is wanting more innocence from us, that is to be wise in how we live, how we respond to God, to other people, to our work, to our family, to ourselves, to our characters, and so on.

So Proverbs is trying to make us wise in all of that. It's trying to force us, I think, to reflect deeply, to cogitate, or to chew the cut, in a sense, to think through some of the ways in which these Proverbs apply.

[5 : 16] From a chapter we're not looking at, but later on, chapter 25, I think it is, 26, you get in consecutive order Proverbs that I think highlight the function of what's going on.

Don't answer fools according to their folly or you'll be a fool yourself. Answer fools according to their folly or they will be wise in their own eyes. Now you can't do both.

So they're not functioning as commands with a promise attached. The wise person you see is the person who knows when to answer a fool according to their folly and when not to.

And that I think is what the book of Proverbs is on about. Helping us to know when to apply specific Proverbs. Now there are some ways of acting that are always going to be right.

Never being lazy, always being diligent, for example. But in other times it's a bit of a sort of situational thing when the wise person is able to respond the right way in the right situation at the right time.

[6 : 15] So I say that by way of a preamble to help, especially those not here last week, to get a feel for this book. At the bottom level all of us need to be wise and not all of us is.

And indeed all of us need to be wiser for those who are already wise. And we saw a bit of that reflected in chapter 1 by way of last week's introduction. So enough of preamble and introduction.

Let's turn to chapter 14. Like last week, chapter 10, we get a whole, almost a random, not totally random, but a whole hotch-potch of different things. And simply, I'm going to work through verse by verse and make some comments about some verses, some more than others.

And the idea is that it's forcing us to think through where are the situations in our life when this applies or doesn't apply and a challenge. Because behind these are not just observations but motivations to be wise and warnings not to be a fool.

The chapter begins, the wise woman builds her house but the foolish tears it down with her own hands. There's quite a bit of debate about who this wise woman is.

[7 : 24] Is it the person who was depicted as wisdom personified in earlier chapters, chapters 8 and 9 in particular, but through chapters 1 to 9. So is it talking about wisdom personified or is it just talking about any wise woman?

I'm in two minds a bit about this but I think in the end, in the flow of what chapters 10 to 15 are on about, I think it's talking about any wise woman. And wisdom builds and builds something that lasts.

We saw that reflected in a proverb last week in chapter 10. So wisdom builds but fools tear it down with her own hands. That may be the fool seeks to tear down what wisdom has built or it may also be the fool actually tears down what the fool has built.

I don't know that we need to be too precise because one of the things about these proverbs is that they're very pithy and being so pithy, they often leave, perhaps deliberately I think, elements of ambiguity and that's part of getting us to think and reflect about what's actually being said here and where does it apply.

See wisdom is constructive, foolishness is destructive. Indeed, if it is, the foolish person tears down her own building, then foolishness is obviously clearly destructive and self-destructive in effect.

[8 : 42] The house, I think, is probably meant to be anything. That is, it's not just the dwelling place. Some people say it's family life, some people say it's the personal life. I think the idea of building your house or tearing down your own house is vague enough in a sense in this book to mean, you know, your life, your family life, the actual building you live in.

I don't know that it's just limited to the building life. So that's what, that characterises folly and wisdom. Wisdom is constructive, folly is destructive and totally stupid if it pulls down what it itself has built.

That's a real waste and real folly. Notice then, what we've already seen in a sense last week, folly is not harmless. The fool is not a harmless buffoon.

The fool actually is on a prompt to destruction. I saw that hinted out in different places last week. We'll see it again this week. There are two destinies. A destiny of life in all its fullness, life as it's meant to be lived, and a destiny in the end of destruction or death.

There's no sort of middle ground. Fools are destructive, not harmless. So whenever the fool is described, it is a warning to us, no, don't be like that, because the outcome is not one that you would want.

[9 : 59] Well, verse 2, those who walk uprightly fear the Lord, but one who is devious in conduct despises Him. Now here, like verse 1, like we saw last week, we get in these Proverbs, line 1, line 2 within a verse.

They're two line verses pretty much. And most of them, not all, but most, line 1 is in contrast to line 2. Line 1 will say something maybe positively, and then it'll flip it in a sense negatively.

What I called last week, and what is called antithetical parallelism. So here you get two things in contrast, two people in contrast, the person who walks uprightly, and the person who is devious.

One fears the Lord, one despises the Lord. That's the contrast. And notice that the person who walks uprightly fears the Lord. We've seen already in this book that fearing the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.

Fearing the Lord is a central, foundational mark of being wise. A wise person is the ethical person, the moral person, the upright person. So it's not wisdom that is clever, it is wisdom that has an essential moral or ethical component.

[11 : 04] The wise person is, if you like, an obedient person. To walk is talking about life habits. So to walk after the ways of the Lord, to use a biblical expression from other places, is to make your life practice obedience to the ways of the Lord.

So to walk here uprightly is that your life practice is morally upright, obedient, righteous, straightforward. The word upright has got that sense of straightness about it.

Something we saw last week that typifies the way of wisdom and the way of God generally in the Bible, making straight paths and so on. The one who's devious is the one who's crooked.

The path doesn't go straight, it veers off, it veers astray or it turns around in circles or distortions. And maybe you've done what I've done at times.

If you've tried to drive, let's say in Canberra, where nothing seems to be straight, either politically or in the roads, you can drive down a road and you lose your bearings.

[12 : 07] You don't know whether you're heading north, south, east or west. You've lost your sense of perspective. And it's a sense in which the fool who goes down devious paths at one level is not just being devious and wrong, going down the bad path, but they've actually lost all sense of perspective.

Because a path that's crooked, you lose track of whether you're heading in the right direction or the wrong direction. That is, good and evil become confused in your mind. That's where the fool ends up in the Scriptures. Not only in the wisdom literature of Proverbs and so on, but in other parts as well.

That is, you can no longer distinguish between what is right and what is wrong. the further down the path of evil or folly you walk. That's a great danger, you see.

You might head off and you might initially know that your path is diverging, but very soon you've lost your bearings. And now no longer do you have the ability to discern good from evil, right from wrong, godly from ungodly.

That is the great danger of the path of folly or the path of evil. That's why it's called devious or crooked here. And that inability to discern is in the end completely dangerous.

[13 : 14] It's fatal because you're unable to find rescue and the way out. Notice too, again, how there's no middle ground, no harmlessness about the fool.

The fool is one who is devious in conduct and despises the Lord. And maybe not consciously are they thinking I'm despising God, but in their conduct that's what they're doing.

That is, it's not a harmless middle ground. You're either fearing the Lord or you're despising Him in the end and fools despise Him. Well, moving on, verse 3, the talk of fools is a rod for their backs, but the lips of the wise preserve them.

Again, you've got a contrasting line one, line two in the verse, both times talking about speech. The talk of fools, the lips of the wise, that's about speaking using different verbs, different words, but same thing.

The first line is about the fool, the second is about the wise and the contrast is clear in the outcome. The talk of fools is a rod for their backs. I take it that that means that foolish talk actually creates a rod for your back, a burden for you by the way you speak.

[14 : 27] And that scene, I think, that interpretation scene, by the way the next line speaks of the lips of the wise, it preserves them or protects them. That is, wise speech actually in some ways preserves or protects the wise person who speaks.

The opposite is that foolish speech will actually bring down, become a burden rather than protecting the person who's a fool. If you think about it, so often when we say foolish things, things we ought not to have said, we end up in all sorts of strife.

We create a burden for our back, that is. The wise speech often somehow, it might even liberate us or other people from some sort of difficulty or burden or dilemma or catastrophe or whatever.

That is, the wise approach can be a harmony-making approach or a peacemaking approach or a rescuing approach. That is, it gives protection and preservation. Now notice, I guess, in picking up a little bit of what I said in the introduction, this is forcing us to think wisely about what we say.

No law of God is going to give us what to say in every situation and there may well be times in a situation where what you say could be right or wrong but how you express rightness may be wise or stupid.

[15 : 44] I haven't thought through a concrete example here but over the years, for example, you see ministers of the gospel who are thoroughly committed to making sure that what they say is absolutely right.

What sometimes happens is that their personal skills are very deficient. They become angular or blunt people, even rude. That is, their expression of what is right may not be wise.

That is, how we express what is right is as important as saying what is right and that is where this book is driving us, you see. It is one trying to help us to see what Proverbs is trying to do.

He is trying to make us wise. So there may be a situation where, for example, as a minister, I ought to reprove or rebuke somebody's bad behaviour. There are various ways I could do it.

I have to work through, think through, pray through, what is the wise way to approach this so that the outcome is the right outcome rather than being, say, rude or divisive or whatever. So I am just trying to help you see how Proverbs in one sense complement some of the laws and how therefore we have got to read it and think, mull over it, chew upon it when the situations arise.

[16 : 52] Now of course, if I am thinking as a minister, I suppose, that I could address a situation, a pastoral situation, saying perhaps what is right but not saying it wisely and I have actually created a burden for my back, a rod for my back as the first line of verse 3 says.

That is, I have inflamed a situation or made it worse but by speaking the right thing wisely and I actually have sought to preserve not only myself but the situation or the other person.

Well, let's move on. Verse 4, where there are no oxen, there is no grain. Abundant crops come by the strength of the ox. Well, I'm sure that if you looked hard enough around the world you'll find places where there are no oxen but there is grain.

I presume a grain silo would be a good place to start. The proverb, of course, is telling us that unless you invest in this ancient agricultural society of course, in having oxen you're not going to get grain because you need ox to draw the plough to harvest the grain.

So, this is a proverb that is perhaps saying without investment there's no profit. That is, without putting in or investing for the sake of a harvest down the track you're not going to get the harvest.

[18 : 03] If you're not going to get any grain unless you're going to get some oxen who are going to pull the plough to harvest the field. No gain without pain along those sorts of lines. It's not talking about being greedy not talking about being investors so that we reap huge amounts of reward it's talking about daily provisions really the grain that you need to eat to keep you alive.

It's just talking about being wise isn't it? You need oxen in order to get a harvest of grain you don't get something for nothing. Verse 5 now changes topic again but still it's the contrast of the wise and the fool.

A faithful witness does not lie but a false witness breathes out lies. It's the importance of truthfulness again speaking of speech one of the very common themes in the book of Proverbs how what we say is so important.

It's talking about the character of the witness that's important a faithful witness compared to a false witness. It's no coincidence that in the story of Naboth's vineyard at the very end of one king Jezebel gets two scoundrels to give false testimony in the issue of King Ahab trying to get Naboth's vineyard that is why if she got two faithful witnesses they wouldn't have done what she asked and Naboth would have been spared in such a situation.

Notice that the false witness breathes out lies that is there's a sense in which all that you get out of his mouth are just lies. It's not the occasional lie that is the issue it's the habitual pattern of the person that flows from their character and lies here I think we need to see in a bigger sense it's not just about something that is untrue it is something that is a mixture of truth or falsehood that's often much more dangerous if somebody only ever says things that are untrue then in one sense it's easy to know that what they say is untrue but it's the people who speak mixtures of truth and falsehood that are so devious then it's hard to know what's right and what's wrong in what you hear or the person who's economical with the truth they're not quite sure how far the truth goes in what they say or whether it goes beyond what they say as well that is people who speak in a misleading way that's what this proverb is trying to get us to do it's not about saying what is a fib or a lie just in itself it's about misleading economic with the truth mixtures of truth and falsehood that is not being faithful and reliable in what you say that can be trusted and known and as I say it's talking about the habits of the person not just the individual one-off situations as well a scoffer seeks wisdom in vain but knowledge is easy for one who understands well does not everyone who seeks wisdom find it is that not the sort of promise that we find in this book or the promise of Jesus that whoever seeks will find a scoffer seeks in vain because of the nature of them being a scoffer a scoffer is a cynic an arrogant so-and-so a scoffer's not a listener usually a scoffer speaks before listening looks down their nose at what else is going on and other people and other opinions and so on that scoffer no matter how much they might say they seek wisdom will not find it and stay a scoffer because a scoffer's a fool a scoffer doesn't listen a scoffer is arrogant and a foundation point or starting point for wisdom is the fear of the Lord which is a place of humility and not a place of arrogance so scoffers therefore lack humility which is essential for wisdom but knowledge is easy for one who understands in one sense that's a bit of a tautology knowledge is easy for one who is knowledgeable or something like that but it's saying really that one who has wisdom or is knowledgeable there's synonyms really wisdom's at home with that person it belongs with that person it doesn't belong with the scoffer and they seek wisdom in vain it's a statement about character it's warning us not to be scoffers not to be cynics not to be arrogant not to look down our nose with ridicule at what other people say or think well then verse 7 leave the presence of a fool for there you do not find words of knowledge well this is a bit like those two proverbs

[22 : 04] I mentioned before from chapter 26 don't answer a fool according to his folly do answer a fool according to his folly there are times when we are in the presence of a fool I'm not quite sure in the end if we took this to its full extreme that we never ever were in the presence of a fool where we'd ever be able to go but notice the reason for it leave the presence of a fool for there you do not find words of knowledge now I don't think it's saying or prohibiting us from some sort of association with fools because I think that the wise have the role of encouraging fools to become wise but the purpose of line 2 in the proverb for there you do not find words of knowledge is don't go looking for words of knowledge or knowledge or understanding in foolish people don't follow what they say if they're fools I think that's the point of the proverb here in verse 7 yes there will be times when it's appropriate to try and convert a fool but indeed there may be times when really we should just in a sense wash our hands or shake the dust off our feet and not waste our time with fools anymore or with a particular fool anymore like not throwing pearls before swine and so on well moving on to verse 8 is the wisdom of the clever to understand where they go but the folly of fools misleads again similar to what we saw before the wisdom or the wise person they understand where they're going it's a straight path their destiny is clear the fools don't understand that for all the clarity in the book of Proverbs that fools are facing ultimate destruction they don't understand that they're so distorted in what is good and evil they don't know where they're heading and that's in effect what that verse 8 is saying verse 9 fools mock at the guilt offering but the upright enjoy God's favour that's an odd contrast in a way one of the things

I tried to point out last week is the way these are written where line A and line B within the verse are in contrast with each other often the contrast is not what we expect we might expect here fools mock at the guilt offering but the upright don't mock at the guilt offering or we might expect fools do not enjoy God's favour but the upright enjoy God's favour but the contrast is meant to make us say oh what an interesting contrast that's part of getting us to reflect and think and cogitate on what's being said here they're not obvious these contrasts all the time now the guilt offering was a standard sacrifice that the ancient Israelites had to make by way of part of the atonement process for their sin there was the sacrifice of an animal there were various sacrifices they weren't all guilt offerings they weren't all to do with sin but the guilt offering was so what I think this seems to be saying is that fools mock the means of dealing with sin I think it's saying in the end that fools actually treat sin lightly they don't think sin is important or worth making a sacrifice for that sort of thing

I think the pithiness of the proverb means that it can actually apply in three or four slightly different situations they might actually despise the sacrificial system they might treat sin lightly they might think killing an animal is a waste of effort or animal for that matter and so on all of those I think would fit into what this proverb is addressing in contrast the wise person or the upright person enjoys God's favour now the implication of this proverb is that they enjoy God's favour not because they're upright and they've somehow earned it but because they've dealt with their sin properly and they've treated the sin or the guilt offering properly and therefore having made guilt offering their sin being atoned for by the sacrificial system they can stand confidently in the favour of God now for us of course we don't make animal sacrifices but we can understand what's being said here about the way you respond to your sin and how serious it is and how seriously it needs to be atoned for so those people who in our society whether in the church or not who think very lightly of sin as though it's a trivial issue brush it aside which is most of our society they're fools they're not taking it seriously and in our church the same applies that is in Christian circles there are people today who are quite who almost trivialise or brush aside a great guilt offering for sin who think that Jesus was the epitome of love but his death is a bit of an odd thing those who think Jesus is just about being the person living in the world an example to follow but don't understand his death they're fools they're treating sin lightly and they're not actually standing in God's favour because standing in God's favour comes only to the sacrifice of Jesus for us verse 10 the heart knows its own bitterness and no stranger shares its joy in one sense this is not so much contrasting line one and two although there's bitterness in one and joy in the other but that I think is adding to itself rather than contrasting bitterness and joy the heart knows its own bitterness and no stranger shares its joy what it seems to be saying is that within each one of us there are depths of bitterness and joy to paint the extremes of emotions but maybe not just limited to those extremes deep emotions certainly but we ourselves experience our own bitterness and joy that no one else in the end can fully comprehend the wise person then knows that the wise person who is full of bitterness in their heart or joy in their heart knows that other people will not fully be able to enter into their bitterness and joy and another wise person will know that their friend who's suffering bitterness and joy they cannot fully identify in their bitterness and joy it's not saying don't sympathise don't empathise it's not saying don't exercise pastoral care and love but it's saying that we cannot go all the way into the heart of another person and if you're wise but you're suffering deep emotion don't expect too much from others and if you're seeking to minister to somebody with deep emotion don't expect too much of what you're able to do don't hold back be loving be sympathetic be empathetic seek to get alongside but recognise the limits in a sense the house of the wicked is destroyed but the tent of the upright flourishes that's a nice contrast

I think we might just say a simple contrast would be the house of the wicked is destroyed and the house of the upright flourishes but by saying the tent of the upright which of the two would you think would last the longest a house or a tent well we'd all think yes a house would last longer than a tent but by saying the house of the wicked is destroyed the tent of the upright flourishes it actually heightens the contrast and makes us sit up and say hang on a minute the issue here is not whether you've got a house or a tent the issue is whether you're upright or not and if you're upright your tent that is your life I think flourishes even if it looks flimsy and no matter how secure it looks the fool's house or the wicked person's house is destroyed in the end verse 12 there is a way that seems right to a person but its end is the way of death I think this is alerting us to the danger of appearances sometimes paths look right but are not and the wise person is the discerning person this is alerting us this fits into the character of this book chapters 1 to 9 by and large are warning the person who's reading this book to beware of the temptations that come to go down the side alleys the crooked paths the devious routes they may look right they may promise all sorts of nice things the wise person knows when to resist and where to go but is cautious about that the word end occurs in verse 12 and the same word end occurs in verse 13 maybe that's why the two proverbs are together even though the content is different even in laughter the heart is sad and the end of joy is grief in one sense this verse sounds as though it should be in Ecclesiastes which is much more sort of melancholy about life certainly I think reflecting on the fact that life is not simple and people are not simple life is complex people are complex

I don't think it's saying that every time you hear a laugh it's just covering up some sort of sadness in the heart though it is striking how many of the great comic heroes and comedians on television and radio over the years have been sadly depressive people but it's not saying all laughter just covers up sadness and it's not saying that all joy just ends up in grief I think it is a reflection on a fallen world that this world is not perfect I think it's a reflection on the complexity of this world and the complexity of the human heart as well I think it's also telling us that we must be careful about appearances a bit like the verse before because sometimes appearances can be deceptive sometimes there's more underneath we're moving on the perverse get what their ways deserve and the good what their deeds deserve oh if that was always so simple and so immediate the writer of the proverbs and Solomon is not naive here throughout this book there is a confidence in an ultimate justice of God that ultimately it is true the perverse or the wicked or the fools they get what they deserve there are just desserts in the end and the good yes they will get what their deeds deserve not necessarily immediately in the book of Ecclesiastes in the book of Job for one paint a very clear picture that it's not always the case the psalmist makes it clear that it's not always the case why do the righteous suffer and the wicked prosper and so on and there are incidents within the scriptures of course where the righteous or the wise don't prosper but ultimately they do and the person who fears the Lord to begin wisdom acknowledges that God is the maker sovereign creator and judge and there is an ultimate justice that we can rely upon in this universe there is in the end a just dessert 15 the simple believe everything but the clever consider their steps well it's hard to imagine somebody believing everything but it is extraordinary what people actually do believe

[31 : 51] G.K. Chesterton I think it was who said that when people give up believing in God it's not that they believe in nothing but that it is they believe in anything and it's true look around our world and people believe in much more bizarre and unlikely things than Jesus rising from the dead and yet they mock us for such belief that is people are gullible easily deceived uncritical lacking discernment they're the simple or the fools they believe anything and everything apart from the truth the clever not the clever in the intellectual sense somebody who's you know got a huge IQ or whatever child genius or something like that the clever is the wise person the wise person who begins by fearing the Lord they consider their steps they don't believe everything they're not fools to fall into the latest fad the latest theory or the latest theology for example much more cautious are they about the various possibilities much more watchful and that same caution is found in the next verse the wise are cautious and turn away from evil but the fool throws off restraint and is careless obviously we've got to be cautious but very clearly turn away from evil it's not saying be cautious going down the path of evil the cautious person turns away from it has nothing to do with it avoids it, shuns it as we've seen in early chapters in Proverbs very clearly but the fool to paint the opposite sort of picture is reckless if my mother who's here excuses me she often says drive carefully when I leave to go home sometimes I say no I'm going to drive recklessly well I never well I hope I never do but that's the sort of contrast here it's a vivid contrast caution for the wise or recklessness for the fool carelessness one who is quick tempered acts foolishly and the schema is hated this is not a contrast of line one and line two it's actually adding to or intensifying line one and two that is both are fools a wise person described here

I think a fool is quick tempered acts spontaneously speaks before they think speaks before they listen and their temper comes to the top very quickly but perhaps even worse is the schema the person who plans evil things not just the person out of whom spontaneously with quick tempered comes something wrong or foolish or bad tempered or evil the one who actually plans it and so maybe the verse is meant to be read yes line one that's bad enough if you're a fool that's foolish line two you actually hate it if you're scheming in a negative sense it seems to me that's probably how the verse is to be read now quick temperedness comes up several times through the book of Proverbs it's a lack of self-control something which in the New Testament we realise is a gift of the spirit because it's not usually within our ability to be totally under our own control it's God's gift in the end the simple are adorned with folly but the clever are crowned with knowledge again I think there's a sense of reaping what you sow or the just desserts if you're a fool then you're going to be adorned with folly you'll be seen to be a fool and if you are wise or clever then you'll be crowned with knowledge crown's a positive thing here a good thing a reward if you like again I think it's reflecting the just dessert sort of view

God is sovereign and ultimately the wise will just be covered in folly and seen to be fools a wise person not so verse 19 the evil bow down before the good the wicked at the gates of the righteous we don't often see that the bowing down here some say it's a slaves or whatever I think it's talking about a reversal in life all too often it's the evil who look down on the good but I think the great reversal as God hints at through the scriptures and performs in Christ is that the proud will be brought down in their conceit and the humble lifted up I think that's what this is talking about it's again in the end the just desserts God is just there is justice in the end and the great reversal we see for example in say Hannah's song in the beginning of 1 Samuel 1 Samuel 2 which Mary built on in her song before Jesus was born about the proud being brought down and the humble lifted up words that Peter echoed James echoed you find here and there in Jesus words and so on it's part of the just desserts that here on earth sometimes the evil the wicked they seem to prosper proud and so on the wise seem to suffer but trust in God's ultimate sovereignty and judgment and he'll reverse the situation to its rights the poor are disliked even by their neighbours but the rich have many friends how true that is the kid who gets a job so splashes it around with drinks and gifts for his mates soon runs out of friends when his job ends and his income source dries up this is just an observation but it is an observation that reflects that the world is not right it is an observation that actually reflects on what real human nature or sinful human nature is like there is a selfishness or a greediness about our human nature here it's not necessarily a good thing that the poor are disliked or that the rich have many friends because it's a reflection of our hearts there's no condemnation of being rich or poor here it's actually more a condemnation of us about whether we respond too quickly to the rich and too slowly to the poor those who despise their neighbours are sinners there comes the moral value if you like attached to the previous verse but happy are those who are kind to the poor and that is a word that typifies the character of God kindness to the poor someone who goes the extra mile despite their poverty despite their need helping them knowing that they'll never receive out of them not doing it because they're rich and wealthy the person who's hospitable to people who are poor and can never reciprocate the hospitality that's the character of God it ought to be the character of the wise person as well loyalty and faithfulness again it's a statement reflecting the just desserts

I think that in the end the fool's plans will come unstuck and they will reap what they deserve the wise person will receive even more than they might expect loyalty and faithfulness again characteristics of God himself who is thoroughly loyal and faithful verse 23 in all toil there is profit but mere talk leads only to poverty so often the book of Proverbs is condemning of laziness and slothfulness well sometimes slothfulness and laziness is cloaked by lots of talk maybe lots of plans lots of committee meetings lots of promises to do things report back to the next meeting how did you go I haven't got around to do it yet but I will for next time real toil is profitable the book of Proverbs commends us to work hard and be diligent but be careful how we cloak our laziness with mere talk but little action idle words not wise words the crown of the wise is their wisdom but folly is the garland of fools not dissimilar from verse 18 that we've already looked at again there's talking about in a sense folly is the fool's reward if you pursue folly it itself is your reward and so often that's the case although in different sorts of language in the scriptures the person who pursues one path of sin actually finds that sin itself is its own punishment

I think that's what in some ways is being said in Romans 1 pursue this line of sin or this line of sin and God will give you up to it and that itself is the punishment not necessarily punish you for it but it itself has within it the seeds of its punishment so pursue folly and folly will just be flowing on top of you and that's in itself its own punishment it seems to be verse 25 back to speech a truthful witness saves lives but one who utters lies is a betrayer well here the truthful witness probably is in a legal context in court speaking the truth so that somebody's life may be spared that is then they're not being put to death for something that they did not do there was a case was it in today's paper of a Victorian woman working with some aid agency in the United States whose testimony in court may yet spare a man on death row in one of the states in America

[40 : 23] I can't remember which state and that is if it is truthful evidence that may well save that person's life rightly so but one who utters lies is a betrayer not now talking about somebody rightly being punished but actually betraying somebody who ought not to be punished and somebody who utters lies to betray what is actually right and good notice the social aspect of our speech it's important what we say it has effects on other people I guess too it's worth reflecting on the fact that lies began in Eden with a serpent quickly picked up by the man and the woman and stayed in human practice ever since verse 26 in the fear of the Lord one has strong confidence and one's children will have a refuge here again no contrast between line A and B but rather line B is actually intensifying or adding to line 1 or line A in the fear of the Lord one has strong confidence that is if you're on the on the foundation of wisdom the starting point fear of the Lord then you can have confidence security something that we see all over this book of Proverbs if you're fearing the Lord he will protect you guard you keep you therefore you can have confidence in him as a refuge but not only that the added blessing or benefit is that one's children will have a refuge as well well here I think is part of the pattern of the way that God works wanting to bless the children of those who revere him or fear him something expressed in say Exodus 20 verse 6 in the Ten Commandments and so on and elsewhere in Proverbs the same sort of thing not only will the wise person be blessed but there is also the hint of the blessing being extended then to children not I think as a promise as a guarantee but saying that that in effect the refuge that a wise person finds in the Lord will be even greater than they themselves need and will flow over more often than not into their children or for their children of course the wise person is one who actually helps transmit the faith to their children so it's part and parcel of all sorts of other things as well the fear of the Lord is a fountain of life so that one may avoid the snares of death that is wisdom is not just about the right path but wisdom itself has within it the means for resisting the wrong path so that one may avoid the snares of death now for the first time in our studies at least we get a mention of a king the glory of a king is a multitude of people without people a prince is ruined now here again this may be the sort of proverb that's a little bit hard to pin down and maybe deliberately we ought not to pin it down too much the glory of a king you see is not their military might or the king's wealth or the king's looks or the king's throne or crown or extent of their empire or anything like that it's the people not the king but the people are the glory so it's a very people-centered thing it's actually in one sense bringing down the king who might be tempted to sort of pride about his own glory by showing it's actually the people who are his subjects that are actually the glory of a king after all without people there would be no one to rule over and you could hardly be a king of just yourself

I guess so the king's glory actually depends upon people and without people a prince is ruined whoever is slow to anger has great understanding but one who has a hasty temper exalts folly slow to anger of course is God's character slow to anger in Exodus 34 in the Psalms all over the place very much a part of God's character so this is not just picking out nice character for its own sake the wise person is reflecting the character of God and as I said before slowness to anger is part of self-control a gift of God's spirit whose role after all is to make us more like the character of God expressed in his son also of course unchecked anger is destructive so the person who has a hasty temper exalts folly is destructive rather than constructive a tranquil mind gives life to the flesh but passion makes the bones rot it's a fairly vivid way of speaking again a contrast line one and two it's talking in one sense about what is psychosomatic as we would call it today that is our mind and body are interrelated so a tranquil mind a peaceful mind will actually flow out to physical benefits but passion now I don't think the word here is passion with negative connotations but it's right to be passionate about all sorts of things but this is passion that is destructive that's the connotation of the word some translate it as envy although it may be broader than just envy so destructive passion rotting your bones well maybe literally it's not going to rot your bones but it's destructive about your body and about yourself and so therefore we're being told to avoid destructive passion those who oppress the poor insult the maker but those who are kind to the needy honour him not dissimilar to what Jesus said of course in Matthew 25 about do it for the least of these you do it for me don't do it you're insulting the maker the poor are part of God's people as much as anyone else the wicked are overthrown by their evil doing but the righteous find a refuge in their integrity not because their integrity is something in which they rely upon to boast upon but their integrity is part of being wise fearing the Lord and therefore a refuge in God but the wicked actually find destruction or overthrown by their wicked doing wisdom is at home in the mind of one who has understanding the sense there is it fits it belongs it's at home but it's not known in the heart of fools the heart of a fool will never have wisdom in it they just don't fit square peg round whole stuff righteousness exalts a nation but sin is a reproach to any people well there's a timely warning I think for our world today because there are plenty of nations in our world that exalt themselves their military strength boastfulness in their wealth or all sorts of other things for that matter but the way nations are assessed in God's eyes is righteousness compared to sin a servant who deals wisely has the king's favour but his wrath falls on one who acts shamefully in one sense a fairly obvious sort of observation but an encouragement to anyone really not just a public servant to deal wisely and not shamefully well there is a vast array of ways in which we are to be wise wisdom is practical it's intellectual it is religious it is moral wisdom is about skilful living in day to day life it's about our character our intention it's about our speech it's about our action it's about our relationships with other people at its heart

wisdom relies on God it begins with the fear of the Lord therefore it acknowledges that God is the creator and remains sovereign and that God is the ultimate judge and there are just desserts in the end the picture of wisdom as it's portrayed in say the book of Proverbs is filled out more in the New Testament I've made very little reference to Jesus Christ here the New Testament talks about Jesus Christ as our wisdom in 1 Corinthians 1 and fear of the Lord in one sense gives way to or increases into faith in Christ and repentance of our sins in the New Testament and there's a real sense when following the path of wisdom as portrayed here is following the path of Christ or being his disciples Christ of course is the judge who brings the just desserts and the character of wise person here in this book is clearly the character of Christ in the end it's not to say though that the wisdom of Proverbs is supplanted by Christ it remains wisdom for us but in one sense the benefit of Jesus in relationship to the book of Proverbs is that he incarnates in the flesh lives out the wise person perfectly as a model for us to follow of course he does more than that but at least he does that as the supreme wise one for us to follow well we'll have a few minutes for questions in a minute but to give you a sense of space and reflection to mull over true the cud on some of these Proverbs we're going to sing it probably is more general than just that

I think you see God sorry Andrew's question for those who couldn't hear was is that just verse 24 applicable only in the Old Testament people of God being Israel compared to other nations or is it applicable now I think it's probably a bit more general than just the Old Testament to be honest in the Old Testament you get God's judgment against nations for their sins for example in Amos 1 and 2 in a number of the other prophets Nahum, Obadiah, Isaiah and so on as well as condemnation about future or past nations in things like the book of Daniel as well as I think hints of that in the book of Revelation so I think whilst God deals with individuals and there's no nation of the people of God there is a sense in which nations may or may not be righteous or more or less righteous and so on so I think it's calling nations to a moral accountability and not only on matters of indifference

I think they are on matters of difference the wise person is a moral person acts rightly as well as wisely the fool acts wrongly as well as foolishly I mean foolishness encompasses wrongdoing but it's but it's it's also about you know in a sense unwise actions that may be you know not necessarily an infringement of a law but I'm not sure that I would say that they are totally on matters of indifference there'll be some matters of indifference where in a sense whether you act wisely or foolishly will not necessarily be sinful or not that is how do you approach somebody in a particular situation you want this outcome which may have a moral association but you can treat it you can act in that wisely or unwisely and the unwise way may not be sinful but it would be a bit foolish and maybe destructive or something yeah ultimately it does yeah we ought not to be foolish no because as I said before foolishness is not harmless it is destructive or self-destructive but it's it's bigger than just the issue of what is right and what is wrong

[51 : 44] I think and that's why does anyone know whether the words righteousness exalted the nation are written into the floor of which parliament I think it's our state parliament actually our state parliament the foyer before Queen's Hall in Victorian state parliament oh well there you go Alison says that it's at the side end of the foyer of the Victorian state parliament building before the Queen's Hall I've never been in the building that I know of so I can't answer the question thank you wisdom's fearing the Lord although there's a sense in which the goal of wisdom is also fearing the Lord growing in wisdom this book is about helping us grow in wisdom so chapter 1 verse 5 or 6 I think it was said that this book is not only for simple people to become wise but it's also for the wise in effect to become wiser so growing in wisdom is in effect growing more moral more in the character of God as revealed in Christ more according to you know the character intention direction of life that's here more clearly understanding resisting temptation shunning evil those sorts of things oh very that's why the book's written different ways the fool is somebody who doesn't fear the

Lord I suppose would be my basic definition because the wise person basically fears the Lord but there's a whole lot that flows out of that or is built on that of course but not fearing the Lord is a practical intellectual moral religious thing it's got all of those components to it I think but it's an acknowledgement that God is God and that we are not it's a positive term it's a relational term it's not about about fearing something that's remote or unknown or unknowable it's certainly not a phobia about God so we mustn't see it as a negative term or a distant remote or relationless term but it's a positive term but it acknowledges that God is God and we're not I think I think you see a New Testament sort of reflection of that in Romans 1 where exchanging the you know mortal God for idols they're not fearing God as God they're not honouring God as God I think is actually the expression in Romans 1 verse 21 or 2 or something like that but it's the same sort of idea

I think alright let's to make us wise and wise for salvation in Christ and we thank you for the Lord Jesus Christ our wisdom for the example of perfect wisdom but even more the one who died for us so that trusting in his death and resurrection a foolishness for most of this world we indeed indeed trust in your wisdom for us Amen Amen