

BIBLE COMPANION COMMENTARY: PROVERBS

PROVERBS

PREFACE

This commentary is based around the New European Version of the Bible, which is generally printed with brief commentary on each chapter. This commentary is the hard copy of the more detailed commentary found on the *Bible Companion* app.

Are there errors of thought and intellectual process in these volumes? Surely there are. Let me know about them. But don't fail to see the wood for the trees. Never let the wonder of the simple, basic Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ and His Kingdom become obscured by all the angst over correctly interpreting this or that Bible verse. Believe it, respond to it, be baptized into Him, and let the word become flesh in you as it was so supremely in Him.

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Duncan Heaster

PROVERBS CHAPTER 1

Pro 1:1 The proverbs of Solomon-

Proverbs is a collection of various statements from Solomon, some of which in later chapters were apparently edited in the time of Hezekiah; with the words of Agur added to the anthology. The "Lemuel" of Prov. 31 may also be Solomon. I will argue that in fact all the chapters are either by or edited by Solomon. They are the result of Solomon being given "wisdom" when he became king. That wisdom was to enable him to govern Yahweh's people Israel, hence they are so practical. However, I will observe time and again that although they are all inspired and true, this Divine truth is used by Solomon to justify himself in his various political tensions with other pretenders to the throne, from the house of Saul and from the supporters of his various half brothers. He comes to elevate his "wisdom", true as it is of itself, far above God's word, and ends up playing God. And this leads to glaring contradictions between the truths and wisdom he writes down, and his personal life. This is especially true in relation to women. And so we have in this book a unique message to those within Christian communities who pride themselves upon "truth" which they have received. The truth of that truth, as it were, is unquestionable. But the lesson is that academic truth and knowledge must be personally applied; and when it isn't, the mere possession of that truth leads to hypocrisy and eventual downfall, of which Solomon is the parade example. The

possession of those truths will not of itself save us; and yet Solomon appeared to think that it would, and therefore failed to apply these things to himself personally.

Are the Proverbs really like precious stones that must be emptied out of the bag and rearranged by theme? In which case, why didn't God do so at the start when inspiring the book? My comments are as follows:

- Some of the Proverbs are basic truisms and maxims which have equivalents in any culture. Solomon wrote the book at the start of his reign when God gave him his wisdom. But Solomon loved Egyptian and Gentile women right from the start of his reign. There are strong similarities both in content and genre between Proverbs and e.g. the Egyptian *Instruction of Amenemope*. It could be that Solomon took various things from the literature of his father in law in Egypt... or of course it could be that Solomon's book of Proverbs was designed to preach to the Egyptians and surrounding nations in their own terms and in a familiar genre. Much is written by Solomon about the establishment of the throne on the basis of truth and justice; and this is commonly found in Egyptian literature about the Pharaohs.
- The text hangs together far better in the original Hebrew. Most people were illiterate, and so the book was designed to be memorized. There are many patterns in the book which depend upon the alliteration and rhyming of words and ideas to enable memorization. This was typical of wisdom literature of the time. There are similar initial syllables of words and verses, or beginning with the same letter. There's much word play, similar sounds repeat between verses if read out loud. Thus the root *sdq* [righteousness] occurs in various words which connect various proverbs which appear unrelated to each other in English translation. These sound patterns form a chain which enables memorization. Thus Prov. 16:27-29 all begin with the word *ish*, 'a man'. Catchwords link adjacent verses.
- Watch out for clusters of verses which do have the same theme; the verses which don't appear to be in a cluster are likely connected by alliteration etc. for easy memorization.
- My own hunch is that although the Proverbs are inspired by God, they were also presented by Solomon with a strong hint of self-justification. He wrote them when he had just inherited the throne from his father David, whom he idolized and was obsessed with. He sought to justify his father against all the various factions who were in Israel who were not sympathetic to David and therefore to Solomon. Almost every other verse in the book appears to have some such sideways swipe at the likes of Saul, Nabal, Absalom or Joab- whilst presenting Solomon as the wise son with whom alone David was pleased. Solomon should've sought his self-worth and value in God's opinion of him; and he should've trusted the promises to David of God establishing his throne and line, rather than seeking to as it were fulfill them for himself by using God's Truth and Wisdom to establish himself at others' expense.

The son of David, king of Israel-

Solomon speaks about him being King in Jerusalem (Ecc. 1:1,12; Prov. 1:1) as if this was the ultimate fulfilment of the Davidic promises. Consider the implications of 2 Chron. 1:9: "O Lord God, let thy promise unto David my father be established: for thou hast made me king over a people like the dust of the earth...give me now wisdom, that I may go out and come in before (i.e. lead) this people". Solomon was asking for wisdom because he thought that he was the Messiah, and he saw wisdom as a Messianic characteristic. He failed to realize that the promises to Abraham and David were only being primarily fulfilled in him (e.g. 1 Kings 4:20); he thought that he was the ultimate fulfilment of them (1 Kings 8:20 states this in so many words). His lack of faith and vision of the future Kingdom lead him to this proud and arrogant conclusion (cp. building up our own 'Kingdom' in this life through our lack of vision of the Kingdom).

Pro 1:2 to know wisdom and instruction; to discern the words of understanding-

Solomon's book of Proverbs is presented by him as having the power to discern truth from "the words of understanding". Whilst indeed the Proverbs do open up the words of God which were then available [mainly the Pentateuch and the book of Job], always in Proverbs we sense Solomon harnessing his wisdom to some more human agenda. Just as we can use God's truth to support our own agendas and personal justification. This opening introduction appears to be saying that this collection of wisdom is necessary in order to know wisdom *in toto*, and is the crucial key to understanding or discerning God. By setting up the book in this way, Solomon is as it were claiming a personal monopoly over Israel's understanding of God. That understanding could only come through his book. And true and Divinely inspired as everything is in it, Solomon appears here to give a hint of spiritual control over his people which was inappropriate.

Pro 1:3 to receive instruction in wise dealing, in righteousness, justice, and equity-
Instruction and wisdom are the terms used by David in Ps. 2:10, where being wise and instructed effectively means to repent. True wisdom is to repent; knowledge in the Hebraic sense refers to relationship with God, rather than technical knowledge of information. In fact the first sin was to partake of the fruit which would apparently make men "wise" (Gen. 3:6). It was a short cut to 'wisdom' in the sense of relationship. And too often the same mistake is made today, whereby knowledge is confused with the wisdom and instruction of repentant relationship with God. And this was the mistake Solomon was to make; he saw "wisdom" as bites of knowledge, like segments of computer memory. All of it was true, but in his own life it didn't come to the synthesis of 'repentant relationship with God' which is true "wisdom".

Pro 1:4 to give prudence to the simple, knowledge and discretion to the young man-
David likens himself to the simple who was made wise by God's word (Ps. 19:7; 119:130), and was therefore preserved (Ps. 116:6). To be taught by God's word we have to become "simple", unlearning and placing to one side all our perceived knowledge and understandings. Solomon repeats David's theme by saying that wisdom makes wise the simple (Prov. 1:4; 8:5; 9:4). But he is equating "wisdom" with the words of God, although for Solomon, "wisdom" seems to be what he personally is saying and teaching. Solomon doesn't direct his listeners back to God's word, as David did, but rather towards loyalty to his teaching. Inspired as it was, his lack of extended reference to God's law places his own teaching of "wisdom" above that law. This is in sharp contrast to David's attitude in Ps. 119, where David gives advice to the simple and the young man- and urges attention to God's word, whereas Solomon directs them instead to *his* wisdom, inspired as it was.

Pro 1:5 that the wise man may be obedient, and increase in learning; that the man of understanding may attain to sound counsel-

The wise men of understanding may refer to the governors of Israel (s.w. Dt. 1:13,15; 16:19). See on :20. They were to learn wisdom in how to judge God's people through all the truths expressed in this book. David had called Solomon a "wise man", and indeed he was made wise by God (s.w. 1 Kings 2:9; 3:12; 5:7). But the logic of what Solomon seems to be saying is that the possession of wisdom makes a man obedient. And this is where he got it wrong; for his mere possession of wisdom didn't do so. And comparing Proverbs with Solomon's personal life as revealed in Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon and the historical records- all indicates that in fact Solomon's possession of wisdom didn't at all make him obedient. Solomon failed to appreciate what David did- that the wise man also dies (Ps. 49:10). What is critical is having the hope of God's Kingdom and the resurrection of the body. But Solomon's possession of "truth" blinded him to this desperate need of all men. The mere possession of wisdom was no guarantee of itself of inheriting glory, as Solomon wrongly thought (Prov. 3:35).

Pro 1:6 to understand a proverb, and parables, the words and riddles of the wise-

This appears to be saying that Solomon's proverbs are required to understand every proverb. The words of the wise are only to be understood through Solomon's proverbs. However this, as noted on :2, appears to be just slightly manipulative; as if Solomon's teaching, inspired as it was, is to be the key to absolutely all understanding and interpretation.

Pro 1:7 The fear of Yahweh is the beginning of knowledge; but the foolish despise wisdom and instruction-

Solomon repeats his father David's conclusion that wisdom begins with the fear of Yahweh (Ps. 111:10 = Prov. 1:7; 9:10). This statement is in sharp contrast with the accepted view of the times, that wisdom was held by the sages, and was accessible only by sitting at their feet. But this idea (and it is common enough today too) is subverted by this idea that wisdom begins in each individual heart being in fear of Yahweh- so that wisdom from Him can be personally experienced, taught directly through relationship with Him rather than sitting at the feet of a human sage. "Wisdom" is parallel with getting "a good understanding" by 'doing His work' or obeying His commandments (Ps. 111:10b). The work we are to do for God in obeying His ways is not simply a test of our obedience; it is designed to give us wisdom. Wisdom therefore comes from experience of obedience and relationship with God, rather than from picking up nuggets of 'truth' from human sages. The fear of God is therefore not so much referring to a fear of the consequence of our sins; but the fear or reverence expressed through keeping His commandments (see on Ps. 112:1).

Pro 1:8 My son, listen to your father's instruction, and don't forsake your mother's teaching-

David so often talks about God's "law", using the word *torah*. But Solomon so often speaks of his own *torah*, and that of his wife, the mother of "my son" (s.w. Prov. 1:8; 3:1; 4:2; 6:20; 7:2; 13:14; 31:26). Yet elsewhere in the Bible, the well over 200 occurrences of *torah* are always about God's law. Solomon applies the word to his own teachings and that of his wife, and thereby plays God. whilst it could be argued that Solomon's teachings were Divinely inspired, all the same he ought surely to have spoken of them as God's *torah* rather than his own *torah*. This kind of playing God is seen so often in the teachers of God's people. We should note that Solomon's wife, the mother of the sons addressed, as a Gentle and idolater. Solomon says things which are true enough, but there is always an underlying element which is not so spiritual and of integrity when we think how it all applied to him and his family personally.

Pro 1:9 for they will be a garland to grace your head, and chains around your neck-

Again Solomon reasons as if the mere possession of truth is what will adorn us before God. But it is personalization of the wisdom, not mere possession of it, which is required. And Solomon was a stellar example of failure in this. It was rulers who had chains around their necks, and Solomon has himself obliquely in view here; and he considers that the fact he was taught truth by his parents qualifies himself as king. That is not altogether untrue, but his personal example shows that it was not the right attitude.

Pro 1:10 My son, if sinners entice you, don't consent-

Solomon's idea of avoiding sin was in resisting the enticement of very sinful people. He pays no attention to the heart, whereas the Biblical message is always that sin is to be avoided in the heart. Spiritual mindedness, rather than mere disassociation from sinners, is of the essence. Dt. 11:16 warns that our heart should not be enticed (s.w.); but Solomon sees enticement as merely from very sinful individuals.

Pro 1:11 If they say, Come with us, let's lay in wait for blood; let's lurk secretly for the innocent without cause-

"Lie in wait" is the word for ambush. Solomon often uses the word, as if it is for him a major characteristic of sinners (Prov. 1:11,18; 7:12; 12:6; 23:28; 24:15). But it's a rather specific word to use so often. It's as if Solomon is consciously alluding to his father's experiences at the hands of the house of Saul (s.w. Ps. 10:9; 59:3), whom Solomon considered a threat to his own kingship. And so he seems to rather like using the term about sinners, as if using his wisdom to have a dig at his immediate opposition. "Innocent blood" refers to Saul's persecution of David's "innocent blood" (s.w. 1 Sam. 19:5).

Pro 1:12 let's swallow them up alive like Sheol, and whole, like those who go down into the pit-

The reference may be to Ahithophel's plan to swallow up David at the time of Absalom's rebellion (2 Sam. 17:12,16 s.w.), and to David's prayers of Ps. 35:25; 69:15 against Saul.

Pro 1:13 We'll find all kinds of wealth. We'll fill our houses with spoil-

The wealth or substance of a man's house is the phrase used in Prov. 6:31, of the adulterer who must pay all the wealth of his house. Solomon presents a perhaps simplistic caricature of the wicked; they use violence, steal, commit adultery etc. And the righteous are consistently wise and righteous, according to Proverbs. Whereas in reality, sin and righteousness is far more subtle. A man like Solomon's father David was righteous and yet also sinned.

Pro 1:14 You shall cast your lot among us, we'll all have one purse-

The phrase "cast your lot" is always used elsewhere in the Bible, 12 times, for the literal casting of lots. "Purse" is the word for "cup", and it seems there is an allusion to casting lots as to which victim or crime to choose.

Pro 1:15 My son, don't walk in the way with them. Keep your foot from their path-

The idea of walking in the way, with feet on the path, is commonly used for walking in the way of God's commandments (Dt. 8:6; 10:12 etc.). David spoke of feet in the pathway of obedience to God's word (Ps. 119:1,3; 128:1 and very often). But Solomon interprets this as not walking in the way with criminals (Prov. 1:5; 16:29). That is somewhat easier than personally walking with God in His way. Again, what Solomon says is not untrue; but he is turning personal, internal spirituality and obedience into a matter of simply avoiding external company with gross sinners. And he suggests that walking in the right way is a matter of externally associating with the path of the righteous (Prov. 2:20).

Pro 1:16 for their feet run to evil. They hurry to shed blood-

David's feet almost ran and hasted to evil (s.w. Ps. 73:2). Solomon simplistically condemns this. But this is not how it was in reality with his father David. Solomon's proverbs seem to fail to address this complexity of situations because of his own self-righteousness; and yet all he says is inspired and true so far as it goes. These words are quoted in Is. 59:17 and applied to the wicked amongst the exiles.

Pro 1:17 For in vain is the net spread in the sight of any bird-

David said that the snare was dug "before me" (Ps. 57:6). Solomon alludes to this here. All Solomon says is inspired truth, but clearly he has a subtext of justifying his father David; this was an obsession with him.

Pro 1:18 but these lay wait for their own blood. They lurk secretly for their own lives-

This repeats the major Biblical theme, that men condemn themselves rather than God forcing condemnation upon them. The trap they set for others is what destroys them. In this sense, judgment day is ongoing now. "We make the answer now".

Pro 1:19 So are the ways of everyone who is greedy for gain; it takes away the life of its owners-

In the sense that those "greedy for gain" destroy their own families (s.w. Prov. 15:27). Hab. 2:9 likewise speaks of the "greedy for gain" as being so because they wish to enrich their own families. This desire for wealth "for my family" is a very powerful and subtle temptation.

Pro 1:20 Wisdom calls aloud in the street. She utters her voice in the public squares-

This may be an allusion to Solomon's wisdom being publically taught throughout Israel. For he asked for it in order to teach Israel, and I noted on :5 that the Proverbs were intended for the teachers / governors of Israel.

Pro 1:21 She calls at the head of busy places, at the entrance of the city gates she utters her words-

See on :20. AV "the chief place of concourse" may refer to the temple, and "the city" would be Jerusalem; as if Solomon's Proverbs were taught there especially.

Pro 1:22 How long, you simple ones, will you love simplicity? How long will mockers delight themselves in mockery and fools hate knowledge?-

The "simple" are made wise by God's word, David repeatedly taught in the Psalms, especially Ps. 119. But Solomon seems often to effectively replace God's word with his Proverbs, as if they were all sufficient, and obedience to his teaching was all that was required, rather than directing attention to God's whole body of revelation. The Hebrew for "knowledge" admittedly has a wide range of meaning, but we get the impression that Solomon is advocating hearing academic theory and giving intellectual assent to it. And it was solely doing this, rather than personalizing it, which led to his demise.

Pro 1:23 Turn at my reproof. Behold, I will pour out my spirit on you, I will make known my words to you-

This associates a true understanding of God's word with the action of His spirit upon us-reading the Book without understanding is of no avail, seeing that the spirit/mind of God is not being revealed to us.

Pro 1:24 Because I have called, and you have refused; I have stretched out my hand, and no one has paid attention-

This is very much the language of the later prophets concerning God's appeals to Israel which were refused. Although I may appear to take a critical approach to Solomon, there is no doubt that what he writes is inspired truth; the problem I am highlighting is in the subtexts he attached to it all, and his slanting of it all towards his own self justification. See on :27.

Pro 1:25 but you have ignored all my counsel, and wished none of my reproof-

This appears to be an out of context allusion to David's words in Ps. 38:14, reflecting on his sin with Bathsheba, and how he felt unable to give reproof to others: "Yes, I am as a man who doesn't hear, in whose mouth are no reproofs". Solomon was obsessed with David his father, speaking hundreds of times of "David my father". But he failed to have his humility; he endlessly dishes out reproofs in Proverbs, indeed he sees his Proverbs as reproofs to people (e.g. Prov. 1:25; 6:23; 10:17; 12:1; 13:18; 15:5,31; 29:15); whereas David humbly felt

unable to do so because of his awareness of his sins. And at the time David wrote the Proverbs, when he received wisdom at the start of his reign, he was sinning likewise [in essence] by marrying foreign women.

Pro 1:26 I also will laugh at your disaster. I will mock when calamity overtakes you-
This sounds out of step with the God who takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked, even if it is brought about by the whirlwind of Divine judgment (:27). Again Solomon appears to use his truth, his wisdom, to gleefully condemn those who will not accept it; rather than lament from the heart their refusal.

Pro 1:27 when calamity overtakes you like a storm, when your disaster comes on like a whirlwind; when distress and anguish come on you-
See on :26. As noted on :24, this is very much the language used by the prophets about Judah's judgment for their refusal of God's word (s.w. Is. 5:28; 8:22; 29:6; Jer. 4:13 etc.). Although I may appear to take a critical approach to Solomon, there is no doubt that what he writes is inspired truth; the problem I am highlighting is in the subtexts he attached to it all, and his slanting of it all towards his own self justification.

Pro 1:28 Then will they call on me, but I will not answer. They will seek me diligently, but they will not find me-
The rejected will want to be accepted. "When your fear cometh as desolation, and your destruction cometh as a whirlwind; when distress and anguish cometh upon you (quoted in Rom. 2:8 about the judgment). Then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer; they shall seek me early, but they shall not find me" (Prov. 1:27,28). The foolish virgins realize the need for prayer all too late; they knocked on the door with great zeal, asking for it to be opened; seeking but not finding. Knocking is sometimes used as a figure for prayer (Mt. 7:7). The basis for these foolish virgins is surely in Prov. 1:28,29: "Then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer... they shall not find me: for that they hated knowledge". Having a laid back attitude to developing a real knowledge of the Lord through the oil of the word is therefore effectively hating knowledge. As we see the Lord's coming approaching, our daily Bible ought to be a bare minimum. There must be a *feeling* of and for those things of which we read, and a holding of them in the heart through the course of each day.

Pro 1:29 because they hated knowledge, and didn't choose the fear of Yahweh-
"The fear of Yahweh" is not therefore an involuntary fear of Him, as an emotion. It refers rather to a way of life now which we consciously choose. To "know" God is not therefore the mere receipt of information about Him, which may be given to us whether or not we ask for it; to "know" Him in the Hebraic sense is to have a relationship with Him, to fear / respect Him.

Pro 1:30 They wished for none of my counsel, they despised all my reproof-
The parallel is with Prov. 12:1: "Whoever loves correction loves knowledge [spoken of in :29], but he who hates reproof is stupid". To really know God is to accept reproof from Him. And this is why people generally refuse the knowledge of God; they may claim they don't understand or agree with the knowledge they find in the Bible, but the subconscious reason is that their pride refuses to accept reproof.

Pro 1:31 Therefore they will eat of the fruit of their own way, and be filled with the fruit of their own schemes-
As noted on :18, men condemn themselves rather than God forcing condemnation upon them.

The trap they set for others is what destroys them. In this sense, judgment day is ongoing now. "We make the answer now".

Pro 1:32 For the backsliding of the simple will kill them. The careless ease of fools will destroy them-

"Careless ease", without being bothered by God's moral demands, may appear to be the way to an easy life. The same word is used in Jer. 22:21 as the reason why God's people refused to hear His word and repent. And we live in an age which glorifies "careless ease" as no other. But the great paradox is that this way of life is in fact the way to self destruction.

Pro 1:33 But whoever listens to me will dwell securely and will be at ease, without fear of harm-

'Dwelling securely' appears to be how Solomon understood life now for those who listened to his book of Proverbs. But this phrase is used of the hope of the resurrection of the body (Ps. 16:9 "rest in hope"), and of the future Kingdom age (Jer. 23:6; 33:16). Solomon went wrong in the end because his focus was solely upon the blessings to be enjoyed in this life, with himself as king of Israel; rather than perceiving the eternity ahead, in God's Kingdom, as the ultimate blessing.

PROVERBS CHAPTER 2

Pro 2:1 My son, if you will receive my words and store up my commandments within you-

Solomon seems to allude to David hiding God's word in his heart (Ps. 119:11) by asking his son to hide *his* word in his heart (s.w. Prov. 2:1; 7:1). Again Solomon is putting his own words in the place of God's words. Whilst his wisdom was inspired by God, I detect something wrong here. He is effectively playing God, and not directing people to God's word but rather to his own words, true and inspired as they might be. This came to full term in Solomon's attitude that personal loyalty to himself was loyalty to God- even when Solomon was far from God in his ways. And the same trap is fallen into by those who hold parts of 'God's truth'; they can come to thereby play God and demand personal loyalty to themselves rather than to God.

Pro 2:2 so as to turn your ear to wisdom, and apply your heart to understanding-

Solomon uses the same phrase "incline your ear" in appealing for his son to incline his ear to Solomon's words (Prov. 4:20). Solomon came to see himself as the embodiment of wisdom, and came to assume that whatever he said or thought must be right because he possessed wisdom. This comes to a peak in Prov. 5:1- "attend [s.w. "incline" in 2:2] unto *my* wisdom, bow your ear to *my* understanding". Solomon made the classic mistake of assuming that his will and word were effectively equivalent to the word of God. In Prov. 6:21 he speaks of the need to bind the law about your heart and neck; but in Song 8:6 he asks his Gentile lover to "set *me* as a seal upon thine heart" and arm. And often in Proverbs he uses the language of the blessings for keeping God's law and turns them into the blessings for keeping *his* law; e.g. "My son, keep my words, and lay up my commandments with thee. Keep my commandments, and live; and my law as the apple of thine eye. Bind them upon thy fingers, write them upon the table of thine heart" (Prov. 7:1,2). And we all do the same in essence, whenever we assume that our consciences are effectively the will of God; when we 'play God' by allowing our words and will to count as if they are *His* word.

As noted on Ps. 119:36; 141:4, David believed that God could act deep within the psychology or heart of man, to incline us toward righteousness and away from evil. This is

how the Holy Spirit works today. Solomon believed the same (s.w. 1 Kings 8:58), but only in theory; for his Gentile wives inclined or turned away his heart from God (s.w. 1 Kings 11:3,9). God will not turn our hearts anywhere we ourselves don't want to go. Solomon often appeals for us to incline our hearts to wisdom (s.w. Prov. 2:2; 4:20; 5:1; 22:17), but he himself was inclined to apostasy (s.w. 1 Kings 11:3,9). All his emphasis is upon the need to incline ourselves, whereas his father David trusted in the work of the Spirit to incline his heart to good and away from evil (Ps. 141:4; 119:36 etc.).

If we "attend" to God's word (Prov. 2:2; 4:1; 7:24), then He will "attend" to our word, of prayer (Ps. 55:2 and often in the Psalms). There is thereby a mutuality between God and man. Our attitude to His word becomes reflected in His attitude to our words in prayer; for God and man are in dialogue.

Pro 2:3 yes, if you cry out for wisdom, and lift up your voice for understanding-

These are the very words used of how wisdom and understanding cry out and lift up their voice (Prov. 8:1). The idea is that God's wisdom and understanding is crying out to those who are crying out for it. There is thus a mutuality between God and man. And the old Yiddish proverb comes true: "And going out to find Him / I met Him coming towards me". God is in search of man, and true man is in search for God. And when they meet, there is that electric spark, parties in Heaven celebrating the reconnection.

Pro 2:4 if you seek her as silver, and search for her as for hidden treasures-

Man's search for God is indeed to be more important than his plans to acquire wealth. But again we sense a subtext of self justification in Solomon; for his choice of wisdom rather than wealth was commended by God, and wealth was added to him because of it. The search for hidden treasure is an image picked up by the Lord and applied to our search for the Kingdom of God (Mt. 13:44), which requires the sacrifice of all our wealth in response to finding it. That sacrifice of wealth can therefore be interpreted as meaning our resignation of the search for it.

Pro 2:5 then you will understand the fear of Yahweh, and find the knowledge of God-

If we seek and cry out for wisdom and knowledge / relationship with God (:2-4), then we will find it. God is not playing hard to get, facing off against man over an open Bible. He earnestly seeks relationship with us. And it is that process of seeking and crying out for Him which of itself leads us to "understand" Him.

Pro 2:6 For Yahweh gives wisdom. Out of His mouth comes knowledge and understanding-

But knowledge in the sense of relationship with God is not the same thing as the words of God, as we have them in the Bible, which come from His mouth. The gift of relationship is more subtle than that. But as so often, Solomon appears to assume that mere possession of God's truth, in the form of inspired words, means that we have knowledge / relationship with God.

Pro 2:7 He lays up sound wisdom for the upright-

The implication could be that there is personal "wisdom" laid up for every upright man, which he must find for himself.

He is a shield to those who walk in integrity-

The allusion may be to how Yahweh was a "shield" to Abraham (Gen. 15:1). But Solomon misses the point, that Abraham like David his father was not always a man of integrity. We think of Abraham's weakness in not leaving Ur nor Lot when he should have done, and his

poor behaviour towards Sarai and Hagar. Again Solomon is too simplistically dividing God's people into abject sinners on one hand, and stellar examples of integrity on the other.

Pro 2:8 that He may guard the paths of justice, and preserve the way of His saints-

"Preserves the way" is s.w. Gen. 3:24; 28:20; Ex. 23:20; Ps. 91:11. These verses suggest God keeps us in the way by Angelic involvement. The cherubim would keep [s.w. preserve] the way to the tree of life- this is a promise of Divine care to lead His people to that tree, rather than a judgment against man. But we on our side must also keep the way of the Lord (Gen. 18:19; Jud. 2:22; Dt. 8:2,6; 11:22; 30:16 etc.). The way God 'preserved [Israel] in the way' through the wilderness to the promised land (Josh. 24:17) looks forward to how we are potentially kept in the way through the wilderness after baptism towards the Kingdom. David could say that he had preserved the way (2 Sam. 22:22) and he asks Solomon to keep / preserve the way (1 Kings 2:3,4); but here Solomon puts the emphasis on the promise that God will keep us in the way, rather than upon our need to preserve the way. Likewise he overlooked the conditional aspect of the promises about David's Son being Messiah. God directly told Solomon at least twice that he must make effort to keep the way (1 Kings 3:14; 11:38), but he misquotes this in 1 Kings 8:25 to the effect that God would keep His people in the way, by inclining their hearts to do so (1 Kings 8:58). David had spoken of God's ability to direct hearts into keeping His way (Ps. 119:5), but this was not the blank cheque assurance which Solomon seems to have taken it as; David speaks of the effort he had to make to keep himself in the way (Ps. 39:1). Worse still, Solomon told his children to keep / preserve *his* way (Prov. 8:32), again confusing himself with God.

Pro 2:9 Then you will understand righteousness and justice, equity and every good path-

Again it seems Solomon is dividing people into those who resist wisdom on one hand, and those on the other who understand everything perfectly, and are totally obedient to it. But this is simply not the case. There seems little humility in his worldview; for who understands God's righteousness and justice completely. David his father confessed so often that the knowledge of these things was far above him.

Pro 2:10 For wisdom will enter into your heart, knowledge will be pleasant to your soul-

Solomon often emphasized the importance of keeping the heart (Prov. 2:10-16; 3:5,6; 4:23-5:5; 6:23-26); he had foreseen that the essential sin of God's people was "the plague of his own heart" (1 Kings 8:46), and he imagined how for this sin God's people would later pray towards the temple. And yet his wives turned away *his* heart (1 Kings 11:13), for all this awareness that the heart must be kept. It was as if the more he knew the truth of something, the more he wanted to do the very opposite. And this is exactly true of our natures. It's why we ourselves can discern the same perversity in our lives. Perhaps with Solomon he reasoned that in *his* case, foreign wives wouldn't turn away *his* heart. Just as our flesh thinks 'Yes, but it can't happen to *me*'. Perhaps too he reasoned that if the temple somehow could bring forgiveness for the plague of the heart, his heart was incorruptible because of the temple.

Pro 2:11 Discretion will watch over you. Understanding will keep you-

Again Solomon veers towards believing that intellectual understanding is all that is required, along with avoiding the worst of sinners (:12). This lack of appreciation of personal spirituality, spiritual mindedness, is what led Solomon himself to fall away completely, and to exhibit remarkable hypocrisy. Solomon was commanded to personally keep or watch over [s.w.] the commandments (1 Kings 3:14 and often); but he seemed to think that possession of intellectual understanding would keep / watch over him and of itself keep him in the way

(Prov. 2:11). This is the temptation for all who pride themselves on possession of academic knowledge of Divine truth.

Pro 2:12 to deliver you from the way of evil, from the men who speak perverse things-

Solomon understands the way of evil as association with perverse men. His focus is upon the external, rather than the internal. And this is the dangerous tendency of all who believe in guilt by association, contamination by communion, call it what you will. Those false ideas tend against personal spiritual mindedness.

Pro 2:13 who forsake the paths of uprightness to walk in the ways of darkness-

As in Prov. 15:10, Solomon sees the wicked as those who once knew the right path and have left it. He contrasts the path of uprightness and that of darkness (Prov. 2:13). But life is not so clear cut. The same phrase is used of how Job felt he was walking the path of darkness (Job 19:8). David, Solomon's father, likewise partially strayed from the path. This inability to recognize that spiritual life is not so black and white led to Solomon assuming he was totally on the way of righteousness. He was unable therefore to appreciate that he himself failed at some points at some times. And this is true for those who have a similarly black and white view of people and spirituality. They never know the wonder of arising from our knees knowing we are forgiven, full of grace and renewed devotion to by all means serve the Lord again with all we have.

Pro 2:14 who rejoice to do evil, and delight in the perverseness of evil-

The only other occurrence of the phrase "rejoice to do evil" is in David's reflections upon the coalition of haters who joined Absalom in trying to overthrow him (Ps. 35:26). Solomon speaks the truth, but he does so with an eye on justifying himself against his brother Absalom and those who had followed him. Always Solomon is harnessing 'truth' to an agenda of self-justification; and we must be warned by this.

Pro 2:15 who are crooked in their ways, and wayward in their paths-

See on :14. Solomon rightly emphasizes that the "wayward" are wayward in their hearts (Prov. 11:20; 17:20), leading to wayward ways in practice (Prov. 2:15); but he repeats his father's mistake, in saying he will have nothing to do with those who are wayward in their hearts (s.w. Ps. 101:4). The mistake was in assuming that he could judge human hearts. It continues the far over simplified view of people which Solomon has; the righteous have pure hearts, always obedient; and wicked have bad hearts. But the Bible warns that all of us have hearts which are fountains of evil thoughts (Mk. 7:15,21-23 etc.).

Pro 2:16 to deliver you from the Gentile woman, even from the foreigner who flatters with her words-

Solomon married "strange women" i.e. Gentiles (1 Kings 11:1) and was led astray by them. Yet at the very time he was marrying them, he wrote in his wisdom that the words of wisdom would preserve / keep / defend a Jewish man from being damaged by them (Prov. 2:16; 6:24; 7:5). The connection would seem to suggest that Solomon reasoned that because he had wisdom, because he had 'the truth', he could therefore enjoy these "strange women" without them corrupting *his* heart; because *he* had wisdom. Thus he thought that mere possession of Divine truth was some kind of insurance policy against moral sin being counted to him. And so many have gone down this road; so many who knew more true theology than many have at the same time made an awful mess of their personal lives, just as Solomon did. This is why the higher one goes in the echelons of Christian organizations, the greater the learning and knowledge a person has, the more powerful is the tendency towards gross hypocrisy in moral

terms. The point is, of course, that all the knowledge of God which we quite rightly seek after must be *personally applied*. The very possession of it and teaching of it to others can of itself make a man or woman demotivated to personally apply it. He foretold that the people would sigh when a wicked man ruled them (Prov. 29:2 RV)- and they did "sigh" because of the heavy burdens he placed upon them (1 Kings 12:4). He imposed the "yoke" of tribute upon the people (2 Chron. 10:4), whereas he himself had warned that a king that imposes tribute on his people "overthrows" a country (Prov. 29:4 RV mg.). He saw it all as true- and yet it was far from him personally.

Pro 2:17 who forsakes the friend of her youth, and forgets the covenant of her God-
Solomon was aware, at least theoretically, of the foolish path he was going down with the Gentile women he was involved with at the time he was given the wisdom which is codified in the book of Proverbs. God had inspired him with the wisdom of Prov. 2:16,17, which warned that wisdom would save a man from the Gentile woman who made a covenant with the God of Israel in her youth (in order to marry an Israelite, by implication), but soon forgot it. This was exactly the case of Solomon; yet he just couldn't see the personal relevance of his own wisdom to himself.

Pro 2:18 for her house leads down to death, her paths to the dead-
Yet Solomon built houses for his pagan, Gentile wives. He did this at the beginning of his reign, at the very time he was writing up his book of Proverbs as a result of the wisdom given him at that time. And he followed their paths to spiritual death, in the end.

Pro 2:19 None who go to her return again, neither do they attain to the paths of life-
Solomon reasoned that he would walk the path to life, whilst his wives walked the path to death (:18). He emphasizes these two paths throughout Proverbs. But his simplistic assumption was that he was on the path to life simply because he possessed academic, abstract truth and "wisdom". He was Divinely inspired with his wisdom, but surely he is also drawing on observation- that those who went to the house of the Gentile woman never spiritually returned. He had seen it happen in the paths of so many of God's people; but assumed that he was different, that it wouldn't happen to him.

Pro 2:20 that you may walk in the way of good men, and keep the paths of the righteous-
Solomon's prophetic sonship of David was conditional upon him preserving or observing Yahweh's ways (1 Kings 2:4; 1 Chron. 22:13; 2 Chron. 7:17); but he didn't preserve or observe them (1 Kings 11:10,11); despite David praying that Solomon would be given a heart to observe them (1 Chron. 29:19). We can pray for God to work upon the hearts of others, but He will not force people against their own deepest will and heart position. Solomon stresses overmuch how God would keep or preserve the righteous (Prov. 2:8; 3:26), without recognizing the conditional aspect of this. Why did Solomon go wrong? His Proverbs are true enough, but he stresses that obedience to *his* wisdom and teaching would preserve his hearers (Prov. 4:4; 6:22; 7:1; 8:32; 15:5), preservation was through following the example of the wise (Prov. 2:20); rather than stressing obedience to *God's* ways, and replacing David his father's simple love of God with a love of academic wisdom: "Yahweh preserves all those who love Him" (Ps. 145:20).

The idea of walking in the way, with feet on the path, is commonly used for walking in the way of God's commandments (Dt. 8:6; 10:12 etc.). David spoke of feet in the pathway of obedience to God's word (Ps. 119:1,3; 128:1 and very often). But Solomon interprets this as not walking in the way with criminals (Prov. 1:5; 16:29). That is somewhat easier than personally walking with God in His way. Again, what Solomon says is not untrue; but he is

turning personal, internal spirituality and obedience into a matter of simply avoiding external company with gross sinners. And he suggests that walking in the right way is a matter of externally associating with the path of the righteous (Prov. 2:20).

Pro 2:21 For the upright will dwell in the land; the perfect will eternally remain in it- Again, Solomon over simplifies things. The old covenant clearly taught that all Israel would be exiled from their land if they broke the covenant. Solomon's dedication of the temple seemed to assume that only the wicked would be exiled from the land, and the temple would stand eternally; to express repentance in exile, they just needed to pray towards it (1 Kings 8:48). But all Israel were sent into exile, and his temple was razed to the ground. But Solomon's belief that "The upright will dwell in the land; the perfect will eternally remain in it" meant that he totally refused to accept the extent of judgment predicted in the curses of Dt. 28. All Israel would be exiled from their land. He liked to assume that his Kingdom would eternally endure; because of his lack of faith in the nature of the future Kingdom, and his mistaken imagination that he was the eternal Messianic king. He refused to recognize that his father David in Ps. 72 had wrongly imagined that he would be that eternal king, and disregarded the conditionality of the promises made to him.

Pro 2:22 But the wicked will be cut off from the land, the deceitful will be rooted out of it- "Transgressors" or "traitors" is the term used by David of Saul and his supporters (Ps. 25:3; 59:5; 119:158). Solomon uses this term, teaching that "transgressors" must be rooted out of the earth / *eretz* promised to Abraham (Prov. 2:22), and that the "transgressors" are to face judgment (Prov. 11:3,6; 13:2; 21:18; 22:12; 23:28; 25:19). All Solomon says is true, but he clearly has in view the house and supporters of Saul, who were a group he felt he needed to repress in order to keep his own kingdom and power intact.

PROVERBS CHAPTER 3

Pro 3:1 My son, don't forget my teaching but let your heart keep my commandments-

David so often talks about God's "law", using the word *torah*. But Solomon so often speaks of his own *torah*, and that of his wife, the mother of "my son" (s.w. Prov. 1:8; 3:1; 4:2; 6:20; 7:2; 13:14; 31:26). Yet elsewhere in the Bible, the well over 200 occurrences of *torah* are always about God's law. Solomon applies the word to his own teachings and that of his wife, and thereby plays God. whilst it could be argued that Solomon's teachings were Divinely inspired, all the same he ought surely to have spoken of them as God's *torah* rather than his own *torah*. This kind of playing God is seen so often in the teachers of God's people.

Pro 3:2 for length of days and years of life, and peace, will they add to you- Length of days was promised for obedience to the covenant, but Solomon appropriates this language to the reward for obedience to his book of Proverbs. He appears to effectively replace God's word with his own words, although his words were indeed Divinely inspired. But he came to ignore the rest of God's revelation, with the result that he was absolutely disobedient to the Mosaic words about not multiplying horses, marrying foreign wives etc. See on :3.

Pro 3:3 Don't let grace and truth forsake you-

David saw "mercy [s.w. "grace"] and truth" as something given by God's grace to

him, an unworthy sinner (Ps. 40:11); whereas Solomon assumes that they are with him and his son. The phrase often refers to God's covenant promises with David; and we note this is particularly addressed to Solomon's son. Solomon perceived the conditionality of the promises when it came to his son; but refused to perceive this concerning himself.

Bind them around your neck. Write them on the tablet of your heart-

The idea is that devotion to the covenant should be externally visible as well as in the heart. But the New Testament emphasizes that it is God who writes upon the table of the human heart by His Spirit (2 Cor. 3:3). Solomon assumes that by intellectual effort, man can do this to himself. There could be the implication that Solomon considered that his Proverbs had now replaced the tables of the covenant; the same word is used. See on :1,2.

Pro 3:4 So you will find favour and good understanding in the sight of God and man-
Quoted in Lk. 2:52 about the Lord Jesus, who fulfilled all the advice to the "son" who is addressed in this part of Proverbs.

Pro 3:5 Trust in Yahweh with all your heart, and don't lean on your own understanding-

Trust in God is indeed predicated upon some form of "understanding", although not necessarily of the abstract, academic type which Solomon had in view. Trusting and leaning are parallel; to trust in Yahweh requires "understanding" of Him. For faith must have some basis, there are things which need to be believed before "faith" can be faith. Thus David predicates "trust" (s.w.) upon knowing Yahweh's Name, His character (Ps. 9:10). But David's "trust" in God was connected with his trust or belief in God's mercy to him regarding his sins (Ps. 13:5; 21:7; 32:10 s.w.). But Solomon doesn't seem to have had any conscience of personal sin, and so trust in the Yahweh whose lead characteristic is grace and forgiveness was not elicited within him.

LXX "be not exalted in thine own wisdom" is precisely what Solomon did; he disobeyed his own teaching. Just as he did regarding marrying Gentiles.

Pro 3:6 In all your ways acknowledge Him-

Relationship with God is to affect all our ways, not merely some of them; just as the regulations concerning offerings required that every part of the animal [representative of the offerer] be given to Him.

And He will make your paths straight-

We must 'rightly divide', or cut straight, the word of truth in our preaching of it (2 Tim. 2:15). The LXX uses the same word in Prov. 3:6: "He will make straight your paths". We are to offer people a clear, straight way to the Kingdom; to span that gulf between the word of God and the mind of man. And this is why simple, direct preaching of Gospel truths is always the most successful.

Pro 3:7 Don't be wise in your own eyes. Fear Yahweh, and depart from evil-

Not being 'wise in our own eyes' is a major theme of Solomon's Proverbs (Prov. 3:7; 12:15; 26:12,16; 28:11). We are to recognize that there is no inherent wisdom in man; it must be taught to us from God's word. And yet we live in a postmodern world, where what seems or feels good to our own gut is taken to be the highest personal truth. This was what led Judah to condemnation (s.w. Is. 5:21), because trusting in their own opinions and gut feelings left them insensitive to God's word. Paul quotes the idea in Rom. 12:16; to be wise in our own eyes means that we ignore those whom

we naturally consider worthy of being ignored. But that is not necessarily the way of the Spirit. But when Solomon lost his faith, he comments that whether a man has wise eyes or not (s.w.) is irrelevant in the face of death (Ecc. 2:14). He clearly conceived wisdom as only helpful for this life; he had no real personal faith in the resurrection of the dead or the establishment of the future Kingdom of God. And this led him to ultimately despise his own wisdom as futile.

Pro 3:8 It will be health to your body, and nourishment to your bones-

Solomon may have the idea here that there will be literal blessings to our health if God's laws are obeyed; and that may also be hinted at in Ex. 15:26; Dt. 7:15. But true as this may have been in a way under the old covenant, this fails to appreciate that bad things have always happened to good people. Material blessings and lack of trials simply haven't been the consistent experience of God's people; for none have been completely righteous. But Solomon had a black and white view of things, and his own apparent good health made him incline the more towards it.

Pro 3:9 Honour Yahweh with your substance, with the first fruits of all your increase-

This is true enough, but Solomon has a subtext it seems. He was obsessed with building the temple, and as the Israelites had 'honoured Yahweh with their substance' in their contributions towards making the tabernacle, so they were asked to do so for the building of the temple. The firstfruits were to be given to the priests for them to live off, but perhaps Solomon is implying they should be given to the king to help the building of the temple. In this case he would be subtly changing the Mosaic law to his own advantage.

Pro 3:10 so your barns will be filled with plenty, and your vats will overflow with new wine-

As noted on :8, this may be true in the sense that the old covenant promised such blessings. But spiritual reality is far more nuanced than that. The Lord told a parable of the unbelieving Jew whose barns were so filled with plenty that he had to build greater barns (Lk. 12:18). But this was not due to his honouring Yahweh as required (:9). Perhaps this was the Lord's way of pointing out that things simply aren't as black and white as Solomon was perhaps suggesting.

Pro 3:11 My son, don't despise Yahweh's discipline, neither be weary of His reproof-

Proverbs is a book full of Solomon's reproof of others. And yet he veers towards playing God, by equating his reproofs with those of Yahweh. What he said was indeed Divinely inspired, but his later apostasy had its roots in this kind of playing God. Yet these words are true, and quoted in Hebrews as encouragement to every true child of God (Heb. 12:5,6). Indeed Solomon is quoting here from Job 5:17. Those were the words of Eliphaz, who said many things which were untrue. We have here an insight into the nature of Divine inspiration. The Bible is indeed wholly inspired as a record of the words and deeds of men; but there is a difference between inspiration of the record, and revelation- in the sense of a "Thus says the Lord". Not all that Eliphaz said was true, and he is rebuked by God for not speaking rightly at the end of the book. But this particular observation was true enough, and given to Solomon as inspired wisdom from God, and likewise quoted under inspiration in Hebrews.

Pro 3:12 for whom Yahweh loves, He reproves; even as a father reproves the son in whom he delights-

This is true, and is quoted as true in Hebrews. But Solomon was 'the one whom Yahweh loves' (2 Sam. 12:24; the same words are used), and there is a subtext here of self justification. Solomon therefore considers himself the son of God in whom God supremely delighted. He uses a Hebrew for "reproves" which can also mean "justifies". It is perhaps in commentary upon Solomon's mistaken ideas about himself that Messiah is called the one whom Yahweh loves (Is. 48:14), the one in whom He supremely delighted (Is. 42:1). David perceived that Yahweh's delight is in those who hope for His mercy and grace after they have sinned (Ps. 147:11); but Solomon seems to have known nothing of personal sin and the receipt of grace upon forgiveness.

Pro 3:13 Happy is the man who finds wisdom, the man who gets understanding-
This is true on one level, but it is a simplistic position. The same words are used in the book of Job for how wisdom in its ultimate sense cannot be "found", but rather must be taught and given by the experience of God's grace through affliction (Job 28:12; 32:13). Solomon often alludes to the book of Job (see on :15), yet he chooses to disregard this. Again Solomon is assuming that there exists "wisdom" as in a set of absolute truth which is attainable by God's people if they listen to the right teachers and intellectually master the system. This is an attitude found in many fundamentalist Christians.

Pro 3:14 For her good profit is better than getting silver, and her return is better than fine gold-

This is true, but Solomon is again hinting at his own justification; for God had commended him for not seeking wealth but wisdom. And yet he seems to relish the fact that God added wealth to him despite not asking for it; for he teaches in :16 that wisdom gives wealth. But the wealth given to Solomon was by pure Divine grace; and yet he sees it rather as an outcome of his own wisdom.

Pro 3:15 She is more precious than rubies. None of the things you can desire are to be compared to her-

The words of Job 28:18 are repeatedly quoted in Proverbs (Prov. 3:15; 8:11; 20:15). "Wisdom" in Proverbs refers not so much to nuggets of isolated truth, but to a way of life in relationship with God; for that is the context in the source passage in Job 28:18 cp. 28. I noted on :13 that although Solomon was clearly aware of Job 28, he chose to only quote what was appealing to him, and ignores that which is inconvenient to his agendas.

Pro 3:16 Length of days is in her right hand, in her left hand are riches and honour-
Length of days was offered as a gift from God in the old covenant; but in return for not having a heart which turned aside to idols (Dt. 30:17,20). Solomon seems to imply that this "length of days" comes instead from merely possessing "wisdom". And because of this, his heart did indeed turn away to idols. Solomon has just said that wisdom is far better than riches (see on :14), but now he claims that wisdom gives wealth. It doesn't, and the Bible is clear enough about that. In his case, his choice of wisdom over wealth led to God blessing him with wealth, but by His grace alone. Solomon seems to wrongly extrapolate from his own experience to a more general principle which is wrong. He saw his wealth as due to his wisdom, rather than due to God's grace; and he ends up wrongly implying that the path to wealth is through loving wisdom.

Pro 3:17 Her ways are ways of pleasantness, all her paths are peace-

Again, Solomon presents a simplistic view. For the lives of those who follow God are rarely those of idyllic peace. The seed of the woman and that of the serpent are ever in conflict. He fails to appreciate that final peace is only possible in God's future Kingdom, rather than solely by following his rule book as presented in the book of Proverbs.

Pro 3:18 She is a tree of life to those who lay hold of her. Happy is each one who retains her-

The way to the tree of life is what we are currently travelling. But Eden is not yet restored. Again, whilst Solomon's words are true as far as they go, they imply a lack of faith and understanding of the future Kingdom of God. He liked to think that he was the Messianic ruler of Ps. 72, as his father had unwisely enthused and fantasized about.

Pro 3:19 By wisdom Yahweh founded the earth, by understanding He established the heavens-

Here and in :20 we have more allusions to the book of Job. This and the Pentateuch were likely the only scriptures possessed by him and his father. As David often alludes to Job, so does Solomon; and we suspect that in this we see a living out of parental expectation, a worshipping of the dominant father figure, rather than personal faith. It was by God's word that the earth was created (Ps. 33:6), but Solomon says it was by wisdom. This is also true (Jer. 10:12), but by "wisdom" Solomon appears to have in view specifically the wisdom he is teaching in this book. And thus he makes his Proverbs effectively the entire word of God, when they are only part of His total revelation. Solomon alludes to the book of Job, but not to those parts which don't quite fit with his simplistic views. For Job 38:4 leaves Job humbled that he doesn't in fact know anything about the founding of the earth, neither does he have such "understanding". But Solomon is saying that the same Divine understanding which was the blueprint for creation is in fact in us all if we accept the wisdom and understanding of the book of Proverbs. This is only partially true; man's lack of understanding and wisdom is a feature of Job, but is not at all reflected in Solomon's thinking.

Pro 3:20 By His knowledge the depths were broken up and the skies drop down the dew-

See on :19. Solomon will go on to now claim that this same knowledge is within us (:21). His claims to hold absolute truth lead him to minimize the wonder of creation, rather than being humbled by it as were David and Job. The breaking up of the depths is the phrase used about the flood (Gen. 7:11). Solomon seems to be saying that we can have the same knowledge as God in judging others; and this is inappropriate for us as fellow sinners who are not to condemn others.

Pro 3:21 My son, let them not depart from your eyes. Keep sound wisdom and discretion-

See on :19,20. Prov. 4:21 develops this thought, interpreting the eyes as the heart: "Let them not depart from your eyes. Keep them in the midst of your heart".

"Discretion" really means plans or intentions. Our entire mindset, intentions, dreams, hopes are to be dominated by wisdom. This is the essence of the spiritual life; to be

spiritually minded. But we live in an age which like no others seeks to dominate our thinking with unspiritual things.

Pro 3:22 so they will be life to your soul, and grace for your neck-

The idea is perhaps that what we think internally within our "soul" will be displayed outwardly as well, like a chain around our neck; see on Prov. 1:9. True spirituality is not just a matter of the mind; it will be outwardly revealed. A city set on a hill cannot be hid; there is to always be some external manifestation of our inward faith and belief. Yet Solomon reasons as if the mere possession of truth is what will adorn us before God. But it is personalization of the wisdom, not mere possession of it, which is required. And Solomon was a stellar example of failure in this. It was rulers who had chains around their necks, and Solomon has himself obliquely in view here; and he considers that the fact he was taught truth by his parents qualifies himself as king. That is not altogether untrue, but his personal example shows that it was not the right attitude.

Pro 3:23 Then you shall walk in your way securely; your foot won't stumble-

The idea is taken from Ps. 91:12, where the Angels "will bear you up in their hands, so that you won't dash your foot against a stone". The same words are used. The potential for Joshua is true for us all. "Guard" is the same word used in Gen. 3:24, and thus alludes to the Angels keeping men in the way to the tree of life- not only physically but spiritually preserving them. The figure of dashing the foot against a stone suggests the idea of spiritual stumbling against a "rock of offence" or stumblingstone (s.w. Jer. 13:16, of how the exiles refused this potential help and did stumble). The Angels bore up the Lord Jesus (to whom Ps. 91:12 refers) to help Him avoid these. But only because He Himself wished for that strength, and avoided the temptation He faced to abuse it and wrongly use it.

Pro 3:24 When you lie down, you will not be afraid. Yes, you will lie down, and your sleep will be sweet-

This repeats the theme of many Psalms of David his father when under persecution. But David attributed this to his faith in God's grace and sustenance (Ps. 3:5); whereas Solomon appears to attribute it to the mere possession of wisdom, rather than personal faith.

Pro 3:25 Don't be afraid of sudden fear, neither of the desolation of the wicked when it comes-

Again, this is true but only to an extent. "Sudden fear" is a phrase only used about the experience of Job (Job 22:10). He was a righteous man, yet afflicted with "sudden fear". Solomon presents a too simplistic view, whereby the righteous live a charmed life of every blessing. And he seems to think that the mere possession of wisdom frees us from any fear of condemnation, the "desolation of the wicked" which is to come. It was this which led Solomon to fail so badly; he had no sense of the conditionality of his relationship with God, no sense of the eternal future he might miss.

Pro 3:26 for Yahweh will be your confidence, and will keep your foot from being taken-

Solomon's prophetic sonship of David was conditional upon him preserving or observing Yahweh's ways (1 Kings 2:4; 1 Chron. 22:13; 2 Chron. 7:17); but he didn't preserve or observe them (1 Kings 11:10,11); despite David praying that Solomon

would be given a heart to observe them (1 Chron. 29:19). We can pray for God to work upon the hearts of others, but He will not force people against their own deepest will and heart position. Solomon stresses overmuch how God would keep or preserve the righteous (Prov. 2:8; 3:26), without recognizing the conditional aspect of this. Why did Solomon go wrong? His Proverbs are true enough, but he stresses that obedience to *his* wisdom and teaching would preserve his hearers (Prov. 4:4; 6:22; 7:1; 8:32; 15:5), preservation was through following the example of the wise (Prov. 2:20); rather than stressing obedience to *God's* ways, and replacing David his father's simple love of God with a love of academic wisdom: "Yahweh preserves all those who love Him" (Ps. 145:20).

Pro 3:27 Don't withhold good from those to whom it is due when it is in the power of your hand to do it-

This is a powerful, incisive challenge to us in our approach to generosity. But again we note how Solomon fences it with the comment "to whom it is due". He sees generosity as predicated upon the worthiness of the recipient. Grace doesn't think like that. He may have in view the payment of wages (Dt. 24:15).

Pro 3:28 Don't say to your neighbour, Go, and come again; tomorrow I will give it to you, when you have it by you-

There is a tendency in human nature to play for time, to not say "Yes straight away" to the calls of Divinely inspired conscience. We see throughout scripture the theme of immediate response, not least in the immediate baptisms of those who heard the Gospel in the Acts of the Apostles. Our nature is the source of our temptations, and there is always the voice of the flesh which urges us to perform our devotions tomorrow and not today. The LXX adds "For thou knowest not what the morrow may bring forth". We may not have the opportunity tomorrow, so, do it today; but that only makes sense if we are possessed of a basic desire to be generous. Solomon may here be interpreting further Dt. 24:15. In this case, paying a worker on time is a form of doing good (:27).

Pro 3:29 Don't devise evil against your neighbour, since he dwells securely by you- "Devise" is literally to plough (as Prov. 6:14). The idea is that bad attitudes to others are a sowing of sin (Prov. 22:8). Solomon so often has a subtext of justifying his father David and his own rulership, seeing there were initially other contenders for the throne. Many of those pretensions to David's throne arose from the fact that David's "neighbour" did "evil" to him by taking his wives at the time of Absalom's rebellion (s.w. 2 Sam. 12:11). This "evil" was brought about by God, and yet Solomon condemns those who did it. That may be fair enough, but again we have to note that David is ever seeking to whitewash David and Bathsheba, Solomon's mother, regarding their sin.

Pro 3:30 Don't strive with a man without cause if he has done you no harm-

To strive or plead a cause is the very phrase used of the opposition of Saul (1 Sam. 24:15) and Nabal to David (1 Sam. 25:39); and in both cases, David had done them "no harm", the phrase used of David's innocence before Nabal (1 Sam. 25:21,28) and Saul (1 Sam. 24:11). Clearly Solomon has these incidents in view, and again his statements of truth have a subtext of justifying his father David, with whom he was psychologically obsessed.

Pro 3:31 Don't envy the man of violence; choose none of his ways-

David had calmly urged not to be envious of the wicked (s.w. Ps. 37:1), but he himself almost failed in this (Ps. 73:3 s.w.). We can profess clearly how much we are not envious of others; and then find ourselves like David, caught in a pang of crisis when we wonder why our lives cannot be like those of the world around us. Solomon simplistically commanded not to be envious of the wicked, drawing a simple contrast between the wicked, and the righteous who are not envious of them (Prov. 3:31; 23:17; 24:1,19 s.w.). But this is not how it was in reality with his father David, who admits to almost having given in to envy of the wicked (Ps. 73:3) despite his earlier simplistic condemnation of such envy (Ps. 37:1), and was only saved from that by God's gracious action on his heart (Ps. 73:2). Solomon's proverbs seem to fail to address this complexity of situations because of his own self-righteousness; and yet all he says is inspired and true so far as it goes.

Pro 3:32 For the perverse person is an abomination to Yahweh, but His friendship is with the upright-

The Hebrew for "perverse" is literally 'the one who turns aside', implying they were once on the right path but had left it. It would seem that Solomon has in view the house of Saul, who were potential contenders for his throne. "Friendship" is AV "secret", a term sometimes used of God's revealed word (Am. 3:7; Job 15:8; Jer. 23:18,22). In this case, Solomon is again veering towards saying that mere possession of God's word of truth is what makes people "upright".

Pro 3:33 Yahweh's curse is in the house of the wicked, but He blesses the habitation of the righteous-

Here as in Prov. 14:11, Solomon again fails to have the subtlety he ought to have learnt from the book of Job. For Job was righteous but his "house" was overthrown, and the house of the wicked apparently prospered at the time of his affliction. Spiritual reality is that things are far more nuanced than the simplistic picture Solomon presents, true as it is in outline and ultimate terms.

Pro 3:34 Surely He mocks the mockers-

But this is not quite how God is, even to those who are against Him. Solomon should again have learned the lesson of Job, who was taught that "God despises not any" (Job 36:5).

But He gives grace to the humble-

This is quoted in James 4:5; 1 Pet. 5:5. But the quotation follows the LXX, which appears to correct Solomon's incorrect statement in the first half of the verse. God "resists the proud", but not with the mockery which Solomon's arrogance liked to impute to God.

Pro 3:35 The wise will inherit glory, but shame will be the promotion of fools-

David had called Solomon a "wise man", and indeed he was made wise by God (s.w. 1 Kings 2:9; 3:12; 5:7). But the logic of what Solomon seems to be saying is that the possession of wisdom makes a man obedient. And this is where he got it wrong; for his mere possession of wisdom didn't do so. And comparing Proverbs with Solomon's personal life as revealed in Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon and the historical records- all indicates that in fact Solomon's possession of wisdom didn't at all make him obedient. Solomon failed to appreciate what David did- that the wise man also dies

(Ps. 49:10). What is critical is having the hope of God's Kingdom and the resurrection of the body. But Solomon's possession of "truth" blinded him to this desperate need of all men. The mere possession of wisdom was no guarantee of itself of inheriting glory, as Solomon wrongly thought.

PROVERBS CHAPTER 4

Pro 4:1 Listen, sons, to a father's instruction. Pay attention and know understanding-

If we "attend" to God's word (Prov. 2:2; 4:1; 7:24), then He will "attend" to our word, of prayer (Ps. 55:2 and often in the Psalms). There is thereby a mutuality between God and man. Our attitude to His word becomes reflected in His attitude to our words in prayer; for God and man are in dialogue.

Pro 4:2 for I give you sound learning. Don't forsake my law-

Solomon condemns those who "forsake the law" (Prov. 4:2; 28:4), and he likely has the house of Saul in view as his father David when using this phrase (Ps. 119:53). But he speaks here in Prov. 4:2 of those who forsook his law; as if he was playing God, considering any inattention to himself as inattention to God. David by contrast continually emphasizes the need not to forsake God's law.

David so often talks about God's "law", using the word torah. But Solomon so often speaks of his own torah, and that of his wife, the mother of "my son" (s.w. Prov. 1:8; 3:1; 4:2; 6:20; 7:2; 13:14; 31:26). Yet elsewhere in the Bible, the well over 200 occurrences of torah are always about God's law. Solomon applies the word to his own teachings and that of his wife, and thereby plays God. Whilst it could be argued that Solomon's teachings were Divinely inspired, all the same he ought surely to have spoken of them as God's torah rather than his own torah. This kind of playing God is seen so often in the teachers of God's people.

Pro 4:3 For I was a son to my father, tender and an only child in the sight of my mother-

David had taught his children with the words: "Come, ye children, hearken unto me: I will teach you the fear of the Lord" (Ps. 34:11- did David say this to his children every evening?). And Solomon uses just the same words, even whilst disobeying God's law at the same time in his own life: "Hear, ye children, the instruction of a father... I give you good doctrine... for I was my father's son, tender and only beloved in the sight of my mother. He taught me also, and said unto me, Let thine heart retain my words: keep my commandments and live" (Prov. 4:1-4 AV). And so Solomon taught his kids with the same outward form of words, although the personal reality of wisdom was lost on him.

David took time out from his busy schedule to spend time instructing his special, beloved son. And David wasn't just playing Scrabble with Solomon in the evenings; he was really drumming into that lad vital spiritual values. Solomon really respected David and loved his mother; he was without doubt the blue eyed boy to her, and he reacted accordingly. We have seen how in Prov. 31 she lays the law down with him about his girlfriends, about not marrying Gentiles, and about not drinking, yet in Song 3:11 we see Bathsheba with

all her motherly pride crowning Solomon on the day of engagement to that Egyptian girl who was to be his downfall. Like David, Bathsheba taught Solomon the principles with great enthusiasm, but she allowed parental pride to make her dismiss the possibility that her son was seriously going astray.

Here again, Solomon justifies himself by implying that he was David's only son. He wasn't, and his half brothers were in bitter competition with him. And so he uses his wisdom to just get the point in that he was the only legitimate heir to the throne.

Pro 4:4 He taught me, and said to me: Let your heart retain my words. Keep my commandments, and live-

Solomon's prophetic sonship of David was conditional upon him preserving or observing Yahweh's ways (1 Kings 2:4; 1 Chron. 22:13; 2 Chron. 7:17); but he didn't preserve or observe them (1 Kings 11:10,11); despite David praying that Solomon would be given a heart to observe them (1 Chron. 29:19). We can pray for God to work upon the hearts of others, but He will not force people against their own deepest will and heart position. Solomon stresses overmuch how God would keep or preserve the righteous (Prov. 2:8; 3:26), without recognizing the conditional aspect of this. Why did Solomon go wrong? His Proverbs are true enough, but he stresses that obedience to his wisdom and teaching would preserve his hearers (Prov. 4:4; 6:22; 7:1; 8:32; 15:5), preservation was through following the example of the wise (Prov. 2:20); rather than stressing obedience to God's ways, and replacing David his father's simple love of God with a love of academic wisdom: "Yahweh preserves all those who love Him" (Ps. 145:20).

Pro 4:5 Get wisdom. Get understanding. Don't forget, neither swerve from the words of my mouth-

"Swerve" is the word for "incline" or "decline", used by David of how he himself inclined his heart to God's word (Ps. 119:51,112,157). But David prayed that God would incline his heart towards His word (Ps. 119:36) and away from sin (Ps. 141:4). This is how the Holy Spirit works to this day- we are confirmed in the psychological attitudes we ourselves choose to have. The word is used of God's mighty "stretched out" arm and "strong hand" in human affairs (Ps. 136:12 and often in Isaiah). This powerful hand of God is at work in human hearts, confirming us in the psychological way in which we ourselves wish to go. In this sense God turns or inclines the heart where He wishes (Prov. 21:1). Solomon in the Proverbs places all the emphasis upon a person themselves in their own strength inclining their heart toward his teaching (Prov. 2:2; 4:5,20; 5:1). He fails to appreciate what David his father did; that God's word is His word and not that of the human channel through which it comes. And he totally puts the emphasis upon human strength of will, self inclination towards God's word, rather than perceiving as David did that without God's psychological help in this, we shall ultimately fail. As Solomon himself did.

Pro 4:6 Don't forsake her, and she will preserve you. Love her, and she will keep you-

David sees God Himself as preserving and keeping him, by His grace (s.w. Ps. 12:7; 140:4), whereas Solomon sees our keeping and preservation as predicted upon our keeping and preserving of wisdom (s.w. Prov. 5:2). He reasons as did the brethren

with misplaced ideals who told me to keep and preserve "the truth" delivered to me as a teenager, and I would be fine in the end. Intellectual maintenance of theological positions will not save in the end; it is God's grace by faith, as David learned by experience.

Pro 4:7 Wisdom is supreme. Get wisdom. Yes, though it costs all your possessions, get understanding-

It is possible that he asked for wisdom only because his father David had taught him to ask for it, just as he taught his children (Prov. 4:5-7). Again Solomon alludes to how he was commended for choosing wisdom over wealth, as ever justifying himself.

Pro 4:8 Esteem her, and she will exalt you. She will bring you to honour when you embrace her-

Dt. 17:17-20 is a warning to the King of Israel not to multiply horses and wives, lest his heart be turned away. It's a conscious prediction of Solomon's apostasy. But one result of such behaviour would be that the King's heart would be "lifted up" or exalted above his brethren (Dt. 17:20)- and this is exactly what happened to Solomon. He came to see himself as somehow above the rest of humanity, to the extent that he was convinced that he was acceptable to God, and that he could abuse his brethren because... he had wisdom. Significantly, Solomon uses the same Hebrew word translated "lifted up" in Dt. 17:20 in Prov. 4:8, when he speaks of how the possession of wisdom will "exalt" or lift up a person. He came to think that his mere possession of true wisdom gave him a superiority over others, and thus he was lifted up above his brethren. There are major warnings here for those who consider that they possess more Bible truth than any other church on earth. It has, sadly, led to a lifting up of many hearts above their fellow man and even their fellow brethren.

Pro 4:9 She will give to your head a garland of grace. She will deliver a crown of splendour to you-

Again Solomon reasons as if the mere possession of truth is what will adorn us before God. But it is personalization of the wisdom, not mere possession of it, which is required. And Solomon was a stellar example of failure in this.

Pro 4:10 O my son, receive my sayings; and the years of your life shall be many-

This is alluding to the promise of long life for the obedient to God's laws; but never does Solomon make the admission that his laws are only a repetition of God's laws. He was playing God by implying that his words carried the weight of God's words. He taught his son obedience to him as a father, but not to God Himself.

Pro 4:11 I have taught you in the way of wisdom, I have led you in straight paths-

He is repeating the words of David in Ps. 32:8: "I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go: I will guide thee with mine eye". But those words in their context were wrung from a David desperately grateful for God's forgiveness of his sin with Bathsheba. Solomon hadn't gone through this contrition- he was a self-justified womanizer, and yet he used the same outward form of words as his father. Solomon assumes he is going in the right way when he says: "I have led thee in right paths" (Prov. 4:11 AV), in subtle contrast to the way David repeatedly asks to be led in the right way by God Almighty (Ps. 23:3; 25:4,5).

Pro 4:12 When you go, your steps will not be hampered. When you run, you will not

stumble-

Again Solomon presents a simplistic picture of the life of wisdom as running without stumbling. The only other reference to steps not being hampered is when the phrase is used about Job in Job 18:7. The reality of spiritual life is that there are times when the steps of the righteous are hampered, and even a righteous man like David stumbled in his path (s.w. Ps. 31:10, and again about Job in Job 4:4).

Pro 4:13 Take firm hold of instruction. Don't let her go. Keep her, for she is your life-
This is the language of Dt. 31:17,20, which taught that if Israel's heart did not decline to idols, then Yahweh Himself would "be your life". Solomon's heart did decline to idols. Because he appropriates the language of personal relationship with God to intellectual acceptance of abstract truth and wisdom. And so many in fundamentalist Christian circles have made the same mistake.

Pro 4:14 Don't enter into the path of the wicked. Don't walk in the way of evil men-
This is of course true, but Solomon is also making a swipe as his competitor and potential usurper Jeroboam, who is described as walking in the way of evil (s.w. 1 Kings 13:33). It seems that always Solomon uses Divine truth to his own self justification, as we can.

Pro 4:15 Avoid it, and don't pass by it; turn from it, and pass on-
Throughout Proverbs, Solomon assumes that he, his sons and his audience are already on the right path, and must not turn aside to the way of the wicked. There is no search for the right way by Solomon, because he assumes that the gift of theoretical truth and "wisdom" to him meant that he personally was walking the path of that truth. But it is one thing to know truth and another to walk the talk. And he totally failed in this, disobeying his own wisdom about women whilst writing it.

Pro 4:16 For they don't sleep, unless they do evil. Their sleep is taken away, unless they make someone fall-
This is all true, it is Divinely inspired wisdom. But 'being made to fall' is the word used of David after his sin with Bathsheba, Solomon's mother (Ps. 31:10), and he appears to want to whitewash this by blaming it upon evil men who made David do it.

Pro 4:17 For they eat the bread of wickedness, and drink the wine of violence-
The contrast is with the invitation of wisdom to eat her bread and drink her wine (Prov. 9:5). Solomon again presents life as being of diametrical opposites, with people within Israel divided between the desperately, criminally wicked- and the spotlessly wise and righteous. But this is simply not true to reality. Human thought and behaviour within the people of God is more mixed than that. Bread and wine even in Old Testament times were of sacramental significance. The wicked are presented as not offering true sacrifice, but a fake appearance of it, to the praise and glory of wickedness and violence. Whereas the wise offer perfectly acceptable sacrifice.

Pro 4:18 But the path of the righteous is like the light of the dawn, that shines more and more until the perfect day-

As often noted on Proverbs, Solomon sees the righteous as having an unrealistically glorious path towards "the perfect day", their way ever brighter, never stumbling, with no darkness. But as noted on :12 that is simply not the case. The language here is very similar to that in 2 Sam. 23:4, where David speaks of his Messianic son as being as

the ever brighter shining light of the dawn. His hope was of course that Solomon would be that Messianic son, and he expresses that hope in his Psalm for Solomon in Ps. 72. So again, Solomon speaks global truths about the righteous, but always seems to have himself in view as the parade example. When in fact at the very time he was writing down this Divine wisdom, he was living in an utterly opposite way by marrying pagan women.

We may interpret this verse as meaning that the dawn of the sun of righteousness at the Lord's second coming is in fact presaged by the bursting of light upon His people in the lead up to it. This would make "the perfect day" equivalent to the future Kingdom. But I doubt this is what Solomon himself had in mind; because he considered himself as the Messianic ruler, and his kingdom to be the Kingdom of God. He has nothing much to say about the hope of the resurrection of the body and the coming of the Kingdom; he considered that his possession of wisdom meant that he had the glory of the Kingdom in this life. And it was this refusal to accept the gospel of a future Kingdom of God which was his moral undoing.

"Perfect" is the word translated "establish" concerning the establishment of the Kingdom of David's son (2 Sam. 7:12). Solomon understood this to mean that he was indeed the Messianic son, he saw no future greater son of David than himself. He saw the righteous as slowly attaining to his own great light, climaxing in his kingdom becoming the full Kingdom of God on earth. But his apostasy meant that this was not to be, and the dawning of Zion's light is yet future (s.w. Is. 60:3,19). He refused to accept that the eternal "establishment" of his kingdom was dependent upon his personal obedience (1 Chron. 28:7).

Pro 4:19 The way of the wicked is like darkness-

This is so, but as it is baldly presented here, it fails to reflect the nuance of spiritual life in practice. Solomon considered himself absolutely and totally right, and all who followed his wisdom would never know darkness. But the righteous man Job had darkness set in his way by God (Job 19:8), and every truly sensitive believer will go through times when the darkness is such that we can't find our paths.

They don't know what they stumble over-

"Stumble" is the word for "fall" in :16. The wicked make others fall, and they themselves fall. The idea is that they want to bring down others with them. This is a basic human desire; to make others like ourselves, to not sin alone.

Pro 4:20 My son, attend to my words. Turn your ear to my sayings-

See on :5; Prov. 2:2. As noted on Ps. 119:36; 141:4, David believed that God could act deep within the psychology or heart of man, to incline us toward righteousness and away from evil. This is how the Holy Spirit works today. Solomon believed the same (s.w. 1 Kings 8:58), but only in theory; for his Gentile wives inclined or turned away his heart from God (s.w. 1 Kings 11:3,9). God will not turn our hearts anywhere we ourselves don't want to go. Solomon often appeals for us to incline our hearts to wisdom (s.w. Prov. 2:2; 4:20; 5:1; 22:17), but he himself was inclined to apostasy (s.w. 1 Kings 11:3,9). All his emphasis is upon the need to incline ourselves, whereas his father David trusted in the work of the Spirit to incline his heart to good and away from evil (Ps. 141:4; 119:36 etc.).

Pro 4:21 Let them not depart from your eyes. Keep them in the midst of your heart-
Our entire mindset, intentions, dreams, hopes are to be dominated by wisdom. This is the essence of the spiritual life; to be spiritually minded. But we live in an age which like no others seeks to dominate our thinking with unspiritual things. See on Prov. 3:21.

Pro 4:22 For they are life to those who find them, and health to their whole body-
Life and health are here made dependent upon Solomon's words (:20). He has again subverted the teachings about God's words and applied them to his words. Even though they were divinely inspired, he speaks as if his book of Proverbs eclipses all other Divine revelation. See on Prov. 15:4.

Pro 4:23 Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it is the wellspring of life-
Solomon often emphasized the importance of keeping the heart (Prov. 2:10-16; 3:5,6; 4:23-5:5; 6:23-26); he had foreseen that the essential sin of God's people was "the plague of his own heart" (1 Kings 8:46), and he imagined how for this sin God's people would later pray towards the temple. And yet his wives turned away his heart (1 Kings 11:13), for all this awareness that the heart must be kept. It was as if the more he knew the truth of something, the more he wanted to do the very opposite. And this is exactly true of our natures. It's why we ourselves can discern the same perversity in our lives. Perhaps with Solomon he reasoned that in his case, foreign wives wouldn't turn away his heart. Just as our flesh thinks 'Yes, but it can't happen to me'. Perhaps too he reasoned that if the temple somehow could bring forgiveness for the plague of the heart, his heart was incorruptible because of the temple.

Pro 4:24 Put away from yourself a perverse mouth, put corrupt lips far from you-
The idea may be that Solomon was the ultimate mouth of wisdom; see on Prov. 15:2,4. And he is warning against listening to any other teachers. Always he seems to have a subtext of commending himself. The only other usage of the term "perverse mouth" is about those whom Solomon considered to be the wicked within Israel (Prov. 6:12). Again, Solomon's idea of spirituality is avoiding false teachers and mixing with sinners- rather than internal spirituality and personal relationship with God.

Pro 4:25 Let your eyes look straight ahead-
The ways of man are "before" or "straight ahead" of Yahweh's eyes (Prov. 5:21 s.w.), and our eyes are to likewise "look straight ahead" (Prov. 4:25 s.w.). Our perspective and vision is to be His. We are to see life as He does. And He looks in the perspective of eternity, His Kingdom on earth which is to dominate the vast majority of our eternal existence. This is the meaning of faith in practice.

Fix your gaze directly before you-
Solomon thinks of the righteous as walking unflinchingly forward in wisdom, never turning to the right or left, refusing to be distracted by any wicked person who suggests walking another way (Prov. 9:15 "to call travellers who go directly on their way"). This approach fails to take account of the simple fact that righteous people sin and stray from the direct path every day, and are saved finally into God's Kingdom by grace alone. That is all something Solomon failed to have any grasp of, whereas David his father did. Prov. 11:5 makes the somewhat tautological statement that "the righteousness of the perfect shall direct his way", s.w. Prov. 4:25 "fix your gaze

directly before you". This contrasts with how David uses the word in Ps. 5:8: "Lead me, O Yahweh... make Your way straight [s.w. direct] before my face". The same statement of God directing in the straight way is found in Is. 45:13; Jer. 18:4 s.w. Solomon didn't see this need for the Spirit of God to direct his path because he assumed that mere possession of Divine truth would itself keep him in the way; hence he teaches that "understanding" makes a man walk "directly" (Prov. 15:21). And he failed miserably because of that arrogant position.

Pro 4:26 Make the path of your feet level. Let all of your ways be established-

If a man prepares his way after God's principles (2 Chron. 27:6; Prov. 4:26), then God will 'prepare' that man's way too (Ps. 37:23; 119:5), confirming him in the way of escape.

When Solomon teaches that God must be allowed to establish or direct our way (Prov. 4:26; 16:29), he is using the same Hebrew words as in Ps. 37:23 and Ps. 119:5, when David says the same. It's as if he was given God's truth and yet he never quite made it his very own- he still articulated it in terms of the faith of his fathers. And thus he lost it in the end. One cannot help notice the great stress placed by Solomon on *teaching* his children, as David had *taught* him. It could be that there was too much emphasis on theory, thinking that by merely teaching the Law, the children would turn out OK. But Dt. 6:1-7 taught that Israel must "*do*" the commandments of the Lord "so that you and your son and your grandson might fear the Lord your God, to keep all His statutes...these words...you shall teach them diligently to your sons". It was by the parents both doing and teaching the Law that their children would "*do*" it too. Behaviour patterns are learnt by observation and experience of parents, not by mere theoretical inculcation. So could it not be that there is a lesson here for us- that the diligent teaching of the Law, as David did to Solomon and as Solomon so proudly did to his children, actually has no lasting effect unless that Law is lived out in a daily life. It seems to me that the Western Christian attitude and program for child-rearing is based very much on the assumption that both parents are believers, marry in their 20s, mother raises the kids and father brings in the money, with the result that the children will in due time also be baptized and repeat the cycle. This is all well and good. But the reality is that less than 7% of America's population fits the traditional nuclear family profile. "Today's family can be a single parent with one or more children, a two-career couple with no children, a female breadwinner with child and househusband, or a blended family that consists of a previously married couple and a combination of children from those two previous marriages" (John Naisbitt, *Megatrends*, NY: Warner Books, 1984 p. 261). Our style of Sunday School material and teaching needs to be appropriate to this reality, if we seek to win this world for Christ rather than just reproduce within the existing Western community. The brethren and sisters of our community and ecclesias must be the de facto spiritual parents of many of our children. Mere doctrinal teaching *alone* is not enough- it must be seen regularly and meaningfully and relevantly to be lived out in transformed lives. Solomon's Proverbs, although inspired by God, have so many similarities with the Psalms of his father David. It seems to me that although he was of course inspired in writing Proverbs, he chose to articulate the wisdom given him in terms which his father had used in his songs, prayers and Psalms.

Pro 4:27 Don't turn to the right hand nor to the left-

The Angel put Balaam in a position where he couldn't turn to the right hand nor the left, and thereby he was forced to face up to his sin (s.w. Num. 22:26). But this was of God's providence, attempting to bring the man to repentance. Whereas Solomon

seems to assume that the power to not turn to the right nor left is solely within the steel will of the individual. He totally denies God's action in human life and hearts, just as many self congratulatory legalists do today.

Remove your foot from evil-

Removing or departing from evil is a major theme of Proverbs (Prov. 13:19; 14:16; 16:6,17). Solomon uses the same phrase in Ecc. 11:10, but he gives the reason as being because youth is vanity; old age will prove that there is no point in not departing from evil, and going the way of evil, like going the way of righteousness, is all the same vanity. This nihilistic approach is because Solomon failed to discern that the end point of the path of righteousness, departing or removing our foot from the way of evil, is the redemption of the body in God's future Kingdom. But because he failed to understand that, he ends up concluding as he gets older that the choice between evil and good is all the same vain and meaningless. It is the hope of the resurrection of the body, the reality of judgment to come and the future Kingdom of God, which make morality of so much meaning today. We may also note again Solomon's overly simplistic idea that if a man removes himself from evil, all will go wonderfully for him in life. The same phrase is used of how Job removed himself from, or "eschewed", evil; but his life was traumatic and without all the blessings for wisdom which Solomon liked to imagine.

PROVERBS CHAPTER 5

Pro 5:1

My son, pay attention to my wisdom, turn your ear to my understanding-

See on Prov. 2:2. As noted on Ps. 119:36; 141:4, David believed that God could act deep within the psychology or heart of man, to incline us toward righteousness and away from evil. This is how the Holy Spirit works today. Solomon believed the same (s.w. 1 Kings 8:58), but only in theory; for his Gentile wives inclined or turned away his heart from God (s.w. 1 Kings 11:3,9). God will not turn our hearts anywhere we ourselves don't want to go. Solomon often appeals for us to turn our ears / incline our hearts to wisdom (s.w. Prov. 2:2; 4:20; 5:1; 22:17), but he himself was inclined to apostasy (s.w. 1 Kings 11:3,9). All his emphasis is upon the need to incline ourselves, whereas his father David trusted in the work of the Spirit to incline his heart to good and away from evil (Ps. 141:4; 119:36 etc.).

"Turn your ear" is the word for "incline", used by David of how he himself inclined his heart to God's word (Ps. 119:51,112,157). But David prayed that God would incline his heart towards His word (Ps. 119:36) and away from sin (Ps. 141:4). This is how the Holy Spirit works to this day- we are confirmed in the psychological attitudes we ourselves choose to have. The word is used of God's mighty "stretched out" arm and "strong hand" in human affairs (Ps. 136:12 and often in Isaiah). This powerful hand of God is at work in human hearts, confirming us in the psychological way in which we ourselves wish to go. In this sense God turns or inclines the heart where He wishes (Prov. 21:1). Solomon in the Proverbs places all the emphasis upon a person themselves in their own strength inclining their heart toward his teaching (Prov. 2:2; 4:5,20; 5:1). He fails to appreciate what David his father did; that God's word is His word and not that of the human channel through which it comes. And he totally puts the emphasis upon human strength of will, self inclination towards God's word, rather than perceiving as David did that without God's psychological help in this, we shall ultimately fail. As Solomon himself did.

Pro 5:2 that you may maintain discretion, that your lips may preserve knowledge-
David sees God Himself as preserving and keeping him, by His grace (s.w. Ps. 12:7; 140:4), whereas Solomon sees our keeping and preservation as predicted upon our keeping and preserving of wisdom (Prov. 4:6 s.w. Prov. 5:2). He reasons as did the brethren with misplaced ideals who told me to keep and preserve "the truth" delivered to me as a teenager, and I would be fine in the end. Intellectual maintenance of theological positions will not save in the end; it is God's grace by faith, as David learned by experience.

Pro 5:3 For the lips of an adulteress drip honey. Her mouth is smoother than oil-
The blindness of Solomon is driven home time and again. The strange woman has words like a honeycomb (Prov. 5:3); and yet this is exactly how Solomon found his woman's words (Song 4:11).

Pro 5:4 but in the end she is as bitter as wormwood, and as sharp as a two-edged sword-
He personally rejected this wisdom and only came to agree with it through doing just what he here condemns (Ecc. 7:26).

Pro 5:5 Her feet go down to death, her steps lead straight to Sheol-
The idea is that the beginning of the relationship would appear sweet, but in the very end, it would lead to death, paralleled here with *sheol*, the grave. And this was exactly the experience with Solomon's Gentile wives. Only in his old age did his chosen path lead him to turn his heart away from God and face an eternal grave. He disobeyed his own wisdom to an extraordinary degree. He clearly considered all the truths he knew as merely ideas in his mind, thereby assuring him of acceptability with God; he never personalized any of it.

Pro 5:6 She gives no thought to the way of life. Her ways are crooked, and she doesn't know it-
The following of the path to death (:5) is done unconsciously, because of a total lack of self awareness and self examination. And yet this was precisely what Solomon did; see on :5.

Pro 5:7 Now therefore, my sons, listen to me. Don't depart from the words of my mouth-
He spoke of *his* law as giving life and blessing, appropriating the very terms of Deuteronomy about the blessings of obedience to *God's* law. Wisdom said: "Now therefore my sons, hearken unto me: for blessed are they that keep my ways" (Prov. 8:32 RV). Yet these are the very words Solomon uses when talking to his kids: "Now therefore my sons, hearken unto me" (Prov. 5:7; 7:24). Conclusion? Solomon sees the woman "Wisdom" as a personification of himself. It was really Solomon's self-justification. *He personally* was wisdom, so he thought. This is how self-exalted his possession of true wisdom made him. And of course, his kids *didn't* listen to wisdom's way. In passing, I have noted that those raised 'in the truth' often find it very hard to take criticism in later life. They find tolerance of others' views hard; they perceive themselves to be right to an intolerant extent. Is this not a little bit of the Solomon syndrome?

Pro 5:8 Remove your way far from her. Don't come near the door of her house-
Solomon had Gentile wives and built them houses (1 Kings 11:7,8). His wisdom was given to him as a young man, and the book of Proverbs appears to be collections of the various statements of that wisdom. But about the same time, he also got involved with multiple Gentile women who led him astray from God and to idolatry. The very warnings he gives against the adulteress and Gentile woman were ignored by him; he became the young man who went wrong with women. His girlfriend speaks in the very language of the Gentile woman of Proverbs: "I found him whom my soul loveth: I held him, and would not let him go, until I had brought him into my mother's house... into her chamber" (Song 3:4). Compare this with "She caught him... come not near the door of her house... her house... the chambers of death" (Prov. 7:13,27; 5:8). We see here the warning for all time; that we can know God's ways in theory, whilst disobeying them in practice, absolutely to the letter. Indeed it may be so that the more we know them, the more strongly we are tempted by our nature to break them.

Pro 5:9 lest you give your honour to others, and your years to the cruel one-
The word for "honour" is used at times specifically of the honour or majesty of kingship (Ps. 21:5; 45:3; Jer. 22:18; Zech. 6:13). Solomon warns his son that the kingship would be taken from the Davidic line if he married Gentiles. His years, his life, would be given to "the cruel", a word associated with idolatry in Dt. 32:22, although "the cruel" is a frequent designation of the Gentile powers in the prophets. All this is precisely what happened to Solomon. He married Gentiles, and finally was led to waste his life through turning to their idols.

Pro 5:10 lest foreigners feast on your wealth, and your labours enrich another man's house-
The allusion may be to the way that the family of Shechem thought they would get Jacob's wealth if their daughters married the sons of Israel. In Ecc. 2:18,19 Solomon laments that his labours will achieve nothing; doubtless alluding back to his words in Prov. 5:10, where he says that the Gentile wife will make the young Israelite's labours meaningless.

Pro 5:11 You will groan at your latter end, when your flesh and your body are consumed-
It would not be unreasonable to interpret the book of Ecclesiastes as Solomon's groaning at his latter end, as his physical faculties declined. Constantly we see him as the parade example of a man whose very knowledge of God's truth led him to live in the very opposite manner; because he refused to personalize it, and assumed that the very possession of such truth justified him.

Pro 5:12 and say, How I have hated instruction, and my heart despised reproof-
Solomon here quotes his father's words in Ps. 50:17 "since you hate instruction". Solomon thus accuses any who refuse his Proverbs of doing just this, hating instruction, which in the context of Ps. 50:17 means 'You are condemned' (s.w. Prov. 5:12; 12:1; 15:10).

Pro 5:13 neither have I obeyed the voice of my teachers, nor turned my ear to those who instructed me!-
This is true, but Solomon is addressing his son, whom he has taught. He is strongly

implying that any refusal to accept his teaching would call down terrible curses. His focus instead should have been upon God's total revelation, and upon God as the ultimate teacher and instructor.

Pro 5:14 I have come to the brink of utter ruin, in the midst of the gathered assembly- David felt that his repentance of his sins with Bathsheba would lead him to praise God in the midst of the congregation (Ps. 22:22; 40:10); by contrast Solomon is more concerned with being shamed in the midst of the congregation. David was unashamed of his shame, because he was repentant. The record presents Solomon as obsessed with "my father David", and yet failing to emulate his humility and attitudes.

Pro 5:15 Drink water out of your own cistern, springing water out of your own spring-

There is no doubt that we can be counted responsible for making another brother sin, even though he too bears responsibility for that sin. The man who commits adultery causes his ex-wife to commit adultery too, the Lord observed (Mt. 5:32). Her sin remains her sin, but he too is guilty. Prov. 5:15,16 (NIV) teach likewise: that a man should drink the waters of his own well, i.e. take sexual fulfilment from his own wife, otherwise his waters (i.e. the sexuality of his wife) will overflow into the streets for all and sundry. She will turn to other men due to his unfaithfulness. Sin thus has so many aspects. We may reason that if we fail to upbuild a brother, or preach, then God will somehow do it anyway. But this doesn't seem to be the spirit of Ez. 3:18: "When... thou givest him not warning...he shall die in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at thy hand".

Pro 5:16 Should your springs overflow in the streets, streams of water in the public squares?-

As explained on :15, Solomon is saying that a man's sexuality should be channeled through his wife, and not overflow to loose women standing in public places. LXX "Let not thy waters flow beyond thy fountain" supports this.

Pro 5:17 Let them be for yourself alone, not for strangers with you-

Sexuality shouldn't be shared with "strangers", as noted on :15, although the word often refers to Gentiles. Yet Solomon was busy acquiring 1000 wives / concubines at the beginning of his reign, when he wrote up the Divine wisdom he was endowed with in the form of the book of Proverbs. This incredible hypocrisy arose from a lack of personal consciousness of sin, an inability to personalize God's truth, and a total wilful ignorance of the conditional nature of all God's purposes with him. He is a major example to all who pride themselves upon knowing God's truth.

Pro 5:18 Let your spring be blessed. Rejoice in the wife of your youth-

See on :15-17. Solomon failed to do so, not restraining his lust for women, as he explains in Ecclesiastes, and marrying 1000 wives / concubines. Despite his ravishment with Pharaoh's daughter as outlined in the Song, she never fulfilled him; indeed, none of his women did. In the Song he speaks of how he was ravished with this Egyptian girl, especially with her breasts (Song 2:7; 3:5; 4:9; 8:14). Alluding to this he could confidently exhort in Prov. 5:18-20 AV: "Rejoice with the wife of thy youth. Let her be as the loving hind and pleasant roe (Song of Solomon language); let her breasts satisfy thee... be thou ravished always with her love... And why wilt thou, my son, be ravished

with a strange (i.e. Gentile) woman?". How, indeed? But 999 women later, it was a different story for Solomon. Solomon writes in Prov. 5:18-20 as if it is of course unthinkable that he should have been ravished by a Gentile woman; but he had been. He spoke to others with absolutely no thought as to whether his words had an application to himself. Effectively he was kidding himself, on a deeply internal level, that he hadn't married out of the faith. The obviousness of all this is in order to drum the warning home to us. How tragic that Solomon should go on to comment that such a person would die for want of instruction (Prov. 5:23). Solomon had all the instruction he could wish for; but he didn't allow it to really sink home one little bit. He hit out on the search for an ultimately satisfying woman, but out of the 1000 he had he never found one (Ecc. 7:28), even when he sat down and analyzed each of them. And even politically, his marriages with all those Gentile women didn't seem to achieve him the support he desired from their home countries; Egypt gave refuge to Jeroboam, Solomon's main rival (1 Kings 11:40), even though he always acquiesced to his wives and even in his very old age he still didn't destroy the idol temples he built for them (2 Kings 23:13).

Pro 5:19 A loving doe and a graceful deer- let her breasts satisfy you at all times. Be captivated always with her love-

The idea is "don't be ravished with the breasts of a Gentile and don't have many wives; be content with your first wife". But Solomon was (Song 4:9; 7:3), and he had many wives; he totally refused to see the personal relevance of the truth and wisdom he taught.

Pro 5:20 For why should you, my son, be captivated with an adulteress? Why embrace the bosom of another?-

See on Ecc. 7:26. The blindness of Solomon is driven home time and again; he knew Divine truth, but the more he knew it, the more he lived the very opposite, failing to grasp the deeply personal relevance of truth to himself. A whole string of passages in Proverbs warn of the "strange" (AV) woman (Prov. 2:16; 5:20; 6:24; 7:5; 20:16; 23:27; 27:13). Yet the very same word (translated "outlandish", AV) is used in Neh. 13:26 concerning the women Solomon married. The antidote to succumbing to the wicked woman was to have wisdom- according to Proverbs. And Solomon apparently had wisdom. Yet he succumbed to the wicked woman. He was writing Song of Solomon at the same time as Proverbs. The reason for this must be that Solomon didn't really have wisdom. Yet we know that he was given it in abundance. The resolution of this seems to be that Solomon asked for wisdom in order to lead Israel rather than for himself, he used that wisdom to judge Israel and to educate the surrounding nations. But none of it percolated to himself. As custodians of true doctrine- for that is what we are- we are likely to suffer from over familiarity with it. We can become so accustomed to 'handling' it, as we strengthen each other, as we preach, that the personal bearing of the Truth becomes totally lost upon us, as it was totally lost upon Solomon.

Pro 5:21 For the ways of man are before the eyes of Yahweh, He examines all his paths-

The ways of man are "before" or "straight ahead" of Yahweh's eyes (Prov. 5:21 s.w.), and our eyes are to likewise "look straight ahead" (Prov. 4:25 s.w.). Our perspective and vision is to be His. We are to see life as He does. And He looks in the perspective

of eternity, His Kingdom on earth which is to dominate the vast majority of our eternal existence. This is the meaning of faith in practice.

"The ways of man are before the eyes (angels) of the Lord, and He pondereth all his goings" (Prov. 5:21 AV). God pondering us (root 'to roll flat') is surely the language of limitation, and applicable to the Angels. God's Angels are pondering us, as they did Abraham, Job etc.

Pro 5:22 The evil deeds of the wicked ensnare him. The cords of his sin hold him firmly-

This continues the huge Biblical theme that sin is its own judgment; the wicked are more self condemned than condemned by God. In seeking to avoid the ties that bind in domestic and sexual life (see on :15-18), a man is tied by the cords of his own list. And again was absolutely fulfilled in Solomon. Once he began taking other wives, he lost all self restraint. And was held by the cords of those sins. "Hold" is the word just used in :5 of how the sinful woman herself 'takes hold' of the grave; and she will bring her men down there along with her. The imagery attributes to women a great power, which in Solomon's time was unheard of; for society considered men to be all powerful. It was perhaps this kind of thinking which led Solomon to ignore any possibility that mere women, as he saw them, could have such great hold on him and his destiny.

Pro 5:23 He will die for lack of instruction. In the greatness of his own folly he will go astray-

"Instruction" is here put for 'receipt of instruction'. But Solomon has Saul in view, his father's great enemy. It was he who greatly went astray (s.w. 1 Sam. 26:21 and see on ps. 119:21). Always there is the subtext in Solomon's words of justifying his father, and justifying himself against any potential opposition to his kingship, such as that from the house of Saul. But "astray" is also the word just used for a man being "ravished" by inappropriate women (:19,20). The person in view in this chapter is always the man who has inappropriate relationships with women other than the wife of his youth. Again, Solomon is presented as the one who went astray in this way more than any other; and it was his wrong attitude to his possession of Divine truth which led him to it.

PROVERBS CHAPTER 6

Pro 6:1 My son, if you have become collateral for your neighbour, if you have struck your hands in pledge for a stranger-

The law of Moses didn't forbid giving or taking collateral for loans, it accepted this would happen (Ex. 22:25-27). But Solomon in the Proverbs is quite obsessed with forbidding it in very strong terms (Prov. 6:1-3; 11:15; 17:18; 20:16; 22:26; 27:13- all quite some emphasis). Perhaps Solomon recalled some bad experience in his family because of this. There is the otherwise curious statement in 1 Sam. 17:18 that David's brothers, Solomon's uncles, were to return a collateral. Perhaps this ruined the family and Solomon's wisdom has some human element in it, reflecting his own bad experiences in his family life. But there is nothing wrong with giving or taking collateral for a loan; what is condemned in God's law is the abuse of the debtor and the abuse of the situation. Indeed David and Hezekiah ask God to be collateral for their needs and debts in various ways (Ps. 119:122; Is. 38:14). And God gives the Holy Spirit

in our hearts as collateral on His debt, as He sees it, to save us (2 Cor. 1:22; 5:5; Eph. 1:14); and in response we give our hearts as a pledge to Him (Jer. 30:21 Heb.). So forbidding the practice seems out of step with the spirit of grace. It would mean asking of God what we are unprepared to do for others. Solomon had not known need, neither material nor spiritual, and it shows in his attitude to this matter. It makes hollow all Solomon's exhortations to be generous to your poor neighbour and to be a brother in adversity to your neighbour (Prov. 14:21; 17:17). Solomon is here reasoning from the viewpoint of secular wisdom.

Pro 6:2 you are trapped by the words of your mouth. You are ensnared with the words of your mouth-

Prov. 5:22 uses this language about those snared by major sins. As noted on :1, Solomon appears to be quite obsessively outlawing the giving of collateral for loans. And he doesn't leave it as mere advice, but presses the point that to disagree with him on this is a heinous sin- and yet this is a matter which has to be judged one case at a time. We again get the impression that he presents a narrative whereby people are either spotlessly perfect, or awful sinners. This is not a mature spiritual position. Any disagreement with his advice makes a person a wicked sinner. Even on such a delicate personal matter, where cases will always be different, and God's law allowed the use of collateral.

Pro 6:3 Do this now my son and deliver yourself, since you have come into the hand of your neighbour. Go, humble yourself. Press your plea with your neighbour-

As noted on :1,2, Solomon is making a huge issue over this matter of obeying his advice [for in such a nuanced matter it can be no more than that] regarding collateral. He sees humility as humility to his advice and positions, rather than before God.

Pro 6:4 Give no sleep to your eyes, nor slumber to your eyelids-

The words of Prov. 6 show that Solomon's motivation for teaching God's ways to his son (Rehoboam) was because this is how his father had taught him. "Give not sleep to thine eyes, nor slumber to thine eyelids", he exhorts his son (Prov. 6:4), in the very language used to describe his father's zeal for the building of the temple (Ps. 132:4). Solomon prayed to God in the terms and language of his father (2 Chron. 6:41,42 cp. Ps. 132:1,8,9). He was familiar with his father's Psalms- after all, all Israel sung them. It must have been like being the son of a world-famous singer. The words were even in Solomon's subconscious it seems, for when he tells his son "Give not sleep to thine eyes nor slumber to thine eyelids" (Prov. 6:4) he is alluding unconsciously, it seems (in that it is out of context) to David's promise not to give sleep to his eyes until he had found a resting place for the ark (Ps. 132:4). But Solomon's spirituality was finally revealed as merely living out parental expectation.

Pro 6:5 Free yourself, like a gazelle from the hand of the hunter, like a bird from the snare of the fowler-

As explained on :2, Solomon elsewhere uses this language about those snared by major sins.

For him it was a heinous sin to disagree with his attitude to the difficult and very personal matter of giving collateral.

Pro 6:6 Go to the ant, you sluggard. Consider her ways, and be wise-

The Proverbs contain repeated condemnation of laziness. Lack of a zealous work ethic is a rejection of wisdom, according to Solomon. As Solomon explains in Ecc. 1, he was an active person, not lazy by nature. And yet he lacked spirituality. He claimed that his service of God was due to his spirituality, but it was in reality merely a semblance of serving God when it was really just reinforcing his own personality type. His mocking of the "sluggard" or "lazy one" is so frequent (Prov. 6:6,9; 10:26; 13:4; 15:19; 19:24; 20:4; 21:25; 22:13; 24:30; 26:13-16). But it is a reflection of his own works-based approach to righteousness; the 'wise' "do" good things, and the wicked don't do enough good things. Personal spiritual mindedness and relationship with God are simply not emphasized.

Pro 6:7 which having no chief, overseer or ruler-

Solomon taught that if the ants can be so zealous, well why can't the ecclesia of God be zealous [for it was 'believers' that he was teaching]. The ants scurry around, working as if there is no tomorrow, to build up something so precarious that is in any case so tragically short lived. Can't we be yet more zealous, with a like loving co-operation, building the eternal things that we are (Prov. 6:6,7)? And Solomon pressed the point further, in that ants are self-motivated; they need no "guide, overseer or ruler". This was surely a reference to the complex system of overseers which Solomon had to place over Israel in order to build the temple and build up the Kingdom. The same Hebrew word for "overseer" is found in 1 Chron. 23:4; 26:29. Yet ideally, he seems to be saying, every Israelite ought to be a zealous worker. Prov. 12:24 says the same: "The hand of the diligent [*whoever* he / she is] shall bear rule [in practice]" [s.w. Prov. 6:7 "ruler"]. And we must ask ourselves, whether for whatever reason the new Israel hasn't slumped into the same problem, of lack of self-motivation, waiting to be asked to do something before we do it, over-relying upon our "overseers". The ants aren't like this. They see the job to be done, and naturally get on with it.

The self-motivated example of the ant should inspire our service and operations. They need no "guide, overseer or ruler". But these are the very words used about Solomon's elaborate hierarchy of foremen and slave drivers whom he used to 'get the job done' in his kingdom. He rejected his own wisdom.

Pro 6:8 yet provides her bread in the summer and gathers her food in the harvest-

See on :7. This again glorifies works and hard work inappropriately. Good harvests were God's blessing for obedience to the covenant; bad harvests were judgment for breaking the covenant (Jer. 5:17 s.w.). But Solomon assumes that hard work will bring good harvests. Again, real spirituality is ignored, and the conditional nature of Divine blessing is also overlooked, just as Solomon did in his own life.

Pro 6:9 How long will you sleep, lazy one? When will you arise out of your sleep?-

See on :6. This despising of sleep is in contrast to the spiritual maturity of David, who understood that true blessing comes from God alone and not from human works, and God gives His beloved sleep, in contrast to vainly rising early and working late to achieve blessing (Ps. 127:2). Time and again, we find Solomon glorifying "my father David", seeking to live out parental expectations; and yet quite out of step with David's spirituality.

Pro 6:10 A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep-

I have suggested on :9 that this condemnation of sleep and laziness is part of a works based mentality that at best is not very spiritually mature. It is therefore significant that when these words are repeated in Prov. 24:33, Solomon doesn't claim this to be part of the package of Divine wisdom given to him; rather he says he worked this out from his own observations of broken down houses and farmsteads, and in mock humility claims to have thereby "received instruction" (Prov. 24:32).

Pro 6:11 so your poverty will come as a robber, and your scarcity as an armed man-

Solomon repeatedly sees poverty as being the fault of the poor, and their refusal of his teaching of wisdom (s.w. Prov. 6:11; 10:4,15; 13:7,8,18,23; 24:34; 28:19; 31:7). Many of these passages are effectively mocking the poor, which Solomon condemns in Prov. 17:5. He fails to take his own wisdom, as we also see in his behaviour with foreign women. Again we see Solomon's works based approach to righteousness, and lack of grace; refusing to accept that we are all poor men before God, as David himself exemplified when he cried to God as a poor man (Ps. 34:6). But his much beloved father David was unashamed to say he was a materially "poor man" (1 Sam. 18:23); and Uriah, whom he wronged, is described also as a "poor man" (2 Sam. 12:1). The poor were to be defended and given to (Ps. 82:3), and the Bible is clear that poverty isn't necessarily a result of sin or unwisdom. But Solomon fails to appreciate this, so obsessed is he with works, and the idea that obedience to his anthology of Proverbs will make the poor prosperous, as if God's truth is a kind of wealth creation scheme.

Pro 6:12 A worthless person, a man of iniquity, is he who walks with a perverse mouth-

True as the Proverbs are which condemn "a worthless / wicked person" (Prov. 6:12; 16:27; 19:28), again we have a subtext of Solomon seeking to justify himself and his father David, and to criticize the various competitors to Solomon's throne. "A worthless person" is the term used for Nabal (1 Sam. 25:17), those in David's camp who were not fully supportive of David (1 Sam. 30:22), Sheba who plotted to overthrow the Davidic line as king (2 Sam. 20:1), and particularly of those who wanted to overthrow Solomon as king (2 Chron. 13:7).

Pro 6:13 who winks with his eyes, who signals with his feet, who motions with his fingers-

The body language of sinners is commented upon several times in the Bible. This is the

degree to which God observes human behaviour. And we have wonderful insights into that of the Lord Jesus; His eyes and hands are often as it were zoomed in upon in the Gospel records. Body language is indeed a "signal" of our innermost heart; and for the wicked, they yield all the members of their bodies to work unrighteousness (Rom. 6:19).

Pro 6:14 in whose heart is perverseness, who devises evil continually, who always sows discord-

Solomon here reasons as if any of his opponents (see on :12) are wrong because they "sow discord". This has ever been an argument deployed by autocratic rulers- any criticism or opposition is wrong because it undermines "unity".

Pro 6:15 Therefore his calamity will come suddenly. He will be broken suddenly, and that without remedy-

Being broken without remedy (as in Prov. 29:1) suggests that what is in view is an earthen vessel smashed, a figure used in the prophets of the last judgment. Israel were likewise smitten without remedy at the hands of their invaders (s.w. 2 Chron. 36:16; Jer. 8:15; 14:19). Many of Solomon's warnings of judgments in the Proverbs come exactly true for the Israel whom he wrongly assumed would be his eternal kingdom. The "remedy" Solomon has in mind is giving heed to wisdom. The "sudden" nature of condemnation is also a Biblical theme. The Bible is very clear about what will lead to condemnation, and yet when it comes, the condemned will as it were be taken by surprise. For they have ignored all the teaching about judgment and assumed it doesn't apply to them.

Pro 6:16 There are six things which Yahweh hates; yes, seven which are an abomination to Him-

"Abomination" is the common word for idols (e.g. Dt. 7:25,26). Idolatry is here interpreted as things like pride and telling lies (:17). These seven things are the essence of idolatry. There is a recurring nature to them, just as idols got a grip on the mind of the worshipper. Solomon often uses the word for quiet, secret sins, words and the matters of the heart, internal attitudes and judgments (Prov. 11:1,20; 12:22; 13:19; 15:26; 16:5; 17:15; 20:10,23; 24:9; 26:25; 28:9; 29:27). And this of course is the essence of idolatry in our age; this is the practical force to us of all Biblical teaching about idolatry.

Pro 6:17 proud eyes, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood-

David's prayer of repentance and request to be saved from "blood guiltiness" (Ps. 51:14) is literally 'from blood'. He was a man of blood and was guilty of Uriah's innocent blood. David had asked for 'men of blood' to be slain (Ps. 55:23 s.w.), those who had taken the blood of the innocent (Ps. 94:21), and for 'men of blood' to be expelled from his presence (Ps. 139:19). And it is not at all clear whether all those Psalms were written before his sin with Bathsheba. God was trying to teach David that he was the type of person whom he condemned. And yet it is unclear if he learned that lesson. Solomon liberally condemns the man who sheds

innocent blood (Prov. 6:17; 28:17), refusing to recognize that his much lauded father had done just this, and was only saved by grace and not by any obedience to wisdom. There is so little grace in the book of Solomon's Proverbs because Solomon had failed to perceive the grace shown to his father. An example of indirect reference to Solomon's pride is found in the way the record points a similarity between Paul and Solomon. Each was given wisdom, and each was given a Satan to humble them because of the way wisdom bloats a man's ego. The fact that we have 'the truth' in basic doctrinal terms - plus a fair bit of other Divine wisdom - really will tempt us to be proud. This is the sort of thing we individually and collectively need to exhort ourselves strongly about. Like us, Solomon knew theoretically the paramount danger of pride; he lists it as the most fundamental of the seven things God hates (Prov. 6:17 cp. 16:5,18). Indeed, Solomon correctly implies in Prov. 28:25 that pride is an outcome of lack of faith, and this was exactly true in Solomon's case. His lack of faith in the future kingdom led him to be proud.

We note here and in Ps. 119:69,78 and elsewhere that pride is associated with slandering others. This inflated self importance is what leads pride people to do others down by slandering them, that they may appear higher. "Innocent blood" refers to Saul's persecution of David's "innocent blood" (s.w. 1 Sam. 19:5). "A proud look" is exactly what Solomon's father David didn't have (s.w. Ps. 131:1).

Pro 6:18 a heart that devises wicked schemes, feet that are swift in running to mischief-

As so often in the Bible, action is presented as the direct result of thought. This was a conception foreign to their contemporary belief systems, where all that mattered was external behaviour. The Lord's "sermon on the mount" develops this teaching as the essence of all spiritual life. Israel were condemned by God specifically for their wicked schemes / imaginations (s.w. Is. 55:7; 59:7; Jer. 4:14). Is. 59:7 repeats this verse about Judah generally. The Proverbs so often end up descriptions of the house of Judah in their later history; whereas Solomon liked to think that his kingdom would be eternal, governed according to his principles as taught in the book of Proverbs.

Pro 6:19 a false witness who utters lies, and he who sows discord among brothers-

This is true, and needs to be given its due weight by those who divide brethren in Christ. But Solomon also doubtless has in view the discord between him and his half brothers, who were contenders for his throne. He considers the cause of the divisions to be "lies", a slander campaign against him and his father. But the division amongst David's sons was a direct fulfilment of Nathan's prediction of the consequence of David's sins associated with Bathsheba. But Solomon seeks to whitewash David, considering any friction arising from his father's sins as mere slander. He doesn't follow David in openly confessing sin and rejoicing in Divine grace.

Pro 6:20 My son, keep your father's commandment, and don't forsake your mother's teaching-

David so often talks about *God's* "law", using the word *torah*. But Solomon so often speaks of his own *torah*, and that of his wife, the mother of "my son" (s.w. Prov. 1:8; 3:1; 4:2; 6:20; 7:2; 13:14; 31:26). Yet elsewhere in the Bible, the well over 200 occurrences of *torah* are always about *God's* law. Solomon applies the word to his own teachings and that of his wife, and thereby plays God. whilst it could be argued that Solomon's teachings were Divinely inspired, all the same he ought surely to have spoken of them as *God's torah* rather than his own *torah*. This kind of playing God is seen so often in the teachers of God's people.

Solomon exhorted others to keep the law of their mother, so that it would keep them from the attractive Gentile girl. And don't think, he went on, that in this context you can take fire into your hands and not be burnt. You can't play around with your own sexuality without it having a permanent spiritual effect upon you (6:27). But dear Bathsheba's words to Solomon warning against the Gentile woman in Prov. 31 were completely forgotten by him.

Solomon told his son, and presumably all his sons, to keep their father's commandment and not forsake the teaching of their mother. In this he was just blindly repeating his own experience of youth, and yet the way he repeated it was irrelevant seeing that his wives were largely Gentiles. To tell them to follow the laws of their mothers was hardly good advice. But he said it because it seemed the right thing, it was what he had been told as a child.

David was motivated by a desire to

fulfil the Law's command that the word should be enthusiastically taught by parents to their children. Externally, Solomon likewise obeyed the command. But he did so as a result of living out parental expectation; he did what his parents had done to him. Yet Rehoboam didn't really take Divine principles very seriously in his later life, although there is reason to think that he did so originally. And so he too lived out the spiritual experience of his father Solomon; the rot of only external spirituality snaked through those generations, until the real spirit of the Truth was lost, and only an external shell remained. There is ample evidence that this is exactly the situation in many areas today.

Pro 6:21 Bind them continually on your heart. Tie them around your neck-

Solomon made the classic mistake of assuming that his will and word were effectively equivalent to the word of God. In Prov. 6:21 he speaks of the need to bind the law about your heart and neck; but in Song 8:6 he asks his Gentile lover to "set *me* as a seal upon your heart" and arm. And often in Proverbs he uses the language of the blessings for keeping God's law and turns them into the blessings for keeping *his* law.

Pro 6:22 When you walk, it will lead you. When you sleep, it will watch over you. When you awake, it will talk with you-

Solomon's prophetic sonship of David was conditional upon him preserving or observing Yahweh's ways (1 Kings 2:4; 1 Chron. 22:13; 2 Chron. 7:17); but he didn't preserve or observe them (1 Kings 11:10,11); despite David praying that Solomon would be given a heart to observe them (1 Chron. 29:19). We can pray for God to work upon the hearts of others, but

He will not force people against their own deepest will and heart position. Solomon stresses overmuch how God would keep or preserve the righteous (Prov. 2:8; 3:26), without recognizing the conditional aspect of this. Why did Solomon go wrong? His Proverbs are true enough, but he stresses that obedience to *his* wisdom and teaching would preserve his hearers (Prov. 4:4; 6:22; 7:1; 8:32; 15:5), preservation was through following the example of the wise (Prov. 2:20); rather than stressing obedience to *God's* ways, and replacing David his father's simple love of God with a love of academic wisdom: "Yahweh preserves all those who love Him" (Ps. 145:20).

Pro 6:23 For the commandment is a lamp, and the law is light. Reproofs of instruction are the way of life-

The connection is with Ps. 119:105: "Your word is a lamp to my feet, and a light for my path". The "word" in view was the prophetic word that David would be king and Saul would be destroyed. Solomon reapplied this in Prov. 6:23; but his legalism comes out, in that he changed "Your word" (of promise) to "the law" and the "commandments".

Pro 6:24 to keep you from the immoral woman, from the flattery of the wayward wife's tongue-

The blindness of Solomon is driven home time and again; he knew Divine truth, but the more he knew it, the more he lived the very opposite, failing to grasp the deeply personal relevance of truth to himself. A whole string of passages in Proverbs warn of the "strange" (AV) woman (Prov. 2:16; 5:20; 6:24; 7:5; 20:16; 23:27; 27:13). Yet the very same word (translated "outlandish", AV) is used in Neh. 13:26 concerning the women Solomon married. The antidote to succumbing to the wicked woman was to have wisdom- according to Proverbs. And Solomon apparently had wisdom. Yet he succumbed to the wicked woman. He was writing Song of Solomon at the same time as Proverbs. The reason for this must be that Solomon didn't really have wisdom. Yet we know that he was given it in abundance. The resolution of this seems to be that Solomon asked for wisdom in order to lead Israel rather than for himself, he used that wisdom to judge Israel and to educate the surrounding nations. But none of it percolated to himself. As custodians of true doctrine- for that is what we are- we are likely to suffer from over familiarity with it. We can become so accustomed to 'handling' it, as we strengthen each other, as we preach, that the personal bearing of the Truth becomes totally lost upon us, as it was totally lost upon Solomon.

Pro 6:25 Don't lust after her beauty in your heart, neither let her captivate you with her eyelids-

The blindness of Solomon is driven home time and again. He warned the typical young man about being captivated by the eyelids of the Gentile woman (Prov. 6:25); yet it was the eyes of Miss Egypt that he openly admitted stole his heart (Song 4:9; 6:5).

Solomon often emphasized the importance of keeping the heart (Prov. 2:10-16; 3:5,6; 4:23-5:5; 6:23-26); he had foreseen that the essential sin of God's people was "the plague of his own heart" (1 Kings 8:46), and he imagined how for this sin God's people would later pray towards the temple. And yet his wives turned away *his* heart (1 Kings 11:13), for all this awareness that the heart must be kept. It was as if the more he knew the truth of something, the more he wanted to do the very opposite. And this is exactly true of our natures. It's why we ourselves can discern the same perversity in our lives. Perhaps with Solomon he reasoned that in *his* case, foreign wives wouldn't turn away *his* heart. Just as our flesh thinks 'Yes, but it can't happen to *me*'. Perhaps too he reasoned that if the temple somehow could bring forgiveness for the plague of the heart, his heart was incorruptible because of the temple.

Pro 6:26 For a prostitute reduces you to a piece of bread. The adulteress hunts for your precious life-

Truth flowed through Solomon's mouth with ease, but took no lodgment at all in his heart. Truth, absolute and pure, flows through our hands in such volume. Bible study after Bible study, chapter after chapter... But does it mean anything at all to us? Prov. 6:26 warns the young man that the Gentile woman will take his money and leave him destitute at the end. These words seem to be alluded to by Solomon years later in Ecc. 6:2, where he laments that despite his wealth and success, a Gentile would have it all after his death. He saw in later life that his warnings to the young men of Israel had been in the form of painting a picture of a typical young man who epitomized youthful folly; but now he saw that he had been making a detailed prophecy of himself.

Pro 6:27 Can a man scoop fire into his lap, and his clothes not be burned?-

He soberly warns against the strange (i.e. Gentile) woman, observing that a man cannot take this kind of fire into his bosom and not be burned by it. Yet this is exactly what he was doing at the time he wrote that. His public removal of his Egyptian wife from the house of David "because the places are holy" (2 Chron. 8:11) is therefore to be seen as spiritual pride, appearing to do the right thing, when his heart was far from it. Burning clothes is the phrase used about what was to be done to the leper (Lev. 13:52,57). The adulterer would be treated by others as a leper.

Pro 6:28 Or can one walk on hot coals, and his feet not be scorched?-

This is exactly what Solomon thought he could do with women. And he was scorched, a figure for condemnation. "Hot coals" is the word used to figuratively describe condemnation (Ps. 120:4; 140:10; Prov. 25:22; 26:21). The man who gets involved with sexual sin reasons that he can tip toe over condemnation without being destroyed or his clothes catching fire (Prov. 6:27). A sober warning of the psychology of all human sin.

Pro 6:29 So is he who goes in to his neighbour's wife-

When he warns his son not to go in to his neighbour's wife, this may be thought to be looking

back to his parents' failure; for Bathsheba was the literal neighbour to David, living next door to his palace. But Solomon so glorifies his parents that I wonder if in fact he had so whitewashed their behaviour in his own mind that he is, as it were, unaware of how he was sounding. He may have been genuinely convinced they had done nothing wrong, and it was all a case of fake news and slander. Despite David's psalms of penitence.

Whoever touches her will not be unpunished-

The book of Proverbs outlines the basis upon which Solomon was to judge Israel. This can be read as Solomon warning that he would not show any grace to a man who went in to his neighbour's wife. But he was only conceived by David because God had not punished David as that iniquity deserved. We see here Solomon's utter refusal to accept grace, or to reflect the grace shown to his family to others. His harsh legalism leads me to conclude that he had [in his own mind] whitewashed his parents as if their sin had never happened.

Pro 6:30 Men don't despise a thief, if he steals to satisfy himself when he is hungry-

Solomon is arguing that there is utterly no excuse for adultery, and therefore he will always prosecute it to the ultimate term; he is arguing that adultery with the woman next door is just inexcusable for any reason. As noted on :29, he is totally hardened by his legalism to any kind of grace; were it not for the grace shown to his father, David would have died before Solomon was even conceived.

Pro 6:31 but if he is found, he shall restore seven times. He shall give all the wealth of his house-

The wealth or substance of a man's house is the phrase used in Prov. 1:13, of those who fill their houses with wealth by violence. Solomon presents a perhaps simplistic caricature of the wicked; they use violence, steal, commit adultery etc. And the righteous are consistently wise and righteous, according to Proverbs. Whereas in reality, sin and righteousness is far more subtle. A man like Solomon's father David was righteous and yet also sinned.

Pro 6:32 He who commits adultery with a woman is void of understanding. He who does it destroys his own soul-

Solomon didn't commit adultery, but he sinned sexually by taking 1000 wives / concubines, who were Gentiles and idolaters. As so often happens, people who fail in the general area of sexuality love to focus upon the specific sins of others in that general area which they themselves have not committed. This is classic human psychology. Solomon is ever glorifying his father David, and he appears to not consider David and his own mother to have committed adultery. Yet he so openly justifies David, whilst condemning adultery in the strongest terms. It seems to me that he had found a way of whitewashing his parents' sin, as so many tend to do in various areas. Solomon simply fails to perceive that God's true people sin as do other sinners; it is faith in grace which makes the difference. But Solomon doesn't perceive this critical nuance. His father David had understanding, but committed adultery. So Solomon's simplistic worldview, whereby the world is divided between stellar examples of

spirituality on one hand and vile criminal sinners on the other, is shown to be bankrupt and at best unrealistic.

Pro 6:33 He will get wounds and dishonour, his reproach will not be wiped away-

This is indeed what happened to Solomon's father David; but I have argued on :29-32 that Solomon doesn't consciously have David's experience in view. His Proverbs often subtly criticize his half brothers and all who had been problematic for David after his sin with Bathsheba. Solomon sees their behaviour as solely their fault and lack of wisdom. He doesn't accept any of that behaviour was in fact provoked by the sins of David his father.

Pro 6:34 For jealousy arouses the fury of the husband. He won't spare in the day of vengeance-

Solomon seems to be saying that such refusal by the husband to pity / spare in the day of judgment is the attitude he will uphold as the judge (see on :29). Solomon is out of step with his father David, who spared Saul and his family (s.w. 1 Sam. 23:21; 2 Sam. 21:7); and was condemned because he showed no pity / sparing to Uriah in taking his wife (s.w. 2 Sam. 12:4,6). Refusal to accept the reality of sin and God's consequent grace makes people harsh in their judgments.

Pro 6:35 He won't regard any ransom, neither will he rest content, though you give many gifts-

I suggested on :34 that Solomon is saying that the husband's insistence upon the death penalty rather than any "ransom" will be eagerly upheld by him in judgment (:29). David his father committed murder, for which no ransom was to be accepted (s.w. Num. 35:31). But God spared David by grace. And God does constantly ransom / redeem hopeless sinners from condemnation; this was what led Him to give His Son for the world's redemption. "Ransom" is a form of the Hebrew word for covering or atonement. But the very core of God's gracious operation with men was not appreciated by Solomon at all, and his technical wisdom only led him to deny this grace.

PROVERBS CHAPTER 7

Pro 7:1 My son, keep my words. Lay up my commandments within you-

Proverbs contains a number of Samson allusions (16:32; 25:28). But the most powerful are in 7:1,5,22,25-27, where the young Israelite is commended to God's word, because this will keep him from falling to the wiles of the Gentile woman, who throws down strong men into the way of miserable death. Solomon evidently writes with allusion to Samson; that here was the man who loved God's word, and yet went so astray with women. And tragically enough, Solomon himself did just the same! He realized and lamented the tragedy of Samson, as a lover of the word who fell for the Gentile woman; and then, with all his wisdom, he did the very same thing! Here, for all to see, is the crucial difference between knowledge and faith.

Solomon seems to allude to David hiding God's word in his heart (Ps. 119:11) by asking his son to hide *his* word in his heart (s.w. Prov. 2:1; 7:1). Again Solomon is putting his own words in the place of God's words. Whilst his wisdom was inspired by God, I detect something wrong here. He is effectively playing God, and not directing people to God's word but rather to his own words, true and inspired as they might be. This came to full term in Solomon's attitude that personal loyalty to himself was loyalty to God- even when Solomon was far from God in his ways. And the same trap is fallen into by those who hold parts of 'God's truth'; they can come to thereby play God and demand personal loyalty to themselves rather than to God.

Solomon's prophetic sonship of David was conditional upon him preserving or observing Yahweh's ways (1 Kings 2:4; 1 Chron. 22:13; 2 Chron. 7:17); but he didn't preserve or observe them (1 Kings 11:10,11); despite David praying that Solomon would be given a heart to observe them (1 Chron. 29:19). We can pray for God to work upon the hearts of others, but He will not force people against their own deepest will and heart position. Solomon stresses overmuch how God would keep or preserve the righteous (Prov. 2:8; 3:26), without recognizing the conditional aspect of this. Why did Solomon go wrong? His Proverbs are true enough, but he stresses that obedience to *his* wisdom and teaching would preserve his hearers (Prov. 4:4; 6:22; 7:1; 8:32; 15:5), preservation was through following the example of the wise (Prov. 2:20); rather than stressing obedience to *God's* ways, and replacing David his father's simple love of God with a love of academic wisdom: "Yahweh preserves all those who love Him" (Ps. 145:20).

Pro 7:2 Keep my commandments and live! Guard my teaching as the apple of your eye-

David so often talks about *God's* "law", using the word *torah*. But Solomon so often speaks of his own *torah*, and that of his wife, the mother of "my son" (s.w. Prov. 1:8; 3:1; 4:2; 6:20; 7:2; 13:14; 31:26). Yet elsewhere in the Bible, the well over 200 occurrences of *torah* are always about *God's* law. Solomon applies the word to his own teachings and that of his wife, and thereby plays God. whilst it could be argued that Solomon's teachings were Divinely inspired, all the same he ought surely to have spoken of them as *God's torah* rather than his own *torah*. This kind of playing God is seen so often in the teachers of God's people.

David had taught his children with the words: "Come, ye children, hearken unto me: I will teach you the fear of the Lord" (Ps. 34:11- did David say this to his children every evening?). And Solomon uses just the same words, even whilst disobeying God's law at the same time in his own life. He repeats these very words of David when teaching his own son: "My son, keep [retain] my words... keep my commandments and live" (Prov. 7:1,2). The idea of keeping commandments in order to live is a reference back to the many Deuteronomy passages where Moses pleads with Israel to keep *God's* commands and live. But Solomon came to perceive his father David's commands as those of God, and in his generation he watered this down in his own mind until he assumed that *his* commands to his children were to be treated by them as the law of God- no matter how far he had strayed himself from God's law. It's a gripping, frightening psychology.

Pro 7:3 Bind them on your fingers, write them on the tablet of your heart-

Often in Proverbs Solomon uses the language of the blessings for keeping God's law and turns them into the blessings for keeping *his* law; e.g. "My son, keep my words, and lay up my commandments with thee. Keep my commandments, and live; and my law as the apple of thine eye. Bind them upon thy fingers, write them upon the table of thine heart" (Prov. 7:1-3 AV). And we all do the same in essence, whenever we assume that our consciences are effectively the will of God; when we 'play God' by allowing our words and will to count as if they are *His* word.

The idea is that devotion to the covenant should be externally visible as well as in the heart. But the New Testament emphasizes that it is God who writes upon the table of the human heart by His Spirit (2 Cor. 3:3). Solomon assumes that by intellectual effort, man can do this to himself. There could be the implication that Solomon considered that his Proverbs had now replaced the tables of the covenant; the same word is used. See on Prov. 3:1,2.

Pro 7:4 Tell wisdom, You are my sister. Call understanding your relative-

"Relative" translates a Hebrew word which occurs only in Ruth 2:1 about a relative who has the power to redeem. Solomon misses the point that redemption is by grace through faith, as explained on Prov. 6:35. He thinks that the mere possession of intellectual truth, what he terms "wisdom", will be enough to redeem a person. This attitude to Divine truth led him to personal spiritual disaster, as it has so many.

Pro 7:5 that they may keep you from the strange woman, from the foreigner who flatters with her words-

The blindness of Solomon is driven home time and again; he knew Divine truth, but the more he knew it, the more he lived the very opposite, failing to grasp the deeply personal relevance of truth to himself. A whole string of passages in Proverbs warn of the "strange" woman (Prov. 2:16; 5:20; 6:24; 7:5; 20:16; 23:27; 27:13). Yet the very same word (translated "outlandish", AV) is used in Neh. 13:26 concerning the women Solomon married. The antidote to succumbing to the wicked woman was to have wisdom- according

to Proverbs. And Solomon apparently had wisdom. Yet he succumbed to the wicked woman. He was writing Song of Solomon at the same time as Proverbs. The reason for this must be that Solomon didn't really have wisdom. Yet we know that he was given it in abundance. The resolution of this seems to be that Solomon asked for wisdom in order to lead Israel rather than for himself, he used that wisdom to judge Israel and to educate the surrounding nations. But none of it percolated to himself. As custodians of true doctrine- for that is what we are- we are likely to suffer from over familiarity with it. We can become so accustomed to 'handling' it, as we strengthen each other, as we preach, that the personal bearing of the Truth becomes totally lost upon us, as it was totally lost upon Solomon.

Solomon here argues as if mere intellectual assent to the truths he was teaching would keep a man safe from sexual temptation. But Solomon himself possessed all this truth and failed miserably in this area (see on :21).

Pro 7:6 For at the window of my house I looked out through my lattice-

Solomon here claims that he had come to his conclusions by his observations, although one wonders if he is speaking literal truth about the incident he claims to be reporting. It is perhaps significant that he doesn't claim this to be part of the package of Divine wisdom given to him; rather he says he worked this out from his own observations. He does the same in Prov. 24:30-32, where his conclusions [see notes there] were not correct. We may conclude that in this anthology he is mixing Divine wisdom with his own pet issues.

Solomon in Prov. 7:6 likens himself to a wise man looking out through his lattice window and noticing a man going astray with a woman. But the precise figure is used in Song 2:9 for how his illicit, pagan Gentile girlfriend found his doing this to be so attractive, if not somehow erotic. The connection shows how totally confused Solomon was in his personal spirituality.

Pro 7:7 I saw among the simple ones. I discerned among the youths a young man void of understanding-

This singles out a particular "young man" [s.w. "child"] who was lacking in "heart", whose folly stood out from that of the other "simple ones". These may well refer to the 200 'simple ones' who went with Absalom in his rebellion against David (2 Sam. 15:11). One of them was particularly singled out here by Solomon as being foolish. And it's no accident that David calls Absalom "the young man" [s.w. "child"] Absalom" (2 Sam. 14:21; 18:5,12,29,32). "Young man" was perhaps David's term of endearment for Absalom. The same "young man" [s.w. "child"] may be in view also in Prov. 22:15- see notes there.

Pro 7:8 passing through the street near her corner, he went the way to her house-

The idea is of furtive movement; and she herself lurked at the corners (:12). The impression is that he met her on the corner, and they arranged to meet later at her house that evening.

Pro 7:9 in the twilight, in the evening of the day, in the middle of the night and in the darkness-

Solomon is therefore claiming that he made these observations throughout a period of many hours, stretching from evening to midnight (:6).

Pro 7:10 Behold, there a woman met him with the attire of a prostitute, and with crafty intent-

AV "subtil of heart". This is a phrase used positively a heart which keeps to God's word (Ps. 119:69; Prov. 3:1; 4:23; 23:26 etc.). The idea is being developed that this sinful woman is a parody of the righteous woman called wisdom.

Pro 7:11 She is loud and defiant. Her feet don't stay in her house-

Just as the woman wisdom "loudly" proclaims her truths on the streets. This woman is a conscious parody of the righteous woman. We note that Solomon considered that the wise woman does stay in her house, whereas the sinful woman doesn't. This appears to be Solomon's chauvinism rather than true wisdom. For he then presents the woman wisdom as being publically on the streets pleading with men to turn in to her wisdom.

Pro 7:12 Now she is in the streets, now in the squares, and lurking at every corner-

See on :8,11. "Lie in wait" is the word for ambush. Solomon often uses the word, as if it is for him a major characteristic of sinners (Prov. 1:11,18; 7:12; 12:6; 23:28; 24:15). But it's a rather specific word to use so often. It's as if Solomon is consciously alluding to his father's experiences at the hands of the house of Saul (s.w. Ps. 10:9; 59:3), whom Solomon considered a threat to his own kingship. And so he seems to rather like using the term about sinners, as if using his wisdom to have a dig at his immediate opposition.

Pro 7:13 So she caught him, and kissed him. With an impudent face she said to him-

See on :27. She catches him in parody of how the good woman wisdom takes hold of righteous men (as in Phil. 3:12). Likewise "impudent" is the word for 'to strengthen', used in Ecc. 7:19 of how wisdom strengthens the wise.

Pro 7:14 Sacrifices of peace offerings are with me. This day I have paid my vows-

Her references to her obedience to the Mosaic law are understandable once we perceive how she is a parody of the wise woman "wisdom" (see on :11,13,15-17,19,20; Prov. 9:17). Her attraction is because she claims to be obedient to the requirements of Israel's God. I will note throughout the Song of Solomon that Solomon likewise sees his idolatrous, Gentile girlfriend as righteous, presenting her in the terms of Israel; when her heart was far from it. And this was what finally led the young man Solomon to his destruction. Again and again, we see Solomon going the way of the foolish which he laments and points out at such length. He

failed to personalize wisdom, to see the conditional nature of his standing before God, and his possession of theoretical truth led him to never examine himself.

Pro 7:15 Therefore I came out to meet you, to diligently seek your face, and I have found you-

This again parodies the way wisdom seeks and finds wise men (s.w. Prov. 8:17); or rather they seek and find her. But Solomon appears to draw a contrast between the whore seeking and finding the man, and the wise woman being sought and found by men. But Solomon fails to perceive that God by grace is in search of man, and indeed He had searched for and found Solomon's father David (Ps. 89:20). Solomon really understands nothing of the grace by which God works constantly in practice. See on :18.

Pro 7:16 I have spread my couch with carpets of tapestry, with striped cloths of the yarn of Egypt-

This woman Solomon warns of appears to want to serve Yahweh, and presents herself in the very language of the tabernacle (Prov. 7:14,16,17). And yet Solomon goes and falls for just such a woman. One can only conclude that the more true spiritual knowledge we have, the more prone we are to do the very opposite. Such is our nature.

Pro 7:17 I have perfumed my bed with myrrh, aloes, and cinnamon-

The Proverbs so frequently refer to the dangers of the house of the Gentile woman; yet the Song shows the Egyptian girl dearly wishing that Solomon would come with her into her house. And Solomon, just like the foolish young man he wrote about, went right ahead down the road to spiritual disaster he so often warned others about. He warns the young man of the dangers of the Egyptian woman who perfumes her bed with myrrh (Prov. 7:16,17)- and then falls for just such a woman (Ps. 45:8).

Pro 7:18 Come, let's take our fill of loving until the morning. Let's solace ourselves with loving-

The whore offers her "love" to the man, whereas Solomon presents the wise woman wisdom as only loving those who first love her (Prov. 8:17; see on :15). Again, Solomon has it all wrong. It is not man's search for intellectual truth about God which is the initial spark in the Divine-human encounter. The opposite is the case. It is not that we loved God first, but rather that God first loved us (1 Jn. 4:19).

Pro 7:19 For my husband isn't at home. He has gone on a long journey-

Verse 11 has described the woman as not staying at home. Solomon's idea is that the woman who has no husband at home will go out of her home to look for sex. This could reflect a rather crude chauvinism. Perhaps he ignored the Biblical warnings that women would turn away his heart from God because he considered that women had no real power. He built houses for his wives and made them stay at home. The man who goes away on a long journey

is used by the Lord for the basis of His parables of the man who goes to a far country (Mt. 21:33; 25:14). This continues the theme developed in earlier verses, that this woman is a parody of true spirituality. But there is a twist; see on :20.

Pro 7:20 He has taken a bag of money with him; he will come home at the full moon-

I suggested on :19 that the Lord in His parables of the man taking a journey was as it were deconstructing the language here, to confirm that the woman is a fake believer. In His stories, the man doesn't take his money with him, but rather gives it to his servants to manage (Mt. 25:14). The woman gives the impression that her husband has taken money with him to enjoy himself, perhaps with other women, and again the Lord may have this in mind in the construction of the parable of the prodigal son who likewise leaves his home with money. The promise that he will return "at the full moon" suggests this family is observant of the Mosaic feasts. Again, the woman gives the impression of spirituality and devotion to the Mosaic law, externally. See on :14.

Pro 7:21 With persuasive words she led him astray-

"Persuasive words" is the word usually translated doctrine or teaching, always used about the teaching of wisdom (Prov. 1:5; 4:2; 9:9; 16:21 etc.). Again, the woman is presented as the antithesis of the wise woman wisdom. They both teach, but the whore's teaching leads astray. This contrast between such women is found in Revelation, where the whore is the antithesis of the bride of Christ. "Led him astray" is the very term used of how Solomon's wives turned his heart astray from God (1 Kings 11:4,9). The more Solomon knew Divine truth, the more he seems to have considered himself free to ignore it and in fact do the very opposite. He clearly thought that mere possession of that truth was the basis for his justification, and dismissed any idea of self examination or awareness that he might in fact personally fail in obedience.

With the flattering of her lips, she seduced him-

Solomon in :5 argues as if mere intellectual assent to the truths he was teaching would keep a man safe from sexual temptation and the flattery of bad women. But Solomon himself possessed all this truth and failed miserably in this area. The Hebrew literally refers to the smoothness of her lips; and Solomon admired the smoothness of the lips of his illicit Gentile girlfriend (s.w. Song 4:3,11; 7:9). Again we see Solomon doing the exact opposite of the wisdom and theoretical truth he was blessed with.

Pro 7:22 He followed her immediately, as an ox goes to the slaughter, as a fool stepping into a noose-

As explained on :21, this is exactly what happened to Solomon. AV "As a fool to the correction of the stocks". Solomon has so much to say about "correction" or instruction coming from the possession of wisdom (Prov. 8:10,33; 10:17; 12:1; 13:1,24; 15:5,10,32; 16:22; 19:20,27; 22:15; 23:12,13). But in the end he chastised or corrected his people by whipping them (s.w. 1 Kings 12:11,14). Solomon initially asked for wisdom in order to guide

his people, but he ended up whipping / physically chastising them into conformity with his wishes rather than allowing wisdom to correct. Again, he was playing God; for it is God through His wisdom who chastises, and not man. But Solomon thought he was effectively God to his people. This is why Solomon argues that servants cannot be corrected by words (Prov. 29:19 s.w.), and a child must be physically chastised (s.w. Prov. 19:18; 29:17 cp. Prov. 13:24; 23:13), regardless of his screams of pain. This kind of thing is a denial of his claims elsewhere that it is Divine wisdom which chastises / corrects, and such correction is from God and not man. Solomon's final description of himself as an old and foolish king who refuses to be admonished says it all (Ecc. 4:13); he admonishes others (s.w. Ecc. 12:12), but refuses to be admonished or corrected by his own wisdom. He failed to personalize it.

Pro 7:23 Until an arrow strikes through his liver, as a bird hurries to the snare, and doesn't know that it will cost his life-

The language of snares alludes to Solomon's father David, asking to be saved from such snares (Ps. 141:9) and rejoicing that he and God's people had been (Ps. 124:7). The initial reference may have been to Saul laying snares for David through getting him to marry his daughters and thereby seeking to kill him; and in Ps. 119:110 David is proud he has not fallen into those snares. Solomon likewise is hinting that the family of Saul, who were still his political opponents, were not better than gentile whores, and he didn't want his own family to intermarry with them. But Psalm 119 finishes with David saying bluntly that he has "gone astray" (Ps. 119:176), as if to say that earlier he had far overrated his own obedience to God's law.

In Proverbs, Solomon is continually alluding positively to his father's words. But in Ecc. 9:12 he alludes to those words cynically. Solomon seems to be cynically commenting that all men are finally snared in death. Earlier Solomon had warned about avoiding spiritual snares (Prov. 7:23; 22:5), but finally in Ecc. 9:12 he concludes that death is the unavoidable snare; and therefore all attempts to avoid being morally snared into sin are ultimately vain. He came to this perspective because he failed to fully grasp the hope of the resurrection of the body at the last day. He thought he would have the Kingdom now, and this led to his rejection of the Gospel of the Kingdom and its moral implications.

In Ecc. 9:12 he says that he suffered the fate of all men in that soon he would die, he would suddenly be caught like a bird in a snare, although he knew not his time. These are the very ideas of Prov. 7:23 AV concerning the snaring of the simple young man by the Gentile woman: "As a bird hasteth to the snare, and knoweth not that it is for his life". But here he presents the Gentile woman is a snare leading to death. But Ecc. 9:12 shows Solomon claiming that death is a snare brought about by time and chance; he thereby minimized the sin of marriage out of the faith.

Pro 7:24 Now therefore, sons, listen to me. Pay attention to the words of my mouth-

If we "attend" to God's word (Prov. 2:2; 4:1; 7:24), then He will "attend" to our word, of prayer (Ps. 55:2 and often in the Psalms). There is thereby a mutuality between God and man.

Our attitude to His word becomes reflected in His attitude to our words in prayer; for God and man are in dialogue.

He spoke of *his* law as giving life and blessing, appropriating the very terms of Deuteronomy about the blessings of obedience to *God's* law. Wisdom said: "Now therefore my sons, hearken unto me: for blessed are they that keep my ways" (Prov. 8:32 RV). Yet these are the very words Solomon uses when talking to his kids: "Now therefore my sons, hearken unto me" (Prov. 5:7; 7:24). Conclusion? Solomon sees the woman "Wisdom" as a personification of himself. It was really Solomon's self-justification. *He personally* was wisdom, so he thought. This is how self-exalted his possession of true wisdom made him. And of course, his kids *didn't* listen to wisdom's way. In passing, I have noted that those raised 'in the truth' often find it very hard to take criticism in later life. They find tolerance of others' views hard; they perceive themselves to be right to an intolerant extent. Is this not a little bit of the Solomon syndrome?

Pro 7:25 Don't let your heart turn to her ways. Don't go astray in her paths-

The young man's heart was made to go astray because of her, and her house led him to death (Prov. 7:27). Miss Egypt caused Solomon's heart to go astray (1 Kings 11:1-4), he built her a house, and her house became an idol temple which destroyed Solomon's faith.

Yet Solomon warned the young men of Israel all about this in Prov. 7; and he even pointed out that such a woman would have all the outward trappings of Yahweh worship; she would claim an enthusiasm for keeping peace offerings and vows (Prov. 7:14).

Solomon was the young man whose picture he was painting.

Pro 7:26 for she has thrown down many wounded. Yes, all her slain are a mighty army-

Solomon had seen many good men destroyed by bad women, a whole army of them. And yet he went that same way. Knowledge of theoretical truth, observation of the sad path of others... is all not enough. There must be a humble personalization of wisdom, which only comes from throwing ourselves upon God's grace, experiencing that grace, and wanting to respond to it in a life and thought pattern in conformity to His will and way. But Solomon hadn't known any of that.

Pro 7:27 Her house is the way to Sheol, going down to the rooms of death-

Solomon's wisdom was given to him as a young man, and the book of Proverbs appears to be collections of the various statements of that wisdom. But about the same time, he also got involved with multiple Gentile women who led him astray from God and to idolatry. The very warnings he gives against the adulteress and Gentile woman were ignored by him; he became the young man who went wrong with women. His girlfriend speaks in the very language of the Gentile woman of Proverbs: "I found him whom my soul loveth: I held him, and would not let him go, until I had brought him into my mother's house... into her chamber" (Song 3:4). Compare this with "She caught him... come not near the door of her house... her

house... the chambers of death" (Prov. 7:13,27; 5:8). We see here the warning for all time; that we can know God's ways in theory, whilst disobeying them in practice, absolutely to the letter. Indeed it may be so that the more we know them, the more strongly we are tempted by our nature to break them.

PROVERBS CHAPTER 8

Pro 8:1 Doesn't wisdom cry out? Doesn't understanding raise her voice?-

These are the very words used of how man is to cry out and raise his voice for wisdom and understanding (Prov. 2:3). The idea is that God's wisdom and understanding is crying out to those who are crying out for it. There is thus a mutuality between God and man. And the old Yiddish proverb comes true: "And going out to find Him / I met Him coming towards me". God is in search of man, and true man is in search for God. And when they meet, there is that electric spark, parties in Heaven celebrating the reconnection.

Pro 8:2 On the top of high places by the way, where the paths meet, she stands-

The crying out of wisdom in Proverbs is alluded to by the Lord as the pattern for our appealing to men and women. A feast is prepared by wisdom, and she sends out people to invite others to come in to it (Prov. 9:1-3)- clearly the basis for the Lord's parable about the King's feast. Those who reject these invitations sin against their own souls (Prov. 8:36)- just as those who reject our witness reject the appeal of God against themselves (Lk. 7:30). Wisdom appeals to people "where the paths meet" (Prov. 8:2 RV), just as the Lord taught that our witness to people places them at a 'crossroad', whereby they have to decide for or against their God. In this context my point is that the appeal of "wisdom" in Proverbs is in a spirit of urgency- an urgency inspired by the ultimate seriousness of the message, and the fact that there are only two paths in Proverbs which men can chose. It's either eternal life or eternal death, the way of wisdom or folly, obedience to the call of the woman wisdom or to the call of the harlot. There's no third way- and this should be the spirit of our witness. Insofar as we appreciate the ultimate eternity of the issues we're preaching about, so we will find a power of urgency that somehow appeals to people and compels them.

Pro 8:3 Beside the gates, at the entry of the city, at the entry doors, she cries aloud-

The wise woman wisdom is presented here as the antithesis of the whore described in Prov. 7, who is also seen outside, crying aloud to men. They both teach, but the whore's teaching leads astray. This contrast between such women is found in Revelation, where the whore is the antithesis of the bride of Christ.

Pro 8:4 To you people I call! I send my voice to the sons of mankind-

The call or cry of wisdom is presented as in response to the cry of the believer for wisdom (s.w. Prov. 2:3; 7:4). There is a mutuality between God and man. We search for God, yet God is in search of man. And when we meet, there is that electric spark spoken of in the parables of Luke 15, whereby Heaven and earth are united together in an electric spark of joy at finding each other. Solomon parallels "the sons of mankind", people generally, with simple fools (:5). Whilst there is an element of truth in this from a spiritual angle, we also get the impression that Solomon despises people generally, leading him to abuse his own people at the end of his reign, whipping them into submission, as they were to complain of at his death.

Pro 8:5 You simple, understand prudence. You fools, be of an understanding heart-
See on :4. David likens himself to the simple who was made wise by God's word (Ps. 19:7; 119:130), and was therefore preserved (Ps. 116:6). To be taught by God's word we have to become "simple", unlearning and placing to one side all our perceived knowledge and understandings. Solomon repeats David's theme by saying that wisdom makes wise the simple (Prov. 1:4; 8:5; 9:4). But he is equating "wisdom" with the words of God, although for Solomon, "wisdom" seems to be what he is saying and teaching. Solomon doesn't direct his listeners back to God's word, as David did, but rather towards loyalty to his teaching. Inspired as it was, his lack of extended reference to God's law places his own teaching of "wisdom" above that law. This is in sharp contrast to David's attitude in Ps. 119.

Pro 8:6 Hear, for I will speak excellent things. The opening of my lips is for right things-
The woman wisdom's lips and words are contrasted with those of the whore in Prov. 7:21. See on :3. "Excellent" translates a Hebrew term usually referring to a ruler or prince, the very term used of Solomon as king (1 Kings 1:35; Prov. 28:16). Again, we see Solomon assuming that the words of wisdom are the words of himself as king. He failed to appreciate the degree to which he was merely a channel for God's truth, and came to assume that his words and positions were on the same level as God's. He therefore ended up playing God, assuming that submission to himself was submission to Divine wisdom. And this is an abiding temptation for all who are used as channels for God's truth. Solomon liked to imagine that he was perfectly obedient to his mother's command to open his lips in right judgment (s.w. Prov. 31:9). But he went further, to assume that whatever he spoke in whatever context was right and true (see on Prov. 8:6-8).

Pro 8:7 For my mouth speaks truth. Wickedness is an abomination to my lips-
As noted on :6, Solomon's personification of wisdom ends up with him effectively considering that it is his own mouth which speaks truth, and his lips simply cannot utter wickedness. And so he went wrong; he assumed that because he did speak Divine truths, therefore all his words and positions were those of wisdom. He thereby lost any sense of personal self examination, or awareness of his own possibility of personal failure. And again we see this repeated in the lives of others who know and teach God's truth.

Pro 8:8 All the words of my mouth are in righteousness. There is nothing crooked or perverse in them-

As noted on :6,7, Solomon takes this personification of wisdom too far- in that he ends up thinking all the words of his mouth must be right just because he was chosen as the channel for God's words. The "crooked and perverse" are those David his father saw as being condemned (s.w. Ps. 18:26), in contrast to "the pure". Solomon wrongly assumed that his knowledge of Divine truth made him "pure" of itself.

Pro 8:9 They are all plain to him who understands, right to those who find knowledge-

The implication is that anyone who disagreed with or misunderstood what Solomon said was not really seeking knowledge. And yet there is, as always, a general truth here; that God's words are "plain" and clear to those who love Him. Those who wish to do God's will can easily discern doctrine / teaching (Jn. 7:17). Much [although not all] 'misunderstanding' or complaint that the Bible is hard to understand is rooted in a refusal to do God's will. People often do not understand because they don't want to. All is plain and clear to those of a humble heart.

Pro 8:10 Receive my instruction rather than silver; knowledge rather than choice gold-

Solomon has so much to say about "correction" or "instruction" coming from the possession of wisdom (Prov. 8:10,33; 10:17; 12:1; 13:1,24; 15:5,10,32; 16:22; 19:20,27; 22:15; 23:12,13). But in the end he chastised or corrected his people by whipping them (s.w. 1 Kings 12:11,14). Solomon initially asked for wisdom in order to guide his people, but he ended up whipping / physically chastising them into conformity with his wishes rather than allowing wisdom to correct. Again, he was playing God; for it is God through His wisdom who chastises, and not man. But Solomon thought he was effectively God to his people. This is why Solomon argues that servants cannot be corrected by words (Prov. 29:19 s.w.), and a child must be physically chastised (s.w. Prov. 19:18; 29:17 cp. Prov. 13:24; 23:13), regardless of his screams of pain. This kind of thing is a denial of his claims elsewhere that it is Divine wisdom which chastises / corrects, and such correction is from God and not man. Solomon's final description of himself as an old and foolish king who refuses to be admonished says it all (Ecc. 4:13); he admonishes others (s.w. Ecc. 12:12), but refuses to be admonished or corrected by his own wisdom. He failed to personalize it.

Pro 8:11 For wisdom is better than rubies. All the things that may be desired can't be compared to it-

The words of Job 28:18 are repeatedly quoted in Proverbs (Prov. 3:15; 8:11; 20:15). "Wisdom" in Proverbs refers not so much to nuggets of truth, but to a way of life in relationship with God; for that is the context in the source passage in Job 28:18 cp. 28.

Pro 8:12 I, wisdom, have made prudence my dwelling. Find out knowledge and discretion-

The emphasis of Solomon is always upon needing to "find out knowledge" through accepting the wisdom he taught. This is no bad exhortation of itself. But it is not the accent given by an understanding of God's grace. Through intellectual searching, we will not find out God, i.e. build relationship with Him- as Job concluded. The Bible is not a riddle to be solved, with relationship with God waiting there as a reward for getting things right. Bible study alone doesn't lead a man to God; or else this would be reason for boasting in intellectual prowess. The Divine-human encounter and relationship is instead predicated upon His prevenient grace, His initiative in seeking us. And so it is not so much a question of us knowing God, but of His knowing us (Gal. 4:9). We love because He first loved us (1 Jn. 4:19).

Pro 8:13 The fear of Yahweh is to hate evil. I hate pride, arrogance, the evil way, and the perverse mouth-

Solomon, as often, repeats his father's phrases. Here he has in mind Ps. 97:10 "You that love Yahweh, hate evil". But Solomon replaces *loving* Yahweh with *fearing* Yahweh. and he gives far stronger accent to the aspect of 'hating' evil and evil people. This is not merely Solomon wishing to put everything in black and white terms; but through that, he is seeking to use God's truth as a vehicle through which to express hatred against others, rather than love. And this is related to why he thinks in terms of *fearing* God rather than *loving Him*.

Pro 8:14 Counsel and sound knowledge are mine. I have understanding and power-

The word translated "power" is frequently used of the power of a king, which is the context of the following verses. Solomon is justifying himself, arguing that he has power to act as he likes because he has wisdom. And the same abuse of possession of Divine truth has so often been seen. By contrast, David often uses this word for "power" about God's power, and the way He uses it to save people, by grace (Ps. 106:8 etc.). But Solomon speaks of such "power" as being possessed by kings [he has himself in view], predicated upon the possession of wisdom.

Pro 8:15 By me kings reign, and princes decree justice-

Solomon is again justifying himself. He had been given wisdom in order to reign over Israel on God's behalf, but from that good basis he had slipped into considering himself as therefore automatically just and right in whatever abuse of power he chose to exercise (see on :14). And he ends his reign abusing and whipping his people. He maintained his intellectual grasp of wisdom to the end (Ecc. 2:9), but he didn't reign nor live by it. He is proof enough that mere intellectual assent to God's truth is not going to save anyone.

Pro 8:16 By me princes rule; nobles, and all the righteous rulers of the earth-

By "the earth", Solomon has in view the *eretz* promised to Abraham. The local rulers he had established were to teach his wisdom and judge and rule according to it. But again, Solomon's personification of wisdom gets confused with himself personally. For it was he who had appointed the various rulers, princes and nobles of Israel, as the historical records record. But he says here that wisdom had done that.

Pro 8:17 I love those who love me. Those who seek me diligently will find me-

The Lord Jesus taught that we should love our enemies, and not fall into the trap of only loving those who love us (Mt. 5:44-46). He seems to be alluding here to Solomon's claim that wisdom says: "I love them that love me" (Prov. 8:17). It seems likely that He was consciously showing that God's grace is in fact the very opposite of what Solomon thought. God loves His enemies, and doesn't only love those who love Him; and this is to be our credo likewise.

The woman wisdom is the opposite of the whore in Prov. 7, who likewise says she seeks and finds men (Prov. 7:15). But Solomon appears to draw a contrast between the whore seeking and finding the man, and the wise woman being sought and found by men. But Solomon fails to perceive that God by grace is in search of man, and indeed He had searched for and found Solomon's father David (Ps. 89:20). Solomon really understands nothing of the grace by which God works constantly in practice.

Pro 8:18 With me are riches, honour, enduring wealth, and prosperity-

This, again, is true, but not quite so simply as Solomon likes to present it. It is true that he chose wisdom rather than wealth, and was rewarded for that with great and enduring wealth. But many of God's wise people have been poor, or lost their wealth and honour; His Son being the parade example (2 Cor. 8:9). Yet Solomon failed to realize that his wealth was given to him by grace, and not because he was wise. And so he makes the false step further, to say that if we have wisdom, we will then have wealth. And logically, any who are poor are so because they have refused wisdom. And that is simply a wrong conclusion. The Gospel has ever been "good news for the poor", rather than a rebuke of them for their poverty.

Pro 8:19 My fruit is better than gold, yes, than fine gold; my yield than choice silver-

This as it were seeks to qualify the simplistic conclusion offered in :18, that wisdom leads to wealth. Solomon has indeed just said that, but now he says that the fruit of wisdom is even more valuable than the material wealth which he thinks wisdom will give to the wise. Solomon's father David concluded that the law of God was better than gold and silver (s.w. Ps. 119:72). But as so often in the book of Proverbs, Solomon speaks of the wisdom he was teaching in the same terms as the Bible elsewhere speaks of God's entire revelation. And he saw fit to flout God's law. It was as if his obsession with the wisdom material he was teaching had led him to effectively replace God's laws with his own. He saw the particular Divine truths he had been given as eclipsing the rest of God's revelation; a mistake we see commonly made.

Pro 8:20 I walk in the way of righteousness, in the midst of the paths of justice-

Again it seems that Solomon's personification of wisdom leads him to come out with things which he clearly enough saw as descriptions of himself. He saw himself as wisdom personified, walking always in the right way, and always judging justly. And the one who walked in "the way of righteousness" would never die (Prov. 12:28 s.w.). Solomon saw his possession of Divine truths as the guarantee of itself that he was the eternal Messianic king. He had been warned that he must walk in the way of God if he was to have long life (s.w. 1 Kings 3:14); but he assumed that the mere possession of Divine wisdom meant he was in that "way". As he got older and was reminded of his own mortality, he would have realized that he had to recalculate his position; and he ended up with the cynicism about his own wisdom seen in Ecclesiastes. And yet his injustice to his own people was evidence enough that he didn't do this in reality, but only in his own mind (1 Kings 12:11).

Pro 8:21 that I may give wealth to those who love me. I fill their treasuries-

I discussed on :18 how this is not totally true. Often Solomon's Proverbs bring out the tension between wealth and wisdom, and the need to choose wisdom (Prov. 8:11; 16:16). But whilst he was inspired to write this, and true as it all was, it is inevitable that Solomon said all this with his mind on the way that he had rejected wealth for wisdom when asked by God for his wish. He thought that his right choice in early life [cp. Christian baptism] justified him in later loving wealth rather than wisdom. He taught that wisdom filled the treasuries of the wise (Prov. 8:21 RV)- just as his treasuries were filled with wealth.

Pro 8:22 Yahweh possessed me in the beginning of His work, before His deeds of old-

LXX has "created" for "possessed". Wisdom was "set up" (:23), "brought forth" (:24,25).

Wisdom is presented as having been 'created' by God, right at the beginning, before the present world was made. Any attempt to use this passage to prove the eternal preexistence of the Lord Jesus is doomed to failure, therefore. It is true that the passage in Jn. 1:1-3 about the *logos* or "word" existing in the beginning, on account of whom all was made, may be alluding here. But clearly enough in this passage, "wisdom" is personified, just as the "word" is in Jn. 1:1-3. The Lord Jesus didn't physically, personally exist before His conception. The word, or wisdom / *logos*, became flesh in Him (Jn. 1:14). And indeed He thereby became the living embodiment of the word / wisdom, and can therefore truly be called "Christ... the wisdom of God" (1 Cor. 1:24,30). But this is not to say that He personally existed in Solomon's time. To insist on reading the text like this is to miss the point that the language of personification and preexistence "with God" is common in Jewish and indeed all Semitic writings. See on :23.

Pro 8:23 I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning, before the earth existed-

This kind of language is common in the literature of the time; see on :22. But it is primitive to suggest that there was a literal personal being called wisdom who existed at the beginning, just as it is to suggest this person was the Lord Jesus. The records of His birth leave out any possibility for His personal preexistence. Thus chapter 42 of the Book of Enoch likewise speaks of the personality and preexistence of Wisdom: "Wisdom found no place where she could dwell; therefore was her dwelling in heaven. Wisdom came forth in order to dwell among the sons of men, and found no habitation; then she returned to her place, and took her seat among the angels". Likewise Wisdom 8:3: "In that she dwelleth with God, she magnifieth her nobility". This is the language of personification; in no way is a literal being in view.

Pro 8:24 When there were no depths, I was brought forth, when there were no springs abounding with water-

The specific references to the waters are because the Genesis creation is spoken of as happening after a point at which the earth was covered with deep waters (Gen. 1:2). But before that point, wisdom was there, God's plan, His ways. LXX "Before the springs of the

waters came forward" would be a reference to the opening up of the fountains at the flood (Gen. 7:11).

Pro 8:25 Before the mountains were settled in place, before the hills, I was brought forth-
The language of Ps. 90:2 about God Himself, who existed before the mountains were settled. But again we note that "wisdom" was brought forth; it had a beginning. Whereas God has no beginning. We cannot simply equate wisdom with God. There is a marked difference between them. Any attempt to prove "Jesus = God" because He is called the wisdom of God is therefore simplistic and lacking in attention to what the text is saying.

Pro 8:26 while as yet He had not made the earth, nor the fields-
The distinction is between the areas used by man and those not. LXX "The Lord made countries and uninhabited places".

Nor the beginning of the dust of the world-
This could be an oblique reference to the seed of Abraham, who were to multiply as the dust- if they followed the way of wisdom. Or "The highest part of the dust of the world" could refer to the creation of man from the dust, the *rosh* or head of all creation (Gen. 3:19; Ecc. 3:20).

Pro 8:27 When He established the skies, I was there; when He set a circle on the surface of the deep-
Here as in Job 22:14, the reference is to the idea that there was a dome like vault called "heaven", imagined as resting on an ocean which surrounds the earth. As with the language of demons in the New Testament, wrong ideas aren't necessarily corrected in the Biblical record. People had these ideas, but believed that God was behind them. And the overall form [belief, faith in God as creator] was more significant to God than the exact content. Human attempts at religion have emphasized the opposite.

Pro 8:28 when He established the clouds above, when the springs of the deep became strong-
This may be a reference to the events of the flood, when the springs of the deep were unleashed (Gen. 7:11). The flood, therefore, was an outcome of "wisdom", it was according to God's plan and in line with His principles, and not some senseless pouring out of Divine anger. LXX "When he made secure the fountains of the earth beneath the heaven" would continue the allusions to current conceptions of creation and cosmology, however incorrect (see on :27).

Pro 8:29 when He gave to the sea its boundary, that the waters should not violate His commandment, when He marked out the foundations of the earth-
The reference may be to the earth / land promised to Abraham. The sea of Gentile nations were given a boundary beyond which they could not pass in their aggression toward Israel

(Jer. 5:22). This was all by the Divine grace which is such an integral part of His "wisdom", His purpose, His word from the beginning.

Pro 8:30 then I was the craftsman by His side. I was a delight day by day, always rejoicing before Him-

This again is the language of personification and not to be taken literally. And such language is found in contemporary writings, with no hint that a literal person is to be imagined. Thus in Wisdom 7:22, Wisdom is called "the worker of all things... from the beginning". And indeed the whole of creation was according to God's wisdom (Prov. 3:19); God spoke, and the creation came about. Creation is presented in Genesis as by the spoken word of God, but that "word" reflected His wisdom, the *logos* which was from the beginning.

Pro 8:31 rejoicing in His whole world. My delight was with the sons of men-

The joy of God and the Angels in creation is elsewhere mentioned (Job 38:7; Ps. 104:31). In this sense, "wisdom" rejoiced. God's special joy was in the creation and salvation of men-according to the principles of His wisdom.

Pro 8:32 Now therefore, my sons, listen to me, for blessed are those who keep my ways-

Solomon's prophetic sonship of David was conditional upon him preserving or observing Yahweh's ways (1 Kings 2:4; 1 Chron. 22:13; 2 Chron. 7:17); but he didn't preserve or observe them (1 Kings 11:10,11); despite David praying that Solomon would be given a heart to observe them (1 Chron. 29:19). We can pray for God to work upon the hearts of others, but He will not force people against their own deepest will and heart position. Solomon stresses overmuch how God would keep or preserve the righteous (Prov. 2:8; 3:26), without recognizing the conditional aspect of this. Why did Solomon go wrong? His Proverbs are true enough, but he stresses that obedience to *his* wisdom and teaching would preserve his hearers (Prov. 4:4; 6:22; 7:1; 8:32; 15:5), preservation was through following the example of the wise (Prov. 2:20); rather than stressing obedience to *God's* ways, and replacing David his father's simple love of God with a love of academic wisdom: "Yahweh preserves all those who love Him" (Ps. 145:20).

He spoke of *his* law as giving life and blessing, appropriating the very terms of Deuteronomy about the blessings of obedience to *God's* law. Wisdom said: "Now therefore my sons, hearken unto me: for blessed are they that keep my ways" (Prov. 8:32 RV). Yet these are the very words Solomon uses when talking to his kids: "Now therefore my sons, hearken unto me" (Prov. 5:7; 7:24). Conclusion? Solomon sees the woman "Wisdom" as a personification of himself. It was really Solomon's self-justification. *He personally* was wisdom, so he thought. This is how self-exalted his possession of true wisdom made him. And of course, his kids *didn't* listen to wisdom's way. In passing, I have noted that those raised 'in the truth' often find it very hard to take criticism in later life. They find tolerance of others' views hard; they perceive themselves to be right to an intolerant extent. Is this not a little bit of the Solomon syndrome?

Pro 8:33 Hear instruction, and be wise. Don't refuse it-

The same power of wisdom in the natural creation just described can be articulated to men who accept wisdom, thereby forming a new creation (2 Cor. 5:17).

Pro 8:34 Blessed is the man who hears me, watching daily at my gates, waiting at my door posts-

This may be an intentional contrast with the bad woman in Prov. 7, who tempts men to furtively enter the doors and gates of her house. And Solomon failed in this; for the Song of Solomon speaks of the "gates" of his illicit Gentile girlfriend (Song 7:13), outside which Solomon waited secretly at night (Song 5:2,4). The language of doors, posts and gates recurs in the descriptions of Solomon's temple. The subtext could be that Solomon considered that building to be the repository of wisdom, in that from there he taught wisdom; whereas the true abode of wisdom is in human hearts.

Pro 8:35 For whoever finds me finds life, and will obtain favour from Yahweh-

True as this is, as noted on :12, through intellectual searching, we will not find out God, i.e. build relationship with Him- as Job concluded. The Bible is not a riddle to be solved, with relationship with God waiting there as a reward for getting things right and our intellectual search ending in 'finding'. Bible study alone doesn't lead a man to God; or else this would be reason for boasting in intellectual prowess. The Divine-human encounter and relationship is instead predicated upon His prevenient grace, His initiative in seeking us. And so it is not so much a question of us knowing God, but of His knowing us (Gal. 4:9). We love because He first loved us (1 Jn. 4:19).

God's "favour" isn't predicated upon our intellectual prowess in mastering "wisdom" (Prov. 8:35) nor upon our good works (Prov. 12:2). Academic truth and / or good living isn't as it were the key which opens up access to God's grace. For otherwise Divine "favour" would be a reward, and grace would no longer be grace. See on :36.

Pro 8:36 But he who sins against me wrongs his own soul. All those who hate me love death-

"Sins" is the word for 'missing', and is the antithesis of 'finding' wisdom in :35. But whilst this may be true in a sense, Solomon has the idea that those who seek wisdom but miss finding her will be punished for it. The truth is that God is in search of man, and finally all we have to do is say "yes" to His approach. Intellectual failure will not of itself mean that we have 'missed' God; for He is right on course for us. The Divine-human encounter I discussed on :12 will surely happen; for God is coming out to meet us, and is focused upon us. The sin, the failure, is to refuse His approach. But Solomon, like many fundamentalists, puts the failure on missing wisdom, not finding truth, for whatever reason.

PROVERBS CHAPTER 9

Pro 9:1 Wisdom has built her house, she has carved out her seven pillars-

See on Prov. 8:2. Solomon's great obsession had been the building of the temple, replete with pillars. I have noted on Prov. 8 that his personification of "wisdom" is to the point that he speaks of himself as "wisdom" personified. So here, his picture of wisdom building her grand and glorious house is in fact referring to his building of grandiose houses, both for God and for himself and his wives.

Pro 9:2 she has prepared her bread, she has mixed her wine. She has also set her table-

A table with bread and wine on it is the language of the altar, the table of Yahweh. As noted on :1, Solomon presents the house wisdom built as the temple which *he* had built.

Pro 9:3 she has sent out her maidens, she cries from the highest places of the city-

The call or cry of wisdom is presented as in response to the cry of the believer for wisdom (s.w. Prov. 2:3; 7:4). There is a mutuality between God and man. We search for God, yet God is in search of man. And when we meet, there is that electric spark spoken of in the parables of Luke 15, whereby Heaven and earth are united together in an electric spark of joy at finding each other.

Pro 9:4 Whoever is simple, let him turn in here! As for him who is void of understanding, she says to him-

David likens himself to the simple who was made wise by God's word (Ps. 19:7; 119:130), and was therefore preserved (Ps. 116:6). To be taught by God's word we have to become "simple", unlearning and placing to one side all our perceived knowledge and understandings. Solomon repeats David's theme by saying that wisdom makes wise the simple (Prov. 1:4; 8:5; 9:4). But he is equating "wisdom" with the words of God, although for Solomon, "wisdom" seems to be what he is saying and teaching. Solomon doesn't direct his listeners back to God's word, as David did, but rather towards loyalty to his teaching. Inspired as it was, his lack of extended reference to God's law places his own teaching of "wisdom" above that law. This is in sharp contrast to David's attitude in Ps. 119.

Pro 9:5 Come, eat some of my bread, drink some of the wine which I have mixed!-

The contrast is with the invitation of wicked men to eat their bread and drink their wine of wickedness and violence (Prov. 4:17). Solomon again presents life as being of diametrical opposites, with people within Israel divided between the desperately, criminally wicked- and the spotlessly wise and righteous. But this is simply not true to reality. Human thought and behaviour within the people of God is more mixed than that. Bread and wine even in Old Testament times were of sacramental significance. The wicked are presented as not offering true sacrifice, but a fake appearance of it, to the praise and glory of wickedness and violence. Whereas the wise offer perfectly acceptable sacrifice.

Pro 9:6 Leave your simple ways, and live. Walk in the way of understanding-

These are the words used by David in Ps. 119:37: "Revive me in Your ways". This idea of living in God's ways was a promised blessing for remaining in the covenant (Dt. 5:33; 30:16). Solomon here uses the phrase for living in the way of

understanding, but the difference with his father David was that David asks to be "revived" or made to live in those ways; whereas Solomon exhorts people to attempt to do this in their own strength and steel willpower. And this ultimately fails, as it did with Solomon.

Pro 9:7 He who corrects a mocker invites insult; he who reproves a wicked man invites abuse-

What is said in :7-9 is true enough, but it presupposes that we judge who is a mocker or scoffer (:8) before sharing with them the reproof and hope of true wisdom. This is out of step with God's universal appeal to "all men" as sinners to repent and accept His grace; wise and unwise, mockers and spiritual enthusiasts alike, are all sinners and in that sense unwise. And the records of the "insults" and "abuse" suffered by the Lord Jesus and His apostles are evidence enough that they did not seek to avoid these things by only selectively witnessing to only some men- those they judged wise.

Pro 9:8 Don't reprove a scoffer, lest he hate you-

As noted on :7, this may be true, but it is not an approach of love. Job's friends were scoffers (s.w. Job 16:20), but still they were reproved by him and God. Our appeal to others should not be made selectively, based upon the likely response we think they will make. Thus it is quite wrong to reason that a person should not be baptized because they may fall away, or it may divide the church. We think of how John the Baptist rebuked Herod, and was hated for it by Herodias.

Reprove a wise man, and he will love you-

Solomon may be justifying his father David's response to Nathan the prophet.

Pro 9:9 instruct a wise man, and he will be still wiser. Teach a righteous man, and he will increase in learning-

This is true, but as noted on :7,8, it rather presupposes that we can somehow judge the spiritual nature of our audience before we begin sharing instruction / wisdom with them. It is indeed so that there is an upward spiral in spiritual life, whereby the wise become wiser. But our motive for wanting to share wisdom ought to be to make the foolish wise, rather than confirm the wise in their wisdom.

Pro 9:10 The fear of Yahweh is the beginning of wisdom, the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding-

Solomon repeats his father David's conclusion that wisdom begins with the fear of Yahweh (Ps. 111:10 = Prov. 1:7; 9:10). This statement is in sharp contrast with the accepted view of the times, that wisdom was held by the sages, and was accessible only by sitting at their feet. But this idea (and it is common enough today too) is subverted by this idea that wisdom begins in each individual heart being in fear of Yahweh- so that wisdom from Him can be personally experienced, taught directly through relationship with Him rather than sitting at the feet of a human sage.

"Wisdom" is parallel with getting "a good understanding" by 'doing His work' or obeying His commandments (Ps. 111:10b). The work we are to do for God in obeying His ways is not simply a test of our obedience; it is designed to give us wisdom.

Wisdom therefore comes from experience of obedience and relationship with God, rather than from picking up nuggets of 'truth' from human sages. The fear of God is therefore not so much referring to a fear of the consequence of our sins; but the fear or reverence expressed through keeping His commandments (see on Ps. 112:1).

"Holy One" can as well be translated "the assembly", the 'holy ones', as if Solomon saw wisdom as held by a group of holy people.

Pro 9:11 For by me your days will be multiplied. The years of your life will be increased-

Solomon claims that the righteous / wise live long lives, and therefore the unwise have shorter lives. This was the promise for obedience to the old covenant (s.w. Dt. 11:21). But it is not always the case, as Job learned (s.w. Job 29:18). And it was so with the Lord Jesus. And faithful men often lament that the wicked seem to get long life, whilst the righteous don't. The answer to that conundrum is that final blessing of long life is at the resurrection, at the last day; and not in this life. But Solomon didn't see that; he thought that long life now was the only reward. He failed to perceive the real meaning of the Gospel of the Kingdom.

Pro 9:12 If you are wise, you are wise for yourself. If you mock, you alone will bear it-

Solomon presents wisdom as of great personal benefit, indeed it is "for yourself"; and folly likewise is to your loss. But this presents a somewhat selfish view of wisdom. Solomon had been granted wisdom not for himself, but because he wanted to know how best to rule God's great people (1 Kings 3:9). But once he has the wisdom, he becomes exalted by it, and concludes that wisdom is essentially for the personal benefit of those who have it, "you are wise for yourself" (Prov. 9:12). Whatever truths are revealed to us are so that we might use them to the glory of God with others, and not to merely keep them for our own personal benefit.

Pro 9:13 The foolish woman is loud, undisciplined, and knows nothing-

Just as the woman wisdom "loudly" proclaims her truths on the streets. This woman is a conscious parody of the righteous woman of Prov. 8. This contrast between such women is found in Revelation, where the whore is the antithesis of the bride of Christ.

Pro 9:14 She sits at the door of her house, on a seat in the high places of the city-

We note that Solomon considered that the wise woman does stay in her house, whereas the sinful woman doesn't. This appears to be Solomon's chauvinism rather than true wisdom. For he then presents the woman wisdom as being publically on the streets pleading with men to turn in to her wisdom.

The blindness of Solomon is driven home time and again. The wicked Gentile woman is associated with a large house in a high place, in the temple area. But this is exactly where Solomon built his Egyptian wife a house!

Pro 9:15 to call to those who pass by, who go straight on their ways-

Solomon thinks of the righteous as walking unflinchingly forward in wisdom, never turning to the right or left, refusing to be distracted by any wicked person who suggests walking another way (Prov. 9:15 "to call travellers who go directly on their way"). This approach fails to take account of the simple fact that righteous people sin and stray from the direct path every day, and are saved finally into God's Kingdom by grace alone. That is all something Solomon failed to have any grasp of, whereas David his father did. Prov. 11:5 makes the somewhat tautological statement that "the righteousness of the perfect shall direct his way", s.w. Prov. 4:25 "fix your gaze

directly before you". This contrasts with how David uses the word in Ps. 5:8: "Lead me, O Yahweh... make Your way straight [s.w. direct] before my face". The same statement of God directing in the straight way is found in Is. 45:13; Jer. 18:4 s.w. Solomon didn't see this need for the Spirit of God to direct his path because he assumed that mere possession of Divine truth would itself keep him in the way; hence he teaches that "understanding" makes a man walk "directly" (Prov. 15:21). And he failed miserably because of that arrogant position.

Pro 9:16 Whoever is simple, let him turn in here. As for him who is void of understanding, she says to him-

Again, this is a parody of the woman wisdom, who likewise gives teaching to "the simple". The person without / lacking or void of understanding is typically the adulterer or sexual sinner (s.w. Prov. 6:32; 7:7; 9:4,16). But Solomon failed with women, despite priding himself on his wisdom. So by 'having understanding' he seems to refer to the mere intellectual possession of it. He thought this would alone preserve men from temptation and sin; but he utterly failed to personalize wisdom. Possession of Divine truth does not of itself preserve from sin; and Solomon is the parade example of this.

Pro 9:17 Stolen water is sweet. Food eaten in secret is pleasant-

"Water" is euphemism for semen, confirming that illicit sexual behaviour is in view, which agrees with the context. The idea of secret bread may allude to the shewbread, and I suggested on Prov. 7:14 that this bad woman portrays herself in the language of the Mosaic law. This was the basis of her attraction to a young Israelite man.

Pro 9:18 But he doesn't know that the dead are there, that her guests are in the depths of Sheol-

The idea is that they are in a living death; her house is the house of the grave. "Guests" is literally "called / invited ones". They responded to her call, which is a parody and antithesis of the call of wisdom. And indeed there are only two ways before us in life, the call of the word of God and that of the flesh, personified here as a whore.

PROVERBS CHAPTER 10

Pro 10:1 The proverbs of Solomon. A wise son makes a glad father; but a foolish son brings grief to his mother-

Although this is all inspired wisdom, Solomon does seem to have his mind on his own self-justification in the way he expresses it. All his many references to "David my father" suggest his spirituality was a living out of parental expectation. He had been called the "wise son" of David (1 Kings 5:7; 2 Chron. 2:12) even before David died, and he clearly wanted to live out that expectation by asking for wisdom and implying his father would've been so happy with him. Yet his heart was far from personal wisdom, as he later admits in Ecclesiastes.

He says that a wise son makes a glad father, so intent was he on living out his father's expectations even after David's death. Because of this he teaches that the King must always be right and be respected, whatever happens (Prov. 16:10-15). He saw himself as the Messianic King and therefore infallible. He again and again failed to realize the

conditionality of all God has promised.

Pro 10:2 Treasures of wickedness profit nothing, but righteousness delivers from death-
"Treasures" is Heb. storehouses. Solomon built these for his horses and his wealth. We have a tendency to do the very thing we know is wrong, just as Solomon married Gentile women despite all his warnings against doing so. This is one window on the ability of religious people to be the worse hypocrites.

David appealed to *God's* righteousness for deliverance from the consequence of his sins (Ps. 71:2). This was appropriate, seeing that David had been saved from death by God's imputation of His righteousness to David (Ps. 32:1-4), by grace through faith; seeing David's sins left him with no righteousness of his own. And it was on this basis that David believed he would continue to be saved / delivered / rescued (s.w. Ps. 51:14 in the Bathsheba context). But Solomon failed to learn from his mother and father's experience of grace, teaching instead that personal righteousness is what saves (Prov. 10:2; 11:4,6).

Pro 10:3 Yahweh will not allow the soul of the righteous to go hungry, but He thrusts away the desire of the wicked-

In the court of Heaven, God "thrusteth away the desire of the wicked" (Prov. 10:3 RV)- as if their prayers are rejected there. And yet Solomon appears to simplistically assume that the righteous never suffer, which the book of Job and other scripture show quite simply not to be the case. It is however true that the righteous would not starve to death; God would always provide for them. And this should be of huge strength to us in our battle against the fears which arise from living in a materialistic society.

Pro 10:4 He becomes poor who works with a lazy hand, but the hand of the diligent brings wealth-

Solomon repeatedly sees poverty as being the fault of the poor, and their refusal of his teaching of wisdom (s.w. Prov. 6:11; 10:4,15; 13:7,8,18,23; 24:34; 28:19; 31:7). Many of these passages are effectively mocking the poor, which Solomon condemns in Prov. 17:5. He fails to take his own wisdom, as we also see in his behaviour with foreign women. Again we see Solomon's works based approach to righteousness, and lack of grace; refusing to accept that we are all poor men before God, as David himself exemplified when he cried to God as a poor man (Ps. 34:6). But his much beloved father David was unashamed to say he was a materially "poor man" (1 Sam. 18:23); and Uriah, whom he wronged, is described also as a "poor man" (2 Sam. 12:1). The poor were to be defended and given to (Ps. 82:3), and the Bible is clear that poverty isn't necessarily a result of sin or unwisdom. But Solomon fails to appreciate this, so obsessed is he with works, and the idea that obedience to his anthology of Proverbs will make the poor prosperous, as if God's truth is a kind of wealth creation scheme.

Pro 10:5 He who gathers in summer is a wise son, but he who sleeps during the harvest is a

son who causes shame-

Solomon contrasts wisdom with shame. But he goes too far in saying that the wise gather in harvest time; for that is what most people do, wise or unwise. He seems over enthusiastic to paint those without the wisdom he taught as lazy and shameful. But there are many who reject Divine wisdom who are zealous gatherers of their harvest, and hard workers. As noted elsewhere in Proverbs, it could be that the Lord's parable of the rich fool with great harvests is intended to correct some of these images. For He there presents the man with good harvests as foolish, and lacking wisdom; whereas Solomon claims that good harvests are the reward for the wise, and the foolish don't enjoy that.

Pro 10:6 Blessings are on the head of the righteous, but violence covers the mouth of the wicked-

Solomon repeatedly condemns "the mouth of the wicked" (Prov. 10:6,11,32; 11:11; 12:6; 15:28; 19:28). All he says is true enough, but he clearly enough has in view how his father David had condemned the supporters of Saul and Absalom as having "the mouth of the wicked" (Ps. 109:2). And these were the groups who were threatening his power and throne. Solomon presents himself by implication as having the mouth of the just / righteous. And yet we must note that David too had spoken multiple words of deceit in relation to the murder of Uriah. Indeed the phrase is used in Is. 53:9 as if the Lord Jesus was the only man who didn't have a "mouth of deceit". Solomon like David was in denial of the fact that we all sin with our mouths, as James makes clear in James 3:1-3.

Pro 10:7 The memory of the righteous is blessed, but the name of the wicked will rot-

The Hebrew idea of 'name' is of reputation, and that is demonstrated here by being paralleled with 'memory'. Who we are and what we spiritually achieve will be eternally remembered. Careers, attainment of wealth etc. will fade away [AV "rot"].

Pro 10:8 The wise in heart accept commandments, but a chattering fool will fall-

The same words are used about Moses receiving commandments on Sinai (Ex. 34:4). This is one of many times when the average Israelite was encouraged to rise up to the spirit of Moses. The contrast is between receiving God's word and thus getting into an upward spiral of spirituality; and talking so much that we don't receive God's words. That same tension is found in :14.

Pro 10:9 He who walks blamelessly walks surely, but he who perverts his ways will be found out-

Again Solomon presents life as polar opposites, with the righteous "blameless", walking surely on the path of righteousness; and the wicked whose ways are perverted. But this is not how spiritual reality is; nobody is blameless, the righteous don't walk surely all the time, but slip from the path as David did. And yet this doesn't make them perverts of the way. It was this overly simplistic view of things which led Solomon to assume himself to be a stellar

example of spirituality, assured of acceptance with God; and thereby failing to appreciate that for all his wisdom and professed faith, his behaviour was disobedient and hypocritical. This led to him finally turning away from Yahweh. If he had maintained a more realistic and humble view of human spirituality, his own included, then he could have avoided this.

Pro 10:10 One winking with the eye causes sorrow, and a chattering fool will fall-

The body language of sinners is commented upon several times in the Bible. This is the degree to which God observes human behaviour. And we have wonderful insights into that of the Lord Jesus; His eyes and hands are often as it were zoomed in upon in the Gospel records. Body language is indeed a "signal" of our innermost heart; and for the wicked, they yield all the members of their bodies to work unrighteousness (Rom. 6:19).

Pro 10:11 The mouth of the righteous is a spring of life, but violence covers the mouth of the wicked-

See on :6. Solomon uses the figure of a well of living water to describe spiritual words and thinking (Prov. 10:11; 13:14; 14:27; 16:22). Yet this is the very figure which he uses concerning his worldly bride (Song of Solomon 4:15). It could be argued that this typifies the massive imputation of righteousness which the Lord Jesus grants to us, His worldly Gentile bride. But I would rather see it as an example of how he chose to justify his love for worldly women by as it were clothing those women in his own mind with the imagery of spirituality.

Pro 10:12 Hatred stirs up strife, but love covers all wrongs-

"Covers", not in the sense of turning a blind eye, but of forgiving just as God covers or deals with / atones [Heb. 'covers'] for sin. The "strife" is defined as that between brothers arising from lies (s.w. Prov. 6:19). This is true, and needs to be given its due weight by those who divide brethren in Christ. But Solomon also doubtless has in view the discord between him and his half brothers, who were contenders for his throne. He considers the cause of the divisions to be "lies", a slander campaign against him and his father; and even if there were truth in any of it, he orders it to be covered by love. But the division amongst David's sons was a direct fulfilment of Nathan's prediction of the consequence of David's sins associated with Bathsheba. But Solomon seeks to whitewash David, considering any friction arising from his father's sins as mere slander. He doesn't follow David in openly confessing sin and rejoicing in Divine grace.

Pro 10:13 Wisdom is found on the lips of him who has discernment, but a rod is for the back of him who is void of understanding-

LXX "He that brings forth wisdom from his lips smites the fool with a rod". Solomon has himself in view, but now instead of attributing wisdom to Divine inspiration, he starts to consider that it emanated from himself. When he died, the people complained that he had whipped [Heb. 'beaten'] them unreasonably (1 Kings 12:11). It was Solomon's false view of his wisdom which led him to do this. He assumed that he must be right, he was infallible,

because of his possession of Divine truths. He justified indulging his natural human tendency to be overly harsh on others because he claimed he was the source of all wisdom. And again we see a parallel in fundamentalist Christian groups; where the more dogmatic are the claimants to possession of absolute truth about everything, the more they tend to abuse others and show no mercy to any who fail to attain to their supposed wisdom.

Pro 10:14 Wise men lay up knowledge, but the mouth of the foolish is near ruin-

"Knowledge" is presented as accumulating progressively, as a witness to the acceptability of the wise. But knowledge in this sense is not the basis of justification with God, contrary to what Solomon [and many fundamentalists] liked to think.

Pro 10:15 The rich man's wealth is his fortified city; the destruction of the poor is their poverty-

This seems to reason as if wealth is a strong city to the wise and righteous of :14, and poverty is the fault of the poor, who are the foolish and wicked of :16. And yet there simply isn't such a direct correlation between wisdom and wealth for the believer; the book of Job and so much Biblical revelation make it clear that the poor are those who tend to respond more to the Gospel (Lk. 7:22). Solomon's choice of wisdom over wealth was indeed pleasing to God, and so he was given wealth by God. But that was a gift by grace. Yet it led Solomon to assume that his wisdom [which was anyway not his own, but God's gift to him] was the basis for his wealth; and that therefore possession of Divine wisdom meant wealth, and thereby poverty was a punishment of God upon the foolish. This is simply not the case.

Pro 10:16 The labour of the righteous leads to life; the increase of the wicked leads to sin-

"Life" and "sin" are placed in antithesis. We would rather read "death" instead of "sin", as death is the opposite of life. But sin can be put for death in that "the wages of sin is death" (Rom. 6:23). But Solomon here veers towards belief in salvation by works, or "labour". Paul explains that this is simply not the case. "Life" is by grace, through faith and not of works (Rom. 4:6). But the wonder of grace was unknown to Solomon.

Pro 10:17 He is in the way of life who heeds correction, but he who forsakes reproof leads others astray-

This appears to be an out of context allusion to David's words in Ps. 38:14, reflecting on his sin with Bathsheba, and how he felt unable to give reproof to others: "Yes, I am as a man who doesn't hear, in whose mouth are no reproofs". Solomon was obsessed with David his father, speaking hundreds of times of "David my father". But he failed to have his humility; he endlessly dishes out reproofs in Proverbs, indeed he sees his Proverbs as reproofs to people (e.g. Prov. 1:25; 6:23; 10:17; 12:1; 13:18; 15:5,31; 29:15); whereas David humbly felt unable to do so because of his awareness of his sins. And at the time David wrote the Proverbs, when he received wisdom at the start of his reign, he was sinning likewise [in essence] by marrying foreign women. See on Prov. 7:22.

Pro 10:18 He who hides hatred has lying lips; he who utters a slander is a fool-

Whether we speak the slander or think it and keep our mouth tactfully shut- it's all the same before God. Nicespeak and tact aren't the same as the true spirituality which includes the love which *thinks* no evil. See on :20. Perhaps Solomon has in view the "hatred" of his brother Amnon (2 Sam. 13:15). The word for "hatred" is used by David in the Psalms, about both the house of Saul and also Solomon's half brothers (see on Ps. 25:19; 103:9; 109:5). All these were contenders to Solomon's throne, and he appears to here condemn them as fools who shall therefore be condemned. This constant focus upon the judgment of others led Solomon to be quite unaware of his personal responsibility to judgment himself.

Pro 10:19 In the multitude of words there is no lack of disobedience, but he who restrains his lips does wisely-

"The multitude of words" is a phrase quoted from Job 11:2, one of the scriptures which would have been available to Solomon. And the conclusion is that Job's multitude of words was not altogether right, and he would have been wiser to restrain his lips, as he himself realizes at the end.

Pro 10:20 The tongue of the righteous is like choice silver; the heart of the wicked is of little worth-

The tongue and the heart / mind are paralleled- thoughts are as bad as words. See on :18. I will suggest on :21 and :31 that the "tongue" effectively means 'the teaching'. Solomon's utilitarian attitude still comes through, in his description of the heart of the wicked as 'worth little', whereas the teaching of the righteous is precious as silver. A wicked heart is abomination to God, and not merely 'worth little'.

Pro 10:21 The lips of the righteous feed many, but the foolish die for lack of understanding-

"Feed" is the word for "pastors" in Jer. 12:10. The idea is that "the righteous" are those with "understanding", and it is this understanding which feeds and gives life to others. This is true enough; our sharing with others and influence upon them can indeed lead them to life and not to die eternally. But Solomon appears to again have his own self justification in view; for he considered that he was the preeminently righteous because he was the teacher of Israel, giving them the wisdom given him. But Solomon fell away from Yahweh, even though he says his wisdom remained with him (Ecc. 2:9), and he continued to teach others that wisdom to the end of his life (Ecc. 12:9). And so it was simply not true that teaching others makes a person righteous, as Solomon supposed often in Proverbs (e.g. Prov. 10:21). .

Pro 10:22 Yahweh's blessing brings wealth, and He adds no trouble to it-

Again Solomon presents the advantage of accepting his wisdom as being in that it will give genuine wealth now. But that is not always the case, as so many Biblical characters came to realize. However we can read "The blessing of the Lord has nothing added to it by human toil" (Prov. 10:22 RVmg.). But just because we don't *have* to do it, we do. This is the power

of grace; it doesn't force us to monotonous service, but should be a wellspring of fresh motivation, to do perhaps the same things with an ever fresh spirit.

Pro 10:23 It is a fool's pleasure to do wickedness, but wisdom is a man of understanding's pleasure-

Solomon sees wisdom as the way to wealth and "pleasure" in this life, and that is the basis for his appeal to men to be wise and accept his wisdom (Prov. 10:23). But David uses the word only of the "pleasure" of the future, restored Kingdom of God on earth (Ps. 126:2); whereas Solomon wanted it all now, just as the 'prosperity gospel' likewise does. And yet as he got older, Solomon realized that such "pleasure" from material things is not in fact pleasure, and he uses the word several times in Ecclesiastes of how pleasure in this life is vain (Ecc. 2:2; 7:3; 10:19). This approach is in fact a contradiction of his seeking after "pleasure" in Proverbs. He came to this nihilistic position because he failed to perceive that the true "pleasure" is not now, but in the future Kingdom.

Pro 10:24 What the wicked fear will overtake them, but the desire of the righteous will be granted-

This is true in ultimate terms at the day of judgment. But that doesn't seem to be what Solomon has in view. He sees the whirlwind of judgment coming in this life (:25), because he had no clear view of the future Kingdom and judgment. But the book of Job ought to have led Solomon to a more subtle view of the difference between the wicked and the righteous. The thing righteous Job greatly feared came upon him (Job 3:25), as did the whirlwind of apparent judgment (:25).

Pro 10:25 When the whirlwind passes, the wicked is no more; but the righteous stand firm forever-

'Have an eternal foundation'. Who we are now is the basis of who we will eternally be. Hence the supreme importance of character formation and personality developed in this life. See on :24; Ps. 35:5.

Pro 10:26 As vinegar to the teeth, and as smoke to the eyes, so is the sluggard to those who send him-

The Proverbs contain repeated condemnation of laziness. Lack of a zealous work ethic is a rejection of wisdom, according to Solomon. As Solomon explains in Ecc. 1, he was an active person, not lazy by nature. And yet he lacked spirituality. He claimed that his service of God was due to his spirituality, but it was in reality merely a semblance of serving God when it was really just reinforcing his own personality type. His mocking of the "sluggard" or "lazy one" is so frequent (Prov. 6:6,9; 10:26; 13:4; 15:19; 19:24; 20:4; 21:25; 22:13; 24:30; 26:13-16). But it is a reflection of his own works-based approach to righteousness; the 'wise' "do" good things, and the wicked don't do enough good things. Personal spiritual mindedness and relationship with God are simply not emphasized.

Pro 10:27 The fear of Yahweh prolongs days, but the years of the wicked shall be shortened- Solomon claims that the righteous / wise live long lives, and therefore the unwise have shorter lives (Prov. 9:11; 10:27). This was the promise for obedience to the old covenant (s.w. Dt. 11:21). But it is not always the case, as Job learned (s.w. Job 29:18); righteous men like David and Hezekiah felt their days had been shortened (s.w. Ps. 89:45; 102:23). And it was so with the Lord Jesus. And faithful men often lament that the wicked seem to get long life, whilst the righteous don't. The answer to that conundrum is that final blessing of long life is at the resurrection, at the last day; and not in this life. But Solomon didn't see that; he thought that long life now was the only reward. He failed to perceive the real meaning of the Gospel of the Kingdom.

Pro 10:28 The prospect of the righteous is joy, but the hope of the wicked will perish- David's "hope / expectation" in the context of Ps. 62:5 was the continuation of his own kingdom, despite all the threats against it from the likes of Saul, Absalom and others who would usurp his Davidic kingship and kingdom. Solomon likely uses the word for "expectation" with the same subtext; that all opposition to him was based upon a false expectation which would be dashed by God (s.w. Prov. 10:28; 11:7,23; 23:18; 24:14).

Pro 10:29 The way of Yahweh is a stronghold to the upright, but it is a destruction to the workers of iniquity-

The very process of walking in the right way, in the hour by hour business of spiritual life, indeed confirms us in that way. God's way is designed to confirm those who walk in it; and those who work iniquity are caused to stumble further by it into destruction. "The workers of iniquity" is a phrase repeatedly used by Solomon's father David concerning the supporters of Saul, and also those supporting David's half brothers- all of which were groups who were potential contenders for Solomon's throne. See notes on Ps. 5:5; 6:8; 14:4; 28:3; 36:12; 53:4; 59:2; 64:2; 92:7,9; 94:4,16; 101:8; 125:5; 141:4,9. So whilst Solomon speaks truly, so far as it goes, he uses language which subtly condemns his political opponents. Thus he harnessed God's truth towards his own self justification, as many do today.

Pro 10:30 The righteous will never be removed, but the wicked will not dwell in the land- David in his earlier Psalms exalts and boasts to God that his feet have not slipped, indeed he was overly confident that his feet would never slip / "be moved" (Ps. 17:5; 21:7; 55:22; 62:2,6; 125:1). His more mature reflection is that he had wrongly said "I shall never slip [AV "be moved"]" (Ps. 30:6), and his feet had indeed slipped, not least over the Bathsheba incident (Ps. 38:16; 94:18). Solomon didn't learn this lesson, for he likewise assumed that the righteous would never be moved / slip (Prov. 10:30), although he appears to accept that even a righteous man like his father had indeed slipped (Prov. 25:26). And Solomon himself did so, not learning the lesson from his father's mistaken assumption that the righteous can never slip.

"He will never be shaken" is spoken in Ps. 112:6 in the context of the outcome of the final judgment. Being unmoved or never shaken is a major theme of the Psalms of David. Human beings naturally seek for stability, but look for it in the wrong places, imagining that their idols shall never be shaken (s.w. Is. 40:20; 41:7). It is only the receipt of eternal salvation at the last day which means we shall never be moved; that is the only ultimate stability (Ps. 62:2,6 s.w.). Their stability will be associated with that of God's eternal Kingdom to be centered upon Zion (s.w. Ps. 125:1). For in secular life under the sun, the righteous do suffer and their lives are "shaken". Solomon's statements that the righteous shall never be shaken / moved (Prov. 10:30; 12:3) are only ultimately true in this sense; but whether he spoke them with that understanding is debatable.

Pro 10:31 The mouth of the righteous brings forth wisdom, but the perverse tongue will be cut off-

This again is true as it stands, but Solomon puts all the focus upon holding true wisdom / teaching, and then teaching it. He sees this as the basis for being righteous. Solomon of course was the one who had the wisdom and taught it, so he is justifying himself as "righteous" thereby. But he was not a spiritual person, he lived otherwise to that wisdom, and fell away from his faith in Yahweh. The problem with holding and teaching Divine truth is that we are tempted to think that this thereby justifies us. But alone, it doesn't. See on :32.

Pro 10:32 The lips of the righteous know what is acceptable, but the mouth of the wicked is perverse-

See on :6,31. Solomon again presents an overly simplistic position; the lips of the righteous are good, and those of the wicked are bad. But the reality is that righteous people say some bad things at times, and are saved by grace. James is far closer to spiritual reality when he writes that the tongue is an uncontrollable evil, and none of us succeed in not offending any by our words, and in this context of the tongue, "in many things we offend all" (James 3:2). The conclusion therefore is that we must cast ourselves upon God's grace. But this was something Solomon knew nothing about.

PROVERBS CHAPTER 11

Pro 11:1 A false balance is an abomination to Yahweh, but accurate weights are His delight-
See on Mt. 6:26. "Abomination" is the common word for idols (e.g. Dt. 7:25,26). Idolatry is here interpreted as things like pride and telling lies (:17). These seven things are the essence of idolatry. There is a recurring nature to them, just as idols got a grip on the mind of the worshipper. Solomon often uses the word for quiet, secret sins, words and the matters of the heart, internal attitudes and judgments (Prov. 11:1,20; 12:22; 13:19; 15:26; 16:5; 17:15; 20:10,23; 24:9; 26:25; 28:9; 29:27). And this of course is the essence of idolatry in our age; this is the practical force to us of all Biblical teaching about idolatry.

Pro 11:2 When pride comes then comes shame, but with humility comes wisdom-
This is true, but Solomon seems to be also implying that anyone who doesn't accept his wisdom by which he ruled Israel was therefore proud. Autocratic rulers like Solomon often use appeals to humility to quash any dissent; and he ended up whipping and abusing his people. Pride is the opposite of being shamed; the proud person will be brought down to shame even in this life, according to Solomon. Whereas the Bible often teaches that the proud apparently prosper, and are only brought to shame at the day of final judgment; and this perspective wasn't what Solomon accepted, as he liked to think of himself as the Messiah figure.

Pro 11:3 The integrity of the upright shall guide them, but the perverseness of the treacherous shall destroy them-

"Transgressors" or "traitors" is the term used by David of Saul and his supporters (Ps. 25:3; 59:5; 119:158). Solomon uses this term, teaching that "transgressors" must be rooted out of the earth / *eretz* promised to Abraham (Prov. 2:22), and that the "transgressors" are to face judgment (Prov. 11:3,6; 13:2; 21:18; 22:12; 23:28; 25:19). All Solomon says is true, but he clearly has in view the house and supporters of Saul, who were a group he felt he needed to repress in order to keep his own kingdom and power intact.

Pro 11:4 Riches don't profit in the day of wrath, but righteousness delivers from death-
"Riches profit not in the day of wrath: but righteousness delivereth from death" (Prov. 11:4). Riches kept in hand will not help us through the day of judgment. But righteousness, which in the Hebraic parallel in this verse refers to the correct use of riches, will deliver us from eternal death.

David appealed to *God's* righteousness for deliverance from the consequence of his sins (Ps. 71:2). This was appropriate, seeing that David had been saved from death by God's imputation of His righteousness to David (Ps. 32:1-4), by grace through faith; seeing David's sins left him with no righteousness of his own. And it was on this basis that David believed he would continue to be saved / delivered / rescued (s.w. Ps. 51:14 in the Bathsheba context). But Solomon failed to learn from his mother and father's experience of grace, teaching instead that personal righteousness is what saves (Prov. 10:2; 11:4,6).

Pro 11:5 The righteousness of the blameless will direct his way, but the wicked shall fall by his own wickedness-

Solomon thinks of the righteous as walking unflinchingly forward in wisdom, never turning to the right or left, refusing to be distracted by any wicked person who suggests walking another way (Prov. 9:15 "to call travellers who go directly on their way"). This approach fails to take account of the simple fact that righteous people sin and stray from the direct path every day, and are saved finally into God's Kingdom by grace alone. That is all something Solomon failed to have any grasp of, whereas David his father did. Prov. 11:5 makes the somewhat tautological statement that "the righteousness of the perfect shall direct his way", s.w. Prov. 4:25 "fix your gaze directly before you". This contrasts with how David uses the word in Ps. 5:8: "Lead me, O Yahweh... make Your way straight [s.w. direct] before my face". The same statement of God directing in the straight way is found in Is. 45:13; Jer. 18:4 s.w. Solomon didn't see this need for the Spirit of God to direct his path because he assumed that mere possession of Divine truth would itself keep him in the way; hence he teaches that "understanding" makes a man walk "directly" (Prov. 15:21). And he failed miserably because of that arrogant position.

Pro 11:6 The righteousness of the upright shall deliver them, but the unfaithful will be trapped by evil desires-

"Destructive" or "wickedness" is the word used of the wickedness of Ahithophel and Absalom (Ps. 55:11). Solomon's Proverbs seem in places a justification of himself as king over his brother Absalom. He uses the same word to speak of "transgressors are taken in their own wickedness / destructiveness" (Prov. 11:6); how a liar [Absalom] listens to a 'destructive' tongue [in taking advice from Ahithophel] (Prov. 17:4); and how a foolish son [Absalom] is the calamity or destruction of his father (Prov. 19:13).

Pro 11:7 When a wicked man dies, hope perishes, and expectation of power comes to nothing-

David's "expectation" in the context of Ps. 62:5 was the continuation of his own kingdom, despite all the threats against it from the likes of Saul, Absalom and others who would usurp his Davidic kingship and kingdom. Solomon likely uses the word for "expectation" with the same subtext; that all opposition to him was based upon a false expectation which would be dashed by God (s.w. Prov. 10:28; 11:7,23; 23:18; 24:14).

Pro 11:8 A righteous person is delivered out of trouble, and the wicked walks into it in his place-

LXX "A righteous man escapes from a snare, and the ungodly man is delivered up in his place". The allusion may be to David's frequent references to having been saved from the snares of Saul. But David prayed for those deliverances from snares according to God's grace; whereas Solomon sees them as due to righteousness.

Pro 11:9 With his mouth the godless man destroys his neighbour, but the righteous will be delivered through knowledge-

It is indeed true that words have great power, as seen in the 'destruction' of Job by his friends. The tongue is indeed a destructive fire (James 3:5,6). But it is not the case that "knowledge" delivers the righteous. Deliverance / salvation is by grace through faith. Solomon had all the knowledge, but it didn't save him. This is the myth of the idea of "saving truth"; intellectual purity of understanding will not of itself save.

Pro 11:10 When it goes well with the righteous, the city rejoices. When the wicked perish, there is shouting-

This had various historical fulfillments, not least in the destruction of Haman and exaltation of Mordecai (Esther 8:15; 2 Kings 11:20; 2 Chron. 23:21). But again Solomon is rather simplistic. When the wicked Absalom perished, David mourned, and likewise for Saul.

Pro 11:11 By the blessing of the upright the city is exalted, but it is overthrown by the mouth of the wicked-

Solomon repeatedly condemns "the mouth of the wicked" (Prov. 10:6,11,32; 11:11; 12:6; 15:28; 19:28). All he says is true enough, but he clearly enough has in view how his father David had condemned the supporters of Saul and Absalom as having "the mouth of the wicked" (Ps. 109:2). And these were the groups who were threatening his power and throne. Solomon presents himself by implication as having the mouth of the just / righteous. And yet we must note that David too had spoken multiple words of deceit in relation to the murder of Uriah. Indeed the phrase is used in Is. 53:9 as if the Lord Jesus was the only man who didn't have a "mouth of deceit". Solomon like David was in denial of the fact that we all sin with our mouths, as James makes clear in James 3:1-3.

Pro 11:12 One who despises his neighbour is without wisdom, but a man of understanding holds his peace-

The person without / lacking or void of understanding is typically the adulterer or sexual sinner (s.w. Prov. 6:32; 7:7; 9:4,16). So the despising of the neighbour particularly refers to adultery with his wife. I have noted that in previous verses, Solomon is seeking to justify his father David and the Davidic succession through himself. But he overlooks how David sinned with Bathsheba. Or, he is indeed alluding to it, but is saying that although his father lacked wisdom at that point, the man of understanding / wisdom will say nothing about it.

Pro 11:13 One who brings gossip betrays a confidence, but one who is of a trustworthy spirit is one who keeps a secret-

David frequently complains in his Psalms about gossip about him, both at the time of Saul's persecution of him and of Absalom's rebellion and putsch. "Keeps a secret" is AV "concealeth the matter", and may continue the theme of :12; that despite David's unwisdom in

sleeping with Bathsheba [which is still whitewashing David, as what he did was a major sin and not just a lack of wisdom], the faithful will conceal the matter instead of gossiping about. Which is clearly what happened amongst those who were to become contenders against Solomon for the throne.

Pro 11:14 Where there is no wise guidance the nation falls, but in the multitude of counsellors there is victory-

"The nation" is better "the people". And the people of Israel fell in war with the Philistines, under Saul's unwise leadership (s.w. 2 Sam. 1:4,12). Whereas under David, they were led to victory. Always Solomon seems to want to justify his father David. "Victory" is AV "safety", and may allude to how the lives of Solomon and David were saved by wise counsellors (s.w. 1 Kings 1:12). Solomon may also be having a swipe at Ahithophel, the grandfather of his mother Bathsheba, who began as a wise counsellor but then became an unwise counsellor when he turned against David.

Pro 11:15 He who is collateral for a stranger will suffer for it, but he who refuses pledges of collateral is secure-

The law of Moses didn't forbid giving or taking collateral for loans, it accepted this would happen (Ex. 22:25-27). But Solomon in the Proverbs is quite obsessed with forbidding it in very strong terms (Prov. 6:1-3; 11:15; 17:18; 20:16; 22:26; 27:13- all quite some emphasis). Perhaps Solomon recalled some bad experience in his family because of this. There is the otherwise curious statement in 1 Sam. 17:18 that David's brothers, Solomon's uncles, were to return a collateral. Perhaps this ruined the family and Solomon's wisdom has some human element in it, reflecting his own bad experiences in his family life. But there is nothing wrong with giving or taking collateral for a loan; what is condemned in God's law is the abuse of the debtor and the abuse of the situation. Indeed David and Hezekiah ask God to be collateral for their needs and debts in various ways (Ps. 119:122; Is. 38:14). And God gives the Holy Spirit in our hearts as collateral on His debt, as He sees it, to save us (2 Cor. 1:22; 5:5; Eph. 1:14); and in response we give our hearts as a pledge to Him (Jer. 30:21 Heb.). So forbidding the practice seems out of step with the spirit of grace. It would mean asking of God what we are unprepared to do for others. Solomon had not known need, neither material nor spiritual, and it shows in his attitude to this matter. It makes hollow all Solomon's exhortations to be generous to your poor neighbour and to be a brother in adversity to your neighbour (Prov. 14:21; 17:17). Solomon is here reasoning from the viewpoint of secular wisdom.

Pro 11:16 A gracious woman obtains honour, but violent men obtain riches-

"Violent men" is AV "strong men". The idea seems to be that grace and strength are associated with the wisdom which Solomon sees as bringing honour and wealth. But the word for "obtains" is used by David always with the sense that it is God who obtains / establishes / holds up the righteous, by grace (s.w. Ps. 16:5; 17:5; 41:12; 63:8). Although Solomon is obsessed with "David my father" and forever justifying him, he totally fails to have the perspective of grace and humility which characterized him.

Pro 11:17 The merciful man does good to his own soul, but he who is cruel troubles his own flesh-

This continues the theme of :16, that the advantage of wisdom is that it benefits you in this life; and the unwise are only hurting themselves. Whilst this is true, it seems an altogether human and secular approach to God's truth. Because the purpose of our believing, obedient lives is for God's wider glory, and to pave the way for life in His Kingdom in the future. But these things seem almost unknown to Solomon. "The merciful man" may be a reference to Solomon's ancestor Boaz (s.w. Ruth 2:20). This kind of self-justification of his ancestral line is seen so often in Solomon's words.

Pro 11:18 Wicked people earn deceitful wages, but one who sows righteousness reaps a sure reward-

Reading this verse along with :19 leads us to conclude that the wages in view are life for the righteous, seen as a just reward; and death for the wicked. But as noted on :19, this is not really true to spiritual reality. For all men sin, there is not one righteous, as David realized (Rom. 3:10). Later, Solomon cynically concludes that the wicked and the righteous all die the same death, and so, he concludes, there is no great advantage in righteousness (Ecc. 9:2). This contrasts with Solomon's huge emphasis in Proverbs upon the difference between the wicked and the righteous (e.g. Prov. 11:18). But it seems he got to that wrong conclusion because he assumes that the blessing for righteousness is in this life, and likewise the curses for wickedness. He totally fails to think in terms of the future judgment and eternal life of God's future kingdom. And so as he himself got older and approached death, he concluded that death means that all effort towards righteousness is therefore vain. He made the same mistake as the false teachers of 1 Cor. 15:19, who likewise considered that "hope in Christ" was only helpful for "this life", because they rejected the resurrection of the body and future judgment and reward.

Pro 11:19 He who is truly righteous gets life; he who pursues evil gets death-

The LXX implies that the righteous are born that way and shall inherit eternal life simply because of their pedigree; and Solomon was the classic case of this, totally overlooking the conditional nature of the promises made to David about him: "A righteous son is born for life: but the persecution of the ungodly ends in death". Whilst these things are true in a sense, Paul in Romans 1-8 points out the obvious truth that no man apart from the Lord Jesus "is truly righteous", and eternal life is a gift by grace. And "the wages of sin is death" (Rom. 6:23) for us all, and not just those who "pursue evil"; for all have sinned. The life and death in view here are perhaps the "wages" of :18.

Pro 11:20 Those who are perverse in heart are an abomination to Yahweh, but those whose ways are blameless are His delight-

Solomon rightly emphasizes that the "perverse" or "wayward" are wayward in their hearts (Prov. 11:20; 17:20), leading to wayward ways in practice (Prov. 2:15); but he repeats his

father's mistake, in saying he will have nothing to do with those who are wayward in their hearts (s.w. Ps. 101:4). The mistake was in assuming that he could judge human hearts. It continues the far over simplified view of people which Solomon has; the righteous have pure hearts, always obedient; and wicked have bad hearts. But the Bible warns that all of us have hearts which are fountains of evil thoughts (Mk. 7:15,21-23 etc.).

Pro 11:21 Most certainly, the evil man will not be unpunished, but the seed of the righteous will be delivered-

The contrast is between the evil man [who is punished] and the seed of the righteous [who is saved]. Salvation is thereby predicated upon being the seed of the righteous. Solomon speaks hundreds of time of "David my father"; he considered his salvation was assured because of his father. But again, this is not fully the case. Personal spirituality is required.

Pro 11:22 Like a gold ring in a pig's snout, so is a beautiful woman who lacks discretion-

The same term is used of Tamar, daughter of Solomon's half brother Absalom (2 Sam. 14:27), whose family would have been potential contenders with Solomon for the throne. He as ever is using Divine truth in a way which knocks back his enemies and portrays himself as justified. "Beautiful woman" is the term Solomon uses about his illicit Gentile girlfriend (Song 1:8), and it is the term sarcastically used about her by Israelite competitors (Song 5:9; 6:1). Seeing Solomon's wives were idolaters, they lacked discretion; and yet Solomon loved them and married them. He behaved with women completely opposite to his own teachings.

Pro 11:23 The desire of the righteous is only for good; the expectation of the wicked is wrath-

This again seems rather simplistic, drawing a dualistic picture of the righteous who seek only good, whereas the wicked can only expect the wrath of Divine judgment. Yet "there is none righteous" (Rom. 3:10), and our desires are not only and solely for good. There are mixed motives in even the best of us. We are saved from wrath by grace and being counted righteous by that grace, as Paul makes clear (Rom. 5:9).

Pro 11:24 There is one who scatters, and increases yet more. There is one who withholds more than is appropriate, but gains poverty-

The one who scatters widely is the generous (:25); and Solomon sees generosity as sure to bring more wealth. But if this is the motive for our generosity, then this isn't surely the kind of self-sacrificial giving until it costs us which God wishes of us. It all fits with the same theme, of righteousness having advantage in this life, and surely bringing wealth. But as I have commented elsewhere, this just isn't the case. And the mean often do not find poverty, but rather apparent wealth. This surely was the intention of the Lord's parable of the rich fool, which can be read as a correction of Solomon's perspective. The difference between the generous and the mean will only be finally articulated in the judgment of the last day, and not

in this life. But Solomon refused to be aware of that, and therefore as he came nearer to his own death, he lost his faith and wrote the rejection of wisdom we have in Ecclesiastes.

Pro 11:25 The generous soul shall be made fat; he who waters shall be watered also himself-

As discussed on :24, Solomon sees the advantage of generosity and wisdom generally as being for this life. He totally lacks any sense of a judgment and Kingdom yet to come. And this was the root of his own spiritual undoing. David saw himself as being "made fat" by God's grace (Ps. 23:5, s.w. "anoint"), whereas Solomon sees this as a direct result of the good deeds of the righteous, such as generosity (Prov. 11:25) and hard work (Prov. 13:4). This is exactly the kind of justification by works which Paul argues against in Romans.

Pro 11:26 People curse someone who withholds grain, but blessing will be on the head of him who sells it-

The allusion may be to Joseph selling the grain he had stored. But Solomon sees the motivation for such behaviour as being to get a blessing from people. To do good is seen as the way to get favour or blessing from men (:27). And yet the Biblical emphasis is upon the blessing of Divine grace, a teaching found right back in the covenant with Abraham. At this point, Solomon is heavily pushing a works-based righteousness, whose end is in having a good life right now. Again, the perspective of the future Kingdom is totally absent.

Pro 11:27 He who diligently seeks good seeks favour, but he who searches after evil, it shall come to him-

As noted on :26, the idea is that one should do good because this is the way to favour or blessing from men. But David emphasizes the need to receive favour / acceptance from God, which is granted by His grace in response to repentance (Ps. 30:5,7; 51:18; 69:13; 106:4).

Pro 11:28 He who trusts in his riches will fall, but the righteous shall flourish as the green leaf-

The same words as in David's vision of how Solomon's kingdom would be in Ps. 72:7: "In his days, the righteous shall flourish". So Solomon's later statement here that the righteous would flourish is therefore a reference to this, assuming that David's fantasy of Solomon having an eternal kingdom was going to be fulfilled in him. In Ps. 92:11,12, David thinks that he himself will see the righteous flourishing (s.w. Ps. 72:7). So he may be imagining that he would somehow be resurrected and see this happening in Solomon's reign. His hope will come ultimately true, but through the kingdom of the Lord Jesus and not Solomon.

Pro 11:29 He who troubles his own house shall inherit the wind. The foolish shall be servant to the wise of heart-

Solomon appears to be overlooking how his father David had troubled his own house, according to the condemnation of Nathan. Such a person will inherit nothing; whereas Solomon liked to think that the Davidic line through him would inherit everything. It appears that Solomon had a blindness to the nature of his parents' sin, and whitewashed them in his

own mind, rather than presenting them [as David would have wished] as the parade example of Divine grace.

Pro 11:30 The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life; he who is wise wins souls-

This is true insofar as we really can be the source of life for others. But access to the tree of life has been taken away because of human sin; only in the restored Eden of the Kingdom of God on earth will we be able to eat the fruit of the tree of life. Indeed God in His grace and wisdom barred access to the tree of life, knowing that eternity in our present state would be a curse. But Solomon likes to think that his kingdom is the Kingdom of God, and the life according to his wisdom was effectively the life eternal. Again we see a failure in Solomon to perceive that the true life and restoration of Eden was yet future. This would explain why as he got older and approached death, he became disillusioned; for clearly his life had not been the life of the Kingdom.

Pro 11:31 Behold, the righteous shall be repaid in the earth; how much more the wicked and the sinner!-

LXX "If the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?". The righteous remnant who spoke often to one another about Yahweh will only be "spared" by God's grace (Mal. 3:17). The accepted will feel so certain of this that they will almost argue with the Lord Jesus at the day of judgment that He hasn't made the right decision concerning them (Mt. 25:37-40). It's only a highly convicted man who would dare do that. Thus the Father will have to comfort the faithful in the aftermath of the judgment, wiping away the tears which will *then* (see context) be in our eyes, and give us special help to realize that our sinful past has now finally been overcome (Rev. 21:4). We will be like the labourers in the parable who walk away clutching their penny, thinking "I really shouldn't have this. I didn't work for a day, and this is a day's pay".

Peter quotes this in 1 Pet. 4:18, although he quotes liberally and mixing quotation with interpretation. Peter never introduces his quotations as Paul does, with an "It is written...". And he always quotes from the LXX, and often in a rather loose way. Peter was illiterate, and would have known the LXX quotations by memory, recollecting how they had been read to him, rather than having read them with his own eyes and memorized them. And this shows in the way he quotes the Old Testament- although the whole process and final product was Divinely inspired.

PROVERBS CHAPTER 12

Pro 12:1 Whoever loves correction loves knowledge, but he who hates reproof is stupid-
Solomon here quotes his father's words in Ps. 50:17 "since you hate instruction". Solomon thus accuses any who refuse his Proverbs of doing just this, hating instruction, which in the context of Ps. 50:17 means 'You are condemned' (s.w. Prov. 5:12; 12:1; 15:10).

Pro 12:2 A good man shall obtain favour from Yahweh, but He will condemn a man of wicked devices-

God's "favour" isn't predicated upon our intellectual prowess in mastering "wisdom" (Prov. 8:35) nor upon our good works (Prov. 12:2). Academic truth and / or good living isn't as it were the key which opens up access to God's grace. For otherwise Divine "favour" would be a reward, and grace would no longer be grace.

Pro 12:3 A man shall not be established by wickedness, but the root of the righteous shall not be moved-

"Not... moved" is alluding to how David considered that his inheritance and dynasty would not be moved (Ps. 16:8). The context is of David's desire to take the hill of Zion from the Jebusites, and for it to become his by conquest. He was confident he could do this in God's strength, and by saying "I shall not be moved" he identifies himself with Zion which "shall not be moved" (Ps. 46:5). And indeed God came through for David. Because he put Yahweh "always before me", he was given mount Zion and established his kingdom there; but he looked forward to resurrection as the ultimate means of receiving the inheritance (Ps. 16:8-10). This passage is then quoted about the Lord Jesus- who likewise shall establish His Kingdom upon David's throne in Zion (Lk. 1:34,35) because of His trust in Yahweh. But Solomon, as the son of David, liked to imagine that his dynasty would continue unmoved anyway; he failed to perceive that the unmoved dynasty was due only to God's grace through the Lord Jesus.

"He will never be shaken" is spoken in Ps. 112:6 in the context of the outcome of the final judgment. Being unmoved or never shaken is a major theme of the Psalms of David. Human beings naturally seek for stability, but look for it in the wrong places, imagining that their idols shall never be shaken (s.w. Is. 40:20; 41:7). It is only the receipt of eternal salvation at the last day which means we shall never be moved; that is the only ultimate stability (Ps. 62:2,6 s.w.). Their stability will be associated with that of God's eternal Kingdom to be centered upon Zion (s.w. Ps. 125:1). For in secular life under the sun, the righteous do suffer and their lives are "shaken". Solomon's statements that the righteous shall never be shaken / moved (Prov. 10:30; 12:3) are only ultimately true in this sense; but whether he spoke them with that understanding is debatable.

Pro 12:4 A worthy woman is the crown of her husband, but a disgraceful wife is as rottenness in his bones-

This is true, but as ever Solomon has his own self justification in view. For "a worthy

woman" is the term used of his ancestor Ruth (Ruth 3:11), and he uses it of his mother Bathsheba (Prov. 31:10). The wife who brings disgrace may refer to David's wife Michal, Saul's daughter, whom he divorced.

Pro 12:5 The thoughts of the righteous are just, but the advice of the wicked is deceitful-
True enough, but probably another swipe at David's advisor Ahithophel, Solomon's great grandfather.

Pro 12:6 The words of the wicked are about lying in wait for blood, but the speech of the upright rescues them-

"Lie in wait" is the word for ambush. Solomon often uses the word, as if it is for him a major characteristic of sinners (Prov. 1:11,18; 7:12; 12:6; 23:28; 24:15). But it's a rather specific word to use so often. It's as if Solomon is consciously alluding to his father's experiences at the hands of the house of Saul (s.w. Ps. 10:9; 59:3), whom Solomon considered a threat to his own kingship. And so he seems to rather like using the term about sinners, as if using his wisdom to have a dig at his immediate opposition.

Solomon repeatedly condemns "the mouth of the wicked" (Prov. 10:6,11,32; 11:11; 12:6; 15:28; 19:28). All he says is true enough, but he clearly enough has in view how his father David had condemned the supporters of Saul and Absalom as having "the mouth of the wicked" (Ps. 109:2). And these were the groups who were threatening his power and throne. Solomon presents himself by implication as having the mouth of the just / righteous. And yet we must note that David too had spoken multiple words of deceit in relation to the murder of Uriah. Indeed the phrase is used in Is. 53:9 as if the Lord Jesus was the only man who didn't have a "mouth of deceit". Solomon like David was in denial of the fact that we all sin with our mouths, as James makes clear in James 3:1-3.

Pro 12:7 The wicked are overthrown, and are no more, but the house of the righteous shall stand-

The implication is that the house of the wicked is overthrown, but the house of the righteous is established. True as this is, the subtext is that Solomon is reflecting upon how the house of Saul and other opponents was "no more", but the house of David through himself was established.

Pro 12:8 A man shall be commended according to his wisdom, but he who has a warped mind shall be despised-

Solomon of course was the man well known for his wisdom. But that wisdom had been given him by God for the purpose of leading Israel. But Solomon went on to conclude that there mere possession of wisdom is what commends a man personally; and all others are therefore "warped" and to be "despised". His possession of wisdom didn't save him personally. This problem is commonly experienced especially in small time Protestant groups; the assumption

is that there mere possession of Divine truth is enough to justify a man and commend him before God and man.

Pro 12:9 Better is he who is lightly esteemed and has a servant, than he who honours himself, and lacks bread-

Perhaps a reference to David, who considered himself "lightly esteemed" (1 Sam. 18:23). We could translate "the lightly esteemed servant", as David was at that time to Saul. The only other reference to a man who "lacks bread" is David's curse upon Joab (2 Sam. 3:29 s.w.), whose family were contenders against Solomon for the throne. So the unsuccessful power grab by Joab is alluded to, and Solomon hints that any who tried to take the throne from him were merely honouring themselves in their own minds.

Pro 12:10 A righteous man respects the life of his animal, but the tender mercies of the wicked are cruel-

Solomon may have in view Balaam's unreasonable beating of his donkey. What he writes is true, but it reflects his simplistic, dualistic view; even when a wicked man [as Solomon defines him] shows tender mercy to his animal, Solomon sees that as cruelty. He utterly fails to recognize that human behaviour is a jagged graph, good people sin, and bad people do good things; we are saved not by consistent, stellar living before God, but by faith in His grace. But he fails to perceive this, when he should have learnt it from his father's experiences and his Psalms.

Pro 12:11 He who tills his land shall have plenty of bread, but he who chases fantasies is void of understanding-

Solomon speaks often of how hard work will "satisfy with bread" (Prov. 12:11; 20:13; 28:19). David his father uses the phrase in the context of saying that being 'satisfied with bread' is part of God's gracious blessing (Ps. 132:15). We see here how Solomon became focused upon works, rather than faith in the blessings which come from Divine grace. And yet he uses the words his father had used; but he interprets them as justification of works rather than acceptance of grace.

Pro 12:12 The wicked desires the plunder of evil men, but the root of the righteous flourishes-

Solomon may be using "root" in the sense of 'the offspring of the root', for the root of David is his Messianic descendant (Is. 11:10; Rev. 5:5; 22:16). And this was who Solomon wrongly perceived himself to be. He could have been the offspring of that root, but that was conditional upon his personal spirituality. But he considered that mere descent by the flesh was enough; an error made by Israel throughout their history.

Pro 12:13 An evil man is trapped by the sinfulness of his lips, but the righteous shall come out of trouble-

As noted on :10 and often, Solomon assumes the righteous never sin with their lips. Whereas James 3:1-5 explains what we all sadly know from honest experience; that nobody fails to sin with their lips, even the best of us. He utterly fails to recognize that human behaviour is a jagged graph, good people sin, and bad people do good things; we are saved not by consistent, stellar living before God, but by faith in His grace. But he fails to perceive this, when he should have learnt it from his father's experiences and his Psalms. The righteous don't always come out of trouble in this life, the Lord Jesus being the parade example. Their victory is only ultimately in the future day of judgment and the Kingdom, which concepts Solomon chose not to understand, as he assumed that his kingdom was God's Kingdom, and he was Messiah.

Pro 12:14 A man shall be satisfied with good by the fruit of his mouth; the work of a man's hands shall be rewarded to him-

Solomon correctly parallels words and actions, as the Scriptures often do. But as noted on :13, he assumes the righteous never sin with their lips. Whereas James 3:1-5 explains what we all sadly know from honest experience; that nobody fails to sin with their lips, even the best of us. And he continues to teach justification by the works of human hands. We shall indeed be given as our works shall be (Rev. 22:12), but not in this life; only at the day of final judgment.

Pro 12:15 The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, but he who is wise listens to counsel-

Not being 'wise in our own eyes' is a major theme of Solomon's Proverbs (Prov. 3:7; 12:15; 26:12,16; 28:11). We are to recognize that there is no inherent wisdom in man; it must be taught to us from God's word. And yet we live in a postmodern world, where what seems or feels good to our own gut is taken to be the highest personal truth. This was what led Judah to condemnation (s.w. Is. 5:21), because trusting in their own opinions and gut feelings left them insensitive to God's word. Paul quotes the idea in Rom. 12:16; to be wise in our own eyes means that we ignore those whom we naturally consider worthy of being ignored. But that is not necessarily the way of the Spirit. But when Solomon lost his faith, he comments that whether a man has wise eyes or not (s.w.) is irrelevant in the face of death (Ecc. 2:14). He clearly conceived wisdom as only helpful for this life; he had no real personal faith in the resurrection of the dead or the establishment of the future Kingdom of God. And this led him to ultimately despise his own wisdom as futile.

Pro 12:16 A fool shows his annoyance the same day, but one who overlooks an insult is prudent-

There's a definite link between shame and anger. Take a man whose mother yelled at him because as a toddler he ran out onto the balcony naked, and shamed him by her words. Years later on a hot Summer evening the man as an adult walks out on a balcony with just his underpants on. An old woman yells at him from the yard below that he should be ashamed of himself. And he's furiously angry with her- because of the shame given him by his mother in that incident 20 years ago. Shame and anger are clearly understood by God as being related,

because His word several times connects them: "A fool's *anger* is immediately known; but a prudent man covers his *shame*" (Prov. 12:16); A king's *anger* is against a man who *shames* him (Prov. 14:35). Or consider 1 Sam. 20:34: "So Jonathan arose from the table in fierce *anger*, and did eat no meat the second day of the month... because his father had done him *shame*". Job's *anger* was related to the fact that he felt that ten times the friends had *shamed* him in their speeches (Job 19:3). Frequently the rejected are threatened with both shame and anger / gnashing of teeth; shame and anger are going to be connected in that awful experience. They will "curse [in anger]... and be ashamed" (Ps. 109:28). The final shame of the rejected is going to be so great that "they shall be greatly ashamed... their everlasting confusion shall never be forgotten" (Jer. 20:11). Seeing they will be long dead and gone, it is us, the accepted, who by God's grace will recall the terrible shame of the rejected throughout our eternity. Their shame will be so terrible; and hence their anger will likewise be. Because Paul's preaching 'despised' the goddess Diana, her worshippers perceived that she and they were somehow thereby shamed; and so "they were full of wrath, and cried out, saying, Great is Diana of the Ephesians" (Acts 19:27,28). It's perhaps possible to understand the wrath of God in this way, too. For His wrath is upon those who break His commands; and by breaking them we *shame* God (Rom. 2:23); we *despise* his desire for our repentance (Rom. 2:4).

Pro 12:17 He who is truthful testifies honestly, but a false witness lies-

This may sound like a pointless statement of the obvious an axiomatic. But we likely need to read in an ellipsis; the truthful *always* testify honestly, and liars *always* lie. But this is simply not the case. Solomon utterly fails to recognize that human behaviour is a jagged graph, good people sin, and bad people do good things; we are saved not by consistent, stellar living before God, but by faith in His grace. But he fails to perceive this, when he should have learnt it from his father's experiences and his Psalms.

Pro 12:18 There is one who speaks rashly like the piercing of a sword, but the tongue of the wise heals-

This uses the language of David, in complaining that his opponents in the house of Saul and the followers of Solomon's half brother Absalom have tongues which pierce like swords (Ps. 57:4; 64:3). Again, what Solomon says is true, but he is using Divine truth to have a dig at his potential competitors for the throne, and to historically justify his father David.

Pro 12:19 Truth's lips will be established forever, but a lying tongue is only momentary-

"Established forever" is the language of the eternal establishment of the Davidic line through his Messianic son; which Solomon wrongly assumed must automatically refer to himself. David led him into this wrong assumption by dedicating "Kingdom" Psalms like Ps. 72 to Solomon. Solomon's fulfilment of the role of David's greater prophetic son was strictly conditional; and he failed totally to meet those conditions. But he uses his possession of wisdom, and teaching of it with his lips, as a reason to wrongly think that he fulfilled the role (Prov. 12:19; 29:14).

Pro 12:20 Deceit is in the heart of those who plot evil, but joy comes to the promoters of peace-

"Plot evil" is the phrase used of Saul's plots against David (1 Sam. 23:9). Saul likely still had his supporters even in Solomon's time, and Solomon came to the throne after a period of continual attempts to take the throne from the Davidic line through Absalom. And he uses his Proverbs, true as they are, to do down any potential opposition, and to present support of him as the only way to national peace and unity- an old ploy.

Pro 12:21 No mischief shall happen to the righteous, but the wicked shall be filled with evil-

Again Solomon presents an over simplistic picture. Mischief / evil does happen to the righteous, and the sufferings of the Lord Jesus are the parade example. David also had suffered much evil. And the wicked prosper in this life. These words are only true within the perspective of a future judgment and a future Kingdom of God on earth when the eternal outcomes of human behaviour will be manifest. But Solomon refused to factor this in, and saw wisdom as having an immediate effect and reward in this life. He had totally refused to learn the lessons of the book of Job, which was extant scripture at his time.

Pro 12:22 Lying lips are an abomination to Yahweh, but those who do the truth are His delight-

"Abomination" is the common word for idols (e.g. Dt. 7:25,26). Idolatry is here interpreted as things like pride and telling lies (:17). These seven things are the essence of idolatry. There is a recurring nature to them, just as idols got a grip on the mind of the worshipper. Solomon often uses the word for quiet, secret sins, words and the matters of the heart, internal attitudes and judgments (Prov. 11:1,20; 12:22; 13:19; 15:26; 16:5; 17:15; 20:10,23; 24:9; 26:25; 28:9; 29:27). And this of course is the essence of idolatry in our age; this is the practical force to us of all Biblical teaching about idolatry.

Pro 12:23 A prudent man keeps his knowledge, but the hearts of fools proclaim foolishness-

We may be intended to understand the silence of the lips of the prudent as contrasted with the heart of the foolish speaking freely. In this case, the heart and the tongue are paralleled, as often in scripture; for out of the heart, the mouth speaks (Lk. 6:45).

Pro 12:24 The hands of the diligent ones shall rule, but laziness ends in slave labour-

See on Prov. 6:7. Solomon's reign concluded with him putting people into slave labour and whipping them. He sees this as fair punishment for their laziness. But by enslaving people and whipping them for their supposed laziness, he was acting like Pharaoh.

Pro 12:25 Anxiety in a man's heart weighs it down, but a kind word makes it glad-

"Weights it down" is the usual word for 'to bow down', and may continue the theme of :24; that the diligent Solomon would have men down to him, although he considers that his words

could also lift them up with gladness. Again, these things are all true, but they are being used to justify Solomon's rulership style, which was far from spiritual and was often abusive, especially at the end of his reign.

Pro 12:26 A righteous person is cautious in friendship, but the way of the wicked leads them astray-

The need to choose friends wisely is true, and yet it would appear justification for how Solomon filled his cabinet with "yes men".

Pro 12:27 The slothful man doesn't roast his game, but the possessions of diligent men are prized-

The slothful man catcheth / roasteth not that which *he* took in hunting" (Prov. 12:27 RVmg.) may be one of the Proverbs' historical commentaries- in this case, on Jacob. The implication would be that Jacob was lazy in staying in the tent and not hunting. But again we see a glorification of works, rather than of grace and faith.

Pro 12:28 In the way of righteousness is life; in its path there is no death-

LXX "In the ways of righteousness is life; but the ways of those that remember injuries lead to death". This is true, but Solomon would be hinting that any legitimate complaints about the behaviour of himself or his father were wrong because love doesn't remember past abuses. That argument is faulty on various counts, but the point is that Solomon is yet again seeking to whitewash his father and himself, and place them beyond any criticism.

The term "way of righteousness" is found in Prov. 8:20 "I walk in the way of righteousness, in the midst of the paths of justice". Again it seems that Solomon's personification of wisdom leads him to come out with things which he clearly enough saw as descriptions of himself. He saw himself as wisdom personified, walking always in the right way, and always judging justly. And the one who walked in "the way of righteousness" would never die (Prov. 12:28 s.w.). Solomon saw his possession of Divine truths as the guarantee of itself that he was the eternal Messianic king. He had been warned that he must walk in the way of God if he was to have long life (s.w. 1 Kings 3:14); but he assumed that the mere possession of Divine wisdom meant he was in that "way". As he got older and was reminded of his own mortality, he would have realized that he had to recalculate his position; and he ended up with the cynicism about his own wisdom seen in Ecclesiastes. And yet his injustice to his own people was evidence enough that he didn't do this in reality, but only in his own mind (1 Kings 12:11).

PROVERBS CHAPTER 13

Pro 13:1 A wise son listens to his father's instruction, but a scoffer doesn't listen to rebuke-

The book of Job makes it clear that it is the *content* of an elder's instruction which should govern whether or not it is accepted. But Solomon demands submission to him simply because he is a king and a father. Being "wise" is predicated therefore upon accepting Solomon's truths; personal behaviour and spirituality doesn't come into the picture with Solomon, and his own apostasy shows the end of this line of thinking.

Pro 13:2 By the fruit of his lips, a man enjoys good things; but the unfaithful crave violence-

"Transgressors" or "traitors" is the term used by David of Saul and his supporters (Ps. 25:3; 59:5; 119:158). Solomon uses this term, teaching that "transgressors" must be rooted out of the earth / *eretz* promised to Abraham (Prov. 2:22), and that the "transgressors" are to face judgment (Prov. 11:3,6; 13:2; 21:18; 22:12; 23:28; 25:19). All Solomon says is true, but he clearly has in view the house and supporters of Saul, who were a group he felt he needed to repress in order to keep his own kingdom and power intact.

Pro 13:3 He who guards his mouth guards his soul; one who opens wide his lips comes to ruin-

This continues the common theme of Proverbs, that the advantage of wisdom is that it benefits you in this life; and the unwise are only hurting themselves. Whilst this is true, it seems an altogether human and secular approach to God's truth. Because the purpose of our believing, obedient lives is for God's wider glory, and to pave the way for life in His Kingdom in the future. But these things seem almost unknown to Solomon.

Pro 13:4 The soul of the sluggard desires, and has nothing, but the desire of the diligent shall be fully satisfied-

The Proverbs contain repeated condemnation of laziness. Lack of a zealous work ethic is a rejection of wisdom, according to Solomon. As Solomon explains in Ecc. 1, he was an active person, not lazy by nature. And yet he lacked spirituality. He claimed that his service of God was due to his spirituality, but it was in reality merely a semblance of serving God when it was really just reinforcing his own personality type. His mocking of the "sluggard" or "lazy one" is so frequent (Prov. 6:6,9; 10:26; 13:4; 15:19; 19:24; 20:4; 21:25; 22:13; 24:30; 26:13-16). But it is a reflection of his own works-based approach to righteousness; the 'wise' "do" good things, and the wicked don't do enough good things. Personal spiritual mindedness and relationship with God are simply not emphasized.

Solomon sees the advantage of generosity and wisdom generally as being for this life. He totally lacks any sense of a judgment and Kingdom yet to come. And this was the root of his own spiritual undoing. David saw himself as being "made fat" by God's grace (Ps. 23:5, s.w. "anoint"), whereas Solomon sees this as a direct result of the good deeds of the righteous, such as generosity (Prov. 11:25) and hard work (Prov. 13:4). This is exactly the kind of justification by works which Paul argues against in Romans.

Pro 13:5 A righteous man hates lies, but a wicked man brings shame and disgrace-

Again, Solomon is justifying his father David, who uses these words to describe how he "hates lies" (Ps. 119:104,128,163). The reality was that David had brought shame and disgrace through his sin with Solomon's mother, Bathsheba. But Solomon seems at pains to make a case that the righteous don't do this kind of thing, and the shame and disgrace which arose was due to Solomon's half brothers and court politics. Whereas Nathan is clear that it all came as a consequence for David's sin.

Pro 13:6 Righteousness guards the way of integrity, but wickedness overthrows the sinner-

David by contrast felt he was kept or guarded in the way of integrity by God constantly pointing out that way to him (s.w. Ps. 119:33). Solomon seems to think that mere possession of Divine truth made him "righteous", and this of itself kept him in the way. He has none of the constant desire to be taught which David had, because he assumed he had received total truth. Those who consider they hold "the truth" as a package of doctrinally correct propositions can make the same mistake as Solomon.

Pro 13:7 There are some who are made rich, yet have nothing. There are some who are made poor, yet have great wealth-

The Hebrew grammar makes these reflexive verbs, as if the making rich or poor are done to the person by themselves, possibly referring simply to their own perceptions of themselves. Solomon's own words were so true of him: "There is that maketh himself rich, yet hath nothing [quoted in Rev. 3:17 about the rejected]: there is that maketh himself poor, yet hath great wealth" (Prov. 13:7 AV). This last phrase is quoted about the Lord Jesus, who made Himself poor on the cross (2 Cor. 8:9). And yet Solomon, who made himself rich, is the very anti-Christ, the only specific person associated in the Bible with the number 666 (1 Kings 10:14).

Pro 13:8 The ransom of a man's life is his riches, but the poor hear no threats-

Prov. 13:8 speaks of how our attitude to wealth is a crucial factor in our eternal destiny: "The ransom of a man's life are his riches". Just prior to that we read in Prov. 13:7: "There is that maketh himself poor, yet hath great riches". This verse is actually part quoted in 2 Cor. 8:9 and Phil. 2:7, about how on the cross, the Lord Jesus made himself poor, of no reputation, and now has been so highly exalted. Our living out of the Lord's cross is shown in our making of ourselves poor. That is surely the unmistakable teaching of this allusion. But Solomon may have had in view the way that rich people were held to ransom to part with their riches for the sake of their lives being spared, whereas the poor don't have this problem. He may be thereby implying that wealth is the most important thing a man has after his physical life. This accords with his mistaken view that the wise get wealth and the foolish are poor.

Pro 13:9 The light of the righteous shines brightly, but the lamp of the wicked is snuffed out-
"The righteous" in :5 and elsewhere in Proverbs refers to David, and Solomon was the "lamp" or descendent given to David, shining brightly in his kingdom (1 Kings 15:4). But Solomon was not the Messianic "lamp" of David in its ultimate term (Ps. 132:17). He failed to fulfil the conditions to become the Messianic son of David. But he prides himself that he is shining brightly, whereas all other contenders for the throne had been snuffed out. Again, what he says is true, but is harnessed to his own personal self-justification.

Pro 13:10 Pride only breeds quarrels, but with ones who take advice is wisdom-
Again this is true, but almost every verse in this section has included some self justification. "Quarrels" is the word used in the parable about the strivings between David's sons (2 Sam. 14:6). He is implying that all the quarrels about his being the one to have the throne merely came from pride, and the wise will accept Solomon's kingship.

Pro 13:11 Wealth gained dishonestly dwindles away, but he who gathers by hand makes it grow-
Solomon believed that his own wealth was a result of his wisdom. But wealth is given by God, and in his case, he was told that right at the start of his reign. It didn't come from his own hard work, but from God's gracious gift, in recognition of his desire for wisdom to teach Israel. And again, the Lord's parable of the rich fool shows that the rich sometimes take their wealth to the grave. But the ultimate perspective upon wealth is that it cannot affect in any way our eternity, nor be taken into God's Kingdom. Indeed, it must be shed if we are to enter the needle gate into the Kingdom- whether or not the wealth was attained by our hard work or by dishonesty.

Pro 13:12 Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but when longing is fulfilled, it is a tree of life-
Access to the tree of life has been taken away because of human sin; only in the restored Eden of the Kingdom of God on earth will we be able to eat the fruit of the tree of life. Indeed God in His grace and wisdom barred access to the tree of life, knowing that eternity in our present state would be a curse. But Solomon likes to think that his kingdom is the Kingdom of God, and the life according to his wisdom was effectively the life eternal. Again we see a failure in Solomon to perceive that the true life and restoration of Eden was yet future. This would explain why as he got older and approached death, he became disillusioned; for clearly his life had not been the life of the Kingdom.

Pro 13:13 Whoever despises instruction will pay for it, but he who respects a command will be rewarded-
Again this is true, but the instruction and commands which Solomon has in immediate view

is his own teaching in the anthology of Proverbs we are reading. He would tolerate no disobedience to it.

Pro 13:14 The teaching of the wise is a spring of life, to turn others away from the snares of death-

AV "the law of the wise is a fountain of life". But the law could not bring life, only grace could; and Solomon was far from realizing this (Gal. 3:21). David so often talks about *God's* "law", using the word *torah*. But Solomon so often speaks of his own *torah*, and that of his wife, the mother of "my son" (s.w. Prov. 1:8; 3:1; 4:2; 6:20; 7:2; 13:14; 31:26). Yet elsewhere in the Bible, the well over 200 occurrences of *torah* are always about *God's* law. Solomon applies the word to his own teachings and that of his wife, and thereby plays God. whilst it could be argued that Solomon's teachings were Divinely inspired, all the same he ought surely to have spoken of them as *God's torah* rather than his own *torah*. This kind of playing God is seen so often in the teachers of God's people.

Solomon uses the figure of a well of living water to describe spiritual words and thinking (Prov. 10:11; 13:14; 14:27; 16:22). Yet this is the very figure which he uses concerning his worldly bride (Song of Solomon 4:15). It could be argued that this typifies the massive imputation of righteousness which the Lord Jesus grants to us, His worldly Gentile bride. But I would rather see it as an example of how he chose to justify his love for worldly women by as it were clothing those women in his own mind with the imagery of spirituality.

Pro 13:15 Good understanding wins favour; but the way of the unfaithful is hard-

Solomon teaches that material blessings (Heb.) come as a result of using wisdom. But Ecc. 9:11 shows his rejection of Prov. 13:15: "The race is not to the swift... neither yet bread to the wise, nor yet riches to men of understanding, nor yet favour to men of skill; but time and chance happeneth to them all". He concluded life was just a random sequence of events.

Pro 13:16 Every prudent man acts from knowledge, but a fool exposes folly-

The idea may be that the actions of the wise and foolish are openly displayed for public view. That may sound obvious, but the sense is that the way of wisdom earns approval from observers, whereas the unwise appear foolish in public. And Solomon seems all too concerned about appearances, being shamed or avoiding looking foolish, in the court of public opinion- rather than before God's final judgment.

Pro 13:17 A wicked messenger falls into trouble, but a trustworthy envoy gains healing-

"Trouble" is the word for "evil", and Solomon uses the idea of falling into evil / trouble as the ultimate judgment for the wicked, to be avoided by all means (Prov. 13:17; 17:20; 28:10,14). But by the time of Ecc. 9:12, Solomon concludes that death is the ultimate falling into evil, and this shall come upon all men, and therefore being righteous or wicked is irrelevant in the face of death.

Pro 13:18 Poverty and shame come to him who refuses discipline, but he who heeds correction shall be honoured-

This appears to be an out of context allusion to David's words in Ps. 38:14, reflecting on his sin with Bathsheba, and how he felt unable to give reproof to others: "Yes, I am as a man who doesn't hear, in whose mouth are no reproofs". Solomon was obsessed with David his father, speaking hundreds of times of "David my father". But he failed to have his humility; he endlessly dishes out reproofs in Proverbs, indeed he sees his Proverbs as reproofs to people (e.g. Prov. 1:25; 6:23; 10:17; 12:1; 13:18; 15:5,31; 29:15); whereas David humbly felt unable to do so because of his awareness of his sins. And at the time David wrote the Proverbs, when he received wisdom at the start of his reign, he was sinning likewise [in essence] by marrying foreign women.

Pro 13:19 Longing fulfilled is sweet to the soul, but fools detest turning from evil-

Removing / turning or departing from evil is a major theme of Proverbs (Prov. 13:19; 14:16; 16:6,17). Solomon uses the same phrase in Ecc. 11:10, but he gives the reason as being because youth is vanity; old age will prove that there is no point in not departing from evil, and going the way of evil, like going the way of righteousness, is all the same vanity. This nihilistic approach is because Solomon failed to discern that the end point of the path of righteousness, departing or removing our foot from the way of evil, is the redemption of the body in God's future Kingdom. But because he failed to understand that, he ends up concluding as he gets older that the choice between evil and good is all the same vain and meaningless. It is the hope of the resurrection of the body, the reality of judgment to come and the future Kingdom of God, which make morality of so much meaning today. We may also note again Solomon's overly simplistic idea that if a man removes himself from evil, all will go wonderfully for him in life. The same phrase is used of how Job removed himself from, or "eschewed", evil; but his life was traumatic and without all the blessings for wisdom which Solomon liked to imagine.

Pro 13:20 One who walks with wise men grows wise, but a companion of fools suffers harm-

Solomon sees wisdom as being mediated through men. Whilst this may be true, and it certainly was in an illiterate society, he fails to perceive the direct, personal relationship possible and preferable between God and man. David's desire was for fools to repent: "Understand, you brutes... You fools, when will you be wise?" (Ps. 94:8). But Solomon makes little appeal to the fools, but instead divides men into the righteous and the fools, and almost gloats over the foolishness of the fools, relishing in describing their position.

Pro 13:21 Misfortune pursues sinners, but prosperity rewards the righteous-

This again is how Solomon wanted to imagine things, assuming that others would follow his pattern, and be given prosperity. But spiritual reality is different. The righteous suffer and don't get prosperity now, whereas the wicked prosper. Reality is far more complex than the simple dualism Solomon presents, and the final rewards for human behaviour are yet future,

at the day of judgment. But he had no desire to perceive that, as he imagined his kingdom to be God's Kingdom, under his own Messianic rulership.

Pro 13:22 A good man leaves an inheritance to his children's children, but the wealth of the sinner is stored for the righteous-

This may be true, but the children of the wicked prosper, apparently (Job 21:11), and wealthy sinners leave prosperous houses to their children (Job 21:9; 22:18; Ps. 49:11). Again, Solomon's simplistic dualism fails to perceive the nuances of spiritual reality, because Solomon seems to have never experienced the ups and downs, paradoxes and tensions which are all part of spiritual experience in practice.

Pro 13:23 An abundance of food is in poor people's fields, but injustice sweeps it away-

AV "want of judgment", as if the failure to have enough food is the fault of the poor. This would be in line with :18 and Prov. 28:19. Solomon repeatedly sees poverty as being the fault of the poor, and their refusal of his teaching of wisdom (s.w. Prov. 6:11; 10:4,15; 13:7,8,18,23; 24:34; 28:19; 31:7). Many of these passages are effectively mocking the poor, which Solomon condemns in Prov. 17:5. He fails to take his own wisdom, as we also see in his behaviour with foreign women. Again we see Solomon's works based approach to righteousness, and lack of grace; refusing to accept that we are all poor men before God, as David himself exemplified when he cried to God as a poor man (Ps. 34:6). But his much beloved father David was unashamed to say he was a materially "poor man" (1 Sam. 18:23); and Uriah, whom he wronged, is described also as a "poor man" (2 Sam. 12:1). The poor were to be defended and given to (Ps. 82:3), and the Bible is clear that poverty isn't necessarily a result of sin or unwisdom. But Solomon fails to appreciate this, so obsessed is he with works, and the idea that obedience to his anthology of Proverbs will make the poor prosperous, as if God's truth is a kind of wealth creation scheme.

Pro 13:24 One who spares the rod hates his son, but one who loves him is careful to discipline him-

Solomon has so much to say about "correction" or "instruction" coming from the possession of wisdom (Prov. 8:10,33; 10:17; 12:1; 13:1,24; 15:5,10,32; 16:22; 19:20,27; 22:15; 23:12,13). But in the end he chastised or corrected his people by whipping them (s.w. 1 Kings 12:11,14). Solomon initially asked for wisdom in order to guide his people, but he ended up whipping / physically chastising them into conformity with his wishes rather than allowing wisdom to correct. Again, he was playing God; for it is God through His wisdom who chastises, and not man. But Solomon thought he was effectively God to his people. This is why Solomon argues that servants cannot be corrected by words (Prov. 29:19 s.w.), and a child must be physically chastised (s.w. Prov. 19:18; 29:17 cp. Prov. 13:24; 23:13), regardless of his screams of pain. This kind of thing is a denial of his claims elsewhere that it is Divine wisdom which chastises / corrects, and such correction is from God and not man. Solomon's final description of himself as an old and foolish king who refuses to be

admonished says it all (Ecc. 4:13); he admonishes others (s.w. Ecc. 12:12), but refuses to be admonished or corrected by his own wisdom. He failed to personalize it.

Pro 13:25 The righteous one eats to the satisfying of his soul, but the belly of the wicked goes hungry-

But we think of the righteous Paul often going hungry, and hardly having a satisfied soul (2 Cor. 6:5; 11:27). As I have observed so often, Solomon is presenting an overly simplistic view of blessing for the righteous now, and cursing for the wicked. The book of Job, and his father David's experiences, ought to have taught him that this was not the case. Solomon later concludes that despite having every material blessing, a man can still not be satisfied (s.w. Ecc. 4:8; 6:3). But in Proverbs he thinks that the righteous *do* satisfy their souls in this life (Prov. 13:25). But he thought that this would be experienced in this life, rather than in any future Kingdom of God on earth. As he got closer to death, he realized that he had not satisfied his soul despite all his wealth. And so he concluded that righteousness was vain, and turned away from Yahweh. This is what happens when we lose the perspective of the future Kingdom of God.

PROVERBS CHAPTER 14

Pro 14:1 Every wise woman builds her house, but the foolish one tears it down with her own hands-

Solomon here continues the spirit of his mother's advice to him about a good wife in Prov. 31; for the virtuous woman is pictures as building up the house / family. Solomon repeats his mother's wisdom about women, whilst disobeying it in practice, as noted throughout Prov. 31. It is one thing to discern and teach truth; but quite another to personalize it and live by it. The very possession of that truth, and the experience of teaching it, can lead us to disobey it because we assume that mere possession of it justifies us.

Pro 14:2 He who walks in his uprightness fears Yahweh, but he who is perverse in his ways despises Him-

The Hebrew for "perverse" is literally 'the one who turns aside', implying they were once on the right path but had left it. It would seem that Solomon has in view the house of Saul, who were potential contenders for his throne.

Pro 14:3 The fool's talk brings a rod to his back, but the lips of the wise protect them-

Discipline and punishment of the unwise is a big theme in Solomon's Proverbs. He took it to the extent of whipping his own people (1 Kings 12:11). This abusive attitude to people arose from his obsession with the idea that he had wisdom, and people generally are fools, idiots, unwise- and therefore he could abuse them. This abusive attitude to people is another outcome of believing that mere possession of truths about God justifies us, and declares all other people foolish, unwise and able to be legitimately abused by us. In contrast, the heart of God (as of David) bleeds for such people and wants to save them rather than gloat in their un wisdom and punish them for it.

Pro 14:4 Where no oxen are, the crib is clean, but much increase is by the strength of the ox-

This is a fair enough observation, but again Solomon falls into the mindset of believing that blessing / increase comes about by strength and hard work. Whereas the consistent Biblical message is that blessing is by grace, and the race is not to the swift nor the battle to the strong, as Solomon later mused (Ecc. 9:11). Power and strength are of God, and from nothing else.

Pro 14:5 A truthful witness will not lie, but a false witness pours out lies-

This may sound like a pointless statement of the obvious an axiomatic. But we likely need to read in an ellipsis; the truthful *always* testify honestly, and liars *always* lie. But this is simply not the case. Solomon utterly fails to recognize that human behaviour is a jagged graph, good people sin, and bad people do good things; we are saved not by consistent, stellar living before God, but by faith in His grace. But he fails to perceive this, when he should have learnt it from his father's experiences and his Psalms.

Pro 14:6 A scoffer seeks wisdom, and doesn't find it, but knowledge comes easily to a discerning person-

It is true that those who claim not to understand God's truth, or who say it's too difficult to interpret, are in fact exercising their own psychological agenda. Subconsciously they don't want to accept His truth, and so they claim not to understand, or cite difficulties in interpretation. Jn. 7:17 is relevant here: "If anyone wills to do His will, he shall know of this teaching, whether it is of God, or I speak from myself". He who wishes above all things to live God's life, to have His Spirit, to live the life eternal with Him... they will intuitively know whether the Lord's doctrine is right or not. This intuitive element is in fact what leads to faith in the first place. There is a strong tendency to talk this down, and assume that it is by intellectual process that a person decides what is true or otherwise. But all appeal to intellectual process alone to decide 'truth' is flawed. For we are talking of spiritual things and not material. And legitimate intellectual process varies between persons. They may come to different conclusions about the same teaching which they analyze. And some are far more capable of intellectual analysis than others. There has to be something beyond intellectual process to decide truth. Here the Lord expresses this as a willing to do God's will, a heart for God, a desire for eternity. In a word, we must be open to the things of the Spirit. And then, the teachings make sense and there is an intuitive congruence between them and our own spirit.

Pro 14:7 Stay away from a foolish man, for you won't find knowledge on his lips-

This is true. There is no Old Testament concept of excommunication or disfellowship of those who taught wrongly or were unwise; rather the simple advice is to keep away from them and their teaching.

Pro 14:8 The wisdom of the prudent is to think about his way, but the folly of fools is deceit-

The idea is that not examining our way is the same as foolish self deceit. Self examination is a fundamental part of the way of life. But the word for "deceit" is so often used by David in the Psalms about his opponents, and their supporters and families were Solomon's opponents too. And he writes them off as all fools who are self deceived.

Pro 14:9 Fools mock at making atonement for sins, but among the upright there is good will-

AV "make a mock at sin", as if a lighthearted attitude to sin is the way of foolishness. But equally, as NEV, the idea may be that fools have no conscience about the seriousness of their sins, and their need for atonement. The "upright" surely ought to be commended for making atonement for their sins. But that is lacking in the parallelism. Solomon sees a simplistic division between fools who sin, and the upright who don't sin. When [as he should have learned from his father David's life], sin is to be found in all. "There is good will" is hard to interpret. The sense may be as in LXX "the houses of the just are acceptable", i.e. they need no atonement, as far as Solomon wanted to see it. Or we may interpret with GNB "Foolish

people don't care if they sin, but good people want to be forgiven"; in which case we are comforted that good people sin, the difference is that they wish for atonement.

Pro 14:10 The heart knows its own bitterness and joy; he will not share these with a stranger-

The implication is that the foolish wear their hearts on their sleeves and share their feelings. But that is not necessarily foolish, but rather a function of personality; some are wired to need to share their emotions, others aren't. But Solomon as ever seeks to justify his own personality type as the right and wise one; hence he commends industry and hard work, because that was how he was wired himself. The lesson is to be aware that spirituality is not about simply reinforcing our own native personality type and wiring.

Pro 14:11 The house of the wicked will be overthrown, but the tent of the upright will flourish-

Because the salvation of others is in our hands, both in and outside of the ecclesia, we are held responsible for their eternal loss if we do not minister to them. "Rescue those being led away to death [if we don't, then they will die]...if you say, "But we knew nothing about this", does not he who weighs the heart perceive it? Does not he who guards *your* life [as you keep your brother's life] know it? Will he not repay each person according to what he has done? [at judgment day]" (Prov. 14:11,12 NIV).

Here as in Prov. 3:33, Solomon again fails to have the subtlety he ought to have learnt from the book of Job. For Job was righteous but his "house" was overthrown, and the house of the wicked apparently prospered at the time of his affliction. Spiritual reality is that things are far more nuanced than the simplistic picture Solomon presents, true as it is in outline and ultimate terms.

Pro 14:12 There is a way which seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death-

We all know from our own experience with temptation that we can justify *anything*. Every way of man can seem right in his own eyes because of this feature of our nature (Prov. 14:12; 16:25; 21:2). The truth of this statement demonstrates the error of the humanistic approach of 'follow your heart', 'do what feels good and right to you'. There must be the influence of God's word to put us on the path to life.

Pro 14:13 Even in laughter the heart may be sorrowful, and mirth may end in heaviness-

But in Ecclesiastes, Solomon gave his heart to mirth, to see if there was wisdom to be found through this. He ended up re-learning the truth that he had earlier presented as prepositional truth. Despite recognizing that "even in mirth there is sorrow" and knowing that fools love mirth (Ecc. 7:4), still Solomon wanted it and indulged that desire (Ecc. 2:2). He rejected this wisdom and only came to agree with it through doing just what Prov. 14:13 condemns (Ecc. 2:2). Another example of this is in Prov. 5:4; 22:14 cp. Ecc. 7:26.

Pro 14:14 The unfaithful will be repaid for his own ways; likewise a good man will be rewarded for his ways-

This is only finally true in the judgment of the last day, and the eternal outcomes of our lives in God's future Kingdom on earth. But they were things which Solomon didn't seem to factor in to his reasoning, as he assumed he was the Messianic figure and his kingdom was God's. So we can conclude that he assumes that the 'reward' for living is in this life. But LXX introduces a more subtle difference between the faithful and unfaithful: "A stout-hearted man shall be filled with his own ways; and a good man with his own thoughts". This would emphasize the power of spiritual mindedness over simply tramping on in our own ways.

Pro 14:15 A simple man believes everything, but the prudent man carefully considers his ways-

Solomon suggests here that our "ways" are influenced by what we hear in teaching from others. Believing everything is compared with self examination. But Paul seems to quote the LXX of this verse in saying that love believes everything (1 Cor. 13:7). This is another example of where the New Testament subtly deconstructs, or adds nuance to, the otherwise simplistic dualism found in Proverbs.

Pro 14:16 A wise man fears, and shuns evil, but the fool is hotheaded and reckless-

Removing / shunning or departing from evil is a major theme of Proverbs (Prov. 13:19; 14:16; 16:6,17). Solomon uses the same phrase in Ecc. 11:10, but he gives the reason as being because youth is vanity; old age will prove that there is no point in not departing from evil, and going the way of evil, like going the way of righteousness, is all the same vanity. This nihilistic approach is because Solomon failed to discern that the end point of the path of righteousness, departing or removing our foot from the way of evil, is the redemption of the body in God's future Kingdom. But because he failed to understand that, he ends up concluding as he gets older that the choice between evil and good is all the same vain and meaningless. It is the hope of the resurrection of the body, the reality of judgment to come and the future Kingdom of God, which make morality of so much meaning today. We may also note again Solomon's overly simplistic idea that if a man removes himself from evil, all will go wonderfully for him in life. The same phrase is used of how Job removed himself from, or "eschewed", evil; but his life was traumatic and without all the blessings for wisdom which Solomon liked to imagine.

Pro 14:17 He who is quick to become angry will commit folly, and a crafty man is hated-

The parallel is between those who are crafty to commit sin, doing so quietly and discreetly; and those who sin openly because they have no self control.

Pro 14:18 The simple inherit folly, but the prudent are crowned with knowledge-

He saw his wisdom and knowledge as some sort of a reward in themselves: "the prudent are crowned with knowledge". This is of course true in a sense, as all the Proverbs are. But

Solomon surely had the idea that he, who was so renowned for his knowledge, was somehow thereby rewarded by having it. This assumption by Solomon was likely behind each of the many references he makes to the value of wisdom and the blessedness of the man who has it. It is rather like feeling that 'we have the truth' because somehow our correct understanding of doctrines is a reward for our righteousness, and mere possession of doctrinal truth means that we are acceptable to God.

Pro 14:19 The evil bow down before the good, and the wicked at the gates of the righteous- The "gates of the righteous" is specifically the gates of Zion (Ps. 118:20; Is. 26:2 s.w.). What Solomon says will only ultimately be true in the future Kingdom, but he is implying that in his exaltation as the Davidic king, he was declared as "good" and "righteous", and all his opponents as evil and wicked. Self justification seems never far from Solomon's thought and expression.

Pro 14:20 The poor person is shunned even by his own neighbour, but the rich person has many friends-

Again Solomon implies that poverty is a sign of curse, and wealth is a sign of blessing. But that is simply not how God works. Solomon was given wealth by God, and he goes on to assume that this is a sign of acceptability with Him, when it isn't. David laments how his friends turned away from him and he was shunned by his neighbours, as a result of his sin with Solomon's mother Bathsheba (Ps. 38:11; 88:18). The way Solomon appears ignorant of this indicates the degree to which he had whitewashed his parents, and considered the effects of that sin not to be consequence for sin, but rather the unreasonable and wrong behaviour of his own half brothers. And he believed they had been condemned for that behaviour, as his Proverbs often allude to them.

Pro 14:21 He who despises his neighbour sins, but blessed is he who has pity on the poor- Solomon had not known need, neither material nor spiritual, and it shows in his attitude to so obsessively forbidding the giving of collateral to guarantee a loan. It makes hollow all Solomon's exhortations to be generous to your poor neighbour and to be a brother in adversity to your neighbour (Prov. 14:21; 17:17). Solomon is here reasoning from the viewpoint of secular wisdom. The law of Moses didn't forbid giving or taking collateral for loans, it accepted this would happen (Ex. 22:25-27). But Solomon in the Proverbs is quite obsessed with forbidding it in very strong terms (Prov. 6:1-3; 11:15; 17:18; 20:16; 22:26; 27:13- all quite some emphasis). Perhaps Solomon recalled some bad experience in his family because of this. There is the otherwise curious statement in 1 Sam. 17:18 that David's brothers, Solomon's uncles, were to return a collateral. Perhaps this ruined the family and Solomon's wisdom has some human element in it, reflecting his own bad experiences in his family life. But there is nothing wrong with giving or taking collateral for a loan; what is condemned in God's law is the abuse of the debtor and the abuse of the situation. Indeed David and Hezekiah ask God to be collateral for their needs and debts in various ways (Ps. 119:122; Is. 38:14). And God gives the Holy Spirit in our hearts as collateral on His debt, as

He sees it, to save us (2 Cor. 1:22; 5:5; Eph. 1:14); and in response we give our hearts as a pledge to Him (Jer. 30:21 Heb.). So forbidding the practice seems out of step with the spirit of grace. It would mean asking of God what we are unprepared to do for others.

Pro 14:22 Don't they go astray who plot evil? But love and faithfulness belong to those who plan good-

"Plot evil" is the phrase used of Saul's plots against David (1 Sam. 23:9). Saul likely still had his supporters even in Solomon's time, and Solomon came to the throne after a period of continual attempts to take the throne from the Davidic line through Absalom. And he uses his Proverbs, true as they are, to do down any potential opposition, and to present support of him as the only way to national peace and unity- an old ploy.

Pro 14:23 In all hard work there is profit, but the talk of the lips leads only to poverty-

Here again we see Solomon's works based attitude. He sees poverty as the result of laziness, and profit / plenty coming from hard work (Prov. 14:23; 21:5). He fails to appreciate the wider narrative in spiritual life. The good news is for the poor, which group may include the lazy. And works will not save, and God's salvation is what is ultimately required by man. But Solomon had no eternal perspective, because he thought his kingdom was God's. And so as he got older and closer to death, he reasons that the reality of death means that man has no profit or preeminence (s.w. Ecc. 3:19). If he had accepted the Gospel of the future Kingdom of God, he would have focused more upon salvation by grace through faith, and less upon the supremacy of hard work and profit / preeminence in this life.

Pro 14:24 The crown of the wise is their riches, but the folly of fools crowns them with folly-

It was Solomon who was the king and wore the ultimate crown in his society. And he implies that his fantastic riches were a result of his wisdom, and that his pattern should be followed by others. But he fails to remember that his desire for wisdom was recognized by God in that He gave Solomon riches. Those riches were a gift from God, by grace, and not acquired or generated by his own application of wisdom (1 Kings 3:13). He therefore misused his possession of wisdom and experience of grace to justify himself, and present himself as a self made man; when he was not that at all.

Pro 14:25 A truthful witness saves souls, but a false witness is deceitful-

Solomon has much to say about true and false witnesses (Prov. 6:19; 12:17; 14:5,25; 19:5,9,28; 21:28; 24:28; 25:18). Whilst his warnings are true enough, he surely has an element of self justification in what he writes. Because he was aware that his parents, David and Bathsheba, had been accused of many things which had led to all the opposition against David at the end of his reign, and which opposition Solomon had to contend with in order to retain the throne for himself. David laments the false witness of the house of Saul and his own sons, Solomon's half brothers (Ps. 27:12; 35:11). The continual condemnation of false witnesses must be understood in this context. Whilst it is all true so far as it goes, Solomon is

harnessing Divine truth to his own agenda of self justification. And we who claim to hold His truths must take warning.

Pro 14:26 In the fear of Yahweh is a secure fortress, and He will be a refuge for His children-

The secure fortress was Zion (Is. 32:18; Ps. 125:1 s.w.), "the stronghold of Zion, the same is the city of David" (2 Sam. 5:7). Whilst what Solomon says is true, and repeats the multiple cases of David in the Psalms professing trust in Yahweh as his strong fortress, Solomon as ever has his agenda of self justification; he saw his possession of Zion as a sign that he feared Yahweh acceptably, and that his children would continue the Davidic line of glory. But sacred space is not so ultimately important to God. Possession of the literal stronghold of Zion was nothing compared to trust in Yahweh.

Pro 14:27 The fear of Yahweh is a fountain of life, turning people from the snares of death- Solomon uses the figure of a well of living water to describe spiritual words and thinking (Prov. 10:11; 13:14; 14:27; 16:22). Yet this is the very figure which he uses concerning his worldly bride (Song of Solomon 4:15). It could be argued that this typifies the massive imputation of righteousness which the Lord Jesus grants to us, His worldly Gentile bride. But I would rather see it as an example of how he chose to justify his love for worldly women by as it were clothing those women in his own mind with the imagery of spirituality.

Solomon claims that the righteous / wise live long lives, and therefore the unwise have shorter lives (Prov. 9:11; 10:27). This was the promise for obedience to the old covenant (s.w. Dt. 11:21). But it is not always the case, as Job learned (s.w. Job 29:18); righteous men like David and Hezekiah felt their days had been shortened (s.w. Ps. 89:45; 102:23). And it was so with the Lord Jesus. And faithful men often lament that the wicked seem to get long life, whilst the righteous don't. The answer to that conundrum is that final blessing of long life is at the resurrection, at the last day; and not in this life. But Solomon didn't see that; he thought that long life now was the only reward. He failed to perceive the real meaning of the Gospel of the Kingdom.

Pro 14:28 In the multitude of people is the king's glory, but without people the prince is nothing-

GNB "A king's greatness depends on how many people he rules; without them he is nothing". Solomon is again justifying himself, for the people at his time are described as very many at his time (1 Kings 4:20). Solomon is harnessing Divine truth to his own agenda of self justification. And we who claim to hold His truths must take warning.

Pro 14:29 He who is slow to anger has great understanding, but he who has a quick temper displays folly-

This is true, but there are several examples of David's quick temper. We recall his furious

desire to slay Nabal's family. But all the historical weaknesses of David are passed over by Solomon. He seems to have subconsciously whitewashed his father, and presents him elsewhere as the glorious example of wisdom, and all his opponents as fools.

Pro 14:30 The life of the body is a heart at peace, but envy rots the bones-

GNB "Peace of mind makes the body healthy, but jealousy is like a cancer". Solomon has much to say about the evil of envy (e.g. Prov. 14:30; 23:17; 24:1,19; 27:4). But true as his condemnations of envy are, he surely has in mind the way that Ephraim envied Judah, and envied his throne (s.w. Is. 11:13). This all came to full term after his death, when Ephraim departed from Judah under Jeroboam. Again, Solomon is harnessing Divine truth to his own agenda of self justification. And we who claim to hold His truths must take warning. But as he faced death, he came to realize that all such envy is as nothing before the reality of death, which he understood as the end of life, as he had assumed this life was the time for reward and expresses no personal hope in a resurrection of the body (Ecc. 4:4; 9:6).

Pro 14:31 He who oppresses the poor shows contempt for his Maker, but he who is kind to the needy honours Him-

Oppression seems to have been a characteristic of the reigns of Saul and Absalom. See on Ps. 62:10. This was the equivalent of how Saul oppressed David (Ps. 119:121,122,134). Samuel's insistence that *he* has not oppressed the people is in the context of his warning that Saul would do this (1 Sam. 12:3,4). When Solomon later condemns the 'oppressors' (s.w. Prov. 14:31; 22:16; 28:3,24), he has in view a wishing of judgment upon the house of Saul. "The poor" whom they had oppressed would easily refer to David (1 Sam. 18:23; Ps. 34:6).

Pro 14:32 The wicked is brought down in his calamity, but in death, the righteous has a refuge-

"Brought down" is 'chased away', the language of Divine judgment at the last day (Job 18:18; 20:8; Is. 13:14; 17:13). AV "hath hope in his death". all this can be read as looking forward to the judgment of the last day; but Solomon doesn't reason as if there is such a judgment. He saw himself, armed with his Divine wisdom, as the ultimate judge of men, and his kingdom as God's Kingdom with himself as the Messiah figure. So whilst his words are recorded in such a way as to look ahead to the future, I suggest this was not the position which he himself held. Rather is he saying that the wicked are brought down in this life, and when faced with violent death, as David was at times, God will deliver them- in this life.

Pro 14:33 Wisdom remains in the heart of one who has understanding, and is even made known in the inward part of fools-

Solomon later alludes to this in saying that although he cast off his faith in Yahweh, and his heart turned aside to idols, his Divinely given wisdom [in an intellectual sense] remained with him (Ecc. 2:9). He seems to be saying that if one has wisdom, it will always remain in the heart, and thereby justify a man. But this isn't the case; one can know Divine truths and

yet live otherwise, without at all personalizing them. And so turn away from the true God, just as Solomon did. The last half of the verse would simply be saying that fools don't get it, and never will, hence GNB "fools know nothing about wisdom".

Pro 14:34 Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a disgrace to any people-

Israel were exalted under Solomon to the peak of their power and extent. And he sees this as being due to "righteousness". But he himself was far from righteousness, as were his people. Their exaltation was due to the work done by David, and God's recognition of David. Material blessing in secular terms is no guarantee of righteousness, nor is a lack of such blessings a sign of sin; as the book of Job makes clear. But Solomon sees only the immediate and the secular, and assumes that the exaltation of Israel was because of their or his righteousness. But that is simply not the case.

Pro 14:35 The king's favour is toward a servant who deals wisely, but his wrath is toward

one who causes shame- See on Prov. 12:16. Although what Solomon writes is true and inspired, he clearly has in view his favour and then wrath against his servant Jeroboam (1 Kings 11:26). Solomon uses his own feelings against Jeroboam as a basis for a global truth about kings and their servants. His Proverbs were indeed inspired, but there was a human element behind his words, ever seeking to use God's truths in order to justify himself.

PROVERBS CHAPTER 15

Pro 15:1 A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger-

LXX "Anger slays even wise men; yet a submissive answer turns away wrath: but a grievous word stirs up anger". There are several similarities here with David's hotheaded desire to kill Nabal and all his family because of harsh words. And indeed Abigail's wise and gentle answer turned away David's wrath. Abigail remained a favourite wife with David, and so Solomon here appears to be justifying her. Although another alternative is that he had so whitewashed the failures and rashness of his father David that he writes this without any awareness that it all applies to his father, and shows him up in a bad light; whereas Solomon is everywhere glorifying "my father David".

Pro 15:2 The tongue of the wise commends knowledge, but the mouth of fools gushes out folly-

Solomon speaks truly, but he seems to have a subtext of declaring himself the ultimate tongue of the wise; see on :4.

Pro 15:3 Yahweh's eyes are everywhere, keeping watch on the evil and the good-

Perhaps a reference to the Angels. The point is that both evil and good are watched over by them, for God is the ultimate creator of both (Is. 45:5-7). This would have been (and still is) at radical variance with the common misconception that some cosmic forces of evil watch over the evil, whilst God watches over the good. See on :11.

Pro 15:4 A gentle tongue is a tree of life, but deceit in it crushes the spirit-

AV "a wholesome tongue". Solomon has early predicated "life" upon his own words (Prov. 4:20,22); so it may be that he again has himself in view as the ultimately good and true tongue. For he considers that his tongue is the ultimate "tongue of the wise" of :2.

Access to the tree of life has been taken away because of human sin; only in the restored Eden of the Kingdom of God on earth will we be able to eat the fruit of the tree of life. Indeed God in His grace and wisdom barred access to the tree of life, knowing that eternity in our present state would be a curse. But Solomon likes to think that his kingdom is the Kingdom of God, and the life according to his wisdom was effectively the life eternal. Again we see a failure in Solomon to perceive that the true life and restoration of Eden was yet future. This would explain why as he got older and approached death, he became disillusioned; for clearly his life had not been the life of the Kingdom.

Pro 15:5 A fool despises his father's correction, but he who heeds reproof shows prudence-

Solomon's prophetic sonship of David was conditional upon him preserving or observing Yahweh's ways (1 Kings 2:4; 1 Chron. 22:13; 2 Chron. 7:17); but he didn't preserve or observe them (1 Kings 11:10,11); despite David praying that Solomon would be given a heart to observe them (1 Chron. 29:19). We can pray for God to work upon the hearts of others, but

He will not force people against their own deepest will and heart position. Solomon stresses overmuch how God would keep or preserve the righteous (Prov. 2:8; 3:26), without recognizing the conditional aspect of this. Why did Solomon go wrong? His Proverbs are true enough, but he stresses that obedience to his wisdom and teaching would preserve his hearers (Prov. 4:4; 6:22; 7:1; 8:32; 15:5), preservation was through following the example of the wise (Prov. 2:20); rather than stressing obedience to God's ways, and replacing David his father's simple love of God with a love of academic wisdom: "Yahweh preserves all those who love Him" (Ps. 145:20).

Pro 15:6 In the house of the righteous is much treasure-

Solomon continues his mistaken attitude to wealth, alluding to the houses he built in which to store his treasures. But he was given wealth by God's grace, as a gift, in recognition of his preference for wisdom. But he abuses this grace, as we can, in assuming that the gift was given because he was righteous- when he wasn't.

But the income of the wicked brings trouble-

The initial reference would be to Achan who loved and coveted wealth and thereby troubled Israel (s.w. 1 Chron. 2:7). But Solomon always has some self justification in his agenda in the Proverbs, and he surely has in mind how Saul troubled Israel (1 Sam. 14:29 s.w.), and was therefore replaced by the line of David through Solomon.

Pro 15:7 The lips of the wise spread knowledge; not so with the heart of fools-

Again the heart and the mouth are paralleled. We cannot hope to think things in our hearts, and they don't ultimately issue forth as words (Mt. 12:34). Solomon considers that he is justified as personally wise, because of his spreading of knowledge in the form of the anthology we have in the book of Proverbs. But teaching others doesn't of itself justify us. He pronounces himself as the "teacher" in Ecclesiastes, at a point where he has clearly lost any personal faith he ever had.

Pro 15:8 The sacrifice made by the wicked is an abomination to Yahweh, but the prayer of the upright is His delight-

We note here the parallel between prayer and sacrifice. This is a major Biblical theme (Hos. 14:2 etc.). Indeed, it is "not for ease that prayer shall be". True prayer involves giving something deeply personal of ourselves.

Pro 15:9 The way of the wicked is an abomination to Yahweh, but He loves him who follows after righteousness-

This is true. But Solomon was 'the one whom Yahweh loves' (2 Sam. 12:24; the same words are used), and there is a subtext here of self justification. See on Prov. 3:12. Solomon's experience of God's love led him to conclude that he must therefore be following righteousness. But he failed to perceive that God's love is by grace, and not a reward for our righteousness.

Pro 15:10 There is stern discipline for one who forsakes the way: whoever hates reproof shall die-

Solomon here quotes his father's words in Ps. 50:17 "since you hate instruction". Solomon thus accuses any who refuse his Proverbs of doing just this, hating instruction, which in the context of Ps. 50:17 means 'You are condemned' (s.w. Prov. 5:12; 12:1; 15:10). As in Prov. 2:13, Solomon sees the wicked as those who once knew the right path and have left it. He contrasts the path of uprightness and that of darkness (Prov. 2:13). But life is not so clear cut. The same phrase is used of how Job felt he was walking the path of darkness (Job 19:8). David, Solomon's father, likewise partially strayed from the path. This inability to recognize that spiritual life is not so black and white led to Solomon assuming he was totally on the way of righteousness. He was unable therefore to appreciate that he himself failed at some points at some times. And this is true for those who have a similarly black and white view of people and spirituality.

Pro 15:11 Sheol and Abaddon are before Yahweh- how much more then the hearts of the children of men!-

Death and the grave are therefore not seen as presided over by some lord of the underworld, a Satan-like figure. Rather God is presented as all powerful and alone in control of good and evil; see on :3. Solomon correctly perceives that the hearts of men are what determine their destiny. But he presents this truth without personalizing it, for his own heart was turned away to idolatry.

Pro 15:12 A scoffer doesn't love to be reproofed; he will not go to the wise-

David had spoken of the house of Saul as scoffing at him (s.w. Ps. 119:51). And the line of David had been chosen to replace Saul because he had refused Samuel's reproof. David had accepted reproof and was open to it, notably from Nathan the prophet (Ps. 38:1; 141:5); and so again Solomon's Proverbs are true, but he harnesses them to the justification of himself and his father. But Solomon was only to remain the prophetic son of David if he accepted reproof (s.w. 2 Sam. 7:14); and he didn't. He refused to personalize his own wisdom, as we can.

Pro 15:13 A glad heart makes a cheerful face; but an aching heart breaks the spirit-

Solomon teaches that a broken spirit is a curse (Prov. 15:13; 17:22; 18:14), and an indication that something is wrong with the core of a person; because an unbroken spirit will "make a cheerful face" (Prov. 15:13), and external appearance and having joy in this life was of primary importance to Solomon. He fails to realize that his father David had a broken spirit (Ps. 31:12; 38:8; 44:19; 51:8,17; 69:20- all a fair emphasis), and had thereby understood that Yahweh is especially close to those with a broken spirit (Ps. 34:18; 147:13), indeed the Gospel is for the broken spirited, and the broken hearted are not to be mocked (Ps. 109:16).

Pro 15:14 The heart of one who has understanding seeks knowledge, but the mouths of fools

feed on folly-

Again the message is that wisdom is manifested in terms of who a person seeks as their teacher. This is indeed true, confirmed by 2 Tim. 4:3. But as ever there is the subtext, that anyone who refuses to accept Solomon as the teacher of Israel is foolish. And yet Solomon was himself morally compromised by his fleshly lifestyle.

Pro 15:15 All the days of the afflicted are wretched, but one who has a cheerful heart enjoys a continual feast-

Again, this is typical of the simplistic dualism of Solomon. The wise have a continual feast, whereas the unwise live wretched lives. But this is simply not true to spiritual reality, and the Bible is full of lament that the wicked have a great life now whilst the righteous suffer, with the final resolution of things only made at the last day. But Solomon assumes that he is the Messianic seed of David and his kingdom is God's Kingdom, and therefore the reward for wisdom has to be immediately in this life.

Pro 15:16 Better is little with the fear of Yahweh, than great treasure with trouble-

This is true, but it is in tension with Solomon's idea that increased wealth comes as a blessing for wisdom. Perhaps LXX is therefore more accurate, speaking of the size of an inheritance: "Better is a small portion...". This may refer to Solomon's tribe of Judah not having the largest portion or inheritance, a source of tension between Judah and Ephraim.

Pro 15:17 Better is a dinner of herbs where love is, than a fattened calf with hatred-

The blindness of Solomon is driven home time and again. The Proverbs which lament the rich man who has bitterness in his family life no doubt came true of Solomon in later life. He is a parade example of knowing Divine truth but living the very opposite.

Perhaps Solomon has in view the "hatred" of his brother Amnon (2 Sam. 13:15). The word for "hatred" is used by David in the Psalms, about both the house of Saul and also Solomon's half brothers (see on Ps. 25:19; 103:9; 109:5). All these were contenders to Solomon's throne, and he appears to here condemn them as fools who shall therefore be condemned. This constant focus upon the judgment of others led Solomon to be quite unaware of his personal responsibility to judgment himself.

Pro 15:18 A wrathful man stirs up contention, but one who is slow to anger appeases strife-
Solomon seems to overlook the fact that his father David was known as a "wrathful man" (s.w. 2 Sam. 11:20), who was hardly "slow to anger", as witnessed by his behaviour at the time of Nabal's provocation. He refuses to see any weakness in his father, and instead presents him as the wise and righteous man.

Pro 15:19 The way of the sluggard is like a thorn patch, but the path of the upright is a highway-

The Proverbs contain repeated condemnation of laziness. Lack of a zealous work ethic is a rejection of wisdom, according to Solomon. As Solomon explains in Ecc. 1, he was an active person, not lazy by nature. And yet he lacked spirituality. He claimed that his service of God was due to his spirituality, but it was in reality merely a semblance of serving God when it was really just reinforcing his own personality type. His mocking of the "sluggard" or "lazy one" is so frequent (Prov. 6:6,9; 10:26; 13:4; 15:19; 19:24; 20:4; 21:25; 22:13; 24:30; 26:13-16). But it is a reflection of his own works-based approach to righteousness; the 'wise' "do" good things, and the wicked don't do enough good things. Personal spiritual mindedness and relationship with God are simply not emphasized.

Pro 15:20 A wise son makes a father glad, but a foolish man despises his mother-

This is true, but Solomon saw himself as the supremely wise man, who made his father David glad. And he may also have in mind how his rival half brother Absalom had reduced David his father to tears, through his unwisdom.

Pro 15:21 Folly is joy to one who is void of wisdom, but a man of understanding keeps his way straight-

Solomon thinks of the righteous as walking unflinchingly forward in wisdom, never turning to the right or left, refusing to be distracted by any wicked person who suggests walking another way (Prov. 9:15 "to call travellers who go directly on their way"). This approach fails to take account of the simple fact that righteous people sin and stray from the direct path every day, and are saved finally into God's Kingdom by grace alone. That is all something Solomon failed to have any grasp of, whereas David his father did. Prov. 11:5 makes the somewhat tautological statement that "the righteousness of the perfect shall direct his way", s.w. Prov. 4:25 "fix your gaze directly before you". This contrasts with how David uses the word in Ps. 5:8: "Lead me, O Yahweh... make Your way straight [s.w. direct] before my face". The same statement of God directing in the straight way is found in Is. 45:13; Jer. 18:4 s.w. Solomon didn't see this need for the Spirit of God to direct his path because he assumed that mere possession of Divine truth would itself keep him in the way; hence he teaches that "understanding" makes a man walk "directly" (Prov. 15:21). And he failed miserably because of that arrogant position.

Pro 15:22 Where there is no counsel, plans fail; but in a multitude of counsellors they are established-

But Solomon disobeyed this, reflecting in Ecc. 4:13 how he had become the king who wouldn't be admonished / counselled.

Pro 15:23 Joy comes to a man as a result of the reply of his mouth. How good is an appropriate word at the right time!-

This is true, but gives rise to a whiff of smug, self congratulatory complacency. For it is as if Solomon see himself and the wise as joyful or happy with themselves because they had used

words rightly to others. Solomon fails to appreciate that spiritual reality is not so simplistic; James is nearer the mark when he writes that we cannot seem to always control our tongues (James 3:1-5). Whereas Solomon is smug at the thought that he always gave the right and appropriate reply.

Pro 15:24 The path of life spirals upward for the wise, to keep him from going downward to Sheol-

Solomon elsewhere clearly understands *sheol* as the grave, and not some place of punishment for the wicked at their death. So his idea is that the wise would be kept from death, perhaps violent death, in their lifetimes. But as Solomon himself got older and approached death, he realized that death was an inevitable factor in every human life; and hence Ecclesiastes is full of reflection that death means that wisdom or unwisdom is ultimately a vain choice. This all arose because Solomon wrongly assumed that this life is the time for reward and punishment for wisdom or unwisdom. He had no perspective on a future day of judgment and eternal reward. These things were clearly understood from Abraham to David, but he chose not to accept that message. But it is indeed true that there is an upward spiral in spiritual life for the wise, empowered in our days by the activity of the Spirit in human life.

Pro 15:25 Yahweh will uproot the house of the proud, but He will keep the widow's borders intact-

This is true, but the house of Solomon had competed for the throne against other families / houses. And he here alludes to that, assuming all the competing houses had been punished for their pride. But that didn't mean Solomon was the humble, wise, righteous one as he assumed. The defence of the widow alludes to David being willing to do this in 2 Sam. 14:5. There may also be an allusion to David promising not to destroy the house of Saul (1 Sam. 24:21); but Solomon considers that Yahweh would do this.

Pro 15:26 Yahweh detests the thoughts of the wicked, but the thoughts of the pure are pleasing-

"Abomination" [s.w. "detests"] is the common word for idols (e.g. Dt. 7:25,26). Idolatry is here interpreted as things like pride and telling lies (:17). These seven things are the essence of idolatry. There is a recurring nature to them, just as idols got a grip on the mind of the worshipper. Solomon often uses the word for quiet, secret sins, words and the matters of the heart, internal attitudes and judgments (Prov. 11:1,20; 12:22; 13:19; 15:26; 16:5; 17:15; 20:10,23; 24:9; 26:25; 28:9; 29:27). And this of course is the essence of idolatry in our age; this is the practical force to us of all Biblical teaching about idolatry.

Pro 15:27 He who is greedy for gain troubles his own house, but he who hates bribes will live-

The initial reference would be to Achan who loved and coveted wealth and thereby troubled Israel and his own house (s.w. 1 Chron. 2:7). But Solomon always has some self justification

in his agenda in the Proverbs, and he surely has in mind how Saul troubled Israel (1 Sam. 14:29 s.w.), and was therefore replaced by the line of David through Solomon.

Pro 15:28 The heart of the righteous weighs answers, but the mouth of the wicked gushes out evil-

Solomon repeatedly condemns "the mouth of the wicked" (Prov. 10:6,11,32; 11:11; 12:6; 15:28; 19:28). All he says is true enough, but he clearly enough has in view how his father David had condemned the supporters of Saul and Absalom as having "the mouth of the wicked" (Ps. 109:2). And these were the groups who were threatening his power and throne. Solomon presents himself by implication as having the mouth of the just / righteous. And yet we must note that David too had spoken multiple words of deceit in relation to the murder of Uriah. Indeed the phrase is used in Is. 53:9 as if the Lord Jesus was the only man who didn't have a "mouth of deceit". Solomon like David was in denial of the fact that we all sin with our mouths, as James makes clear in James 3:1-3.

Pro 15:29 Yahweh is far from the wicked, but He hears the prayer of the righteous-

"The Lord is far from the wicked: but He heareth the prayer of the righteous". This implies that God is too physically far away from the wicked to hear their prayer. Ps. 10:1 is one of the many references in the Psalms to God being physically far away when a prayer is not answered: "Why standest Thou afar off, O Lord? Why hidest Thou Thyself in times of trouble?". This is the language of limitation- God Himself hears every sound of our lips, including the prayers of the wicked, which He says are like smoke in His nostrils and an annoyance to Him. So if our prayers are heard when God is 'near' us, does it not follow that when our Angel is physically near us, then our prayer is more quickly heard? Hence Jesus' Angel was physically with Him in Gethsemane in order to encourage Him in prayer. Once we accept that prayer goes first to an Angel, then this suggestion looks more sensible.

LXX adds "Let the heart of a man think justly, that his steps may be rightly ordered of God". This suggests that the thinking of man is confirmed by God. This has ever been the work of the Holy Spirit.

Pro 15:30 The light of the eyes rejoices the heart; good news gives health to the bones-

The Hebrew isn't clear, and perhaps the GNB may be closer to the sense: "Smiling faces make you happy, and good news makes you feel better". The immediate context in :31,32 is about the positive result of hearing wisdom, so the idea may be that if Solomon smiled on a person and they received his gospel or good news, then the person would be happy; whereas if his words were refused, there would be grief (:32). But again we note that the emphasis is upon blessing right now in this life, with no perspective of a future eternal Kingdom as the time of blessing.

Pro 15:31 The ear that listens to reproof lives, and will be at home among the wise-

This appears to be an out of context allusion to David's words in Ps. 38:14, reflecting on his

sin with Bathsheba, and how he felt unable to give reproof to others: "Yes, I am as a man who doesn't hear, in whose mouth are no reproofs". Solomon was obsessed with David his father, speaking hundreds of times of "David my father". But he failed to have his humility; he endlessly dishes out reproofs in Proverbs, indeed he sees his Proverbs as reproofs to people (e.g. Prov. 1:25; 6:23; 10:17; 12:1; 13:18; 15:5,31; 29:15); whereas David humbly felt unable to do so because of his awareness of his sins. And at the time David wrote the Proverbs, when he received wisdom at the start of his reign, he was sinning likewise [in essence] by marrying foreign women.

Pro 15:32 He who refuses correction despises his own soul, but he who listens to reproof gets understanding-

Solomon has so much to say about "correction" or "instruction" coming from the possession of wisdom (Prov. 8:10,33; 10:17; 12:1; 13:1,24; 15:5,10,32; 16:22; 19:20,27; 22:15; 23:12,13). But in the end he chastised or corrected his people by whipping them (s.w. 1 Kings 12:11,14). Solomon initially asked for wisdom in order to guide his people, but he ended up whipping / physically chastising them into conformity with his wishes rather than allowing wisdom to correct. Again, he was playing God; for it is God through His wisdom who chastises, and not man. But Solomon thought he was effectively God to his people. This is why Solomon argues that servants cannot be corrected by words (Prov. 29:19 s.w.), and a child must be physically chastised (s.w. Prov. 19:18; 29:17 cp. Prov. 13:24; 23:13), regardless of his screams of pain. This kind of thing is a denial of his claims elsewhere that it is Divine wisdom which chastises / corrects, and such correction is from God and not man. Solomon's final description of himself as an old and foolish king who refuses to be admonished says it all (Ecc. 4:13); he admonishes others (s.w. Ecc. 12:12), but refuses to be admonished or corrected by his own wisdom. He failed to personalize it.

Pro 15:33 The fear of Yahweh teaches wisdom; before honour is humility-

This is true, but Solomon supposes that wisdom is received by firstly fearing Yahweh. Solomon was given wisdom as a gift, by grace. But once he possessed it, he begins to reason as if he received it because of some prior righteousness on his part. He abused the gifts of grace, just as we can.

PROVERBS CHAPTER 16

Pro 16:1 The plans of the heart within man, and the answer of the tongue, is from Yahweh-

This is the introduction to the section from :1-9 about the heart. Although we are responsible for our hearts, there is this 'other' factor, over and above our mental efforts. This is the work of the Spirit, that element "from Yahweh" over and above our freewill thought control. Note how the tongue and the heart are paralleled- for as the Lord stated specifically, our words reflect our thoughts. And yet the "answer of the tongue is from Yahweh" in that at times we find ourselves saying things which are beyond us or not fully of ourselves. It could be that the last verse in the section, :9, concludes by saying the same- "A man's heart plans his course, but Yahweh directs his steps".

Pro 16:2 All the ways of a man are clean in his own eyes; but Yahweh weighs the motives-

The Hebrew refers to balancing weights. He doesn't make an automatic judgment, but consciously considers the positives and negatives within our spirits [*ruach*- "motives", NEV]. He does it this way, although He could do it without any process and instantly, in order to encourage us to do likewise, realizing that our self-examination is mirroring His.

Pro 16:3 Commit your deeds to Yahweh, and your plans shall succeed-

"Commit" is the word used by David in Ps. 37:5 "Commit your way to Yahweh. Trust also in Him, and He will do this". What He will "do" is to grant the desire of our heart (Ps. 37:4), which is defined in this Psalm as eternally inheriting the land. And this will be achieved by imputing righteousness to us (Ps. 37:6). We are to commit our life's way to Yahweh, knowing that it is His desire to grant us our heart's desire- a place in His Kingdom. So David speaks of committing our life's way to Yahweh and then trusting that He will bring us to His Kingdom; but here Solomon tweaks this into "Commit [s.w.] your *works* unto Yahweh" (Prov. 16:3). We see here Solomon's works-based approach.

Works and His thoughts are paralleled here (as in Ps. 40:5; 92:5). Thoughts are therefore our "way" of life in practice (Is. 55:7). This is because thought and action are understood as essentially the same; hence the sermon on the mount condemns thoughts of sin as if they are the sin itself.

Pro 16:4 Yahweh has made everything for its own end-- yes, even the wicked for the day of evil-

Nothing is wasted in the Divine ecology. God uses wicked people, and when He brings evil / disaster, He uses them. Sin does not, therefore, achieve its intention- of rebellion against God and the attainment of radical freedom from His purpose.

Pro 16:5 Everyone who is proud in heart is an abomination to Yahweh: they shall certainly not be unpunished-

AV "though hand join in hand, he shall not be unpunished". The idea that God somehow will forget or omit to punish sin is rooted in pride. The punishment will surely come. And even if

we are hand in hand with others who are doing the same, this will not take away Divine judgment.

"Abomination" is the common word for idols (e.g. Dt. 7:25,26). Idolatry is here interpreted as things like pride and telling lies (:17). These seven things are the essence of idolatry. There is a recurring nature to them, just as idols got a grip on the mind of the worshipper. Solomon often uses the word for quiet, secret sins, words and the matters of the heart, internal attitudes and judgments (Prov. 11:1,20; 12:22; 13:19; 15:26; 16:5; 17:15; 20:10,23; 24:9; 26:25; 28:9; 29:27). And this of course is the essence of idolatry in our age; this is the practical force to us of all Biblical teaching about idolatry.

An example of indirect reference to Solomon's pride is found in the way the record points a similarity between Paul and Solomon. Each was given wisdom, and each was given a Satan to humble them because of the way wisdom bloats a man's ego. The fact that we have 'the truth' in basic doctrinal terms - plus a fair bit of other Divine wisdom - really will tempt us to be proud. This is the sort of thing we individually and collectively need to exhort ourselves strongly about. Like us, Solomon knew theoretically the paramount danger of pride; he lists it as the most fundamental of the seven things God hates (Prov. 6:17 cp. 16:5,18). Indeed, Solomon correctly implies in Prov. 28:25 that pride is an outcome of lack of faith, and this was exactly true in Solomon's case. His lack of faith in the future kingdom led him to be proud.

Pro 16:6 By mercy and truth iniquity is atoned for; by the fear of Yahweh men depart from evil-

A radical idea at the time of the Mosaic law, which taught that atonement was through the blood of sacrifice. "Mercy and truth" is a term often associated with the promises to David; Solomon, as David's son, was surely aware of this. The salvation envisaged in those promises was not dependent upon obedience to the Law. And yet quite simply the message may be that we must show true mercy in order to obtain mercy / atonement.

Pro 16:7 When a man's ways please Yahweh, He makes even his enemies to be at peace with him-

A reference to Esau's surprising peace with Jacob (Proverbs is packed with such historical commentary). Yet as they made peace, Jacob was saying that Esau was his Lord, and he was Esau's servant (32:18; 33:14), in designed denial of the Divine prophecy that Esau was to serve Jacob (25:23). Yet at this very time, Jacob's ways pleased Yahweh. See on :9.

Pro 16:8 Better is a little with righteousness, than great revenues with injustice-

This is true, but it is in tension with Solomon's idea that increased wealth comes as a blessing for wisdom. Perhaps LXX is therefore more accurate, speaking of the size of an inheritance: "Better is a small portion...". This may refer to Solomon's tribe of Judah not having the largest portion or inheritance, a source of tension between Judah and Ephraim.

Pro 16:9 A man's heart plans his course, but Yahweh directs his steps-

It is within the power of choice within each human mind to decide which overall path we take in life; but we are led along that path, step by step, by God. He confirms us in our choice. The same Hebrew word *derek*, translated "course", is found translated "ways" in :7. If our choice of way or path is pleasing to God, then He will confirm us in it.

David considered his ways and turned his steps / ways towards obedience (Ps. 119:59); Solomon takes this further, using the same phrase, but saying that God directs the ways / steps of the man who considers his ways (s.w. Prov. 16:9). We have here an example of how the Spirit confirms a Godly person in the way they consciously wish to go.

David had earlier understood that for the humble and righteous, God can "prepare their heart" (Ps. 10:17). This is evidence enough that God works directly upon the human heart and psychology, which He does today through the work of His Spirit upon the human spirit. For it is men who must prepare their heart in prayer and relationship toward God (s.w. 2 Chron. 12:14; Job 11:13; Ps. 7:9). But God can also do this for the humble. Hence David later asks God to create in him a 'prepared' heart (s.w. Ps. 51:10). And God heard; for the same phrase is used of how God 'prepared' or (AV) "fixed" / NEV 'made steadfast' his heart (Ps. 57:7; 108:1; 112:7). In allusion to this, Solomon was to later reflect that God can direct or 'prepare' (s.w.) the heart of man, even if he is thinking to direct his steps elsewhere (Prov. 16:9).

Pro 16:10 Inspired judgments are on the lips of the king. He shall not betray his mouth- Solomon writes inspired truth in Proverbs of course, but it is inevitable that much of what he writes about the need to respect the man who has wisdom, and his superiority over all others, was written with an eye to his own self-justification. He even writes as if the king must be accepted as automatically infallible: "A divine sentence is in the lips of the king; his mouth transgresseth not in judgment... the fear of a king is as the roaring of a lion: whoso provoketh him to anger sinneth against his own soul" (Prov. 16:10; 20:2 AV). It was really Solomon's self-justification. See on :15.

Pro 16:11 Honest balances and scales are Yahweh's; all the weights in the bag are His work- The idea may be that no matter how men make false weights, Yahweh works through that ultimately and controls all the scales. Or the stress may be on the fact that Yahweh is the ultimate judge, weighing all things in perfectly accurate balances and with ultimately true weighting. This then leads on to the comment in :12 that a true king, and Solomon refers to himself, cannot judge wrongly because he is king on God's behalf. His judgment must therefore be accepted as correct, because he is king on behalf of Yahweh, the ultimately true and fair judge. Hence LXX "or the throne of rule is established by righteousness". But this is reasoning which is biased towards Solomon's self justification, and desire to cement himself as the unquestioned moral judge and teacher of Israel- although personally he was so far from it.

Pro 16:12 It is an abomination for kings to do wrong, for the throne is established by righteousness-

This cannot be without reference to the fact that Solomon's throne was "established"- and he assumed it was thanks to his righteousness, and his father's good standing with God. *Faith* and an acceptance of God's grace in doing this just didn't come into it. His father's high parental expectation of him led him to self-assurance, arrogance, an assumption he was right and could never be wrong. And one sees this in many a Christian family.

Pro 16:13 Righteous lips are the delight of kings; they value one who speaks the truth-

As noted on :11, this may be true, but it is Solomon's self justification. He claims to have righteous lips, and therefore to be only interested in truth. But his passion for intellectual truth was related to his mistaken idea that mere possession of Divine truth or "wisdom", as he terms it, of itself justifies a man. And Solomon utterly failed to personalize all his knowledge of truth, and his own way of life was far from what God required- because of his obsession with "truth" for its own sake. And this path to failure has been seen in so many small time Protestant groups likewise obsessed with possession of "truth" for its own sake.

Pro 16:14 The king's wrath is as a messenger of death, but a wise man will pacify it-

"The wrath of a king is as messengers (Angels) of death" (Prov. 16:14 AV)- as if to say that as the Angels- of evil and death in this case- are zealous to obey the king of Heaven's command, so are the messengers who obey a human king's over-hasty command to kill someone. As God sends out angels of death, as on Passover night, it's a reflection of His decision as King in the court of Heaven. But Solomon decided that his court was as God's court, and therefore his thoughts, emotions and decisions would therefore be somehow Divinely fulfilled, with Angels sent out to fulfil them. He took 'God manifestation' to such a degree that he denied his own humanity, and this destroyed his own person. We see it happening all around us- church pastors, visual artists who think somehow God is speaking through them to the point they see themselves as "Gods in their own right" [as Dali and Picasso have been described as seeing themselves], Kings and political leaders and corporate directors and office managers and working class husbands and obsessive, domineering single mums... who all somehow come to see themselves as little gods with a 'Divine right' to infallible decision making for others. See on :15.

Pro 16:15 In the light of the king's face is life. His favour is like a cloud of the spring rain-

He says that a wise son makes a glad father (Prov. 10:1), so intent was he on living out his father's expectations even after David's death. Because of this he teaches that the King must always be right and be respected, whatever happens (Prov. 16:10-15). He saw himself as the Messianic King and therefore infallible. He again and again failed to realize the conditionality of all God has promised.

Solomon was so sure that he was acceptable with God by reason of being David's son, that he ended up playing God. He did this by assuming that *his* feelings were actually those of God. When he says, with reference to himself, that "the wrath of a king is as messengers [angels] of death" (Prov. 16:14), he meant that his feelings of anger would, he thought, be implemented by the Angels. He assumed, with reference to himself, that "a divine sentence is in the lips of the King" (Prov. 16:10). He was infallible, because of who he was, because he 'knew the truth', and had been raised in it, and was 'to the manner born'. So he thought. And thus he ended up appropriating to himself language relevant to God alone: "In the light of the King's countenance is life; and his favour is as a cloud of the latter rain" (Prov. 16:15).

Pro 16:16 How much better it is to get wisdom than gold! Yes, to get understanding is to be chosen rather than silver-

This commendation of choosing wisdom over wealth could be read as Solomon's self-justification and self-commendation for his own choice of wisdom. The whole section from :10-32 can be read as Solomon's justification of his own judgments.

Often Solomon's Proverbs bring out the tension between wealth and wisdom, and the need to choose wisdom (Prov. 8:11; 16:16). But whilst he was inspired to write this, and true as it all was, it is inevitable that Solomon said all this with his mind on the way that he had rejected wealth for wisdom when asked by God for his wish. He thought that his right choice in early life [cp. Christian baptism] justified him in later loving wealth rather than wisdom. He taught that wisdom filled the treasuries of the wise (Prov. 8:21 RV)- just as his treasuries were filled with wealth.

Solomon's father David concluded that the law of God was better than gold and silver (s.w. Ps. 119:72). But as so often in the book of Proverbs, Solomon speaks of the wisdom he was teaching in the same terms as the Bible elsewhere speaks of God's entire revelation. And he saw fit to flout God's law. It was as if his obsession with the wisdom material he was teaching had led him to effectively replace God's laws with his own. He saw the particular Divine truths he had been given as eclipsing the rest of God's revelation; a mistake we see commonly made.

Pro 16:17 The highway of the upright is to depart from evil. He who keeps His way preserves his soul-

Removing / turning or departing from evil is a major theme of Proverbs (Prov. 13:19; 14:16; 16:6,17). Solomon uses the same phrase in Ecc. 11:10, but he gives the reason as being because youth is vanity; old age will prove that there is no point in not departing from evil, and going the way of evil, like going the way of righteousness, is all the same vanity. This nihilistic approach is because Solomon failed to discern that the end point of the path of righteousness, departing or removing our foot from the way of evil, is the redemption of the body in God's future Kingdom. But because he failed to understand that, he ends up concluding as he gets older that the choice between evil and good is all the same vain and meaningless. It is the hope of the resurrection of the body, the reality of judgment to come

and the future Kingdom of God, which make morality of so much meaning today. We may also note again Solomon's overly simplistic idea that if a man removes himself from evil, all will go wonderfully for him in life. The same phrase is used of how Job removed himself from, or "eschewed", evil; but his life was traumatic and without all the blessings for wisdom which Solomon liked to imagine.

Pro 16:18 Pride goes before destruction, and an arrogant spirit before a fall-

It must be more than ironic that it was Solomon who wrote that before a fall there is pride (Prov. 16:18). Clearly Solomon never considered he could fall, so he never considered the possibility that he was proud. The words of Dt. 17:16-20 are evidently a prophecy of Solomon. He did multiply silver, gold, horses and wives; his heart *was* turned away (Dt. 17:16,17= 2 Chron. 9:20). Yet this passage says that if he studied the Law all his life, this would *not* happen, and also his heart would not be "lifted up above his brethren" (Dt. 17:20). Solomon's whipping of the people and sense of spiritual and material superiority (Ecc. 1:16; 2:7,9) shows how his heart *was* lifted up. Yet Solomon knew the Law, despite his explicit disobedience to the commands concerning wives, horses etc. But his knowledge of the word didn't bring forth the true humility which it was intended to. This, surely, is what we need exhortation about: the need to achieve a true humility in this evil, arrogant world. Solomon *assumed* he wasn't proud; he assumed the word was having its intended effect upon him. Such spiritual assumption is a major temptation for every child of God. The fact that Solomon's pride is only inferred is a reflection of the fact that his pride was not publicly apparent, either to himself or to Israel; we learn of it indirectly through Dt. 17:16-20.

Pro 16:19 It is better to be of a humble spirit with the poor, than to divide the plunder with the proud-

This may appear to contradict Solomon's ideas expressed elsewhere that wealth is a blessing from God, and the poor are poor because of their unwisdom. Perhaps the LXX is therefore correct: "Better is a meek-spirited man with lowliness, than one who divides spoils with the proud". But it can be that quite simply, Solomon's statements in the book of Proverbs do contradict themselves. Some are his direct repetition of Divinely inspired wisdom, whereas others are based upon his own observations and nuanced by his own biases and obsessions; see on Prov. 7:6; 24:32.

Pro 16:20 He who heeds the word finds prosperity; whoever has faith in Yahweh is blessed-

"Has faith" is s.w. "trusted" in Prov. 3:5. Trust in God is indeed predicated upon some form of "understanding" or 'heeding the word', for faith comes by hearing the word of God; although not necessarily of the abstract, academic type which Solomon had in view. Trusting and heeding the word are parallel; to trust in Yahweh requires "understanding" and "heeding" of Him. For faith must have some basis, there are things which need to be believed before "faith" can be faith. Thus David predicates "trust" (s.w.) upon knowing Yahweh's Name, His character (Ps. 9:10). But David's "trust" in God was connected with his trust or belief in

God's mercy to him regarding his sins (Ps. 13:5; 21:7; 32:10 s.w.). But Solomon doesn't seem to have had any conscience of personal sin, and so trust in the Yahweh whose lead characteristic is grace and forgiveness was not elicited within him.

Pro 16:21 The wise in heart shall be called prudent. Pleasantness of the lips promotes instruction-

GNB "A wise, mature person is known for his understanding". The idea seems to be that wisdom is a good thing in this life, because it gets you a good reputation. Constantly, Solomon has the attitude that the blessings of righteousness are just for this life. He has no willingness to accept the perspective offered by the future Kingdom of God. See on :23,24.

Pro 16:22 Understanding is a fountain of life to one who has it, but the punishment of fools is their folly-

Solomon uses the figure of a well of living water to describe spiritual words and thinking (Prov. 10:11; 13:14; 14:27; 16:22). Yet this is the very figure which he uses concerning his worldly bride (Song of Solomon 4:15). It could be argued that this typifies the massive imputation of righteousness which the Lord Jesus grants to us, His worldly Gentile bride. But I would rather see it as an example of how he chose to justify his love for worldly women by as it were clothing those women in his own mind with the imagery of spirituality. See on Prov. 7:22.

Solomon has little patience with those whom he considers 'foolish'; hence GNB "Wisdom is a fountain of life to the wise, but trying to educate stupid people is a waste of time". This contrasts with the desire of God, and David his father, to bring the simple and unwise to God's saving grace. A simple division of the world into stellar examples of wisdom on one hand, and sinful fools on the other, militates against any efforts at evangelism in order to save those in the 'other' category. And there is no lack of exemplification of this in believing communities.

Pro 16:23 The heart of the wise instructs his mouth, and adds learning to his lips-

The argument is that if wisdom is possessed, then words will automatically be learned. But whilst this is true in a sense, it also overlooks the fact that intellectual assent to and possession of Divine truths doesn't therefore make all words spoken sweet and blessed (:24). And there is also the sense that the advantage of wisdom is that ones words appear impressive, hence LXX "and on his lips he will wear knowledge". External appearance is still the ultimate outcome for Solomon, even if he says that this appearance comes from wisdom in the heart.

Pro 16:24 Pleasant words are a honeycomb, sweet to the soul, and health to the bones-

This is true, but as explained on :21,23, Solomon's concern seems to be that the wise words of the wise will be attractive and tasty to the hearers; the advantage of wisdom is that others

will think well of us. And this is not the correct perspective. By contrast, David emphasized that God's word, and not the words of men, was sweet as the honeycomb to him.

Pro 16:25 There is a way which seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death-

We all know from our own experience with temptation that we can justify *anything*. Every way of man can seem right in his own eyes because of this feature of our nature (Prov. 14:12; 16:25; 21:2). The truth of this statement demonstrates the error of the humanistic approach of 'follow your heart', 'do what feels good and right to you'. There must be the influence of God's word to put us on the path to life.

Pro 16:26 The appetite of the labouring man labours for him; for his mouth urges him on-

This presents people as automatons, their mouth or need to eat makes them labour, and they are merely slaves to their own basic desires. But this is all part of the human condition described in Genesis; in the sweat of our face man must eat bread. And yet Solomon seems to find some fault in this, as if his wisdom can somehow lift man above it. He then goes on in the next verses to condemn the tongue, the words which come out of the mouth. So perhaps Solomon is arguing that the tongue must be controlled, and we are not to merely drift through life in slavery to our natural thoughts and feelings, in the way that seems right to us (:25) in that it is what we naturally feel the need to do and be.

Pro 16:27 A worthless man devises mischief; his speech is like a scorching fire-

True as the Proverbs are which condemn "a worthless / wicked person" (Prov. 6:12; 16:27; 19:28), again we have a subtext of Solomon seeking to justify himself and his father David, and to criticize the various competitors to Solomon's throne. "A worthless person" is the term used for Nabal (1 Sam. 25:17), those in David's camp who were not fully supportive of David (1 Sam. 30:22), Sheba who plotted to overthrow the Davidic line as king (2 Sam. 20:1), and particularly of those who wanted to overthrow Solomon as king (2 Chron. 13:7).

Most people were illiterate, and so the book of Proverbs was designed to be memorized. There are many patterns in the book which depend upon the alliteration and rhyming of words and ideas to enable memorization. This was typical of wisdom literature of the time. There are similar initial syllables of words and verses, or beginning with the same letter. There's much word play, similar sounds repeat between verses if read out loud. Thus the root 'sdq' [righteousness] occurs in various words which connect various proverbs which appear unrelated to each other in English translation. These sound patterns form a chain which enables memorization. Thus Prov. 16:27-29 all begin with the word *ish*, 'a man'. Catchwords link adjacent verses.

Pro 16:28 A perverse man stirs up strife, a gossip separates close friends-

Solomon rightly condemns gossip and the stirring up of divisions. But he is writing up his Divinely given wisdom at the start of his reign, where there were various groups of opposition to him. These groupings had all arisen from the divisions which arose after his

parents' sin with each other; they were a consequence for David's sin, which Nathan had prophesied. Inevitably, David's behaviour had invited all manner of gossip and strife. But Solomon seems to blame this on the gossipers, and carefully considers they alone are guilty; for he is ever glorifying and whitewashing his father David.

Pro 16:29 A man of violence entices his neighbour, and leads him in a way that is not good- He may specifically have Saul in view (David uses the term "violent man" about him in Ps. 18:48; 140:1). Solomon's idea of avoiding sin was in resisting the enticement of very sinful people. He pays no attention to the heart, whereas the Biblical message is always that sin is to be avoided in the heart. Spiritual mindedness, rather than mere disassociation from sinners, is of the essence. Dt. 11:16 warns that our heart should not be enticed (s.w.); but Solomon sees enticement as merely from very sinful individuals.

The implication is that God will lead us in the way which *is* good. One cannot help notice the great stress placed by Solomon on *teaching* his children, as David had *taught* him. It could be that there was too much emphasis on theory, thinking that by merely teaching the Law, the children would turn out well. But Dt. 6:1-7 taught that Israel must “*do*” the commandments of the Lord “so that you and your son and your grandson might fear the Lord your God, to keep all His statutes... these words... you shall teach them diligently to your sons”. It was by the parents both doing and teaching the Law that their children would “do” it too. Behaviour patterns are learnt by observation and experience of parents, not by mere theoretical inculcation. So could it not be that there is a lesson here for us- that the diligent teaching of the Law, as David did to Solomon and as Solomon so proudly did to his children, actually has no lasting effect unless that Law is lived out in a daily life. It seems to me that the Western Christian attitude and program for child-rearing is based very much on the assumption that both parents are believers, marry in their 20s, mother raises the kids and father brings in the money, with the result that the children will in due time also be baptized and repeat the cycle. This is all well and good. But the reality is that only a small percentage of the population fits the traditional nuclear family profile. Our style of Sunday School material and teaching needs to be appropriate to this reality, if we seek to win this world for Christ rather than just reproduce within the existing Western community. The brethren and sisters of our community and ecclesias must be the de facto spiritual parents of many of our children. Mere doctrinal teaching *alone* is not enough- it must be seen regularly and meaningfully and relevantly to be lived out in transformed lives. Solomon’s Proverbs, although inspired by God, have so many similarities with the Psalms of his father David. It seems to me that although he was of course inspired in writing Proverbs, he chose to articulate the wisdom given him in terms which his father had used in his songs, prayers and Psalms. Thus when Solomon teaches that God must be allowed to establish or direct our way (Prov. 4:26; 16:29), he is using the same Hebrew words as in Ps. 37:23 and Ps. 119:5, when David says the same. It’s as if he was given God’s truth and yet he never quite made it his very own- he still articulated it in terms of the faith of his fathers. And thus he lost it in the end.

Pro 16:30 One who winks his eyes to plot perversities, one who compresses his lips, is bent

on evil-

Solomon likely has in view his half brother Absalom, and the other contenders for Solomon's thrown.

Pro 16:31 Gray hair is a crown of glory; it is attained by a life of righteousness-

The idea may be *if* it is attained by a good life; for as the book of Job teaches, gray hair is far from always a sign of wisdom. We appear to have a series of allusions here in :27-33 to incidents in the life of David. The reference here would be to David's command to Solomon to bring down the gray hair of Shimei to the grave with blood (1 Kings 2:9).

Pro 16:32 One who is slow to anger is better than the mighty; one who rules his spirit, than he who takes a city-

This may allude to the hot headed anger of Joab and the "sons of Zeruiah", who had opposed Solomon and sought the throne for themselves towards the end of David's life. It was Joab who had taken the citadel of Zion and also the city of Rabbah (2 Sam. 12:26), but this is dismissed by Solomon as cancelled out, as it were, by his hot headed lack of mental self control. The allusion is also to Samson.

Pro 16:33 The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from Yahweh-

The previous verses have all alluded to incidents in the life of David, with Solomon using these statements of wisdom to thereby justify David and the line of succession through Solomon. The majority of Biblical references to "the lot" are to the usage of this system in deciding inheritance portions within the land of Israel. The "lot" of Solomon's tribe, Judah, was a cause of contention with Ephraim (Is. 11:13), especially regarding the vexed issue of into whose lot Jerusalem fell. Solomon may be urging for all contention to cease over this, and to just accept the position of Judah and Jerusalem, because he says that Yahweh had worked through the disposing of the lots (Prov. 16:33; 18:18).

PROVERBS CHAPTER 17

Pro 17:1

Better is a dry morsel of bread with quietness, than a house full of feasting with strife-

Proverbs 17 is one of the best examples of where the Proverbs appear to be a muddled collection of true sayings but lacking any structure. Are the Proverbs really like precious stones that must be emptied out of the bag and rearranged by theme? In which case, why didn't God do so at the start when inspiring the book? My comments are as follows:

- Some of the Proverbs are basic truisms and maxims which have equivalents in any culture. Solomon wrote the book at the start of his reign when God gave him his wisdom.

But Solomon loved Egyptian and Gentile women right from the start of his reign. There are strong similarities both in content and genre between Proverbs and e.g. the Egyptian *Instruction of Amenemope*. It could be that Solomon took various things from the literature of his father in law in Egypt... or of course it could be that Solomon's book of Proverbs was designed to preach to the Egyptians and surrounding nations in their own terms and in a familiar genre. Much is written by Solomon about the establishment of the throne on the basis of truth and justice; and this is commonly found in Egyptian literature about the Pharaohs.

- The text hangs together far better in the original Hebrew. Most people were illiterate, and so the book was designed to be memorized. There are many patterns in the book which depend upon the alliteration and rhyming of words and ideas to enable memorization. This was typical of wisdom literature of the time. There are similar initial syllables of words and verses, or beginning with the same letter. There's much word play, similar sounds repeat between verses if read out loud. Thus the root *sdq* [righteousness] occurs in various words which connect various proverbs which appear unrelated to each other in English translation. These sound patterns form a chain which enables memorization. Thus Prov. 16:27-29 all begin with the word 'ish', 'a man'. Catchwords link adjacent verses.

- Watch out for clusters of verses which do have the same theme; the verses which don't appear to be in a cluster are likely connected by alliteration etc. for easy memorization.

- My own hunch is that although the Proverbs are inspired by God, they were also presented by Solomon with a strong hint of self-justification. He wrote them when he had just inherited the throne from his father David, whom he idolized and was obsessed with. He sought to justify his father against all the various factions who were in Israel who were not sympathetic to David and therefore to Solomon. Almost every other verse in the book appears to have some such sideways swipe at the likes of Saul, Nabal, Absalom or Joab- whilst presenting Solomon as the wise son with whom alone David was pleased. Solomon should've sought his self-worth and value in God's opinion of him; and he should've trusted the promises to David of God establishing his throne and line, rather than seeking to as it were fulfill them for himself by using God's Truth and Wisdom to establish himself at others' expense. Chapter 17 is a parade example of this.

Pro 17:2 A servant who deals wisely will rule over a son who causes shame, and shall have a part in the inheritance among the brothers-

The son who causes shame would be a reference to Absalom and other half brothers of

Solomon who had contended with him for the throne. I have suggested that the book of Proverbs was written early in Solomon's reign, when he was first given wisdom from God with which to govern Israel. The servant who is to be exalted would then refer to Jeroboam, who was Solomon's servant whom he trusted and exalted at the start of his reign, although he later rebelled against Solomon (1 Kings 11:26-29).

Pro 17:3 The refining pot is for silver and the furnace for gold, but Yahweh tests the hearts-
The idea is that Yahweh seeks purified hearts, spiritual mindedness, more than anything else; and the fire of affliction is used to purify our thinking. Purified hearts or spirits is the aim of the work of the Holy Spirit as taught in the New Testament. Yet a man must use the refining pot when he receives praise (Prov. 27:21). We have some election over this refining process, we are to work together with God in it; but the end result is the purification of the heart / mind / spirit.

Pro 17:4 An evildoer heeds wicked lips; a liar gives ear to a mischievous tongue-
Saul promised to no more 'do wickedly' to David (1 Sam. 26:21). The wicked doer is therefore an allusion to Saul, who listened to lies against David from the likes of Doeg. Note how "false" is the same word in as in 1 Sam. 15:23 about Saul's iniquity; "give heed" is s.w. "hearken" in 1 Sam. 15:22.

"Destructive" or "wickedness" is the word used of the wickedness of Ahithophel and Absalom (Ps. 55:11). Solomon's Proverbs seem in places a justification of himself as king over his brother Absalom. He uses the same word to speak of "transgressors are taken in their own wickedness / destructiveness" (Prov. 11:6); how a liar [Absalom] listens to a 'destructive' tongue [in taking advice from Ahithophel] (Prov. 17:4); and how a foolish son [Absalom] is the calamity or destruction of his father (Prov. 19:13).

Pro 17:5 Whoever mocks the poor reproaches his Maker. He who is glad at calamity shall not be unpunished-

Yet Solomon's teachings about poverty do very often mock them and draw caricatures about them (e.g. Prov. 20:4), for he implies at several points that poverty is due to unwisdom and laziness, and the blessing of wisdom is wealth (:6 LXX). Yet again we see Solomon failing to personalize his wisdom; he disobeyed it because he seems to have reasoned that mere possession of Divine truth was all that was required for acceptability with God. And the same mistake is seen in so many.

Pro 17:6 Children's children are the crown of old men; the glory of children are their parents-

This is only true if the parents and children are righteous and not the "son who causes shame" and not glory (:25). So Solomon doesn't have every child and every parent in view. Rather is he clearly alluding to his own constant glorification (and whitewashing) of his parents. LXX adds "The faithful has the whole world full of wealth; but the faithless not even a farthing".

Solomon was given his wealth by God as a gift, as grace; and not because he was faithful. But he abuses that grace and assumes that gift was some kind of reward for his faithfulness. And again he argues that poverty is a result of lacking faith.

Pro 17:7 Arrogant speech isn't fitting for a fool, much less do lying lips fit a prince-
LXX has "faithful lips" for "arrogant speech". The contrast is between a fool and a prince; not a fool and a wise man. Solomon assumes that a prince is the wise man. And we see here his problem; he assumed that because he was David's son and was on the throne, that therefore he was wise- because he was a prince. But the wisdom given to him was a gift, by grace, just as is any Divine truth which we hold. But Solomon came to see that gift as having been deserved by him, and thinks that his position is of itself a sign that he must be wise.

Pro 17:8 A bribe is a precious stone in the eyes of him who gives it; wherever he turns, he apparently prospers-

"Prosper" is a word commonly used about David being wise and prospering wherever he turned during his period at the court of Saul (s.w. 1 Sam. 18:5,14,15,30). The words are also those used by David to Solomon when he charged Solomon to follow God's word so "that you may prosper in all that you do and wherever you turn" (1 Kings 2:3). It could be argued that the "evil" and "foolish" man in Proverbs is often alluding to Saul and Nabal ['fool'- s.w., the former husband of David's wife Abigail], and the wise and righteous to David and Solomon- confirming the impression that whilst all that is said is true and inspired, it was also spoken by Solomon to the end of justifying both himself and his father David, whose name was under a cloud in some parts of Israel. There are probably many more allusions to David's life in Proverbs which we don't pick up on because we don't know all that happened in David's life.

Pro 17:9 He who covers an offence promotes love; but he who repeats a matter separates best friends-

The idea of 'covering sin' is surely an allusion to the words of David, Solomon's father, who wrote a song he wished all Israel to sing- the 'maschil' Psalm 32: "Blessed is he whose transgression... is covered... I acknowledged my sin, my iniquity I did not hide [s.w. "cover"]' I said, I will confess my transgressions to the Lord" (Ps. 32:1,5). Because David did not cover his sin, God covered it. This is clearly in Solomon's mind in Prov. 28:13: "Whoever conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them will obtain mercy". So in line with Solomon's obsession with David, it's likely he also has David in view here in 17:9. In which case, the One seeking love by covering sin is God. Love is to be our response to the covering of our sins. And yet the words also apply to us- we are to cover others' sins in forgiving them, and gossiping to others about them [the second half of the Proverb] is therefore rooted in our unforgiveness. This is a helpful thought in analyzing why we gossip or repeat others' sins to others- it's because we've not forgiven the sin. See on 17:13.

Pro 17:10 A rebuke enters deeper into one who has understanding than a hundred lashes into a fool-

If 17:9 alludes to David's sin with Bathsheba, this verse would allude to Nathan's rebuke of David being accepted by him.

Solomon seems to comment upon God's arrows piercing or 'entering' (s.w.) David (Ps. 38:2). True as this is, Solomon was all the same justifying his father's response to the rebuke of Nathan and the Divine arrows which 'entered deep' to David. By the end of his reign, Solomon was whipping his people (1 Kings 12:11); he came to consider that most of God's people were fools, and had refused the rebuke of his wisdom, and therefore he could lash them. Those who are lifted up with pride at their possession of "truth" often come to despise and abuse others.

Pro 17:11 An evil man seeks only rebellion; therefore a cruel messenger shall be sent against him-

The "evil man" is often an allusion to Saul, and the Proverb related to it is often a justification of Solomon's father David. The Hebrew for "rebellion" is exactly that used about Saul in 1 Sam. 15:23. The "cruel *malak* / Angel" sent by God would then refer to the evil spirit / Angel *from the Lord* sent upon Saul (1 Sam. 16:14; 19:9).

Pro 17:12 Let a bear robbed of her cubs meet a man, rather than a fool in his folly-

An allusion to Nabal, 'fool', going out to meet David. "A bear robbed of her whelps" is exactly how David is described in 2 Sam. 17:8. LXX "Care may befall a man of understanding; but fools will meditate evils".

Pro 17:13 Whoever rewards evil for good, evil shall not depart from his house-

This is another of the many references by Solomon in the Proverbs to the life of his father David. The Hebrew words for "requite evil for good" are found in 1 Sam. 25:21 concerning how Nabal requited evil for David's good. The impression that the Proverbs are merely isolated sayings is somewhat ameliorated when we consider that many of them are a running commentary upon David's life, and they are connected by the common theme of allusion to David rather than a semantic connection between them.

Pro 17:14 The beginning of strife is like breaching a dam, therefore stop contention before quarreling breaks out-

Blaming strife and "contention" upon sinners is a common theme in Proverbs. But the same root word is used in 2 Sam. 19:9 regarding the "strife" and division which there was amongst Israel after Absalom's rebellion. Rather than seeing this as all part of the consequence of David's sin, Solomon instead justifies his father and blames his half brothers by saying that that "strife" was the result of their unwisdom. It could be argued that Solomon is making rather a crude allusion to this period by saying it is like urination... and the problem was with the person who began it, an allusion surely to Absalom, whom Solomon would've blamed for

it all, rather than seeing it as partly the promised judgment upon David for his sin with Bathsheba.

Pro 17:15 He who justifies the wicked, and he who condemns the righteous, both of them alike are an abomination to Yahweh-

This seems to be Solomon condemning his rival brother Absalom. 2 Sam. 15:4 records how "Then Absalom would say, "Oh that I were judge in the land! Then every man with a dispute or cause might come to me, and I would give him justice"". The Hebrew for "justice" is the noun of the verb used here in Prov. 17:15. The implication is that Solomon blamed the 'time of strife' in Israel upon Solomon and his followers, whom Solomon is claiming were wicked men whom Absalom wrongly justified. "The just" is how Saul described David (1 Sam. 24:17 s.w.). Verse 16 may be an allusion to some unrecorded incident in Absalom's life where he showed himself as having no interest in wisdom and thought it could be purchased with money.

"Abomination" is the common word for idols (e.g. Dt. 7:25,26). Idolatry is here interpreted as things like pride and telling lies (:17). These seven things are the essence of idolatry. There is a recurring nature to them, just as idols got a grip on the mind of the worshipper. Solomon often uses the word for quiet, secret sins, words and the matters of the heart, internal attitudes and judgments (Prov. 11:1,20; 12:22; 13:19; 15:26; 16:5; 17:15; 20:10,23; 24:9; 26:25; 28:9; 29:27). And this of course is the essence of idolatry in our age; this is the practical force to us of all Biblical teaching about idolatry.

Pro 17:16 Why is there money in the hand of a fool to buy wisdom, since he has no understanding?-

This may be Solomon's comment upon the various ambassadors who came to him from other nations with gifts and money in their hands, wanting to as it were buy wisdom. LXX "Why has the fool wealth? for a senseless man will not be able to purchase wisdom. He that exalts his own house seeks ruin; and he that turns aside from instruction shall fall into mischief". The one who exalted or 'lifted up' his own house would refer to the various attempted coups against David and Solomon (e.g. 2 Sam. 18:28; 20:21; 1 Kings 11:26).

Pro 17:17 A friend loves at all times; and a brother is born for adversity-

There could be a reference here to David's 'friends' during the wilderness years (s.w. 1 Sam. 30:26; 2 Sam. 16:17) who were faithful to him even in his hard times, perhaps especially Solomon is alluding to Hushai, David's "friend" who was so loyal to him (2 Sam. 16:17). The same Hebrew word is used about Hushai in 1 Chron. 27:33, where it seems he was given an official title of "The King's Friend". The same Hebrew words "all times" is used in the eulogy of David in 1 Chron. 29:30 about "all the times" of David's life. See on :18.

Pro 17:18 A man without understanding strikes hands, and becomes collateral in the presence of his neighbour-

"Strikes hands" are the same two Hebrew words used about Joab 'thrusting his hand' into Absalom to kill him (2 Sam. 18:14). Joab later turned against David, and so again we see Solomon establishing his father's name and dynasty by using his 'wisdom' to conveniently condemn all the parties who were politically against him. Likewise 17:19 speaks of the man who is "exalted", but the same word is in 1 Sam. 10:23 about how Saul was "taller" than his brethren- it is an allusion to Saul, but rather indirectly, couched within the wisdom and truth being spoken. We can likewise so easily use God's Truth and wisdom in order to fuel our own petty self justification and family politics.

The law of Moses didn't forbid giving or taking collateral for loans, it accepted this would happen (Ex. 22:25-27). But Solomon in the Proverbs is quite obsessed with forbidding it in very strong terms (Prov. 6:1-3; 11:15; 17:18; 20:16; 22:26; 27:13- all quite some emphasis). Perhaps Solomon recalled some bad experience in his family because of this. There is the otherwise curious statement in 1 Sam. 17:18 that David's brothers, Solomon's uncles, were to return a collateral. Perhaps this ruined the family and Solomon's wisdom has some human element in it, reflecting his own bad experiences in his family life. But there is nothing wrong with giving or taking collateral for a loan; what is condemned in God's law is the abuse of the debtor and the abuse of the situation. Indeed David and Hezekiah ask God to be collateral for their needs and debts in various ways (Ps. 119:122; Is. 38:14). And God gives the Holy Spirit in our hearts as collateral on His debt, as He sees it, to save us (2 Cor. 1:22; 5:5; Eph. 1:14); and in response we give our hearts as a pledge to Him (Jer. 30:21 Heb.). So forbidding the practice seems out of step with the spirit of grace. It would mean asking of God what we are unprepared to do for others. Solomon had not known need, neither material nor spiritual, and it shows in his attitude to this matter. It makes hollow all Solomon's exhortations to be generous to your poor neighbour and to be a brother in adversity to your neighbour (Prov. 14:21; 17:17). Solomon is here reasoning from the viewpoint of secular wisdom.

Pro 17:19 He who loves disobedience loves strife. One who builds a high gate seeks destruction-

Again this is true, but so often Solomon's Proverbs include his own. He is implying that all the strife about his being the one to have the throne merely came from pride (Prov. 13:10) or disobedience, and the wise will accept Solomon's kingship. Those who build their own gate, i.e. set themselves up for the kingship, will be destroyed.

Pro 17:20 One who has a perverse heart doesn't find prosperity, and one who has a deceitful tongue falls into trouble-

Solomon rightly emphasizes that the "perverse" or "wayward" are wayward in their hearts (Prov. 11:20; 17:20), leading to wayward tongues and ways in practice (Prov. 2:15); but he repeats his father's mistake, in saying he will have nothing to do with those who are wayward in their hearts (s.w. Ps. 101:4). The mistake was in assuming that he could judge human hearts. It continues the far over simplified view of people which Solomon has; the righteous have pure hearts, always obedient; and wicked have bad hearts. But the Bible warns that all of us have hearts which are fountains of evil thoughts (Mk. 7:15,21-23 etc.).

Pro 17:21 He who becomes the father of a fool grieves; the father of a fool has no joy-
Perhaps this is a commentary upon David's sorrow at the death of his foolish son Absalom (as :25).

Pro 17:22 A cheerful heart makes good medicine, but a crushed spirit dries up the bones-
Solomon's criticism of the melancholy are likely intended allusions to Saul. Solomon teaches that a broken spirit is a curse (Prov. 15:13; 17:22; 18:14), and an indication that something is wrong with the core of a person; because an unbroken spirit will "make a cheerful face" (Prov. 15:13), and external appearance and having joy in this life was of primary importance to Solomon. He fails to realize that his father David had a broken spirit (Ps. 31:12; 38:8; 44:19; 51:8,17; 69:20- all a fair emphasis), and had thereby understood that Yahweh is especially close to those with a broken spirit (Ps. 34:18; 147:13), indeed the Gospel is for the broken spirited, and the broken hearted are not to be mocked (Ps. 109:16).

Pro 17:23 A wicked man receives a bribe in secret, to pervert the ways of justice-
Solomon's criticism of unjust judges surely looks back to how Absalom judged the cases of the men of Israel and by his injustice built up support for his rebellion against David and Solomon. There were few judges in Israel, and Solomon's condemnation of how others judge was therefore only really relevant to himself and a few others, it was not wisdom for the masses; and it was a kind of self-justification.

Pro 17:24 Wisdom is before the face of one who has understanding, but the eyes of a fool wander to the ends of the earth-
The idea may be that wisdom affects the outward appearance of a person's face; hence LXX "The countenance of a wise man is sensible; but the eyes of a fool go to the ends of the earth". Again, wisdom is seen to be advantageous because of the image it gives to those who possess it. Solomon never seems to emphasize that the real intention and blessing of wisdom is to lead us to God's eternal Kingdom in the future. He sees the reward of wisdom as solely in this life, because he considered his kingdom to be God's Kingdom, and himself to be the Messiah figure.

Pro 17:25 A foolish son brings grief to his father, and bitterness to her who bore him-
A reference to David's grief over the foolish Absalom, whose supporters were contenders for David's throne and wished to displace Solomon from it. Always Solomon seems to be harnessing these Divine truths to his own agenda and self justification, just as we can.

Pro 17:26 Also to punish the righteous is not good, nor to flog officials for their integrity-
This was totally disobeyed by Solomon, for he became famed for flogging his people (1 Kings 12:11). Likewise what he writes in Proverbs about foreign women was personally disobeyed by him. It was almost as if the more he knew Divine truth, and thought he was

justified by mere possession of it, the more he disobeyed it. This perverse feature of human nature is widely observable.

Pro 17:27 He who spares his words has knowledge. He who is even tempered is a man of understanding-

LXX "He that forbears to utter a hard word is discreet, and a patient man is wise". But possession of knowledge does not of itself mean that a person controls their words. Solomon again gives far too much power to the idea of mere possession of knowledge.

Pro 17:28 Even a fool, when he keeps silent, is counted wise. When he shuts his lips, he is thought to be discerning-

The very same words used about Saul, whom Solomon saw as the archetypical "fool", wisely holding his peace when despised at the start of his reign (1 Sam. 10:27). Always Solomon seems to be 'having a go' at his father's opponents, whose children now in the next generation were his competitors for the throne.

PROVERBS CHAPTER 18

Pro 18:1 An unfriendly man pursues selfishness, and defies all sound judgment-
AV "a man, having separated himself, seeketh and intermeddleth with all wisdom";
LXX "A man who wishes to separate from friends seeks excuses; but at all times he will be liable to reproach". The same word is used in Prov. 19:4: "The poor is separated from his friend". Separation from others is seen as unwisdom, and therefore associated with poverty; for Solomon thinks that wisdom brings wealth and unwisdom brings poverty. Solomon presents a picture of any deviation from the society which he presided over being punished; by poverty, and being reproached as unwise.

Pro 18:2 A fool has no delight in understanding, but only in revealing his own opinion-

This is true, but we must remember that Solomon is presenting himself as the teacher of understanding; anyone who doesn't want to accept him, or has "his own opinion", gets reproached and mocked by Solomon.

Pro 18:3 When wickedness comes, contempt also comes, and with shame comes disgrace-

Solomon presents the disadvantage of sin as being the shame and disgrace it brings in this life. Solomon never seems to emphasize that the real intention and blessing of wisdom is to lead us to God's eternal Kingdom in the future. He sees the reward of wisdom as solely in this life, because he considered his kingdom to be God's Kingdom, and himself to be the Messiah figure.

Pro 18:4 The words of a man's mouth are like deep waters; the fountain of wisdom is like a flowing brook-

LXX "A word in the heart of a man is a deep water, and a river and fountain of life spring forth". The sense may be that if a word of wisdom is placed within a man's heart, it becomes a fountain of life for others. The Lord uses a similar figure in Jn. 7:38,39 for the water of life which can pour from a man's innermost being, once he truly accepts the word of the Gospel. When He says that this was "as the scripture has said", this may be one of the passages He had in mind. Our witness to others is therefore from our innermost being, from the word of the Gospel believed and firmly lodged in the deepest heart.

Pro 18:5 To be partial to the faces of the wicked is not good, nor to deprive the innocent of justice-

The idea is that the man of wisdom will judge cases fairly. But the average Israelite was not a courtroom judge. And so Solomon, as so often, has himself in view as the parade example of what he means. And the implication is that his judgments were perfect and beyond question, apart from by fools. But he fails to appreciate that a man can hold Divine truth and correct judgments in his intellectual understanding, and yet judge and live otherwise.

Pro 18:6 A fool's lips come into strife, and his speech asks for beatings-

Solomon became famed for beating his people (1 Kings 12:11). He came to assume that his people were fools, and he could abuse them therefore, at will. Those who are

lifted up with pride at their possession of "truth" often come to despise and abuse others.

Pro 18:7 A fool's mouth is his destruction, and his lips are a snare to his soul-

This continues the major Biblical theme that the condemned are essentially self condemned; out of their own mouths they will be judged at the last day (Lk. 19:22). In this we see the critical importance of our words, and the thinking which they inevitably express (Mt. 12:34). But Solomon sees the outcome of folly as being in this life, for he has nothing much to say about the last judgment and the future Kingdom; for he considered himself the ultimate Messianic judge of men, and his kingdom to be God's Kingdom.

Pro 18:8 The words of a gossip are like tasty morsels: they go down into a person's innermost parts-

Solomon rightly condemns gossip and the stirring up of divisions. But he is writing up his Divinely given wisdom at the start of his reign, where there were various groups of opposition to him. These groupings had all arisen from the divisions which arose after his parents' sin with each other; they were a consequence for David's sin, which Nathan had prophesied. Inevitably, David's behaviour had invited all manner of gossip and strife. But Solomon seems to blame this on the gossipers, and carefully considers they alone are guilty; for he is ever glorifying and whitewashing his father David. And yet what he writes is so true; throwaway comments of gossip take deep lodgment in the hearers.

LXX "Fear casts down the slothful; and the souls of the effeminate shall hunger".

Pro 18:9 One who is slack in his work is brother to him who is a master of destruction-

Again Solomon is exalting works and therefore condemning laziness as the worst sin. To omit to do anything is, in his book, as bad as the man who actively and zealously destroys. But Solomon was wired to be an active, hard working person; and he is glorifying his own personality type, reinforcing who he was anyway as a person; rather than exploring the wonder of salvation by grace without works. LXX implies that hard work is necessary to help ourselves; all idea of God helping us by grace is just not considered: "A man who helps not himself by his labour is brother of him that ruins himself".

Pro 18:10 The name of Yahweh is a strong tower: the righteous run into Him, and are safe-

Solomon presents his father David's being 'set on high' (Ps. 69:29) as programmatic for the exaltation of all the righteous; he sees David as the epitome of the righteous, and thereby justifies the Davidic dynasty (s.w. Prov. 18:10; 29:25). Ultimately these words come true in entering the Name by baptism into it.

Pro 18:11 The rich man's wealth is his strong city, like an unscalable wall in his own imagination-

This was precisely what Solomon did. Solomon was given his wealth by God as a gift, as grace; and not because he was faithful; see on Prov. 17:6. But he abuses that grace and assumes that gift was some kind of reward for his faithfulness. And elsewhere he argues that poverty is a result of lacking faith. Solomon realized the danger of the rich man's wrong "own imagination". But he goes and makes that very

mistake. He has no self-examination, no personalization of truth, because he considered that the mere possession of truth thereby justified him.

Pro 18:12 Before destruction the heart of man is proud, but before honour is humility-

This is the very phrase used about David, when he says his heart is not lifted up (Ps. 131:1). Solomon is presenting his father as the pinnacle of spirituality.

Pro 18:13 He who gives answer before he hears, that is folly and shame to him-

LXX "Whoso answers a word before he hears a cause". This is the language of the courtroom. But the average Israelite was not a courtroom judge. And so Solomon, as so often, has himself in view as the parade example of what he means. And the implication is that his judgments were perfect and beyond question, apart from by fools. And again we note that he considers folly to be bad because it can lead to shame in this life; he has no sense of the connection between present behaviour and our eternal outcomes at the last day of judgment.

Pro 18:14 A man's spirit will sustain him in sickness, but a crushed spirit, who can bear?-

Solomon teaches that a crushed or broken spirit is a curse (Prov. 15:13; 17:22; 18:14), and an indication that something is wrong with the core of a person; because an unbroken spirit will "make a cheerful face" (Prov. 15:13), and external appearance and having joy in this life was of primary importance to Solomon. He fails to realize that his father David had a broken spirit (Ps. 31:12; 38:8; 44:19; 51:8,17; 69:20- all a fair emphasis), and had thereby understood that Yahweh is especially close to those with a broken spirit (Ps. 34:18; 147:13), indeed the Gospel is for the broken spirited, and the broken hearted are not to be mocked (Ps. 109:16).

Pro 18:15 The heart of the discerning gets knowledge; the ear of the wise seeks knowledge-

"Gets" is LXX "purchases". But elsewhere Solomon implies that wisdom cannot be bought. He may be alluding, as in :16, to the ambassadors of the nations who came to him, bearing gifts in order to hear and 'get' Solomon's Divine wisdom. But what he says is true enough; there is an upward spiral in spirituality, whereby the wise get wiser, and part of their wisdom is to desire more of it.

Pro 18:16 A man's gift makes room for him, and brings him before great men-

He may be alluding, as in :15, to the ambassadors of the nations who came to him, bearing gifts in order to hear and 'get' Solomon's Divine wisdom. And yet he thereby implies that he is one of the "great men", possibly an intensive plural referring to the one great man, referring to himself.

Pro 18:17 He who pleads his cause first seems right; until another comes and questions him-

As in :13, this is the language of the courtroom, and is advice to judges. But the average Israelite was not a courtroom judge. And so Solomon, as so often, has himself in view as the parade example of what he means. And the implication is that his judgments were perfect and beyond question, apart from by fools. He is alluding to his judgment of the two prostitutes in 1 Kings 3:17.

Pro 18:18 The lot settles disputes, and keeps strong ones apart-

The majority of Biblical references to "the lot" are to the usage of this system in deciding inheritance portions within the land of Israel. The "lot" of Solomon's tribe, Judah, was a cause of contention with Ephraim (Is. 11:13), especially regarding the vexed issue of into whose lot Jerusalem fell. Solomon may be urging for all contention to cease over this, and to just accept the position of Judah and Jerusalem, because he says that Yahweh had worked through the disposing of the lots (Prov. 16:33; 18:18).

LXX "A silent man quells strifes, and determines between great powers".

Pro 18:19 A brother offended is more difficult to be won than a fortified city; and disputes are like the bars of a castle-

To win a fortified city is presented as a human impossibility; but David is described as taking the fortified cities of Zion and then later Rabbah. Always there is the hint of justification and glorification of "my father David", a phrase Solomon uses a few hundred times. LXX "A brother helped by a brother is as a strong and high city; and is as strong as a well-founded palace". The implication is that Solomon's half brothers, who had been against him and whose families were contenders for his throne, lacked wisdom; otherwise they would have helped their brother Solomon to the throne.

Pro 18:20 A man's stomach is filled with the fruit of his mouth. With the harvest of his lips he is satisfied-

This emphasis upon the critical importance of the tongue (:21) is reflected in James 3. But there is still an element of self congratulation here, as if the wise always say wise words and are smugly satisfied with themselves because of it. Whereas James 3:3-5 warns that we seem unable to fully control the tongue, it refuses to be tamed, and in some words we say we offend all. This is spiritual reality, rather than the simplistic differentiation Solomon makes between the sinful fools, and the wise who always speak wise words.

Pro 18:21 Death and life are in the power of the tongue; those who love it will eat its fruit-

This is true insofar as by our words we will be justified, and by our words condemned (Mt. 12:37). Perhaps the Lord had this verse in mind when saying this. But again, it is only part of the picture. James 3:3-5 warns that we seem unable to fully control the tongue, it refuses to be tamed, and in some words we say we offend all. And so consideration of the matter of the tongue drives us to throw ourselves upon God's grace for salvation; whereas Solomon seems to imply that the wise have steel self control in their souls which empowers them to always say the right thing (see on :20). But this is simply not the case in spiritual reality.

Pro 18:22 Whoever finds a wife finds a good thing, and obtains grace of Yahweh-

One wonders whether Solomon justified his many wives by reasoning that they were all gifts to him by Yahweh's grace [gift]. He claims that possessing understanding leads to finding good (Prov. 19:8 s.w.). He assumes therefore that the mere possession of wisdom meant that the wives he found must be "good"; but his subsequent experience with them shows how wrong he was. LXX "He that puts away a good wife, puts away a good thing, and he that keeps an adulteress is foolish and ungodly". This reading would then be a justification of how Solomon's father David had put

away his wife Michal, Saul's daughter, who had then married Phaltiel, a relationship Solomon liked to see as adultery (2 Sam. 3:15). Constantly Solomon uses his knowledge of Divine truths to justify himself and his father, just as God's truth can likewise be abused today.

Pro 18:23 The poor plead for mercy, but the rich answer harshly-

This is not simply an otherwise rather pointless description of how life often is. It must be understood within the context of Solomon's theme that the poor are poor because of their unwisdom, and riches are the reward for wisdom. And so, within that overly simplistic worldview, Solomon seems to justify the rich treating the poor harshly. He himself treated his people as fools, whipping them (1 Kings 12:11). And so often his Proverbs draw simplistic caricatures of the folly and laziness of the poor.

Pro 18:24 A man of many companions may be ruined, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother-

AV "A man that hath friends must shew himself friendly". GNB "Some friendships do not last, but some friends are more loyal than brothers". This may again be a justification of David his father, who had many friends in the course of his career, some of whom betrayed him, but he had a hard core of exceptionally loyal supporters all the way through the various revolts against him, and who gave their support to Solomon's kingship. And they were better friends to Solomon than his own brothers, who vied with him for the throne.

PROVERBS CHAPTER 19

Pro 19:1 Better is the poor who walks in his integrity than he who is perverse in his lips and is a fool-

Solomon often mocks the poor as poor because they are unwise, and argues that wisdom brings wealth. In this he denies the wisdom he here states; that poor people can still have integrity. Or perhaps he has in view his father David, "the poor" in his wilderness years (1 Sam. 18:23; Ps. 34:6), who 'walked in his integrity', as David often says about himself in the Psalms. The fool who has perverse lips would then refer to Nabal, meaning "fool". The fact the hotheaded David was restrained from sinning against Nabal by grace alone was overlooked by Solomon. He refuses to discern grace in his father's life, and seeks only to highlight his righteousness. Whereas David himself so often alludes to his own weaknesses and sins.

Pro 19:2 It isn't good to have zeal without knowledge; nor being hasty with one's feet and missing the way-

This is quoted in Rom. 10:2 about those in Israel who miss the way of the Lord Jesus, who is ultimately "the way". The fact the Proverbs are so often alluded to and quoted in later scripture confirms that they are indeed inspired by God; but Solomon presents them in ways which clearly justify himself and his father. David's feet almost ran and hasted to evil (Ps. 73:2), yet Solomon seems to overlook this. Solomon's proverbs seem to fail to address this complexity of situations because of his own self-righteousness; and yet all he says is inspired and true so far as it goes.

Pro 19:3 The foolishness of man subverts his way; his heart rages against Yahweh-
LXX "The folly of a man spoils his ways: and he blames God in his heart". "Subverts" is the word for "overthrows". But God overthrows the wicked (s.w. Prov. 21:12). Solomon thereby equates the foolish with the wicked. But he seems to classify as foolish anyone who doesn't accept his take on life, or is ignorant of the wisdom he teaches. Ignorance, and even intellectual failure, is not of itself wickedness. Solomon has such a dualistic view of things that he assumes anyone who is not wise and thereby wealthy to be foolish and thereby wicked. But amongst God's people, things are not so black and white. And we are not to judge, largely because we simply cannot judge.

Pro 19:4 Wealth adds many friends, but the poor is separated from his friend-
This is the word used in Prov. 18:1 for how the unwise separates himself from his friends; the LXX of Prov. 18:1 makes it clearest: "A man who wishes to separate from friends seeks excuses; but at all times he will be liable to reproach". The same word is used in Prov. 19:4: "The poor is separated from his friend". Separation from others is seen as un wisdom, and therefore associated with poverty; for Solomon thinks that wisdom brings wealth and un wisdom brings poverty. Solomon presents a picture of any deviation from the society which he presided over being punished; by poverty, and being reproached as unwise.

Pro 19:5 A false witness shall not be unpunished; he who pours out lies shall not go free-
Solomon has much to say about true and false witnesses (Prov. 6:19; 12:17; 14:5,25; 19:5,9,28; 21:28; 24:28; 25:18). Whilst his warnings are true enough, he surely has an element of self justification in what he writes. Because he was aware that his parents, David and Bathsheba, had been accused of many things which had led to all the opposition against David at the end of his reign, and which opposition Solomon had to contend with in order to retain the throne for himself. David laments the false witness of the house of Saul and his own sons, Solomon's half brothers (Ps. 27:12; 35:11). The continual condemnation of false witnesses must be understood in this context. Whilst it is all true so far as it goes, Solomon is harnessing Divine truth to his own agenda of self justification. And we who claim to hold His truths must take warning.

Pro 19:6 Many will entreat the favour of a ruler, and everyone is a friend to a man who gives gifts-

See on :7. Solomon surely has himself in view, the ruler who was visited by representatives from many nations, wanting his favour. He contrasts this with the poor who have no friends (:7). The idea is that his wealth was a result of his wisdom; whereas God had given him wealth as a gift of grace. But he abused that grace by arguing that it was a result of his wisdom.

Pro 19:7 All the relatives of the poor shun him: how much more do his friends avoid him! He

pursues them with pleas, but they are gone-

Here we have one of many examples of where Solomon sees poverty very negatively, coming as a result of un wisdom just as wealth supposedly comes as a result of wisdom. And yet in other Proverbs he urges pity to be shown to the poor. His attitude to poverty is very conflicted; see on :17. He compares the unpopular poor man with the popular rich man (:6); as if a chief advantage of wisdom is that it makes the wise popular with people because of the wealth it gives. This is a very human and secular view, devoid of any real spirituality.

Pro 19:8 He who gets wisdom loves his own soul; he who keeps understanding shall find good-

Whilst this is true so far as it goes, it presents a selfishness in wanting wisdom. Wisdom is to be gotten from the motive of self love, because it is profitable for this life. This reflects how Solomon misses completely the idea of living for the glory of God both now and eternally. He uses the same term for 'finding good' about how he found his wives (Prov. 18:22). He assumes therefore that the mere possession of wisdom / correct understanding meant that the wives he found must be "good"; but his subsequent experience with them shows how wrong he was.

Pro 19:9 A false witness shall not be unpunished; he who utters lies shall perish-

See on :5. Solomon is alluding to his father David's parting commandments to Solomon to destroy all the opposition to him (1 Kings 2:6,9). So whilst what Solomon writes is true, he is harnessing Divine truth to his own agenda of self justification. And we who claim to hold His truths must take warning.

Pro 19:10 Delicate living is not appropriate for a fool, much less for a servant to have rule over princes-

Ecc. 10:7 indicates Solomon finally didn't think Prov. 19:10 was true in practice: "I have seen servants upon horses, and princes walking as servants upon the earth". He thought that in reality, servants do rule over princes. Although he retained his theoretical wisdom as a teaching position, his own heart was far from it.

Pro 19:11 The discretion of a man makes him slow to anger; it is his glory to overlook an offence-

We wonder how Solomon could write this without thinking of his hot tempered father who refused to overlook the offence of Nabal, and was about to murder him and his family. But he appears to whitewash his father, and instead has in view how David overlooked the offences of the likes of Shimei at one point; although he later asked Solomon to ensure he murdered Shimei.

"Overlook" is literally 'to pass over', and the Hebrew is used for "transgression" (s.w. Josh. 23:16; 2 Kings 18:12; Jer. 2:20). God's response to human 'passing over' is at times to 'pass over' it, to overlook it. Other times He deals with sin differently, atoning for it, forgiving it,

reconciling His people... but as a Father has compassion on His children, so He likewise overlooks much human failure. Indeed this 'passing by' transgression [s.w. 'overlook'] is what makes Yahweh unique- there is no other god like Him in this (Mic. 7:18). And this is to feature in our range of options in dealing with human sin. To copy God in this will be our "glory".

Pro 19:12 The king's wrath is like the roaring of a lion, but his favour is like dew on the grass-

At the end of his days, Solomon recognized that although he had loved the theory of wisdom, the image of a spiritual life, the wisdom of God had never really impacted his soul: "I said, I will be wise (referring back to his request for wisdom in 1 Kings 3); but it was far from me" (Ecc. 7:23). His request for wisdom had only been so that he could do the job of leading Israel, living out the parental expectation of his father, whom he admits in Proverbs 4 had taught him to ask for wisdom. In Prov. 19:12 he speaks as if his own wisdom was like the dew coming down- as if he felt that the mere possession of wisdom made him the Messiah figure which his father had so hoped for him to be in Ps. 72:6. And he says as much in Prov. 29:3: "Whoso loveth wisdom [exactly what Solomon was commended for doing] rejoiceth his father".

Pro 19:13 A foolish son is the calamity of his father. A wife's quarrels are a continual dripping-

"Destructive" or "wickedness" is the word used of the wickedness of Ahithophel and Absalom (Ps. 55:11). Solomon's Proverbs seem in places a justification of himself as king over his brother Absalom. He uses the same word to speak of "transgressors are taken in their own wickedness / destructiveness" (Prov. 11:6); how a liar [Absalom] listens to a 'destructive' tongue [in taking advice from Ahithophel] (Prov. 17:4); and how a foolish son [Absalom] is the calamity or destruction of his father (Prov. 19:13).

Pro 19:14 House and riches are an inheritance from fathers, but a prudent wife is from Yahweh-

David had left Solomon an inheritance of both riches (1 Chron. 29:28) and a "house" or family line to continue. But Solomon liked to think that his many wives were "prudent", and were "from Yahweh"- when they were idolaters who were not of Yahweh, and who turned his heart away from Yahweh to their gods. This arrogant perception and persuasion led Solomon to liken his illicit Gentile girlfriend in the Song of Solomon to a true Israelite, describing her in the language of the tabernacle and likening her to various attractive places within Israel. All Solomon writes is true, but he clearly always has himself in mind as the parade fulfilment of them; and in this he was so wrong.

Pro 19:15 Slothfulness casts into a deep sleep; the idle person shall suffer hunger-

Again Solomon's works centred approach leads him to condemn laziness and sloth. In Prov.

10:3 Solomon has taught that the righteous will never "suffer hunger" (s.w.). So he considers idleness to be unrighteousness. Righteousness is thereby equated with doing many works. But this fails to appreciate that there is none truly righteous, at times God suffers men to hunger (s.w. Dt. 8:3) that He might teach them; and blessing in the end is all of grace and not of works, lest any man [like Solomon] should boast in their works, as he does in Ecc. 1.

Pro 19:16 He who keeps the commandment keeps his soul, but he who is disrespectful in his ways shall die-

Solomon has no eternal perspective in his thinking. He assumes that he is the judge of all, and his kingdom is the promised Messianic Kingdom of God on earth. He presents untimely death in this life as the result for disrespect to the commandments. But in fact the wicked prosper, and the ultimate outcome of human life is not now, but in the judgment of the last day. In contrast, David wanted God to "keep his soul" (e.g. Ps. 25:20), rather than Solomon's emphasis upon a person keeping their own soul through obedience.

Pro 19:17 He who has pity on the poor lends to Yahweh; He will reward him-

Solomon on one hand teaches pity towards the poor (Prov. 14:21,31; 19:17; 28:8). But on the other, he mocks the poor as being poor because of their unwisdom, believing that wealth is given in response to wisdom. He is very conflicted in his attitude to the poor. The Divine revelation of truth to him was clearly that he should be generous to the poor. But he fences against this in other places by saying that the poor are being punished for their unwisdom. So like us when we encounter need that requires our generosity, he hedges his position very carefully; rather than accepting the simple force of the wisdom given to him, that pity to the poor as it were transfers our wealth from earth to heaven, and we will receive it back in due time (Prov. 19:17). And he is quite obsessive about not being collateral for the poor. Solomon had not known need, neither material nor spiritual, and it shows in his attitude to so obsessively forbidding the giving of collateral to guarantee a loan (Prov. 6:1-3; 11:15; 17:18; 20:16; 22:26; 27:13- all quite some emphasis). It makes hollow all Solomon's exhortations to be generous to your poor neighbour and to be a brother in adversity to your neighbour (Prov. 14:21; 17:17). Solomon is here reasoning from the viewpoint of secular wisdom. The law of Moses didn't forbid giving or taking collateral for loans, it accepted this would happen (Ex. 22:25-27).

Another approach is to understand Solomon's positive comments about helping the poor as historical allusion to his father David. "The poor" would easily refer to David (1 Sam. 18:23; Ps. 34:6).

Pro 19:18 Discipline your son while there is hope; don't be a willing party to his death-

As will be explained on :20, this is true so far as it goes, and is a fair enough commentary upon the Mosaic instruction to stone to death a disobedient son. But Solomon took this idea of physical chastisement too far, to the point of not giving due weight to the power of God Himself through His wisdom to discipline or chastise a person.

Pro 19:19 A hot-tempered man must pay the penalty, for if you rescue him, you must do it again-

Solomon had asked for wisdom in order to know how to judge Israel. And so many of his Proverbs refer to judgment. But there is no grace in what he says; he frequently insists that the judgment for sin and un wisdom must be carried out, and any 'rescue' of the man by grace is pointless and wrong. But he totally fails to appreciate that his father had been saved by grace for his hot blooded intention to murder Nabal and all his family, and forgiven by grace alone for his sin against Bathsheba and Uriah, when the just penalty was death. He had psychologically, subconsciously whitewashed his father David; he has no sense of grace and reflecting gratitude for grace in merciful judgment of others.

Pro 19:20 Listen to counsel and receive instruction, so that you may be wise in your very end-

Solomon has so much to say about "correction" or "instruction" coming from the possession of wisdom (Prov. 8:10,33; 10:17; 12:1; 13:1,24; 15:5,10,32; 16:22; 19:20,27; 22:15; 23:12,13). But in the end he chastised or corrected his people by whipping them (s.w. 1 Kings 12:11,14). Solomon initially asked for wisdom in order to guide his people, but he ended up whipping / physically chastising them into conformity with his wishes rather than allowing wisdom to correct. Again, he was playing God; for it is God through His wisdom who chastises, and not man. But Solomon thought he was effectively God to his people. This is why Solomon argues that servants cannot be corrected by words (Prov. 29:19 s.w.), and a child must be physically chastised (s.w. Prov. 19:18; 29:17 cp. Prov. 13:24; 23:13), regardless of his screams of pain. This kind of thing is a denial of his claims elsewhere that it is Divine wisdom which chastises / corrects, and such correction is from God and not man. Solomon's final description of himself as an old and foolish king who refuses to be admonished says it all (Ecc. 4:13); he admonishes others (s.w. Ecc. 12:12), but refuses to be admonished or corrected by his own wisdom. He failed to personalize it.

Pro 19:21 There are many plans in a man's heart, but Yahweh's counsel will prevail-

Yahweh's counsel is seen as the wisdom which Solomon was teaching (:20). The truth of this statement demonstrates the error of the humanistic approach of 'follow your heart', 'do what feels good and right to you'. There must be the influence of God's word to put us on the path to life.

Pro 19:22 That which makes a man to be desired is his kindness; a poor man is better than a liar-

Spiritual ambition means that we will desire to do some things which we can't physically fulfil- and yet they will be counted to us. Abraham is spoken of as having offered up Isaac- his intention was counted as the act. And Prov. 19:22 RV appropriately comments: "The desire of a man is the measure of his kindness". It is all accepted according to what a man has, not what he has not. Faith is perfected / matured by the process of works (James

2:22,23). The works, the upward spiral of a life lived on the basis of faith, develop the initial belief in practice.

Pro 19:23 The fear of Yahweh leads to life, and whoever has it rests satisfied; he will not be visited by harm-

But as the book of Job teaches, this is simply not the case. Solomon insists on a simplistic form of the prosperity Gospel, whereby the wise have a wonderful life with no "harm", and the unwise are always falling into sin and misery. But the wicked prosper; in this life. Solomon fails to appreciate that there is judgment to come, and only then will there be "life" indeed granted.

Pro 19:24 The lazy buries his hand in the dish; he will not so much as bring it to his mouth again-

The Proverbs contain repeated condemnation of laziness. Lack of a zealous work ethic is a rejection of wisdom, according to Solomon. As Solomon explains in Ecc. 1, he was an active person, not lazy by nature. And yet he lacked spirituality. He claimed that his service of God was due to his spirituality, but it was in reality merely a semblance of serving God when it was really just reinforcing his own personality type. His mocking of the "sluggard" or "lazy one" is so frequent (Prov. 6:6,9; 10:26; 13:4; 15:19; 19:24; 20:4; 21:25; 22:13; 24:30; 26:13-16). But it is a reflection of his own works-based approach to righteousness; the 'wise' "do" good things, and the wicked don't do enough good things. Personal spiritual mindedness and relationship with God are simply not emphasized.

Pro 19:25 Flog a scoffer, and the simple will learn prudence; rebuke one who has understanding, and he will gain knowledge-

David had spoken of the house of Saul as scoffing at him (s.w. Ps. 119:51). And the line of David had been chosen to replace Saul because he had refused to "learn prudence" at Samuel's rebuke. David had accepted rebuke and was open to it, notably from Nathan the prophet (Ps. 38:1; 141:5); and so again Solomon's Proverbs are true, but he harnesses them to the justification of himself and his father. But Solomon was only to remain the prophetic son of David if he accepted reproof (s.w. 2 Sam. 7:14); and he didn't. He refused to personalize his own wisdom, as we can.

Pro 19:26 He who robs his father and drives away his mother, is a son who causes shame and brings reproach-

Solomon surely has in view his half brother Absalom, who for years had garnered support from the men of Israel in return for promises that he would judge in their favour if they helped him overthrow David. And yet the problems with Absalom were all prophesied by Nathan as a Divinely raised up punishment and consequence for the sin of David with Bathsheba, Solomon's mother. But Solomon whitewashes his parents, and always puts the

blame for the consequences and the trouble in the family solely upon the behaviour of his half brothers.

Pro 19:27 If you stop listening to instruction, my son, you will stray from the words of knowledge-

This may sound axiomatic and stating the obvious. Hence LXX "A son who ceases to attend to the instruction of a father will cherish evil designs"; GNB "My child, when you stop learning, you will soon neglect what you already know", AV "Cease, my son, to hear the instruction that causeth to err from the words of knowledge". "Stray" is the word used for Saul straying from the words of instruction given him by Samuel (1 Sam. 26:21), whereas David kept listening to it. Again we see Solomon always seeking to justify his father David, and to criticize his competitors in the house of Saul.

Pro 19:28 A corrupt witness mocks justice, and the mouth of the wicked gulps down iniquity- Solomon repeatedly condemns "the mouth of the wicked" (Prov. 10:6,11,32; 11:11; 12:6; 15:28; 19:28). All he says is true enough, but he clearly enough has in view how his father David had condemned the supporters of Saul and Absalom as having "the mouth of the wicked" (Ps. 109:2). And these were the groups who were threatening his power and throne. Solomon presents himself by implication as having the mouth of the just / righteous. And yet we must note that David too had spoken multiple words of deceit in relation to the murder of Uriah. Indeed the phrase is used in Is. 53:9 as if the Lord Jesus was the only man who didn't have a "mouth of deceit". Solomon like David was in denial of the fact that we all sin with our mouths, as James makes clear in James 3:1-3.

True as the Proverbs are which condemn "a worthless / wicked person" (Prov. 6:12; 16:27; 19:28), again we have a subtext of Solomon seeking to justify himself and his father David, and to criticize the various competitors to Solomon's throne. "A worthless person" is the term used for Nabal (1 Sam. 25:17), those in David's camp who were not fully supportive of David (1 Sam. 30:22), Sheba who plotted to overthrow the Davidic line as king (2 Sam. 20:1), and particularly of those who wanted to overthrow Solomon as king (2 Chron. 13:7).

Pro 19:29 Penalties are prepared for scoffers, and beatings for the backs of fools-

Solomon seems to justify the rich treating the poor harshly (see on Prov. 18:23). He himself treated his people as fools, beating them (1 Kings 12:11). And so often his Proverbs draw simplistic caricatures of the folly and laziness of the poor. He came to assume that his people were fools, and he could abuse them therefore, at will. Those who are lifted up with pride at their possession of "truth" often come to despise and abuse others.

PROVERBS CHAPTER 20

Pro 20:1 Wine is a mocker, and beer is a brawler; whoever is led astray by them is not wise-
"Strong drink is a brawler" (RV). This is a metonymy- a drunk man is a brawler, not alcoholic drinks of themselves. But "strong drink" is put for 'a drunk man'. Alcohol is the alcoholic, and vice versa. This is some comfort for families of alcoholics who lament how alcohol so dominates their family member, and who marvel at the extent to which it is really so- that alcohol is the alcoholic, and the alcoholic lives for alcohol.

Solomon's warnings against alcohol were totally disregarded by Solomon in his later search for fulfilment in the flesh (Ecc. 2:3). His alcoholism contradicted his own earlier condemnations of drink as being for the unwise (e.g. Prov. 20:1). Thus by turning to drink he was throwing off his former wisdom, even though his access to it remained with him (Ecc. 2:9; cp. 'But I still believe the Truth, you know').

Pro 20:2 The terror of a king is like the roaring of a lion; whoever provokes him to anger forfeits his own life-

Solomon writes inspired truth in Proverbs of course, but it is inevitable that much of what he writes about the need to respect the man who has wisdom, and his superiority over all others, was written with an eye to his own self-justification. He even writes as if the king must be accepted as automatically infallible: "A divine sentence is in the lips of the king; his mouth transgresseth not in judgment... the fear of a king is as the roaring of a lion: whoso provoketh him to anger sinneth against his own soul" (Prov. 16:10; 20:2 AV). It was really Solomon's self-justification.

Pro 20:3 It is an honour for a man to keep aloof from strife; but every fool will be quarrelling-

The many exhortations to keep away from strife and "meddling" (AV) are fair enough. But it seems Solomon also had another agenda in pushing this; he didn't want his reign and policies to be questioned. He and his teaching were to be accepted without question. So often an appeal for "peace" is really a guise for insisting that a particular agenda is accepted.

Pro 20:4 The lazy will not plough by reason of the winter; therefore he shall beg in harvest, and have nothing-

The Proverbs contain repeated condemnation of laziness. Lack of a zealous work ethic is a rejection of wisdom, according to Solomon. As Solomon explains in Ecc. 1, he was an active person, not lazy by nature. And yet he lacked spirituality. He claimed that his service of God was due to his spirituality, but it was in reality merely a semblance of serving God when it was really just reinforcing his own personality type. His mocking of the "sluggard" or "lazy one" is so frequent (Prov. 6:6,9; 10:26; 13:4; 15:19; 19:24; 20:4; 21:25; 22:13; 24:30; 26:13-16). But it is a reflection of his own works-based approach to righteousness; the 'wise' "do" good things, and the wicked don't do enough good things. Personal spiritual mindedness and relationship with God are simply not emphasized.

Solomon had elsewhere taught in Prov. 17:5 that "Whoever mocks the poor reproaches his Maker. He who is glad at calamity shall not be unpunished". Yet Solomon's teachings about poverty do very often mock them and draw caricatures about them (e.g. Prov. 20:4), for he implies at several points that poverty is due to un wisdom and laziness, and the blessing of wisdom is wealth (:6 LXX). Yet again we see Solomon failing to personalize his wisdom; he disobeyed it because he seems to have reasoned that mere possession of Divine truth was all that was required for acceptability with God. And the same mistake is seen in so many.

Pro 20:5 Counsel in the heart of man is like deep water; but a man of understanding will draw it out-

The thought is as in Prov. 18:4 LXX "A word in the heart of a man is a deep water, and a river and fountain of life spring forth". The sense may be that if a word of wisdom is placed within a man's heart, it becomes a fountain of life for others. The Lord uses a similar figure in Jn. 7:38,39 for the water of life which can pour from a man's innermost being, once he truly accepts the word of the Gospel. When He says that this was "as the scripture has said", this may be one of the passages He had in mind. Our witness to others is therefore from our innermost being, from the word of the Gospel believed and firmly lodged in the deepest heart. The person of understanding who draws out this water from another sounds like the Queen of Sheba drawing wisdom from Solomon; so again, he sees himself as the man with true counsel in his heart.

Pro 20:6 Many men claim to be men of unfailing love, but who can find a faithful man?- LXX "a merciful man precious: but it is hard to find a faithful man". "Unfailing love" is *chesed*, the word for "grace". It could be that Solomon in his utilitarian, secular way is saying that a man of grace is not as much use as a man who is faithful / trustworthy to Solomon's cause.

Pro 20:7 A righteous man walks in integrity; blessed are his children after him-

Solomon has as usual his own agenda of self justification in view here. The man who 'walked in integrity' is without doubt David (s.w. 1 Kings 9:4; Ps. 26:1,11; 101:2). Solomon assumed that because his father had walked in integrity, then he as his child would automatically be blessed. But he was choosing to misunderstand the conditional nature of the promises to him in 1 Kings 9:4; if he walked himself in integrity "as David your father walked", then he would be the prophetically blessed son of David.

Pro 20:8 A king who sits on the throne of judgment scatters away all evil with his eyes-

Clearly Solomon has himself in view. He had asked for wisdom in order to be able to judge Israel rightly; but he became lifted up in pride by the mere fact of possessing the Divine truths he is collecting together in the book of Proverbs. And he assumes that therefore he has correct judgment just by reason of who he is, rather than on account of putting into operation the wisdom given him. See on :11.

Pro 20:9 Who can say, I have made my heart pure. I am clean and without sin?-

David claimed to have cleansed his heart (Ps. 26:2,6; 73:13). Solomon uses the same word in saying that nobody can say "I have cleansed my heart" (Prov. 20:9); as if disagreeing with his father David on this point. Solomon may be suggesting that all you can do is live an externally clean life, you can never cleanse your heart- and this refusal to allow the Holy Spirit to cleanse him inwardly is what led to his apostasy. For disregarding deep, core level spiritual mindedness and trusting on externalities... is a sure path to spiritual disaster. And Solomon took it.

Pro 20:10 Differing weights and differing measures, both of them alike are an abomination to Yahweh-

"Abomination" is the common word for idols (e.g. Dt. 7:25,26). Idolatry is here interpreted as things like pride and telling lies (:17). These seven things are the essence of idolatry. There is a recurring nature to them, just as idols got a grip on the mind of the worshipper. Solomon often uses the word for quiet, secret sins, words and the matters of the heart, internal attitudes and judgments (Prov. 11:1,20; 12:22; 13:19; 15:26; 16:5; 17:15; 20:10,23; 24:9; 26:25; 28:9; 29:27). And this of course is the essence of idolatry in our age; this is the practical force to us of all Biblical teaching about idolatry.

Pro 20:11 Even a child makes himself known by his doings, whether his work is pure, or whether it is right-

This may continue the idea of :8, that Solomon thinks he can intuitively judge purity and impurity in human hearts; all people, even children, can be easily discerned by their deeds; so Solomon claims. They can indeed be known by God, but no amount of possession of Divine truths gives someone the power to judge each person rightly, let alone to claim that such judgment is simple and intuitively obvious to them. And so many have followed Solomon in this; their possession of some Divine truths has led them to assume that they can accurately judge others, and their intuitive gut feeling about people they therefore assume to be perfectly correct Divine judgment.

Pro 20:12 The hearing ear, and the seeing eye, Yahweh has made even both of them-

This is in the context of Solomon's claim that as a just judge endowed with Divine wisdom, he knows the truth about all the cases which come before him (see on :8,11). The God who has ultimate awareness, hearing and seeing all things, has given such awareness to Solomon the judge; so Solomon liked to think.

Pro 20:13 Don't love sleep, lest you come to poverty. Open your eyes, and you shall be satisfied with bread-

This continues Solomon's rhetoric against laziness and his insistence that poverty comes as a result of idleness. He argues that if lazy people even just opened their eyes, they would be

satisfied with bread. Solomon on one hand teaches pity towards the poor (Prov. 14:21,31; 19:17; 28:8). But on the other, he mocks the poor as being poor because of their unwisdom, believing that wealth is given in response to wisdom. He is very conflicted in his attitude to the poor. The Divine revelation of truth to him was clearly that he should be generous to the poor. But he fences against this in other places by saying that the poor are being punished for their unwisdom. So like us when we encounter need that requires our generosity, he hedges his position very carefully; rather than accepting the simple force of the wisdom given to him, that pity to the poor as it were transfers our wealth from earth to heaven, and we will receive it back in due time (see on Prov. 19:17).

Solomon speaks often of how hard work will "satisfy with bread" (Prov. 12:11; 20:13; 28:19). David his father uses the phrase in the context of saying that being 'satisfied with bread' is part of God's gracious blessing (Ps. 132:15). We see here how Solomon became focused upon works, rather than faith in the blessings which come from Divine grace. And yet he uses the words his father had used; but he interprets them as justification of works rather than acceptance of grace.

Pro 20:14 It's no good, it's no good, says the buyer; but when he is gone his way, then he boasts-

The idea is that he boasts at what a wonderful deal he has got. The verse may simply be an observation upon how things are, but I suggest it be read along with :15. The gold and rubies are bought for a very low price, but all the same, lips of knowledge are worth even more than them. Perhaps the Lord quarried His parable of the treasure hid in a field from these verses. The man gives all that he has to by all means buy the field which contains the treasure, but that treasure is the knowledge of the Gospel.

Pro 20:15 There is gold and abundance of rubies; but the lips of knowledge are a rare jewel- See on :14. The words of Job 28:18 are repeatedly quoted in Proverbs (Prov. 3:15; 8:11; 20:15). "Wisdom" in Proverbs refers not so much to nuggets of truth, but to a way of life in relationship with God; for that is the context in the source passage in Job 28:18 cp. 28.

Pro 20:16 Take the garment of one who puts up collateral for a stranger-

The law of Moses didn't forbid giving or taking collateral for loans, it accepted this would happen (Ex. 22:25-27). But Solomon in the Proverbs is quite obsessed with forbidding it in very strong terms (Prov. 6:1-3; 11:15; 17:18; 20:16; 22:26; 27:13- all quite some emphasis). Perhaps Solomon recalled some bad experience in his family because of this. There is the otherwise curious statement in 1 Sam. 17:18 that David's brothers, Solomon's uncles, were to return a collateral. Perhaps this ruined the family and Solomon's wisdom has some human element in it, reflecting his own bad experiences in his family life. But there is nothing wrong with giving or taking collateral for a loan; what is condemned in God's law is the abuse of the debtor and the abuse of the situation. Indeed David and Hezekiah ask God to be collateral for their needs and debts in various ways (Ps. 119:122; Is. 38:14). And God gives the Holy Spirit

in our hearts as collateral on His debt, as He sees it, to save us (2 Cor. 1:22; 5:5; Eph. 1:14); and in response we give our hearts as a pledge to Him (Jer. 30:21 Heb.). So forbidding the practice seems out of step with the spirit of grace. It would mean asking of God what we are unprepared to do for others. Solomon had not known need, neither material nor spiritual, and it shows in his attitude to this matter. It makes hollow all Solomon's exhortations to be generous to your poor neighbour and to be a brother in adversity to your neighbour (Prov. 14:21; 17:17). Solomon is here reasoning from the viewpoint of secular wisdom.

And hold him in pledge for a wayward woman-

The blindness of Solomon is driven home time and again; he knew Divine truth, but the more he knew it, the more he lived the very opposite, failing to grasp the deeply personal relevance of truth to himself. A whole string of passages in Proverbs warn of the "strange" (AV) woman (2:16; 5:20; 6:24; 7:5; 20:16; 23:27; 27:13). Yet the very same word (translated "outlandish", AV) is used in Neh. 13:26 concerning the women Solomon married. The antidote to succumbing to the wicked woman was to have wisdom- according to Proverbs. And Solomon apparently had wisdom. Yet he succumbed to the wicked woman. He was writing Song of Solomon at the same time as Proverbs. The reason for this must be that Solomon didn't really have wisdom. Yet we know that he was given it in abundance. The resolution of this seems to be that Solomon asked for wisdom in order to lead Israel rather than for himself, he used that wisdom to judge Israel and to educate the surrounding nations. But none of it percolated to himself. As custodians of true doctrine- for that is what we are- we are likely to suffer from over familiarity with it. We can become so accustomed to 'handling' it, as we strengthen each other, as we preach, that the personal bearing of the Truth becomes totally lost upon us, as it was totally lost upon Solomon.

Pro 20:17 Fraudulent food is sweet to a man, but afterwards his mouth is filled with gravel- "Fraudulent" is 'deceit'. The allusion is to Ahithophel, who had betrayed Solomon's father David, when once they had eaten bread together, although in deceit (Ps. 41:9). And he then committed suicide, to which the mouth of a corpse being filled with gravel may allude. Always Solomon seems to have in view the justification of David and condemnation of his opposition.

Pro 20:18 Plans are established by advice; by wise guidance you wage war!-

Solomon's advice to his son sounds all well and good; but Rehoboam was given two different paths of advice by his advisors. Again, Solomon's words are true, but simplistic. Because as Rehoboam's case shows, the issue is not so much having advisors *per se*, but deciding which advisors to listen to. Solomon too had advisors (1 Kings 12:6), but did what he wanted, making this Proverb somewhat hollow when applied to himself.

Pro 20:19 He who goes about as a tale-bearer reveals secrets; therefore don't keep company with him who opens wide his lips-

"Opens wide" is the word for "enticed". Solomon's idea of avoiding sin was in resisting the enticement of very sinful people (s.w. Prov. 1:10; 16:29). He pays no attention to the heart, whereas the Biblical message is always that sin is to be avoided in the heart. Spiritual mindedness, rather than mere disassociation from sinners, is of the essence. Dt. 11:16 warns that our heart should not be enticed (s.w.); but Solomon sees enticement as merely from very sinful individuals.

Solomon rightly condemns gossip and the stirring up of divisions. But he is writing up his Divinely given wisdom at the start of his reign, where there were various groups of opposition to him. These groupings had all arisen from the divisions which arose after his parents' sin with each other; they were a consequence for David's sin, which Nathan had prophesied. Inevitably, David's behaviour had invited all manner of gossip and strife. But Solomon seems to blame this on the gossipers, and carefully considers they alone are guilty; for he is ever glorifying and whitewashing his father David.

Pro 20:20 Whoever curses his father or his mother, his lamp shall be put out in blackness of darkness-

A "lamp" was understood as the inheritance and continuation as king (1 Kings 15:4). Solomon here has in view how his half brother Absalom, and indeed his other half brothers, had contended with him for the throne; but their "lamp" in this sense had been extinguished. And he likes to imply that this was because they had cursed their father David, whereas Solomon revered him.

Pro 20:21 An inheritance quickly gained at the beginning won't be blessed in the end-

If indeed :20 is referring to Absalom, this may also allude to him; implying Absalom and Solomon's other competitors for the throne had sought to grab the inheritance of their father David, but had not retained it in the end.

Pro 20:22 Don't say, I will pay back evil. Wait for Yahweh, and He will save you-

Solomon considered that much evil had been done to him and his father David by the various contenders for the throne. Solomon had been careful to cut down all such opposition when he became king, not following the example of David when he became king, in being so gracious to the house of Saul his contenders. But here he rather hypocritically claims he had not repaid evil, alluding to how David had not repaid evil by killing Saul when he could have done, but had waited for Yahweh to remove Saul and establish his kingdom.

Pro 20:23 Yahweh detests differing weights, and dishonest scales are not pleasing-

AV "are an abomination". This repeats Prov. 11:1. "Abomination" is the common word for idols (e.g. Dt. 7:25,26). Idolatry is here interpreted as things like dishonest scales and a quiet desire to repay evil (:22). These internal things are the essence of idolatry. Solomon often uses the word "abomination" for quiet, secret sins, words and the matters of the heart, internal attitudes and judgments (Prov. 11:1,20; 12:22; 13:19; 15:26; 16:5; 17:15; 20:10,23; 24:9;

26:25; 28:9; 29:27). And this of course is the essence of idolatry in our age; this is the practical force to us of all Biblical teaching about idolatry.

But the context here is of Solomon claiming that his wisdom makes him a correct judge of men (:26). This is likewise the context of Prov. 16:11: "Honest balances and scales are Yahweh's; all the weights in the bag are His work". The stress may be on the fact that Yahweh is the ultimate judge, weighing all things in perfectly accurate balances and with ultimately true weighting. This then leads on to the implication in :26 and Prov. 16:12 that a true king, and Solomon refers to himself, cannot judge wrongly because he is king on God's behalf. His judgment must therefore be accepted as correct, because he is king on behalf of Yahweh, the ultimately true and fair judge. Hence Prov. 16:11 LXX "or the throne of rule is established by righteousness". But this is reasoning which is biased towards Solomon's self justification, and desire to cement himself as the unquestioned moral judge and teacher of Israel- although personally he was so far from it.

Pro 20:24 A man's steps are from Yahweh; how then can man understand his way?-

David here quotes his father's words in Ps. 37:23: "The steps of a good man are ordered by Yahweh". Man without God's help cannot therefore understand his "way". But God understands man's way because He alone understands the way of wisdom (Job 28:23 s.w.), and therefore David prays to be "made to understand the way" (s.w. Ps. 119:27). And Solomon has used this phrase about wisdom empowers man to understand his way (Prov. 14:8). The only way to understand life's way is therefore from the God who is ordering it; unaided, without His gift of wisdom, we cannot understand it. See on :27; Prov. 21:29.

Pro 20:25 It is a snare to a man to make a rash dedication, then later to consider his vows-

The reference is to the way that it was common in those days, as it still is in Semitic languages and cultures, to make very extreme promises of dedication which could not then be kept. Clearly Solomon has in view Jephthah's rash vow. But he also surely alludes to his half brother Absalom's attempted putsch to wrest the throne from David and Solomon, which used the guise of having made a vow he needed to perform (s.w. 2 Sam. 15:7,8). So again and again we see Solomon saying what is true and wise enough, but always with some underlying narrative justifying himself and his father.

Pro 20:26 A wise king winnows out the wicked, and drives the threshing wheel over them-

Solomon uses language elsewhere used about Messiah's final judgment when he says this. He felt that his judgment must be that of God, therefore he had to be right, because he 'had wisdom', he 'had the truth'; he assumed that because he was the king, therefore his heart would inevitably be guided by the Lord (Prov. 21:1), and he could judge and condemn others. This is where abusing the knowledge or possession of Divine truths can lead. See on :23.

Pro 20:27 The spirit of man is Yahweh's lamp, searching all his innermost parts-

This must be understood in the context of :24. There is as it were cooperation between God

and man in order to understand our ways. Without the lamp of His word and involvement in our spirit, the unaided spirit of man cannot search out himself with any real meaning. Our self examination is in this sense God's, although we may not be conscious of it.

Pro 20:28 Love and faithfulness keep the king safe; his throne is sustained by love-

"Mercy and truth" ("love and faithfulness") were to be the basis of David's throne because that is what upheld God's throne. And David was to reign on God's behalf, his throne was to be as God's throne (Is. 16:5; Ps. 89:14; 101:1). Solomon liked to imagine that his throne was likewise upheld by God as His throne, also on the basis of "mercy and truth" ("grace and justice"). But he assumed that would happen automatically, whereas David's response to this is given in Ps. 101- he vows that he will personally reign in "grace and justice", whereas Solomon assumes that God will provide the "grace and justice" ("mercy and truth") as it were automatically. "Mercy and truth preserve the king, and he upholdeth his throne by mercy" (Prov. 20:28 RVmg.) says as much- the promises ("mercy and truth" usually refer to God's promises) had been given to David and just because of that, Solomon was sure that *his* throne and kingdom would thereby be upheld. He forgot the crucial need for personal, obedient relationship with God.

Pro 20:29 The glory of young men is their strength. The splendour of old men is their gray hair-

This is true in an outline, broad brush sense. But Solomon is not merely describing things how they are for the sake of it. He seems to be painting a word picture of how he saw himself, the strong, glorious young man, along with his splendid father David.

Pro 20:30 Wounding blows cleanse away evil, and beatings purge the innermost parts-

Again this is true, but Solomon by the end of his reign was beating his people (1 Kings 12:11); he came to consider that most of God's people were fools, needing to be cleansed by his punishment of them. Because they had refused the rebuke of his wisdom, he thought that therefore he could lash them. Those who are lifted up with pride at their possession of "truth" often come to despise and abuse others.

PROVERBS CHAPTER 21

Pro 21:1 The king's heart is in Yahweh's hand like the watercourses; He turns it wherever He desires-

"Turns" is the word for "incline", used by David of how he himself inclined his heart to God's word (Ps. 119:51,112,157). But David prayed that God would incline his heart towards His word (Ps. 119:36) and away from sin (Ps. 141:4). This is how the Holy Spirit works to this day- we are confirmed in the psychological attitudes we ourselves choose to have. The word is used of God's mighty "stretched out" arm and "strong hand" in human affairs (Ps. 136:12 and often in Isaiah). This powerful hand of God is at work in human hearts, confirming us in the psychological way in which we ourselves wish to go. In this sense God turns or inclines the heart where He wishes (Prov. 21:1). Solomon in the Proverbs places all the emphasis upon a person themselves in their own strength inclining their heart toward his teaching (Prov. 2:2; 4:5,20; 5:1). He fails to appreciate what David his father did; that God's word is His word and not that of the human channel through which it comes. And he totally puts the emphasis upon human strength of will, self inclination towards God's word, rather than perceiving as David did that without God's psychological help in this, we shall ultimately fail. As Solomon himself did.

When Solomon, as the current King, wrote this, it's possible to understand this as a claim that whatever he thought in his heart was in fact from God. He played God, having convinced himself that he was somehow automatically thinking on God's behalf. This is one of the dangers of mishandling the Divine truth and wisdom which is granted us to possess.

Solomon's heart was "turned away", or 'influenced' by his wives towards idols (1 Kings 11:3). Yet Solomon uses this very idea of the heart being turned or influenced in Prov. 2:2; 22:17 about the need to turn our hearts towards God's word. He taught, but did the very opposite. And perhaps Prov. 21:1 explains why he did this- he says there that Yahweh turns the heart of the King wherever He wishes- and so perhaps he thought that control of our thinking and inclinations is unnecessary, because somehow God will do it for us. And there's a lesson there for us, who may assume at times that God will somehow control our hearts for us, rather than our making a conscious effort towards mind control.

Pro 21:2 Every way of a man is right in his own eyes, but Yahweh weighs the hearts-

Is he perhaps drawing a contrast between the infallibility of the King's thought, compared to the deceit of the human heart in the population? Thus Solomon came to see himself as somehow more than human.

We all know from our own experience with temptation that we can justify *anything*. Every way of man can seem right in his own eyes because of this feature of our nature (Prov. 14:12; 16:25; 21:2). The truth of this statement demonstrates the error of the humanistic approach of 'follow your heart', 'do what feels good and right to you'. There must be the influence of God's word to put us on the path to life.

Pro 21:3 To do righteousness and justice is more acceptable to Yahweh than sacrifice-

This was quite a paradigm breaking statement, seeing Solomon was living under the law of

Moses. His father David came to a similar, but far more mature conclusion after his sin with Solomon's mother, Bathsheba. He concluded that God wanted a broken, contrite, repentant heart rather than sacrifice (Ps. 51:17). Solomon instead speaks of *doing* righteous acts, rather than sacrifice. He had so whitewashed his father David that he closed his mind to learn the deep spiritual insights which David had come to as a result of recognizing his sin, rather than subconsciously denying it as Solomon did.

Pro 21:4 A high look and a proud heart are the lamp of the wicked, and are sin-

A "lamp" was understood as the inheritance and continuation as king (1 Kings 15:4).

Solomon here has in view how his half brother Absalom, and indeed his other half brothers, had contended with him for the throne; but their "lamp" in this sense had been extinguished because of their pride and the "high look" of Absalom. Again we see how Solomon constantly uses God's truth in order to justify himself and constantly have a dig at his competitors; just as many misuse "truth" today.

Pro 21:5 The plans of the diligent surely lead to profit; and everyone who is hasty surely rushes to poverty-

When he writes things like "the thoughts of the diligent tend only to plenteousness" (Prov. 21:5 AV), he must inevitably be connecting his own fantastic wealth / blessing with his hard work. He was justifying himself by works rather than by faith; he assumed his righteousness and acceptance with God rather than struggling through the work of faith. Yet he could say "Labour not to be rich; cease from thine own wisdom" (Prov. 23:5 AV). He had all the right theory. Solomon was an active, industrious person by nature; and whilst all his many proverbs criticizing the lazy and glorifying the diligent are true as they stand, is there not in all this some element of self-justification, interpreting his own natural personality type as inherently righteous?

Here again we see Solomon's works based attitude. He sees poverty as the result of laziness, and profit / plenty coming from hard work (Prov. 14:23; 21:5). He fails to appreciate the wider narrative in spiritual life. The good news is for the poor, which group may include the lazy. And works will not save, and God's salvation is what is ultimately required by man. But Solomon had no eternal perspective, because he thought his kingdom was God's. And so as he got older and closer to death, he reasons that the reality of death means that man has no profit or preeminence (s.w. Ecc. 3:19). If he had accepted the Gospel of the future Kingdom of God, he would have focused more upon salvation by grace through faith, and less upon the supremacy of hard work and profit / preeminence in this life.

Pro 21:6 Getting wealth by a lying tongue is a fleeting vapour for those who seek death-

"A lying tongue" is the very phrase David uses about Saul's smear campaign against him (Ps. 27:12; 31:13 cp. 1 Sam. 26:19). This frequency of reference in itself indicates the weight with which this tragedy rested upon David's mind. It makes good homework to list all the lies Saul told David. But these words also apply to the lies told to David at the time of Absalom's

rebellion, who for years prior to it had bad mouthed David to the men of Israel. Solomon repeatedly condemns "the mouth of the wicked" (Prov. 10:6,11,32; 11:11; 12:6; 15:28; 19:28). All he says is true enough, but he clearly enough has in view how his father David had condemned the supporters of Saul and Absalom as having "the mouth of the wicked" (Ps. 109:2). And these were the groups who were threatening his power and throne. Solomon presents himself by implication as having the mouth of the just / righteous. And yet we must note that David too had spoken multiple words of deceit in relation to the murder of Uriah. Indeed the phrase is used in Is. 53:9 as if the Lord Jesus was the only man who didn't have a "mouth of deceit". Solomon like David was in denial of the fact that we all sin with our mouths, as James makes clear in James 3:1-3.

Pro 21:7 The violence of the wicked will drive them away, because they refuse to do what is right-

GNB "The wicked are doomed by their own violence". This continues the Biblical theme that the wicked are essentially condemned by themselves more than by the Lord; they "make the answer now", their behaviour is of itself their own condemnation. 'Driven away' is the figure of condemnation in Ps. 35:5.

Pro 21:8 The way of the guilty is devious, but the conduct of the innocent is upright-

Or "crooked... straight". Whilst the way of life of itself is straight and direct, it is far too simplistic to imagine that the righteous are totally innocent, the sinners are totally guilty; and the righteous walk in a direct path to the Kingdom, marching ever upright. This is simply not true to spiritual reality and experience. David was of course an example of how things are in reality. But as with many today, Solomon's simplistic dualism led him to assume that he was in the "innocent" category; he therefore didn't examine himself, didn't seriously think he was capable of major sin, and considered others to be in that group of "the guilty". And this led him totally astray.

Pro 21:9 It is better to dwell in the corner of the housetop, than to share a house with a contentious woman-

A man on a housetop recalls the story of David's sin with Solomon's mother, Bathsheba. I detected on Prov. 18:22 Solomon's justification of David's divorce with Michal. And here too there is a subtext, however unconscious even. Solomon appears to have totally whitewashed his parents, and any consequence of David's sins are blamed by Solomon upon his half brothers and foolish men, as if they were totally guilty and David totally innocent; for this was his worldview. See on :8,19; Prov. 25:24.

Pro 21:10 The soul of the wicked desires evil; his neighbour finds no mercy in his eyes-

LXX "The soul of the ungodly shall not be pitied by any man". Solomon's judgmentalism and lack of pity is notable in the Proverbs. Yet had God not shown grace and pity to his father David, Solomon would not have been born. David was rebuked for not showing pity regarding the sin with Bathsheba and Uriah (2 Sam. 12:6). But Solomon shows no

understanding of these things, no awareness of grace, and he acts as if David never sinned with his mother, and as if he too has never sinned.

Pro 21:11 When the mocker is punished, the simple gains wisdom. When the wise is instructed, he receives knowledge-

This seems to be justifying David's command for Solomon to punish the mocker Shimei, who had cursed him at the time of Absalom's rebellion. At the time, David had forgiven Shimei and forbidden his men to kill him. But at the end of his life, David didn't maintain that level of grace, and commanded Solomon to ensure that he brought Shimei's grey hairs down to the grave with blood (1 Kings 2:9). And Solomon justified this collapse of forgiveness and grace by saying that it would give wisdom to others and instruct the wise.

Pro 21:12 The Righteous One considers the house of the wicked, and brings the wicked to ruin-

To 'bring to ruin' is the word for 'subvert' or 'destroy' in Prov. 19:3: "The foolishness of man subverts his way". But God, "the righteous One", overthrows the wicked. Solomon thereby equates the foolish with the wicked. But he seems to classify as foolish anyone who doesn't accept his take on life, or is ignorant of the wisdom he teaches. Ignorance, and even intellectual failure, is not of itself wickedness. Solomon has such a dualistic view of things that he assumes anyone who is not wise and thereby wealthy to be foolish and thereby wicked. But amongst God's people, things are not so black and white. And we are not to judge, largely because we simply cannot judge.

LXX "A righteous man understands the hearts of the ungodly: and despises the ungodly for their wickedness". Solomon considered that his mere possession of Divine truth enabled him to infallibly judge people and to read their hearts. And thereby despise sinners. But Solomon wasn't infallible, knowledge of Divine truth doesn't empower us to read and judge human heart. God doesn't despise sinners (Job 36:5), but sorrows for them and seeks to save them.

Pro 21:13 Whoever stops his ears at the cry of the poor, he will also cry out, but shall not be heard-

Solomon speaks of the wicked within Israel as stopping their ears at the cry of the poor. He is alluding to how David his father had complained that the judges of Israel were like cobras who stopped their ear to the voice of charmers, refusing the voice of God's word (Ps. 58:4 s.w.). Connecting the ideas, the cry of the poor is the cry of God's word to us; our response to them is our response to them.

Pro 21:14 A gift in secret pacifies anger; and a bribe in the cloak, strong wrath-

LXX and GNB are rather different, and do not justify bribery: "If someone is angry with you, a gift given secretly will calm him down". But if NEV and MT are followed, this may connect with :15, which speak of how the righteous "do justice", and don't take bribes, therefore. Solomon's continual theme of justice and a just judiciary would be a swipe at his

half brother Absalom, who had tried to become the judge of Israel and offered biased judgments towards whoever supported his attempt to take Solomon's throne (2 Sam. 15:1-6).

Pro 21:15 It is joy to the righteous to do justice; but it is a destruction to the workers of iniquity-

"The workers of iniquity" is a phrase repeatedly used by Solomon's father David concerning the supporters of Saul, and also those supporting David's half brothers- all of which were groups who were potential contenders for Solomon's throne. See notes on Ps. 5:5; 6:8; 14:4; 28:3; 36:12; 53:4; 59:2; 64:2; 92:7,9; 94:4,16; 101:8; 125:5; 141:4,9. So whilst Solomon speaks truly, so far as it goes, he uses language which subtly condemns his political opponents. Thus he harnessed God's truth towards his own self justification, as many do today.

Pro 21:16 The man who wanders out of the way of understanding shall remain in the assembly of the dead-

GNB "Death is waiting for anyone who wanders away from good sense". I suspect this is the correct sense, because Solomon constantly speaks as if this life is the time for the reward for wisdom, and the punishment for unwisdom.

Pro 21:17 He who loves pleasure shall be a poor man; he who loves wine and oil shall not be rich-

"Pleasure" is s.w. "mirth" in Ecc. 2:1,2;8:15. Solomon had to re-learn this for himself rather than accept the direct Divine teaching about it which he knew and taught. But again Solomon appears set on seeing the outcomes as all in this life. For many who love oil and wine are rich, and the poor are not always pleasure lovers. But Solomon sees things within the terms of his simplistic dichotomy, where the wise are generally rich and the foolish and lazy are generally poor.

Pro 21:18 The wicked is a ransom for the righteous; the treacherous for the upright-

"Treacherous" or "traitors" is the term used by David of Saul and his supporters (Ps. 25:3; 59:5; 119:158). Solomon uses this term, teaching that "transgressors" must be rooted out of the earth / *eret* promised to Abraham (Prov. 2:22), and that the "transgressors" are to face judgment (Prov. 11:3,6; 13:2; 21:18; 22:12; 23:28; 25:19). All Solomon says is true, but he clearly has in view the house and supporters of Saul, who were a group he felt he needed to repress in order to keep his own kingdom and power intact.

Pro 21:19 It is better to dwell in a desert land, than with a contentious and fretful woman-

See on :9. I detected on Prov. 18:22 Solomon's justification of David's divorce with Michal. And here too there is a subtext, however unconscious even; however true Solomon's observation may be in more general terms. For David divorced Michael whilst he was still in the desert, on the run from her father Saul.

Pro 21:20 There is precious treasure and oil in the dwelling of the wise; but a foolish man swallows it up-

Again, Solomon teaches that generally, the wise are wealthy. This simply doesn't accord with observed reality, neither with Biblical history and lament that the wicked prosper in this life. Solomon comes to this simplistic dichotomy in order to justify himself, the one made rich by God's gift rather than his own hard work or wisdom. For he abused that grace by assuming that his wealth was because of his wisdom. Whereas that doesn't accord with the chronology of his life; he inherited riches from David, chose wisdom, and God then gave him great wealth as a young man. The idea seems to be that the wise hoard their treasure, whereas a fool "spendeth it up" (AV) if wealth comes to him. The Lord's parable of the rich fool who hoarded his wealth is therefore again seen to be correcting Solomon's perspective. That man was in the position of Solomon; his wealth was only for this life, and he had totally ignored the factor of human mortality, as many do today.

Pro 21:21 He who follows after righteousness and kindness finds life, righteousness, and honour-

The "life" which Solomon saw as the reward for wisdom was not therefore "eternal life"; because in this life, the wise "finds life". And "honour", good standing in the eyes of men, was so important to Solomon. He lacks any Kingdom perspective, nor an awareness of the future day of judgment. For he assumes that his kingdom is God's promised future Kingdom, and he is the Messianic ruler. As he got older and came nearer to death, he lost all faith- as seen in his musings in Ecclesiastes. His wives turned his heart to their idols. If he had more firmly accepted with all humility the gospel of the Kingdom to come, this could have all been avoided.

Pro 21:22 A wise man scales the city of the mighty, and brings down the strength of its confidence-

"Confidence" is literally 'fortress'. The secure fortress was Zion (Is. 32:18; Ps. 125:1 s.w.), "the stronghold of Zion, the same is the city of David" (2 Sam. 5:7). Whilst what Solomon says is true, and repeats the multiple cases of David in the Psalms professing trust in Yahweh as his strong fortress, Solomon as ever has his agenda of self justification; he saw his possession of Zion as a sign that he feared Yahweh acceptably, and that his children would continue the Davidic line of glory. But sacred space is not so ultimately important to God. Possession of the literal stronghold of Zion was nothing compared to trust in Yahweh.

The allusion is to how Joab scaled the city of Zion. But Joab turned against David, and his family and supporters became one of the groups of opposition to Solomon. Solomon here gives credit to his father David, the "wise man", as he sees him, for scaling the city of Zion; when in fact it was Joab who did it. Again we see his desire to exalt and glorify his father.

Pro 21:23 Whoever guards his mouth and his tongue keeps his soul from troubles-

As explained on :21, Solomon sees the advantage of controlling our tongue as simply being that we are thereby preserved from "troubles" in this life. And yet David suffered "troubles" from Saul, although innocent (s.w. 1 Sam. 26:24; 2 Sam. 4:9). David understood that Yahweh was a refuge from "troubles" (s.w. Ps. 9:9; 10:1; 22:11; 25:17; 34:6 and so often); rather than thinking, as did Solomon, that we are somehow preserved from them due to steel willed self control and wise speaking. Solomon glorified his father David, but totally failed to grasp his far more spiritual perspective.

Pro 21:24 The proud and haughty man, scoffer is his name; he works in the arrogance of pride-

David had spoken of the house of Saul as scoffing at him (s.w. Ps. 119:51). And the line of David had been chosen to replace Saul because he had refused Samuel's reproof. David had accepted reproof and was open to it, notably from Nathan the prophet (Ps. 38:1; 141:5); and so again Solomon's Proverbs are true, but he harnesses them to the justification of himself and his father. But Solomon was only to remain the prophetic son of David if he accepted reproof (s.w. 2 Sam. 7:14); and he didn't. He refused to personalize his own wisdom, as we can.

Pro 21:25 The desire of the lazy kills him, for his hands refuse to labour-

The Proverbs contain repeated condemnation of laziness. Lack of a zealous work ethic is a rejection of wisdom, according to Solomon. As Solomon explains in Ecc. 1, he was an active person, not lazy by nature. And yet he lacked spirituality. He claimed that his service of God was due to his spirituality, but it was in reality merely a semblance of serving God when it was really just reinforcing his own personality type. His mocking of the "slothful" or "lazy one" is so frequent (Prov. 6:6,9; 10:26; 13:4; 15:19; 19:24; 20:4; 21:25; 22:13; 24:30; 26:13-16). But it is a reflection of his own works-based approach to righteousness; the 'wise' "do" good things, and the wicked don't do enough good things. Personal spiritual mindedness and relationship with God are simply not emphasized.

Pro 21:26 There are those who covet greedily all day long; but the righteous give and don't withhold-

This is the phrase only elsewhere used for Israel's coveting of meat in the wilderness (Num. 11:4; Ps. 106:14). The reason for their lust was because they were lazy (:25). They ought to have instead thought of what they could give, rather than lusting for what they could additionally get. This generous attitude is the antidote to lust.

Pro 21:27 The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination: how much more, when he brings it with a wicked mind!-

Solomon may have in view Saul's rejection from the kingship for his wrong attitude to sacrifice (1 Sam. 15:21,22). Likewise the attempts of Absalom and Adonijah to take the throne from David and Solomon involved the offering of sacrifices (2 Sam. 15:12; 1 Kings

1:9). What Solomon says in the Proverbs is true on one level, but he harnesses Divine truth to justify himself and his own agendas; just as we can.

Pro 21:28 A false witness will perish, but a man who listens speaks consistently-

The Hebrew implies that the man who has heard truth will constantly speak about it. Solomon has much to say about true and false witnesses (Prov. 6:19; 12:17; 14:5,25; 19:5,9,28; 21:28; 24:28; 25:18). Whilst his warnings are true enough, he surely has an element of self justification in what he writes. Because he was aware that his parents, David and Bathsheba, had been accused of many things which had led to all the opposition against David at the end of his reign, and which opposition Solomon had to contend with in order to retain the throne for himself. David laments the false witness of the house of Saul and his own sons, Solomon's half brothers (Ps. 27:12; 35:11). The continual condemnation of false witnesses must be understood in this context. Whilst it is all true so far as it goes, Solomon is harnessing Divine truth to his own agenda of self justification. And we who claim to hold His truths must take warning.

Pro 21:29 A wicked man hardens his face; but as for the upright, he establishes his ways-

"Establishes" is "understands". The same phrase is used in Prov. 20:24: "A man's steps are from Yahweh; how then can man understand his way?". David here quotes his father's words in Ps. 37:23: "The steps of a good man are ordered by Yahweh". Man without God's help cannot therefore understand his "way". But God understands man's way because He alone understands the way of wisdom (Job 28:23 s.w.), and therefore David prays to be "made to understand the way" (s.w. Ps. 119:27). And Solomon has used this phrase about wisdom empowers man to understand his way (Prov. 14:8). The only way to understand life's way is therefore from the God who is ordering it; unaided, without His gift of wisdom, we cannot understand it.

Pro 21:30 There is no wisdom nor understanding nor counsel against Yahweh-

This appears to be stating an obvious truth, until we discern the allusion to Ahithophel's counsel to destroy David and take the throne away from him and Solomon. See on :27,28.

Pro 21:31 The horse is prepared for the day of battle; but victory is with Yahweh-

"Prepared" is the word translated "established" in the promises of the eternal establishment of David's throne (2 Sam. 7:12,13,16 etc.), and Solomon wrongly assumed that the conditional nature of the promises concerning the seed were just irrelevant to him as he had wisdom. Therefore he uses the word of how his kingdom has been "established" (1 Kings 2:24 s.w.). The previous verses have all featured allusions to Solomon's contenders for the throne being stopped by God, they tried to prepare or establish themselves but it never worked out (2 Sam. 15:1; 1 Kings 1:5); and so surely Solomon has the idea in mind that he has been established as the promised Messianic seed of David with an eternally "established" throne and kingdom. This leads him to the conclusion that the outcome of wisdom and folly is in this life, and he

has no perspective of a final day of judgment and eternal establishment of God's Kingdom on earth. This is why the simplistic dichotomies he presents between the blessed and wise, and the cursed and foolish, are not always true to observed experiences in this life. For it is the future Kingdom which puts them in ultimate perspective.

PROVERBS CHAPTER 22

Pro 22:1 A good name is more desirable than great riches, and loving favour is better than silver and gold-

The dating of Proverbs becomes crucial in interpreting the book. It can too easily be assumed that the Proverbs were part of the wisdom given to Solomon in his youth, and his subsequent life was a tragic example of saying 'Do as I say but not as I do', going directly against the principles taught in the theoretical wisdom he had been given. And that may well be so. But we need to consider the possibility that the Proverbs were written throughout the life of Solomon, at least, up until his final, public turning away from Yahweh to other gods in his old age, which probably gave rise to the book of Ecclesiastes. The comments here in 22:1 about a name, a lasting legacy, being better than wealth may well have arisen from his own reflection upon what little his wealth had done for him. It is who we are, our name before God and our lasting legacy, which is important- bank balances are utterly irrelevant to it. It was David who 'got him a name' through his work for the Lord (2 Sam. 8:13); David had the name, and Solomon the wealth. Solomon was obsessed with his father- so many times he refers to "David my father". His proverbs are shot through with allusion to David. And now perhaps he reflects that his father had done better than he. David had the name, Solomon the riches. But the riches were nothing compared to the name. A case can be made that the wise, righteous one portrayed in Proverbs is based around David, and Solomon's message was to be like David his father, whom he saw as the embodiment of the theoretical wisdom which he had received. Or we could read Solomon here as saying that his father had wealth, but it was his name / legacy / record which was far more significant.

Pro 22:2 The rich and the poor have this in common-

Or, "the rich and poor meet together". Perhaps Solomon had in view Nathan's parable to David after his sin with Bathsheba (Solomon's mother). David was likened to the rich man, and Uriah to the poor man (2 Sam. 12:1). The same Hebrew words are used. The parable would have been well known to Solomon, because Bathsheba was his mother. He was perhaps reflecting that David and Uriah met together in that they were only human, each made equal to the other by reason of having a common creator. It may be that the subtext here [once again] is Solomon seeking to minimize the failures of his father and his dynasty, as if to say 'Dad was of course only human, as human as Uriah, they were both the same...!'

Yahweh is the maker of them all-

One implication of believing that God is our personal creator is that we will not be envious of the rich; we will not see them as so fundamentally different from ourselves.

Pro 22:3 A prudent man sees danger, and hides himself-

The Hebrew word for "prudent" is twice used about David whilst under persecution from Saul (1 Sam. 23:22). The context is that David was hiding himself in the forests of Ziph (1 Sam. 23:19). And so Solomon says that the prudent man hides himself. The "danger" [Heb. 'evil'] naturally refers to the 'evil' foreseen by David which was determined against him by Saul; the same word for "evil" / "danger" is found in 1 Sam. 20:7,9. Without doubt, Solomon is setting up his father David as the parade example and embodiment of his teaching. So whilst all he says is true, there is also a subtext of justifying his father and his father's choice of himself as king. Our witness to others, our use of God's Truth, can likewise have mixed motives and very human, self-justifying subtexts to it. We can also see Solomon moving towards a position whereby he personally distances himself from the great truths he is preaching; his idea is 'Look at my father, follow his example, he was a truly good man'; rather than rejoicing in God's truths for himself, and unconsciously radiating them to others in his own life.

But the simple pass on, and suffer for it-

The Hebrew translated "pass on" is used of how Saul 'passed on' to sin at Gilgal (1 Sam. 15:12,24), and was condemned for doing so, resulting in his replacement by David. On David's death, there were multiple interest groups within Israel, reflected in the various rebellions against David in his final years. One of those groups was the family of Saul and those loyal to the memory of Saul; and all these groups had to be repressed by Solomon. Thus Solomon in Proverbs so often paints the foolish one, the simple one, the disobedient, in terms of Saul. Again, there is a subtext of self-justification and fortification of ones' own position, despite the words spoken being true enough of themselves. Our motivation for witness needs to be pure, to simply proclaim God's grace, to make known His Son, to see their glory... and all human agendas must be left behind. But we have to search our own psychology very deeply to come to this level of self-understanding.

LXX "An intelligent man seeing a bad man severely punished is himself instructed, but fools pass by and are punished".

Pro 22:4 The result of humility and the fear of Yahweh is wealth, honour, and life-

David himself said that it was humility which had 'made him great or 'increased' him (2 Sam. 22:36 Heb.; the common translations suggest that it was God's humility which increased David, but there is no pronoun in the Hebrew text. The statement is simply that humility had increased David). And David had reigned in "the fear of Yahweh" (2 Sam. 23:3). David was given "wealth" [s.w.] as a result of this (1 Chron. 29:12,28), as well as "honour" (s.w. 1 Chron. 17:18). Again, Solomon is presenting his own father as the parade example. The three blessings of wealth, honour and [long] life were the very things which God gave to Solomon in reward for having chosen wisdom (1 Kings 3:13,14). So Solomon could be arguing that he had been given those things because of his humility. Solomon had more "wealth" than any other person on earth at the time (the same Hebrew word is used as here for "wealth"; 1 Kings 10:23). So surely Solomon is speaking with some reference to himself. Actually, he

was given the wealth because of his love of wisdom, not because of his humility. And yet Solomon here may be claiming to be humble, and citing his blessings as evidence. This of course is revolting- to parade ones' own supposed humility.

Solomon is here alluding to the way that he did not ask for riches, but wisdom; and was rewarded with the gift of riches. But this is but false humility. For he boasts about his riches in Prov. 14:24 "The crown of the wise is their riches, but the folly of fools crowns them with folly". It was Solomon who was the king and wore the ultimate crown in his society. And he implies that his fantastic riches were a result of his wisdom, and that his pattern should be followed by others. But he fails to remember that his desire for wisdom was recognized by God in that He gave Solomon riches. Those riches were a gift from God, by grace, and not acquired or generated by his own application of wisdom (1 Kings 3:13). He therefore misused his possession of wisdom and experience of grace to justify himself, and present himself as a self made man; when he was not that at all.

Pro 22:5

Thorns and snares are in the path of the wicked-

The Proverbs often allude to the Law of Moses or earlier Israelite history. Here the reference is to the only other time that "thorns and snares" occur together in the Bible, in Josh. 23:13, where Israel are warned that association and intermarriage with the pagan world around them will be as thorns and snares to them. The wicked therefore put these things in their own path; and again, Solomon makes this warning whilst failing spectacularly himself in this very thing. And yet the language of "thorns and snares" is very much what Solomon's father David used about the fate of those who persecuted him (Ps. 11:6; 69:22; 119:110; 140:5)- the likes of Saul and Absalom, whose supporters were the very ones who had been in competition with Solomon for the throne. The same Hebrew word translated "wicked" is used by David about all his enemies and opponents (2 Sam. 22:27; Ps. 101:4).

The language of snares alludes to Solomon's father David, asking to be saved from such snares (Ps. 141:9) and rejoicing that he and God's people had been (Ps. 124:7). The initial reference may have been to Saul laying snares for David through getting him to marry his daughters and thereby seeking to kill him; and in Ps. 119:110 David is proud he has not fallen into those snares. Solomon likewise is hinting that the family of Saul, who were still his political opponents, were not better than gentile whores, and he didn't want his own family to intermarry with them. But Psalm 119 finishes with David saying bluntly that he has "gone astray" (Ps. 119:176), as if to say that earlier he had far overrated his own obedience to God's law.

In Proverbs, Solomon is continually alluding positively to his father's words. But in Ecc. 9:12 he alludes to those words cynically. Solomon seems to be cynically commenting that all men are finally snared in death. Earlier Solomon had warned about avoiding spiritual snares (Prov. 7:23; 22:5), but finally in Ecc. 9:12 he concludes that death is the unavoidable snare; and therefore all attempts to avoid being morally snared into sin are ultimately vain. He came to this perspective because he failed to fully grasp the hope of the resurrection of the body at the

last day. He thought he would have the Kingdom now, and this led to his rejection of the Gospel of the Kingdom and its moral implications.

Whoever guards his soul stays away from them-

The very same Hebrew words used of how the son of David could be the Messiah figure if he took heed to, or 'guarded', his soul (1 Kings 2:4). Solomon is of course assuming that he had fulfilled the conditions for being the true 'Son of David'; when in fact he did not. We can make the same fatal assumption. Whilst on one hand rejoicing in God's grace, we need to ever bear in mind a sense of the future we might miss, and our extreme frailty before God's ultimate judgment. Significantly, David repeatedly uses these same words to beg *God* to 'guard his soul' (Ps. 25:20; 86:2; 97:10; 121:7); whereas Solomon speaks as if the righteous do this in their own strength, guarding their own soul; and he seems to assume that he is amongst the category who guarded their own soul. In our days this may translate in terms of those who think by their own Bible study and steel-willed obedience they can guard their souls, keeping themselves in the way; instead of throwing themselves upon the spiritual action of God. Comparing David's Psalms with Solomon's Proverbs, we often see David asking *God* to do the same things which Solomon says the righteous man must do himself. This matter of guarding our soul is one of a number of such examples.

Pro 22:6

Train up-

The Hebrew word is only elsewhere translated 'to dedicate', and is used of Solomon's dedication of the temple (2 Chron. 7:5). So in view of the above comments, it could even be that Solomon here is wrongly assuming that a mere dedication ceremony alone will ensure a child will not depart from the way of his or her dedicators. Rabbinic commentary sees here a reference to circumcision, from which there can be no departing; at very least, the Rabbis recognize that the Hebrew refers to a one off dedication ceremony, rather than to a process of 'training up'.

A child in the way he should go-

God works with individuals and we are each independently judged regardless of whether we had believing or unbelieving parents, and so it cannot be that someone comes to the Kingdom simply because of faithful parents. And yet none of us will reach salvation purely by our own effort; there are other elements over and above that, and faithful parenting is one such element in the final algorithm which determines who is saved and who isn't. It's an endless motivation for parents, therefore, to raise their children in God's way. The verse as it stands presents various problems. For one, it's not true to experience- children are raised one way and yet they depart from it. And is it really so that the final destiny of a believer's child simply must be salvation, because they cannot depart from the way in which they were raised? Or is the verse not talking about spiritual matters at all? Could it be so that any individual cannot depart from the way, just because they had good parents? I suggest that the notes on :1 be reviewed at this point. Because the verse makes sense in the context of Solomon seeking to justify himself as the only legitimate 'son of David', the only rightful

King, who automatically fulfilled the conditions which God had given regarding how the Son of David must be obedient to Him if he is going to continue as the Messianic King. So Solomon would be claiming that because his father David was righteous, and he had been raised by his father, therefore he was bound to never depart from the right way.

The Biblical comment is that when Solomon was old, he *did* depart from the way of his father David and did *not* have the heart of "David his father" (1 Kings 11:4). Surely there is an intended connection with this Proverb; Solomon was wrong to assume that because of his pedigree, he simply had to be a Kingdom person and could not possibly depart from the way of his father. He did depart from it, for all his much repeated obsession with "David my father". And he stands as a warning for all time to those who consider that they will never depart from the faith of their fathers. I would go so far as to say that Prov. 22:6 is therefore presented by 1 Kings 11:4 as not being strictly true- this is simply part of Solomon's self-justification, and our notes on the rest of Proverbs 22 demonstrate that almost every verse here is alluding to David and an example of Solomon's self-justification.

Solomon here speaks of bringing up a child in the way he should go. Sadly by the time of Ecc. 2:19 and his experience with his own children, he comments about his heir: "Who knoweth whether he shall be a wise man or a fool?". He simply didn't see the relevance of his wisdom to his own personal family life. Yet he proudly insisted: "Who is as the wise man?", as if the possession of theoretical truth and wisdom was the ultimate possession; and he then goes on to say that this made him beyond criticism (Ecc. 8:2-4). This surely *must* be a danger for any community or individual who considers they have "the truth" and who considers the possession of it to be of the utmost importance.

And when he is old he will not depart from it-

Again, Solomon is justifying his father David and presenting him as the parade example of all Solomon's wisdom; for the same word is used by David in claiming that he had never 'departed' from God's ways (2 Sam. 22:23; Ps. 119:102).

Pro 22:7

The rich rule over the poor-

This may appear totally out of context, unless we follow the exposition of :6 offered above, which suggests that here we have Solomon deep in personal self-justification. The Hebrew for "rules" is so often used about Solomon's 'ruling'; and likewise he is described as rich / wealthy in the same contexts. He is observing that he has become the richest man on earth, and is ruling the poor, with others in servitude to him. He considered this to be his spiritual self-justification; just as weak believers can wrongly consider their material prosperity to automatically reflect their justification before God. What is stated in this verse would appear an almost pointless truism, a stating of the obvious- until we realize that Solomon is referring to himself, and [mistakenly] citing his wealth and power as evidence of his rightness before God.

And the borrower is servant to the lender-

When experiencing blessings for obedience, Israel would lend to many nations (Dt. 28:12). Solomon may well have lent to the nations who came to him; in any case, he is alluding to the blessings for spiritual obedience, and considering (wrongly) that his material wealth thereby declares him to be a spiritual person.

Pro 22:8

He who sows wickedness reaps trouble- The same word for "wickedness" is used by David about Saul (the "wicked man" of Ps. 43:1); about Nabal "the fool" (Ps. 53:1), and about Joab and Joab's family (2 Sam. 3:29,34). All these were interest groups with whom Solomon had been in competition for the throne. Solomon's words are true enough, but he seems to be teaching them with a strong hint that they refer to his opponents and thereby justifying himself.

And the rod of his fury will be destroyed- The idea of "the rod" is commonly used regarding a scion / descendant. In the context of Prov. 22, Solomon is saying that David's "rod", i.e. himself, will be blessed; but the attempts of others to have their 'rod' take the throne will not work out because they are wicked. Solomon overlooked the fact that God had set him on His throne. He took this as meaning that he was thereby justified spiritually, and that all other pretenders to the throne were therefore wicked. The Hebrew for "fury" is used by David in the Psalms about the rage of Saul's supporters against him.

But note GNB "If you plant the seeds of injustice, disaster will spring up, and your oppression of others will end". Solomon did oppress others. Discipline and punishment of the unwise is a big theme in Solomon's Proverbs. He took it to the extent of whipping his own people (1 Kings 12:11). This abusive attitude to people arose from his obsession with the idea that he had wisdom, and people generally are fools, idiots, unwise- and therefore he could abuse them. This attitude is another outcome of believing that mere possession of truths about God justifies us, and declares all other people foolish, unwise and able to be legitimately abused by us. In contrast, the heart of God (as of David) bleeds for such people and wants to save them rather than gloat in their unwisdom and punish them for it.

Pro 22:9 He who has a generous eye will be blessed; for he shares his food with the poor- Heb. 'a good eye'. The Hebrew of 1 Sam. 25:8 uses these two words in appealing for Nabal to be generous to David and his men in their poverty. And the second half of the verse makes that allusion explicit: "for he shares his food with the poor". The same Hebrew words for 'sharing' and 'food' are found in 1 Sam. 25:11 concerning Nabal's refusal to 'give' his 'bread' to the poor David. Yet again we find Solomon justifying his father David, and implicitly criticizing his father's enemies. And here he is of course directly repeating David's own words in Ps. 41:1: "Blessed is he who considers the poor". The Hebrew translated "food" is literally "bread", and we recall the incident where David's supporters at Nob gave bread to him and his men (1 Sam. 21:3,6; 22:13); the same two Hebrew words are used as here in Prov. 22:8 'to share [give] food [bread]'. Solomon is going over his father's life and pronouncing blessing

on those who supported David, and judgment upon those who did not. The huge number of times that Solomon uses the phrase 'my father David' reflects this psychological obsession with his father. It resulted in his living out parental expectation, whilst having a terrifying emptiness within himself when it came to real personal spirituality. The same words for 'giving bread' are used by Hiram, when he says that Solomon 'gave him bread / food' in return for his assistance with building the temple (1 Kings 5:9). This was purely a commercial transaction, but it may be that Solomon is here justifying it as some act of grace and kindness on his part.

Pro 22:10

Drive out-

"Drive out" is the same Hebrew word is used for how Solomon "thrust out Abiathar from being priest" (1 Kings 2:27) because he had supported those who had rebelled against his father David. Solomon felt that Abiathar had thus 'mocked' David, and felt that the idea of 'unity' and lack of strife / dissension justified his purges.

The mocker-

The word used by David to describe his enemies (Ps. 1:1; 119:51), whose descendants in turn became Solomon's threats to the throne.

And strife will go out-

The same root word used regarding how at the end of David's reign, the people of Israel "were at strife throughout all the tribes of Israel" (2 Sam. 19:9). Solomon inherited that situation when he came to the throne. Solomon is using the argument used by so many in history and to this day- in order to achieve peace in a community, it's necessary to assign historical precedents to the opposition, slander them, appeal to some kind of Divine judgment of them, and exclude them in order to reduce strife and enable unity within the group. But this is not to say that the Proverbs are not inspired truth; it's the way Solomon uses the principles which is such a dangerous mixture of flesh and spirit, and which is our warning and lesson.

Yes, quarrels and insults will stop- The idea is of reproach, and the same word is used by David to describe what the house of Saul had done to him (1 Sam. 18:23). Solomon is arguing that the only way to end this situation is to drive out any opposition.

22:11 He who loves purity of heart and speaks gracefully is the king's friend- Having in :10 spoken of his plan to purge Israel of opposition, Solomon now gives the other side of the coin. Anyone who is supportive of him and speaks nicely to him will be "the king's friend" and he considers loyalty to him an evidence of "purity of heart". One sees this today in church life- anyone who takes the side of a certain leader is pronounced to be 'most spiritually minded' and so forth. But "the king's friend" was a technical term for a senior Government minister, and the term is used only once elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible, with reference to one of Solomon's chief officers: "Zabud the son of Nathan was chief officer, the

king's friend" (1 Kings 4:5). Nathan was one of David's hawks, one of his hardest core loyalists, and Solomon appointed his son as his chief advisor; and justifies it by pronouncing this man as pure of heart just because he was "king's friend". There is no particular *ipse facto* reason for thinking that a king's friend is automatically pure of heart; but this Proverb declares that to be the case. Again, Solomon appears to be using Divine wisdom to justify his own politics, and this is a lesson that needs to be learnt in church life today.

Pro 22:12 The eyes of Yahweh-

"The eyes of the Lord" is a phrase commonly found in the historical records of David. And so Solomon surely also had in mind Saul, who did evil in the eyes of the Lord and was therefore rejected and replaced by David (1 Sam. 15:19), because the eyes of the Lord looked upon David's heart and therefore chose him and not Saul (1 Sam. 16:7). David himself had claimed that the eyes of the Lord preserved him against all opposition from Saul and his supporters (1 Sam. 26:24), and that even when his throne was under threat from Absalom's rebellion, "the eyes of the Lord" would restore him his throne (2 Sam. 15:25). When this happened, David exalted that he was seen as pure in the Lord's eyes (2 Sam. 22:25), and God's comment in 1 Kings 15:5,11 confirms this. All this was highly relevant to Solomon at the start of his reign, when he was given his wisdom, and when perhaps he wrote it down in the form of the book of Proverbs. So a statement that is true enough in itself is being given a subtext of justifying David's dynasty through Solomon. God's comment on all this subtexting and self-justification is in 1 Kings 11:6: "Solomon did that which was evil in the eyes of Yahweh, and didn't go fully after Yahweh, as did David his father".

Another reading is possible. Angels have a special role in performing the miracle of preserving God's word intact. This work of the Angels is maybe referred to here in Prov. 22:12 "The eyes (Angels) of the Lord preserve knowledge", which is now concentrated in the form of the written word.

Watch over knowledge-

The idea of being 'preserved' or watched over is commonly used by David in the Psalms he wrote whilst under persecution from Saul or opposition from pretenders to his throne at the end of his life (Ps. 12:7; 25:21; 31:23; 32:7; 40:11; 61:7; 64:1; 140:1 all use the same Hebrew word as found here in Prov. 22:12 for "preserve"). Yet again, Solomon is upholding his father David as the parade example of a man preserved by God, and he is using that to proclaim his own preservation by God. But David also very often uses this word to speak of how he in turn had 'preserved' or 'kept' God's way and commandments. And Solomon didn't want to notice that conditional element.

Solomon surely by metonymy is putting 'discretion' or 'wisdom' for the discreet / wise person, who was preeminently himself. In contrast to the apostates alluded to in the previous verses, whose destiny and claims to the throne had ended in failure, he hints that *his* preservation to be king was because "the eyes of the Lord" had preserved him because he was wise / discreet. But he overlooks the fact that his wisdom was a gift from God and was not intrinsic to himself. The "eyes of the Lord" perhaps allude to Angels, and Solomon may have in view

how the cherubim preserved / guarded the way to the tree of life; and he obviously felt that he and his kingdom were in the way to the tree of life, to the Kingdom of God on earth.

But He frustrates the words of the unfaithful-

A reference to how Solomon perceived that all opposition to him had come to nothing. "The unfaithful" is a term David uses about Saul and his other opponents (Ps. 25:3; 59:5; 119:158). But Biblical history demonstrates that in fact his dynasty was not preserved in the absolute terms he envisaged, because upon his death, the majority of Israel divided from his dynasty and made Jeroboam their king and rejected the dynasty of David: "What portion have we in David? Neither do we have an inheritance in the son of Jesse. To your tents, Israel! Now see to your own house, David" (1 Kings 12:16).

"Unfaithful" or "traitors" is the term used by David of Saul and his supporters (Ps. 25:3; 59:5; 119:158). Solomon uses this term, teaching that "transgressors" must be rooted out of the earth / *eretz* promised to Abraham (Prov. 2:22), and that the "transgressors" are to face judgment (Prov. 11:3,6; 13:2; 21:18; 22:12; 23:28; 25:19). All Solomon says is true, but he clearly has in view the house and supporters of Saul, who were a group he felt he needed to repress in order to keep his own kingdom and power intact.

Pro 22:13 The lazy one says, There is a lion outside! I will be killed in the streets!-

"The lazy one" is a term only found in Proverbs, and 14 times at that. Solomon was active, for all his sins, he was not lazy. That wasn't his personality type. And he rather glorifies that, as if works can justify a person, and as if more passive personality types are thereby found to be condemned and rejected by God. That isn't the case; personality type is not the basis upon which we are justified before God. Rather is it by grace through faith, and Solomon just didn't get that at all. David was the man characterized by being fearless of lions (1 Sam. 17:34). So again, we see a subtext of justifying his father David. Solomon's implication is surely that a lion may indeed be outside, but it is laziness which stops a man going outside. And again, that seems rather a strange thing to say. Surely fear is the reason a man won't go outside in this case, not laziness. But Solomon calls the man lazy, because he himself was well known as *not* a lazy person.

It's also worth noting that Saul and also Absalom's supporters are described as lions (2 Sam. 1:23; 17:10; Ps. 10:9; 22:13,21). David was given victory against them all, by grace, as he often celebrated in the Psalms. But Solomon considered that such victory was because he and his father were not lazy, and had gone out against the lions. There's a significant difference in approach, and again, Solomon is justifying himself by framing Divine wisdom in a way which alludes to himself and his father.

Pro 22:14 The mouth of an adulteress is a deep pit: he who is under Yahweh's wrath will fall into it-

The Hebrew *zur* is translated "strange women" in the AV, but it can mean simply one who turns aside (LXX "a transgressor"). It doesn't have to refer to a woman who tempts. Solomon may be saying that by listening to wrong advisers, "he who is under Yahweh's wrath will

fall". The Hebrew for "fall" is repeatedly used about the 'fall' of Saul and his family (1 Sam. 31:1,4,8; 2 Sam. 1:4,10,12,19,25,27; Ps. 5:10; 7:15; 20:8; 35:8; 36:12; 57:6), whereas David did not "fall" due to Saul's machinations (1 Sam. 18:25; 26:20 s.w.). "He who is under Yahweh's wrath" would be how Solomon saw Saul and his family. There might even be reference to the way in which Saul 'fell' to the earth as a result of the words of the witch woman at Endor (1 Sam. 28:20 s.w.), and to how the family of Joab [who tried to usurp David's throne in opposition to Solomon] were cursed to 'fall' (2 Sam. 3:29).

Solomon rejected this wisdom and only came to agree with it through doing just what he here condemns (Ecc. 7:26).

Pro 22:15

Folly is bound up in the heart of a child-

This doesn't serve as any evidence that human beings are born intrinsically evil, because the next half of the verse says that this 'folly' can depart from a person as they pass through the process of discipline. The majority of the 25 usages of the word translated "folly" are found in Solomon's Proverbs; perhaps he had in view Nabal, 'folly', whose wife Abigail was one of his father's wives, and whose children were surely in competition with him for the throne. He therefore appears to rather belabour the folly of 'folly', and here makes the point that whatever 'folly' had been in him as a child, had been driven from him by the discipline of his wonderful father David. "Bound up" is the same Hebrew word used about those who 'conspired' against David (2 Sam. 15:31). Solomon may be implying: 'But if these people had been properly brought up, like I was, as the true scion of David, then such conspiracy would have been driven out of them in youth as it was with me'. "Child" can just as well be translated "young man". Prov. 7:7 singles out a particular "young man" [s.w. "child"] who was lacking in "heart", whose folly stood out from that of the other "simple ones". These may well refer to the 200 'simple ones' who went with Absalom in his rebellion against David (2 Sam. 15:11). One of them was particularly singled out here by Solomon as being foolish. And it's no accident that David calls Absalom "the young man [s.w. "child"] Absalom" (2 Sam. 14:21; 18:5,12,29,32). "Young man" was perhaps David's term of endearment for Absalom. The same "young man" [s.w. "child"] may be in view here in 22:15. The context of the chapter is Solomon arguing that *he* and not anyone else like Absalom was the rightful successor to David. He may be suggesting that Absalom had not been properly raised from childhood, his foolishness had not been driven from him by a good upbringing, and therefore he was not the proper candidate for their father's throne. Seeing it was women who raised the children, it's significant that Absalom's mother appears to have been a Gentile, daughter of a Syrian king (2 Sam. 3:3), whereas Solomon was the son of Bathsheba, from a Jerusalem family right at the center of David's Government.

The rod of discipline drives it far from him-

This is the same word as found in the promises to David in 2 Sam. 7:14 about David's Messianic son: "I will chasten him with the rod of men". Solomon felt he was the fulfilment of those promises, and that the warning of conditionality, that the Messianic Son must beware not to sin, simply meant that he as a child had naturally been foolish, but "the rod" had driven

this from him. In this way Solomon minimized the sense of possible failure and the conditionality of the promises made to him. A related word translated "discipline" is found in 1 Kings 12:11,14, where Solomon's son Rehoboam recognizes that Solomon had 'chastised' or 'disciplined' his people severely. And it was this which led to the diminishing of Solomon's dynasty, rather than its establishment. Again we see evidence that Solomon's justification of his dynasty and claim to the throne didn't hold up for long. Subsequent Biblical history always seems to disprove and invalidate his claims.

Solomon has so much to say about "correction" or "instruction" coming from the possession of wisdom (Prov. 8:10,33; 10:17; 12:1; 13:1,24; 15:5,10,32; 16:22; 19:20,27; 22:15; 23:12,13). But in the end he chastised or corrected his people by whipping them (s.w. 1 Kings 12:11,14). Solomon initially asked for wisdom in order to guide his people, but he ended up whipping / physically chastising them into conformity with his wishes rather than allowing wisdom to correct. Again, he was playing God; for it is God through His wisdom who chastises, and not man. But Solomon thought he was effectively God to his people. This is why Solomon argues that servants cannot be corrected by words (Prov. 29:19 s.w.), and a child must be physically chastised (s.w. Prov. 19:18; 29:17 cp. Prov. 13:24; 23:13), regardless of his screams of pain. This kind of thing is a denial of his claims elsewhere that it is Divine wisdom which chastises / corrects, and such correction is from God and not man. Solomon's final description of himself as an old and foolish king who refuses to be admonished says it all (Ecc. 4:13); he admonishes others (s.w. Ecc. 12:12), but refuses to be admonished or corrected by his own wisdom. He failed to personalize it.

Pro 22:16 Whoever oppresses the poor for his own increase and whoever gives to the rich- David's Psalm 119 seems written when he was on the run from Saul. He speaks of how he was 'oppressed' by Saul (Ps. 119:121,122); and he saw himself as "the poor". Samuel had predicted that Saul would oppress the poor for his own gain, and so it happened. So we have here another sideward swipe at the house of Saul. And yet as noted on other verses in this chapter, Solomon was ultimately guilty of what he accuses his opponents of; for it was he who oppressed the poor in Israel, and this led to the decline of his dynasty.

Oppression seems to have been a characteristic of the reigns of Saul and Absalom. See on Ps. 62:10. This was the equivalent of how Saul oppressed David. Samuel's insistence that *he* has not oppressed the people is in the context of his warning that Saul would do this (1 Sam. 12:3,4). When Solomon later condemns the 'oppressors' (s.w. Prov. 14:31; 22:16; 28:3,24), he has in view a wishing of judgment upon the house of Saul. "The poor" whom they had oppressed would easily refer to David (1 Sam. 18:23; Ps. 34:6).

Both come to poverty-

Considering that the wicked often prosper materially in this life, "poverty" must refer to poverty of spirit.

Pro 22:17 Turn your ear, and listen to the words of the wise; apply your heart to my teaching-

Now begins the "thirty pieces of advice". "The wise" is a title of both David (2 Sam. 14:20) and Solomon (1 Kings 2:9; 5:7). Solomon makes the connection with himself obvious in the second half of the verse: "apply your heart to *my* teaching". Wisdom was listening to him and obeying him; and of course he had been given Divine wisdom, so he was partially right. It's just unfortunate that the rest of the chapter is his own self-justification. "My teaching" is literally "my knowledge" (see AV). But Solomon also taught that knowledge comes from God (Prov. 2:6 s.w.). David had urged people to turn to God's word directly (especially throughout Psalm 119), whereas Solomon 'plays God' and urges people to get there Divine knowledge from *him*. By doing so, he associates respect of himself with respect towards God.

As noted on Ps. 119:36; 141:4, David believed that God could act deep within the psychology or heart of man, to incline us toward righteousness and away from evil. This is how the Holy Spirit works today. Solomon believed the same (s.w. 1 Kings 8:58), but only in theory; for his Gentile wives inclined or turned away his heart from God (s.w. 1 Kings 11:3,9). God will not turn our hearts anywhere we ourselves don't want to go. Solomon often appeals for us to incline our hearts to wisdom (s.w. Prov. 2:2; 4:20; 5:1; 22:17), but he himself was inclined to apostasy (s.w. 1 Kings 11:3,9). All his emphasis is upon the need to incline ourselves, whereas his father David trusted in the work of the Spirit to incline his heart to good and away from evil (Ps. 141:4; 119:36 etc.).

Pro 22:18 For it is a pleasant thing if you keep them within you-

David had written of the blessedness of keeping God's word within us, but Solomon speaks of keeping *his* teaching within the heart. Whilst admittedly he was teaching Divine wisdom, we can see how he was misusing his position in order to get a personal following. Every true teacher is not standing between God and man, but merely directing attention to God's word, rather than his or her own words.

If all of them are ready on your lips-

The sense of the Hebrew is unclear. "If you remember them and can quote them" (GNB), "if all of them are ready on your lips" (ESV), "they shall also gladden thee on thy lips" (LXX). Perhaps the idea is that they would be recited as songs- in other words, Solomon wished for his Proverbs to be recited and perhaps sung just as the Psalms of his father David had been. In this case we can yet again sense an overpowering pressure he felt to live out parental expectation. See on 22:20 *Haven't I written to you thirty excellent things.*

Pro 22:19 That your trust may be in Yahweh- Again, David is the one who is so often presented as 'trusting in Yahweh' (the same Hebrew word is found in Ps. 13:5; 21:7; 22:9; 25:2; 26:1; 27:3; 28:7; 40:4; 52:8; 65:5; 71:5 etc.); thus Solomon presents his father David as the epitome of the idealized believer. Solomon considers that listening to his Proverbs will lead the listener to such trust; David uses the word to describe how he had to throw himself upon the Lord due to his own sins (Ps. 52:8) or extremity of situation. Solomon, by contrast, seemed to consider 'trust' as something attainable by mere theory.

"Trust" is literally 'a fortress'. The secure fortress was Zion (Is. 32:18; Ps. 125:1 s.w.), "the stronghold of Zion, the same is the city of David" (2 Sam. 5:7). Whilst what Solomon says is

true, and repeats the multiple cases of David in the Psalms professing trust in Yahweh as his strong fortress, Solomon as ever has his agenda of self justification; he saw his possession of Zion as a sign that he feared Yahweh acceptably, and that his children would continue the Davidic line of glory. But sacred space is not so ultimately important to God. Possession of the literal stronghold of Zion was nothing compared to trust in Yahweh.

I teach you today, even you- Does Solomon have one specific individual in view? Is this the same person to whom he refers as "my son"? If we are to take this literally, then we are left with the impression that Solomon wished his own son Rehoboam to be as fixated upon him as Solomon had been upon his own father David. The relative failure of Rehoboam would therefore be another demonstration that Solomon's theories about his own dynasty were wrong.

Pro 22:20 Haven't I written to you thirty excellent things of counsel and knowledge-

The Hebrew is capable of various translation; another option is to read this as meaning 'I have written to you things which you are to copy out and memorize'. In this case, we would again see Solomon seeking to have his Proverbs memorized and recited just as his father's Psalms were. We must remember that David was the greatest composer / musician of the day; everyone was going around humming his songs and muttering his words as they worked. And Solomon wanted his Proverbs to be treated likewise. See on 22:18 *If all of them are ready on your lips*. There are many repeated verses in Proverbs- it seems over 20% of the material is repeated. One reason for that could be that the material was designed to be memorized and / or publically performed.

Pro 22:21 to teach you truth, reliable words, to give sound answers to the ones who sent you?-

People came to hear Solomon's wisdom from many nations (1 Kings 4:34), so the book of Proverbs was maybe first compiled as an answer to be sent back to them. But many versions translate the Hebrew the opposite way around: "When you are sent to find it out, you will bring back the right answer" (GNB).

Pro 22:22

Don't exploit the poor, because he is poor- AV "rob". The word is used of what Saul did to "the poor" David (Ps. 35:10).

And don't crush the needy in court- Again, we find the Hebrew used for how Saul tried to "crush" David (Ps. 143:3). "In court" is literally 'the gate', and perhaps Solomon had in view how his competitor Absalom stood in the gate promising all kinds of advantage over the poor to the rich.

Pro 22:23 for Yahweh will plead their case, and plunder the life of those who plunder them- The same phrase used of how God pleaded David's case against Saul and Nabal (1 Sam.

24:15; 25:39; Ps. 35:1; 119:154) and Absalom (Ps. 43:1). Yet again, David is presented as the parade example of the righteous, and David's enemies are presented as the unwise and rejected.

Pro 22:24 Don't befriend a hot-tempered man-

The same word is used about David's brother Eliab, another opponent of David (1 Sam. 17:28); Saul (1 Sam. 20:30; Ps. 55:3) and all David's enemies (Ps. 138:7). Whilst all Solomon says in the Proverb is indeed true, he clearly had an agenda- to justify his purging of the party of all historical opponents to his father.

And don't associate with one who harbours anger-

Solomon is justifying his purging of those associated with his father's opponents. But the Hebrew words used here are used of Solomon's association with Gentile women, who led him away from the faith of his father (1 Kings 11:2). And we have seen this so often in church life. Those who shout the loudest against association with others within the community of God's people are often the very ones who are deeply associated with unbelievers through various forms of unspiritual relationships.

Pro 22:25 lest you learn his ways, and ensnare your soul-

Bad company, even amongst the people of God, rubs off on us; we are more vulnerable to negative spiritual influences than we think. Solomon's idea was that friendship with unspiritual people will eventually result in us learning their ways and acting like them, even if that is not the case at the point of initial friendship. This was precisely what Solomon himself did in marrying Gentile women, who in time did indeed make him learn their idolatrous ways. David was the one who repeatedly avoided the snares set for him by Saul (s.w. 1 Sam. 18:21; Ps. 64:5; 140:5; 141:9). So again, the wise man is being set up as Solomon's father David.

Pro 22:26 Don't you be one of those who strike hands, of those who are collateral for debts-

The prohibition was in the case of a person standing surety when they did not actually have the money to do so (:27), in fact they only had their 'bed', which may be a reference to the outer garment in which a poor person slept (Ex. 22:26,27). The warning would appear to be not to boast of wealth which you don't have, standing surety for someone else's debt when actually if they default, you all the same could not pay the debt. All the rest of this chapter has been making allusion to historical figures and incidents in the lives of David and Solomon. It would be surprising if there is no such allusion here in :26,27, but admittedly it is hard to perceive. But it may well have been an allusion to a situation well known at the time.

The law of Moses didn't forbid giving or taking collateral for loans, it accepted this would happen (Ex. 22:25-27). But Solomon in the Proverbs is quite obsessed with forbidding it in very strong terms (Prov. 6:1-3; 11:15; 17:18; 20:16; 22:26; 27:13- all quite some emphasis). Perhaps Solomon recalled some bad experience in his family because of this. There is the otherwise curious statement in 1 Sam. 17:18 that David's brothers, Solomon's uncles, were to

return a collateral. Perhaps this ruined the family and Solomon's wisdom has some human element in it, reflecting his own bad experiences in his family life. But there is nothing wrong with giving or taking collateral for a loan; what is condemned in God's law is the abuse of the debtor and the abuse of the situation. Indeed David and Hezekiah ask God to be collateral for their needs and debts in various ways (Ps. 119:122; Is. 38:14). And God gives the Holy Spirit in our hearts as collateral on His debt, as He sees it, to save us (2 Cor. 1:22; 5:5; Eph. 1:14); and in response we give our hearts as a pledge to Him (Jer. 30:21 Heb.). So forbidding the practice seems out of step with the spirit of grace. It would mean asking of God what we are unprepared to do for others. Solomon had not known need, neither material nor spiritual, and it shows in his attitude to this matter. It makes hollow all Solomon's exhortations to be generous to your poor neighbour and to be a brother in adversity to your neighbour (Prov. 14:21; 17:17). Solomon is here reasoning from the viewpoint of secular wisdom.

Pro 22:27 If you don't have means to pay, why should he take away your bed from under you?-

See on :26. This is a somewhat exaggerated statement, because the spirit of the Mosaic law in Dt. 24:13 effectively forbade this. But as noted on :26, Solomon is so obsessed by this particular issue of collateral that he exaggerates his case.

Pro 22:28 Don't move the ancient boundary stone, which your fathers have set up-

This is cited as one of the clearest quotations in Proverbs from the Egyptian 'Wisdom of Amenemopet'. Here we may see evidence of Solomon wishing to appease his Egyptian wife; or, if in fact the Egyptian document was quoting from Proverbs, we would have evidence that Solomon's Egyptian wife shared some of the Proverbs with her people. However, Solomon is here only repeating the spirit of the Mosaic command about this (Dt. 19:14; 27:17); so my sense is that it was the Egyptians who copied from the Biblical source rather than the other way around. The preceding verses are about pretending to have more cash wealth than one does; and this verse is similar, in warning against appearing to have more land than one does. In the spirit of Solomon's self-justification which has been seen earlier in this chapter, it could be that Solomon, as the world's richest man, is saying that he has real wealth, and doesn't have to pretend. In this case we again can perceive an element of self-justification and criticism of anyone less than him.

Pro 22:29 Do you see a man skilled in his work? He will serve kings. He won't serve obscure men-

For Solomon as a king to teach that only smart people serve kings is again merely a truism-until we realize the manipulative game he is playing. The message really is: 'If you submit to me as king, then you're smart. You must be- because my proverb says you will be!'. But we must remember that there were many pretenders to the throne at Solomon's time, and so by reasoning like this he is seeking to justify himself and those who take his side. As noted before several times in this chapter, Solomon's attempts to inject self-justification into the Proverbs so often ended up going wrong. Jeroboam was a zealous, industrious servant of

Solomon, who fitted the language of this verse exactly (1 Kings 11:28); but he later turned against Solomon and divided Solomon's kingdom in the next generation. We can also see in "a man skilled in his work" a reference to the skilled men of Hiram, king of Tyre, who worked for Solomon in building the temple. But again, Solomon and Hiram fell out and again, Solomon's kingdom suffered because of this (1 Kings 9:13). Solomon's flattery of his servants through this Proverb just didn't come to anything- indeed, it ended up in grief.

PROVERBS CHAPTER 23

Pro 23:1 When you sit to eat with a ruler, consider diligently what is before you-

Solomon was the "ruler" (s.w. 1 Kings 4:21; 2 Chron. 7:18), but he may have in view any person of authority, as he uses the term in Prov. 22:7 "the rich rules over the poor". The book of Proverbs has in view a bad ruler (s.w. Prov. 28:15; 29:2,12,26; Ecc. 9:17). And this bad ruler offers deceitful food (Prov. 23:3), which Solomon in Prov. 23 advises against eating. We need to recall that eating together was seen as a sign of fellowship and acceptance of each other within the same cause. Solomon may have in view Jeroboam, who clearly sought to usurp Solomon as king. Or he may be alluding back to the various people like Absalom and Adonijah who had feasted to celebrate their apparent usurping of David's throne. The LXX in Prov. 23:1-8 reads rather differently to the Masoretic Text, and speaks much of the evil of the ruler in view.

Pro 23:2 put a knife to your throat, if you are a man given to appetite-

The idea may be that through eating heartily with this bad ruler, you are sucked deeper into fellowship with him.

Pro 23:3 Don't be desirous of his dainties, since they are deceitful food-

Heb. "don't desire huge meals". But Solomon did the very opposite in his own life (1 Kings 4:22,23). But see on :2. "Deceitful" is a word associated with idols (s.w. Am. 2:4). There may be an allusion to participating in idol feasts which this wicked ruler presided over.

Pro 23:4 Don't weary yourself to be rich; in your wisdom, show restraint-

But Solomon did desire wealth in the end (Ecc. 2:8,11). When he writes things like "the thoughts of the diligent tend only to plenteousness" (Prov. 21:5 AV), he must inevitably be connecting his own fantastic wealth / blessing with his hard work. He was justifying himself by works rather than by faith; he assumed his righteousness and acceptance with God rather than struggling through the work of faith. Yet he could say "Labour not to be rich; cease from thine own wisdom" (Prov. 23:4 AV). He had all the right theory. Solomon was an active, industrious person by nature; and whilst all his many proverbs criticizing the lazy and glorifying the diligent are true as they stand, is there not in all this some element of self-justification, interpreting his own natural personality type as inherently righteous?

LXX "If thou art poor, measure not thyself with a rich man; but refrain thyself in thy wisdom" could be read as Solomon saying that he, the ultimate rich man, was not to be questioned, but his authority accepted without question.

Pro 23:5 Why do you set your eyes on that which is not? For it certainly sprouts wings like an eagle and flies in the sky-

If the reference is to wealth (:4), then Solomon appears very hypocritical in that for him, wealth was clearly something he set his eyes upon. And he often says that riches are given as a reward for wisdom. And yet on the other hand, he theoretically recognizes that wealth can

disappear and has no ultimate reality. But so many will say the same, theoretically accepting how ephemeral are riches; and yet focus their lives and thinking upon them.

The LXX reads this as applying to the ruler and not the food: "If thou shouldest fix thine eye upon him, he will disappear; for wings like an eagle's are prepared for him, and he returns to the house of his master".

Pro 23:6 Don't eat the food of him who has a stingy eye, and don't crave his delicacies-

To eat together, or to decline to do so, was understood as a religious act, a sign of acceptance of a person. Hence the radical nature of the open table policy of the Lord Jesus in the New Testament. The man with the stingy eye is presumably the wicked ruler of :1. If a more wealthy or powerful person invited you to their table, it would be hard for the weaker person to decline it. But this is what Solomon urges.

Pro 23:7 for as he thinks about the cost, so he is. Eat and drink! he says to you, but his heart is not with you-

AV "For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he". The Israelites were seen as grasshoppers by their enemies- and so this is how they came to perceive themselves (Num. 13:33). Prov. 23:7 RV observes: "As he reckoneth within himself, so is he". We are defined by our own self-perception. We must come in the end to perceive ourselves from God's perspective and not according to how men perceive us. We must see ourselves from outside ourselves, and thereby "guide thine own heart in the way" (Prov. 23:19).

It is a common Bible teaching that how a man thinks is expressed in his actions (Prov. 23:7; Mt. 12:34); a little reflection upon our own actions will confirm this. We think of something and then we do it. Our 'spirit' or mind may reflect upon the fact that we are hungry and desire food. We see a banana going spare in the kitchen; that desire of the 'spirit' is then translated into action - we reach out for the banana, peel it and eat. This simple example shows why the Hebrew word for 'spirit' means both the breath or mind, and also power. Our spirit, the essential us, refers to our thoughts and therefore also to the actions which we take to express those thoughts or disposition within us. On a far more glorious scale, God's spirit is the same; it is the power by which He displays His essential being, His disposition and purpose. God thinks and therefore does things. "As I have thought, so shall it come to pass; and as I have purposed, so shall it stand" (Is. 14:24).

Pro 23:8 The morsel which you have eaten you shall vomit up, and lose your good words-

The allusion may be to Job 20:15, where the man who has gained riches wrongfully vomits them up (s.w.). The same word is used of eating too much honey, and vomiting it up (Prov. 25:16). All this is true, but Prov. 23:8 says that eating the tasty food of the wicked ruler will also lead to vomiting it up. Again Solomon may be cementing his own power, suggesting that any other wealthy ruler is somehow fake, and to sit at his table, in acceptance of him, would be like eating too much honey, partaking in riches wrongfully acquired. Perhaps he has Jeroboam in view.

Pro 23:9 Don't speak in the ears of a fool, for he will despise the wisdom of your words-
Solomon has little patience with fools. He considers anyone who doesn't immediately accept his wisdom to be unworthy of any further effort. He has none of the spirit of patient evangelism which was in David, and which is supremely seen in God's tireless efforts to bring resistant fools to wisdom and His way.

This abusive attitude to people arose from Solomon's obsession with the idea that he had wisdom, and people generally are fools, idiots, unwise- and therefore he could abuse them. This attitude is another outcome of believing that mere possession of truths about God justifies us, and declares all other people foolish, unwise and able to be legitimately abused by us. In contrast, the heart of God (as of David) bleeds for such people and wants to save them rather than gloat in their unwisdom and punish them for it.

Pro 23:10 Don't move the ancient boundary stone; don't encroach on the fields of the fatherless-

This is cited as one of the clearest quotations in Proverbs from the Egyptian 'Wisdom of Amenemopet'. Here we may see evidence of Solomon wishing to appease his Egyptian wife; or, if in fact the Egyptian document was quoting from Proverbs, we would have evidence that Solomon's Egyptian wife shared some of the Proverbs with her people. However, Solomon is here only repeating the spirit of the Mosaic command about this (Dt. 19:14; 27:17); so my sense is that it was the Egyptians who copied from the Biblical source rather than the other way around.

But we also perceive here a spirit of conservatism, wishing everything to be set in stone, because all truth is with Solomon, his judgment is unquestionably correct, no other teacher is to be listened to, and all the boundary stones are to be kept in place in every way. This may be in order to cement the placing of Jerusalem in Solomon's tribal canton of Judah, rather than Benjamin. And he is using the need to protect the fields of the fatherless as a cover for that. This kind of thing often happens in politics; defence of the defenceless is used as a cover for policies which have quite different agendas.

Pro 23:11 for their Defender is strong, He will plead their case against you-

See on :10. "Defender" is 'redeemer', used of Boaz being the kinsman redeemer for Ruth and Naomi. God has an especial interest in the weak, and loves to redeem them. This provides endless encouragement to us, the weak. If we will perceive our weakness. And those who are against the weak, in whatever way [including against the spiritually weak], will be judged. God enters a court of judgment against such people, and Solomon implies that happens in this life.

Pro 23:12 Apply your heart to instruction, and your ears to the words of knowledge-

Solomon has so much to say about "correction" or "instruction" coming from the possession of wisdom (Prov. 8:10,33; 10:17; 12:1; 13:1,24; 15:5,10,32; 16:22; 19:20,27; 22:15;

23:12,13). But in the end he chastised or corrected his people by whipping them (s.w. 1 Kings 12:11,14). Solomon initially asked for wisdom in order to guide his people, but he ended up whipping / physically chastising them into conformity with his wishes rather than allowing wisdom to correct. Again, he was playing God; for it is God through His wisdom who chastises, and not man. But Solomon thought he was effectively God to his people. This is why Solomon argues that servants cannot be corrected by words (Prov. 29:19 s.w.), and a child must be physically chastised (s.w. Prov. 19:18; 29:17 cp. Prov. 13:24; 23:13), regardless of his screams of pain. This kind of thing is a denial of his claims elsewhere that it is Divine wisdom which chastises / corrects, and such correction is from God and not man. Solomon's final description of himself as an old and foolish king who refuses to be admonished says it all (Ecc. 4:13); he admonishes others (s.w. Ecc. 12:12), but refuses to be admonished or corrected by his own wisdom. He failed to personalize it.

Pro 23:13 Don't withhold correction from a child. If you punish him with the rod, he will not die-

As explained on :12, this is true so far as it goes, and is a fair enough commentary upon the Mosaic instruction to stone to death a disobedient son. But Solomon took this idea of physical chastisement too far, to the point of not giving due weight to the power of God Himself through His wisdom to discipline or chastise a person.

Pro 23:14 Punish him with the rod, and save his soul from Sheol-

Quite clearly, the efforts of parents on behalf of their children can affect the eternal destiny of a third party. Prov. 23:13,14 speaks of how we can save a child from the [eternal] grave by correctly disciplining and teaching him. Indeed, the Proverbs have so much to say about how parental influence can affect a child's eternal destiny. But see on :12.

Discipline and punishment of the unwise is a big theme in Solomon's Proverbs. He took it to the extent of whipping his own people (1 Kings 12:11). This abusive attitude to people arose from his obsession with the idea that he had wisdom, and people generally are fools, idiots, unwise- and therefore he could abuse them. This abusive attitude to people is another outcome of believing that mere possession of truths about God justifies us, and declares all other people foolish, unwise and able to be legitimately abused by us. In contrast, the heart of God (as of David) bleeds for such people and wants to save them rather than gloat in their un wisdom and punish them for it.

Pro 23:15 My son, if your heart is wise, then my heart will be glad, even mine-

Solomon here envisages a meeting of hearts between father and son (:16). And indeed family relationships are enhanced beyond any description if hearts are connected spiritually. He parallels the son's wise heart with the son's lips speaking rightly (:16), correctly understanding that thoughts lead to words (Mt. 12:34).

Pro 23:16 yes, my heart will rejoice, when your lips speak what is right-

See on :15. But Solomon is repeating to his son what David had said to him, in commanding him to have lips which spoke truth and not falsehood (s.w. Ps. 34:13). Solomon's heart departed from Yahweh and was turned aside to idols, even if his lips continued to teach Divine truth (Ecc. 2:9). But families can still go through the motions of spirituality.

Pro 23:17 Don't let your heart envy sinners; but rather fear Yahweh all the day long-
David had calmly urged not to be envious of the wicked (s.w. Ps. 37:1), but he himself almost failed in this (Ps. 73:3 s.w.). We can profess clearly how much we are not envious of others; and then find ourselves like David, caught in a pang of crisis when we wonder why our lives cannot be like those of the world around us. Solomon simplistically commanded not to be envious of the wicked, drawing a simple contrast between the wicked, and the righteous who are not envious of them (Prov. 3:31; 23:17; 24:1,19 s.w.). But this is not how it was in reality with his father David, who admits to almost having given in to envy of the wicked (Ps. 73:3) despite his earlier simplistic condemnation of such envy (Ps. 37:1), and was only saved from that by God's gracious action on his heart (Ps. 73:2). Solomon's proverbs seem to fail to address this complexity of situations because of his own self-righteousness; and yet all he says is inspired and true so far as it goes.

Pro 23:18 Indeed surely there is a future hope, and your hope will not be cut off-
David's "expectation" in the context of Ps. 62:5 was the continuation of his own kingdom, despite all the threats against it from the likes of Saul, Absalom and others who would usurp his Davidic kingship and kingdom. Solomon likely uses the word for "expectation" with the same subtext; that all opposition to him was based upon a false expectation which would be dashed by God (s.w. Prov. 10:28; 11:7,23; 23:18; 24:14). LXX "For if thou shouldest keep these things, thou shalt have posterity; and thine hope shall not be removed" would imply that Solomon thought that the promises concerning his kingly line continuing depended upon accepting his wisdom.

Pro 23:19 Listen, My son, and be wise, and keep your heart on the right path!-
AV "Guide thine heart in the way". This is true insofar as there must be an element of self control and self direction of our thoughts. But it is hard to consciously direct our heart. David by contrasted invited God to keep his heart in the way / right path (s.w. Ps. 119:32). And the Holy Spirit is available to all who make the same request today. Those who trust in their own steel will and self direction often utterly fail, as Solomon did.

Pro 23:20 Don't keep company with those who drink too much wine, or those who gorge themselves on meat-

This again is true, but the Lord Jesus was known and mocked for keeping company with gluttons and drunkards. He had no fear of guilt by association nor contamination by communion. Mere physical separation from wicked people, of the type so often advised by Solomon, will not lead to our own spiritual growth nor their salvation.

Pro 23:21 for the drunkard and the glutton shall become poor; and drowsiness clothes them in rags-

LXX "for every drunkard and whoremonger shall be poor; and every sluggard shall clothe himself with tatters and ragged garments". This sounds exactly the picture of the prodigal son presented by the Lord Jesus in His parable. But again, His parable appears designed to engage with Solomon's views and modify or qualify them. For the Father, God, eagerly wants the repentance of such a person and is ever waiting and looking out for their repentance. But Solomon simply writes off such persons as lacking wisdom, and as if he forgets them.

Pro 23:22 Listen to your father who gave you life, and don't despise your mother when she is old-

But Solomon disregarded Bathsheba's warning not to drink and marry Gentiles (Prov. 31) - he did just this when she was old. Solomon also fails to give due weight to the fact that the mothers of his sons were unbelieving Gentiles. He is coming out with wise words when his own family life was totally out of step with them.

Pro 23:23 Buy the truth, and don't sell it. Get wisdom, discipline, and understanding-

"The truth" is a term associated with God's covenant with David and Abraham. The Hebrew for "buy" carries the idea of establishing. The idea is that knowledge and understanding would establish the promises to David and the line through Solomon. But Biblically, "the truth" is God's truth to man, His faithfulness to His covenant. But as often, Solomon sees it the other way around; truth must be bought by man from God, insofar as man gets the right knowledge about Him. This basic denial of grace is seen in so many Christian groups.

Pro 23:24 The father of the righteous has great joy. Whoever fathers a wise child delights in him-

Solomon considers himself as the ultimately wise child. Clearly from Ps. 45,72, David delighted in Solomon. So again, he is using Divine truth to justify himself.

Pro 23:25 Let your father and your mother be glad! Let her who bore you rejoice!-

The wicked woman lying in wait to kill the simple man (Prov. 23:25-27) is a clear enough reference to Delilah and her henchmen lying in wait in the bedroom. And yet, for all this reflection upon Samson, Solomon went and did *par excellence* according to Samson's well-studied folly. And we can do the same, in principle. There is this vast distance between knowledge and belief.

Pro 23:26 My son, give me your heart; and let your eyes observe my ways-

Even when married to Gentile women, Solomon could charge his son to "observe my ways. For... a strange [Gentile] woman is a narrow pit" (Prov. 23:26,27). The fact he himself had fallen into the pit of marriage to unbelievers just didn't seem to occur to him; he was sure that

he was in fact an upright example. This passage reflects more than many the extent to which Solomon's conscience was so deeply damaged. For he wasn't saying 'Do as I say but not as I do'. He was beyond that- doing the very wrong that he warned others not to do, and confidently presenting himself to them as a good example whose ways were to be observed.

Solomon was so sure of his own rightness that he just couldn't conceive that in reality he might sin or break the principles he preached. He warns his son to "observe my ways. For... a gentile woman is a narrow pit" (Prov. 23:26,27). He held himself up in this matter as an example to his son even at the very time when he had married Gentile women! He describes in Ecclesiastes how he indulged every possible desire, and took each of his lusts to its ultimate term. Yet he warned his son to only eat honey in moderation, i.e. don't gorge your natural desires (Prov. 25:16). This sense of the impossibility of spiritual failure is stamped all over Solomon; and it has been the downfall of so many others too.

David by contrast felt he was kept or guarded in the way of integrity by God constantly pointing out that way to him (s.w. Ps. 119:33). Solomon seems to think that mere possession of Divine truth made him "righteous", and this of itself kept him in the way; and the way to follow was *his* way rather than God's. He has none of the constant desire to be taught which David had, because he assumed he had received total truth. Those who consider they hold "the truth" as a package of doctrinally correct propositions can make the same mistake as Solomon.

Pro 23:27 For a prostitute is a deep pit; and a Gentile woman is a narrow well-

Often the Proverbs allude to characters in Israel's history. The references to a wise son rejoicing his father and mother (Prov. 23:25) and saddening them by his folly shout for application to Samson. The warnings about not *looking* at a strange woman recall how Samson *saw* the Philistine girl in Timnath and the prostitute in Gaza (14:1; 16:1). The wicked woman lying in wait to kill the simple man (Prov. 23:25-27) is a clear enough reference to Delilah and her henchmen lying in wait in the bedroom. And yet, for all this reflection upon Samson, Solomon went and did *par excellence* according to Samson's well-studied folly. And we can do the same, in principle. There is this vast distance between knowledge and belief.

The blindness of Solomon is driven home time and again; he knew Divine truth, but the more he knew it, the more he lived the very opposite, failing to grasp the deeply personal relevance of truth to himself. A whole string of passages in Proverbs warn of the Gentile / "strange" (AV) woman (2:16; 5:20; 6:24; 7:5; 20:16; 23:27; 27:13). Yet the very same word (translated "outlandish", AV) is used in Neh. 13:26 concerning the women Solomon married. The antidote to succumbing to the wicked woman was to have wisdom- according to Proverbs. And Solomon apparently had wisdom. Yet he succumbed to the wicked woman. He was writing Song of Solomon at the same time as Proverbs. The reason for this must be that Solomon didn't really have wisdom. Yet we know that he was given it in abundance. The resolution of this seems to be that Solomon asked for wisdom in order to lead Israel rather than for himself, he used that wisdom to judge Israel and to educate the surrounding nations. But none of it percolated to himself. As

custodians of true doctrine- for that is what we are- we are likely to suffer from over familiarity with it. We can become so accustomed to 'handling' it, as we strengthen each other, as we preach, that the personal bearing of the Truth becomes totally lost upon us, as it was totally lost upon Solomon.

Pro 23:28 Yes, she lies in wait like a robber, and increases the unfaithful among men-
"Lie in wait" is the word for ambush. Solomon often uses the word, as if it is for him a major characteristic of sinners (Prov. 1:11,18; 7:12; 12:6; 23:28; 24:15). But it's a rather specific word to use so often. It's as if Solomon is consciously alluding to his father's experiences at the hands of the house of Saul (s.w. Ps. 10:9; 59:3), whom Solomon considered a threat to his own kingship. And so he seems to rather like using the term about sinners, as if using his wisdom to have a dig at his immediate opposition.

"Transgressors" or "traitors" is the term used by David of Saul and his supporters (Ps. 25:3; 59:5; 119:158). Solomon uses this term, teaching that "transgressors" must be rooted out of the earth / *eretz* promised to Abraham (Prov. 2:22), and that the "transgressors" are to face judgment (Prov. 11:3,6; 13:2; 21:18; 22:12; 23:28; 25:19). All Solomon says is true, but he clearly has in view the house and supporters of Saul, who were a group he felt he needed to repress in order to keep his own kingdom and power intact.

Pro 23:29 Who has woe? Who has sorrow? Who has strife? Who has complaints? Who has needless bruises? Who has bloodshot eyes?-

Solomon here in Prov. 23:29-31 strongly condemns wine, but later gave himself to wine (Ecc. 2:3). And so he again demonstrated how although his wisdom remained with him and he continued to teach it (Ecc. 2:9), he had failed to personalize that wisdom. It flowed through his mind and his mouth, but took no personal lodgment in his heart.

Pro 23:30 Those who stay long at the wine; those who go to seek out mixed wine-

"Seek" is the word used for seeking wisdom (Job 28:27; Ps. 139:1). The fact the supposedly wise man Solomon sought to wine in later life (Ecc. 2:3) shows that he had not personally sought for wisdom. He had been given a mass of Divine truth in one shot, as it were; but had never personally sought for God or His truth. And this can be true of many 'raise in the Truth', as they think, who in later life find themselves searching everywhere for the truth they had supposedly found in youth.

Pro 23:31 Don't look at the wine when it is red, when it sparkles in the cup, when it goes down smoothly-

Compare this with "...the roof of thy mouth like the best wine, that goeth down smoothly for my beloved" (Song 7:9 RV)- how did Solomon know unless even at a relatively young age, he knew about the sensation of wine from personal experience? Again we see Solomon's failure to be personally touched by the wisdom he knew.

Pro 23:32 In the end, it bites like a snake, and poisons like a viper-

The effect of wine is presented in terms of the serpent, the symbol of all sin and evil. That Solomon would freely explore wine and alcoholism as a possible source for enjoyment in later life (Ecc. 2:3) is again indication enough that he utterly failed to grasp the truths he held and taught on any personal level.

Pro 23:33 Your eyes will see strange things, and your mind will imagine confusing things-

AV "strange women". The idea is that the drunkard will get involved with strange or Gentile women. But this is precisely what Solomon did, before he turned to alcohol (Ecc. 2:3). He was involved with strange women, but condemns alcohol. But he links the two here, and so it is unsurprising that he turns to alcohol later in life. Again, his "wisdom" remained as technical knowledge, so many smart ideas, and was not personalized by him.

Pro 23:34 Yes, you will be as he who lies down in the midst of the sea, or as he who lies on top of the rigging-

The implication may be that the drunk sailor in view was intended to be the captain or pilot of the boat, on top of the rigging, watching astutely as to the direction of the vessel; thus it would be a specific warning to Solomon's son, as the next king. Hence LXX "as a pilot in a great storm".

Pro 23:35 They hit me, and I was not hurt! They beat me, and I don't feel it! When will I wake up so that I can do it again?-

Solomon sees the folly of alcoholism in that the drunkard never learns, and the addiction leads him to seek it again, somehow closing off his mind to the damage he is doing himself and the consequences of his actions. But Solomon married Gentile women (see on :34), and then takes to alcohol (Ecc. 2:3), with no sense of the personal implications of his actions. And this was his problem all along; he refused to personalize the truths he held and taught, and insisted others accepted. This is a basic feature of human nature, which we see in others and of course in our own temptations.

PROVERBS CHAPTER 24

Pro 24:1 Don't be envious of evil men; neither desire to be with them-

See on :19. Solomon has much to say about the evil of envy (e.g. Prov. 14:30; 23:17; 24:1,19; 27:4). But true as his condemnations of envy are, he surely has in mind the way that Ephraim envied Judah, and envied his throne (s.w. Is. 11:13). This all came to full term after his death, when Ephraim departed from Judah under Jeroboam. Again, Solomon is harnessing Divine truth to his own agenda of self justification. And we who claim to hold His truths must take warning. But as he faced death, he came to realize that all such envy is as nothing before the reality of death, which he understood as the end of life, as he had assumed this life was the time for reward and expresses no personal hope in a resurrection of the body (Ecc. 4:4; 9:6).

Pro 24:2 for their hearts plot violence, and their lips talk about mischief-

Ps. 7:14,16 twice refers to the "mischief" [s.w.] done to David by Cush [Ps. 7:1 states the Psalm is about the words and plans of Cush]. Solomon is again referring to how the enemies of his father, whose descendants and supporters were likely still threats to Solomon, were condemned by God.

Pro 24:3 Through wisdom a house is built; by understanding it is established-

The "house" here refers to David's house / family- but this was established through Solomon's line by God's gracious promise to David, not by Solomon's wisdom. Again, his wisdom and possession of academic truth led him to forget the power of grace. Solomon overlooked all the hard work that his father had done in preparing for the temple to be built- in that he claimed all glory for himself: "Through wisdom is an house builded; and by understanding it is established" (Prov. 24:3) he said- perfectly true, but with the self-justifying twist behind the words in his case, that he had built the temple thanks to his own wisdom. Wisdom is given, he said, to the man who is pleasing to God (Ecc. 2:26)- again referring to himself.

Pro 24:4 by knowledge the rooms are filled with all rare and beautiful treasure-

AV "chambers", an allusion to Solomon's store cities where he placed his wealth. But that wealth was a gift from God to him (1 Kings 3:13), it was not because of his wisdom in itself. Again he fails to perceive grace because of his possession of Divine truth.

Pro 24:5 A wise man has great power and a knowledgeable man increases strength-

David's house waxed stronger and stronger (2 Sam. 3:1)- but by grace, because God chose as a sovereign choice to work through Solomon and continue the Davidic line of rulership through him. LXX "A wise man is better than a strong man; and a man who has prudence than a large estate".

Pro 24:6 for by wise guidance you wage your war; and victory is in many advisors-

David had two men specifically noted as his advisors / counsellors (his uncle Jonathan and Ahithophel- 1 Chron. 27:32,33) and likely he had others, e.g. Nathan the prophet. Again Solomon is justifying his father's Government.

Pro 24:7 Wisdom is too high for a fool: he doesn't open his mouth in the gate-

Solomon's simplistic division of people into wise and foolish meant that he despised the fools. He had no interest in evangelism, in trying to persuade them. If they refused wisdom initially, he put them in the 'hopeless' basket as fools who weren't worth bothering with. He had no patience with them, no attempt to patiently persuade or engage with them. God is so different. And this is exactly the condemnatory attitude in those who today have such simplistic worldviews.

Pro 24:8 One who plots to do evil will be called a schemer-

"Will be called" may suggest a name and shame policy by Solomon; for the wisdom given him was ostensibly to enable him to govern and judge Israel. Any who plotted against him (for that is surely the implication) would be pilloried. But Proverbs has much to say about judgment for unwisdom; there is no grace in Solomon. He had not reflected upon his father's salvation by grace alone. Or Solomon may intend this as a commentary upon how the history of his family should be read; for "schemer" is the word used by David for his enemies within the camps of Saul and Absalom (Ps. 10:2,4; 21:11; 31:13; 37:7).

Pro 24:9 The schemes of folly are sin. The mocker is detested by men-

"Is an abomination". "Abomination" is the common word for idols (e.g. Dt. 7:25,26). Idolatry is here interpreted as things like pride and telling lies (:17). These seven things are the essence of idolatry. There is a recurring nature to them, just as idols got a grip on the mind of the worshipper. Solomon often uses the word for quiet, secret sins, words and the matters of the heart, internal attitudes and judgments (Prov. 11:1,20; 12:22; 13:19; 15:26; 16:5; 17:15; 20:10,23; 24:9; 26:25; 28:9; 29:27). And this of course is the essence of idolatry in our age; this is the practical force to us of all Biblical teaching about idolatry.

Pro 24:10 If you falter in the time of trouble, your strength is small-

There are many references to the "day of trouble" in David's Psalms. Solomon appears to be boasting of his father's deliverance from various 'days of trouble'. But the phrase is used of the Assyrian invasion (s.w. Is. 37:3). And some of the Proverbs were rewritten at the time by Hezekiah (Prov. 25:1).

Pro 24:11 Rescue those who are being led away to death! Indeed, hold back those who are staggering to the slaughter!-

AV "If thou forbear to deliver...". Sins of omission are perhaps our most besetting weakness; and to forbear to rescue others on the path to destruction is likely one of our commonest sins of omission.

David may be alluding to the situation in 2 Sam. 18:16, where the followers of Absalom were held back [s.w.] from slaughter by David's army. And as always, Solomon wishes to give a positive spin on every historical event in the life of his father David.

Pro 24:12 If you say, Behold, we didn't know this; doesn't He who weighs the hearts consider it?-

This is a great example of where the Bible is absolutely piercing in its analysis of our human psychology. For from earliest childhood, this is indeed our excuse: 'I didn't know. I didn't notice. I didn't do anything wrong'. And indeed we may not 'do' wrong, in committing sins of commission. But this is exactly our childish excuse for the great sin of omission we commit when we fail to rescue those heading for eternal death (:11).

He who keeps your soul, doesn't He know it? -

God now weighs hearts, and only at the last day renders to every man according as his works shall be. The essence of judgment is therefore ongoing. It's not as if God is not paying attention, and will only review everything at the last day. If we believe that God keeps *our* soul, we should be thereby motivated to reach out and try to preserve others as He does to us.

Shall He not render to every man according to his work? -

Quoted about the last judgment in Rev. 22:12. The "work" in view would therefore be our attitude to others, whether we kidded ourselves we didn't notice their predicament or not.

Pro 24:13 My son, eat honey, for it is good; the droppings of the honeycomb, which are sweet to your taste -

An allusion to how Saul forbade his men to eat honey but Jonathan ate a honeycomb in defiance of this (1 Sam. 14:29). Another justification of his father David. But Solomon is unwittingly perhaps identifying himself with Samson, the only other Biblical character who found and ate a honeycomb- and he was well nigh destroyed by foreign women also.

Pro 24:14 so you shall feel wisdom to be to your soul; if you have found it, then there will be a reward, your hope will not be cut off -

David's "reward" or "expectation" in the context of Ps. 62:5 was the continuation of his own kingdom, despite all the threats against it from the likes of Saul, Absalom and others who would usurp his Davidic kingship and kingdom. Solomon likely uses the word for "expectation" with the same subtext; that all opposition to him was based upon a false expectation which would be dashed by God (s.w. Prov. 10:28; 11:7,23; 23:18; 24:14).

Pro 24:15 Don't lay in wait, wicked man, against the habitation of the righteous. Don't destroy his resting place -

An allusion to how Saul sent men to lay in wait around David's house (1 Sam. 19:11). "Lie in wait" is the word for ambush. Solomon often uses the word, as if it is for him a major characteristic of sinners (Prov. 1:11,18; 7:12; 12:6; 23:28; 24:15). But it's a rather specific word to use so often. It's as if Solomon is consciously alluding to his father's experiences at the hands of the house of Saul (s.w. Ps. 10:9; 59:3), whom Solomon considered a threat to his own kingship. And so he seems to rather like using the term about sinners, as if using his wisdom to have a dig at his immediate opposition.

Pro 24:16 for a righteous man falls seven times, and rises up again; but the wicked are overthrown by calamity -

An allusion to David's moral failures- glorifying David in that he rose up after them. *Seven* times may suggest complete failure. The wicked are overthrown because they will not rise up from their sin in repentance. However, I have noted elsewhere in Proverbs that Solomon appears to totally whitewash David's sin with Solomon's mother Bathsheba. So he may be using "falls" not in the sense of falling into sin, but in the sense of being overwhelmed by calamity. This would give more force to the opening word of the verse: "for...". The connection with :15 is that it is futile for the wicked to try to overthrow the righteous, because the righteous will arise from whatever temporary calamity is brought upon them. This is also how the idea of 'falling' is used in :17.

Pro 24:17 Don't rejoice when your enemy falls, don't let your heart be glad when he is overthrown-

Alluding to how David did not rejoice when Saul fell in battle. This section of the chapter has many references to David. Solomon is using the truths revealed to him as "wisdom" to justify and glorify his father, and thereby himself. And Divine truth can be abused in the same kind of way today.

Pro 24:18 lest Yahweh see it, and it displease Him, and He turn away His wrath from him-

I suggested on :17 that Solomon had in view how David didn't rejoice when Saul fell. But David was genuinely sad when Saul fell, and subsequently showed grace to Saul's family. But Solomon knew nothing of grace, and is ever eager to criticize all his potential competitors for his throne. And so he makes the point that David's lack of rejoicing over Saul actually meant for sure that the wrath of God was upon Saul and his family.

Pro 24:19 Don't fret yourself because of evildoers; neither be envious of the wicked-

David had calmly urged not to be envious of the wicked (s.w. Ps. 37:1), but he himself almost failed in this (Ps. 73:3 s.w.). We can profess clearly how much we are not envious of others; and then find ourselves like David, caught in a pang of crisis when we wonder why our lives cannot be like those of the world around us. Solomon simplistically commanded not to be envious of the wicked, drawing a simple contrast between the wicked, and the righteous who are not envious of them (Prov. 3:31; 23:17; 24:1,19 s.w.). But this is not how it was in reality with his father David, who admits to almost having given in to envy of the wicked (Ps. 73:3) despite his earlier simplistic condemnation of such envy (Ps. 37:1), and was only saved from that by God's gracious action on his heart (Ps. 73:2). Solomon's proverbs seem to fail to address this complexity of situations because of his own self-righteousness; and yet all he says is inspired and true so far as it goes.

Pro 24:20 for there will be no reward to the evil man; and the lamp of the wicked shall be snuffed out-

God promised to give David a light / candle in Jerusalem through the kingship continuing through Solomon (same word in 1 Kings 11:36 "that David may have a light [candle, s.w.] always before Me in Jerusalem"). Solomon is justifying his own taking of the throne.

Pro 24:21 My son, fear Yahweh and the king. Don't join those who are rebellious-
Solomon [in the context of our note on :20] is suggesting that anyone who questions his right to the throne is not fearing God, and anyone involved in rebellion will be destroyed (:22). AV "With them that are given to change". Such ultra conservatism is common in Solomon's thought; he wanted to cement himself in power permanently, and so he clamped down on any change in any context.

Pro 24:22 for their calamity will rise suddenly; and who knows the destruction of them both?-

This is alluding to Dt. 32:35 about the sudden calamity of Israel as a nation if they turn to idolatry. But Solomon applies this language to any group of individuals within Israel who might be rebellious against his rule (:21). Again, he is using Divine truths to bolster his own personal position. But again Solomon is too simplistic in assuming that "calamity" is the judgment of the rebellious. For David his father experienced plenty of calamity (s.w. 2 Sam. 22:19). But this contradicts the simplistic worldview which Solomon wishes to present, whereby the wise have wonderful lives, and the foolish are sinners whose lives are full of calamity. It was this simplistic worldview, failing to perceive that bad things happen to good people, and good people also sin and are foolish at times, which led Solomon to the conceit which was his destruction.

Pro 24:23 These also are sayings of the wise- The rest of this chapter is a separate and third section, incorporated into the anthology which is the book of Proverbs. But it is effectively an appendix to the second section.

To show partiality in judgment is not good-

Solomon was famous for his wise judgment of the two prostitutes. He showed no partiality in that judgment. And so again, whilst what he says is true, he is using Divine truths to justify himself. And he is also having a swipe at his competitor Absalom, who set himself up as the judge of Israel and yet showed partiality towards his potential supporters (2 Sam. 15:5,6).

Pro 24:24 He who says to the wicked, You are righteous; peoples shall curse him, and nations shall abhor him-

An indirect criticism of Absalom's unjust giving of judgment being the basis upon which he garnered support for his rebellion against David (2 Sam. 15:6). The allusion is to Dt. 15:1. Solomon repeats this idea in 1 Kings 8:32, where he says that God condemns the wicked but justifies the righteous. And in Prov. 24:24 and other Proverbs, he teaches that this is how men should judge, lest they be cursed. But by having this position, he shows his total lack of appreciation of God's grace to his father David. For David was worthy of condemnation, but by grace, he the wicked was justified, counted righteous, when he was not (Ps. 32:2 cp. Rom. 4:4-6). This lack of appreciation of grace arose from how it seems Solomon totally whitewashed the sin of his father David with his mother Bathsheba. And it resulted in his lack of grace, and failure throughout Proverbs to appreciate that human behaviour is nuanced, and is not simply divided between spotlessly righteous behaviour and terrible sinfulness.

Pro 24:25 but it will go well with those who convict the guilty, and a rich blessing will come on them-

As noted on :24, Solomon fails to appreciate that God does not convict the guilty in every case, but imputed righteousness to the likes of his father David. God's blessing is in fact the imputation of righteousness to the guilty "without works" (Rom. 4:6). But the "blessing" can be read as the blessing and approbation of men; hence LXX "But they that reprove him shall appear more excellent, and blessing shall come upon them". What seems to matter to Solomon is how justice appears to men, rather than reflecting God's grace.

Pro 24:26 An honest answer is like a kiss on the lips-

AV "Every man shall kiss his lips that giveth a right answer". This smacks of the self congratulatory attitude of Solomon throughout Proverbs. LXX likewise "Every man shall kiss his lips that giveth a right answer". The answer in view would be the legalistic, harsh judgment of :25. See on :25.

Pro 24:27 Prepare your work outside, and get your fields ready. Afterwards, build your house-

Justifying how David prepared for the building of the temple.

Pro 24:28 Don't be a witness against your neighbour without cause. Don't deceive with your lips-

David is called Saul's "neighbour" (1 Sam. 15:28; 28:17). And he persecuted David "without cause" (1 Sam. 19:5; Ps. 35:7,19 69:4; 109:3; 119:161 etc.). Solomon has much to say about true and false witnesses (Prov. 6:19; 12:17; 14:5,25; 19:5,9,28; 21:28; 24:28; 25:18). Whilst his warnings are true enough, he surely has an element of self justification in what he writes. Because he was aware that his parents, David and Bathsheba, had been accused of many things which had led to all the opposition against David at the end of his reign, and which opposition Solomon had to contend with in order to retain the throne for himself. David laments the false witness of the house of Saul and his own sons, Solomon's half brothers (Ps. 27:12; 35:11). The continual condemnation of false witnesses must be understood in this context. Whilst it is all true so far as it goes, Solomon is harnessing Divine truth to his own agenda of self justification. And we who claim to hold His truths must take warning.

Pro 24:29 Don't say, I will do to him as he has done to me; I will render to the man according to his work-

True enough, but a justification of his father David's refusal to kill Saul. See on :17.

Pro 24:30 I went by the field of the lazy, by the vineyard of the man void of understanding-

The Proverbs contain repeated condemnation of laziness. Lack of a zealous work ethic is a rejection of wisdom, according to Solomon. As Solomon explains in Ecc. 1, he was an active person, not lazy by nature. And yet he lacked spirituality. He claimed that his service of God was due to his spirituality, but it was in reality merely a semblance of serving God when it

was really just reinforcing his own personality type. His mocking of the " sluggard " or " lazy one " is so frequent (Prov. 6:6,9; 10:26; 13:4; 15:19; 19:24; 20:4; 21:25; 22:13; 24:30; 26:13-16). But it is a reflection of his own works-based approach to righteousness; the ' wise ' " do " good things, and the wicked don't do enough good things. Personal spiritual mindedness and relationship with God are simply not emphasized.

Pro 24:31 behold, it was all grown over with thorns. Its surface was covered with nettles, and its stone wall was broken down-

I will suggest on :32,33 that this is not a mature attitude; see on :30. The broken down wall of Israel (Is. 5:5; Ez. 13:14) was not a result of Israel's lack of hard work or laziness. Walls are broken down and houses left desolate for many reasons, not least Divine judgment of men because they refused to *believe* in Him, rather than because they were lazy. For works cannot save.

Pro 24:32 Then I saw, and considered well. I saw, and received instruction-

On this point of the need for hard work, Solomon is at best immature; see on :33. It is therefore significant that he doesn't claim this to be part of the package of Divine wisdom given to him; rather he says he worked this out from his own observations of broken down houses and farmsteads, and in mock humility claims to have thereby "received instruction". See on Prov. 7:6; 16:19.

Pro 24:33 a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep-

This despising of sleep is in contrast to the spiritual maturity of David, who understood that true blessing comes from God alone and not from human works, and God gives His beloved sleep, in contrast to vainly rising early and working late to achieve blessing (Ps. 127:2). Time and again, we find Solomon glorifying "my father David", seeking to live out parental expectations; and yet quite out of step with David's spirituality.

Pro 24:34 so your poverty will come as a robber, and your want as an armed man-

Solomon repeatedly sees poverty as being the fault of the poor, and their refusal of his teaching of wisdom (s.w. Prov. 6:11; 10:4,15; 13:7,8,18,23; 24:34; 28:19; 31:7). Many of these passages are effectively mocking the poor, which Solomon condemns in Prov. 17:5. He fails to take his own wisdom, as we also see in his behaviour with foreign women. Again we see Solomon's works based approach to righteousness, and lack of grace; refusing to accept that we are all poor men before God, as David himself exemplified when he cried to God as a poor man (Ps. 34:6). But his much beloved father David was unashamed to say he was a materially "poor man" (1 Sam. 18:23); and Uriah, whom he wronged, is described also as a "poor man" (2 Sam. 12:1). The poor were to be defended and given to (Ps. 82:3), and the Bible is clear that poverty isn't necessarily a result of sin or unwisdom. But Solomon fails to appreciate this, so obsessed is he with works, and the idea that obedience to his anthology of Proverbs will make the poor prosperous, as if God's truth is a kind of wealth creation scheme.

PROVERBS CHAPTER 25

Pro 25:1

These also are proverbs of Solomon, which the men of Hezekiah king of Judah copied out-

This begins the fourth section of the anthology of wisdom sayings which Solomon put together in this book of Proverbs. It seems that just as Solomon used these Divine truths to justify himself, and it led to his spiritual undoing, so Hezekiah may have likewise used these Proverbs with an agenda of self justification. This doesn't make them untrue or not Divinely inspired; but Divine truth is being used at times with the subtext of self justification, just as it can be today. There are 130 proverbs following, matching the numerical value of "Hezekiah".

Pro 25:2 It is the glory of God to conceal a thing, but the glory of kings is to search out a matter-

This is not to be read as meaning that God plays hard to get, hiding Himself, leaving the Bible as a riddle to be solved, with relationship with God offered to those who crack it. God is in search of man, and is desperate to connect with us. The idea may be that it is His glory which conceals Him, but we can as it were see through that glory if we know Him. The reference to the glory of kings being to search out God would sound like Solomon implying he has the glory of having found God. And yet if so, he is totally missing the point that man cannot by searching find out God (Job 11:7); rather it is by grace that God reveals Himself to men. And God is in search of man, far more than we are searching for Him. We only love because He first loved us; and it is more a question of God knowing us than our knowing Him.

LXX "The glory of God conceals a matter: but the glory of a king honours business". This could be read as a justification of Hezekiah's wrongful handling of the business of the Babylonian ambassadors; see on :1,25.

Pro 25:3 As the heavens for height, and the earth for depth, so the hearts of kings are unsearchable-

This appears to be Solomon implying that he as king was beyond analysis or criticism by others, because his heart was unsearchable. But David his father used the same word in saying that God is unsearchable (s.w. Ps. 145:3; Job 9:10; 11:7). But Solomon lacked this sense of wonder because he had no personal relationship with God, and so he comes to use terms only appropriate to God in his own self defence and aggrandizement.

Pro 25:4 Take away the dross from the silver, and material comes out for the refiner-

"Dross" is used by David to refer to the house of Saul (see on Ps. 119:119). It would seem that Solomon has this in view. But "take away" is LXX "beat out", and the Proverbs have much to say about beating. Solomon ended up beating his own people (1 Kings 12:11, and he justifies this by quasi spiritual reasoning, forcing his Proverbs to justify his poor behaviour.

Pro 25:5 remove the wicked from the king's presence, and his throne will be established in

righteousness-

This was justifying the way he killed Shimei at the establishment of his kingdom. The promises to David involved the establishment of Solomon's throne. But God had declared clearly enough that this depended upon Solomon's personal spirituality. But he willfully failed to see this, deciding that: "Take away the wicked from before the king, and his throne shall be established in righteousness" (Prov. 25:5 AV). He externalized righteousness, believing in a form of guilt-by-association, which the righteous would avoid. He redefined righteousness not as anything personal, but a separation from sinners. And there is no lack of evidence that the Christian community has in places and at times fallen into some similar form of legalism. His concept of righteousness was not God's. He forgot all about personal holiness, and instead focused upon not being guilty by association with sinners. And he thought this would justify him as righteous. The same error has been made so many times since. For how often has it happened that brethren who have had the most to say about separation from "the wicked" reveal personal lives which are anything but righteous. Solomon's attitude to being king was similar.

Pro 25:6 Don't exalt yourself in the presence of the king, or claim a place among great men- Solomon thought that his possession of theoretical wisdom placed him in a God-like position above his people (see on :3), and therefore they dare not even begin to question him or examine him; and none should therefore dare to 'put himself forth' in the King's presence (Prov. 25:6 AV). Truly, "knowledge puffs up". And our very possession of 'the truth' of Christ and the word of God carries with it the same potential temptations, leading us to consider the world so far beneath us, that we can do what we wish with no accountability to anyone. And so brethren with amazing Biblical knowledge end up in court for pedophilia, etc. etc.

Pro 25:7 for it is better that it be said to you, Come up here, than that you should be put lower in the presence of the prince, whom your eyes have seen-

These words are worked by the Lord Jesus into His parable of the final judgment (LK. 14:9). But Solomon's original idea is that he is the undisputed prince, to whom there should be no opposition. Any who rise up closer to the throne would do so by Solomon's express invitation; and any who tried to rise up without that would be shamed. The Lord Jesus reapplied all this to Himself and His Kingdom and judgment. Solomon wrongly imagine his kingdom to be God's Kingdom, and himself the Messianic ruler. And so the Lord's parable alludes to Solomon's words and corrects them.

Pro 25:8 Don't be hasty in bringing charges to court. What will you do in the end when your neighbour shames you?-

"Bringing charges to court" is AV "strive" and that may simply be the meaning; it is the same word for "debate" in :9. But it is all the same true that recourse to the judiciary is not the ideal thing for believers, as Paul also says. Rather should there be discussion between individuals and seeking for resolution (:9). But the motive for Solomon's advice is so that you don't get

shame if you are judged to be in the wrong (:10). This desperate avoidance of shame at all costs is a major theme in Solomon's Proverbs, and reflects his overall focus upon the external rather than the internal. He does indeed talk about the heart, but on balance I would conclude that he is more concerned about appearances before men than before God. And this led to his own spiritual downfall.

Pro 25:9 Debate your case with your neighbour, and don't betray the confidence of another-
See on :8. The advice in :8 is not to "debate" at all (s.w. 'bring charges to court'). The endless need to 'take the matter up' with others really reflects much about our own insecurity. The 'debating' in view appears to involve betraying the confidence of another. If we hear gossip about another, we are to seek to disregard it, rather than go to our neighbour and raise / debate the matter. We are not to gossip, nor are we to distribute gossip; he that utters or distributes a slander is a fool (Prov. 10:18). This is an Old Testament foretaste of the spirit of love expounded in 1 Cor. 13 in the New Testament.

Pro 25:10 lest one who hears it put you to shame, and your bad reputation never depart-
This desperate avoidance of shame at all costs is a major theme in Solomon's Proverbs, and reflects his overall focus upon the external rather than the internal. He does indeed talk about the heart, but on balance I would conclude that he is more concerned about appearances before men than before God. And this led to his own spiritual downfall.

Pro 25:11 A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in settings of silver-
Appropriate speech to others is compared here to the spreading and action upon gossip condemned in :9,10. The idea seems to be that good words will be preserved as an ornament (:12), beautifully framed. This may be true, but Solomon as ever has the subtext inserted of his own self justification; for it is his words of wisdom which he knew were to be preserved, and he was compiling the book of Proverbs as a permanent record of his words, as an ornament. Settings is LXX "in a necklace of sardius", connecting with the idea of body jewelry in :12. But Solomon was blown away by the jewelry of his illicit Gentile girlfriend; he looked on the external, rather than on the internal. "The necklace you are wearing has stolen my heart" (Song 4:9 GNB).

Pro 25:12 As an earring of gold, and an ornament of fine gold, so is a wise reprover to an obedient ear-
This again may be Solomon's justification of his father David, who was obedient to the reproofs of Nathan, regarding Bathsheba and the temple building project. But again the hint is of external show; the obedient ear is outwardly adorned with a gold earring. Wisdom is portrayed as profitable because of the good public image it creates for the wise.

Pro 25:13 As the cold of snow in the time of harvest-
This is hyperbole, because it contradicts Prov. 26:1, where snow in harvest is a curse. What

Solomon says is always true in a sense. But he seeks to exaggerate wisdom and folly to such an extent that he ends up with a simplistic dichotomy between good people and bad people which is unrealistic to the point of being false. Because wise people suffer and fail; and fools are sometimes wise. Human behaviour and its outcomes are not so simply divisible. The wise don't enjoy wonderful lives, nor do fools have miserable lives. The final outcomes are not in this life, as Solomon wrongly implies, but at the last day and in the eternity of God's future Kingdom- which perspective Solomon simply fails to adopt.

So is a faithful messenger to those who send him; for he refreshes the soul of his masters-

This positive comment about faithful ambassadors must be read in the context of the fact that Prov. 25:13 was one of the Proverbs rewritten in Hezekiah's time. He sinned with regard to the ambassadors of Babylon (2 Chron. 32:31), but perhaps he was led into this by willfully misreading this Proverb, or at least getting it rewritten with the subtext of justifying what he did. See on :2,25. Perhaps also in view is Hezekiah's sending of messengers to Isaiah and their returning a positive answer from him concerning the Assyrian threat.

Pro 25:14 As clouds and wind without rain, so is he who boasts of gifts deceptively-

LXX "As winds and clouds and rains are most evident objects, so is he that boasts of a false gift". I suggested on :1 that these words were rewritten at the time of Hezekiah. The boasting of gifts deceptively would then refer to the false claims of Rabshakeh to give Judah a land of blessing, or to offer them horses upon which to fight him. However we clearly have a kind of prophecy here of Ananias and Sapphira, especially if we read it as "boasting of gifts never given".

Pro 25:15 By patience a ruler is persuaded; a soft tongue breaks the bone-

The Hebrew for "persuaded" is nearly always translated "deceived". The connection of a soft tongue is with Prov. 15:1, where a soft answer turns away wrath. This would have relevance to the soft answers of Isaiah and Hezekiah to the princes of Assyria, which resulted in the turning away of the angry Assyrian army. So whilst this verse is [as ever] true as it stands, there is the subtext added which glorifies Hezekiah's response to the Assyrian crisis; see on :1.

Pro 25:16 Have you found honey? Eat as much as is sufficient for you, lest you eat too much and vomit it-

Solomon warns about only eating a limited amount of the honey you may find. Yet Ecclesiastes 1 and 2 show how Solomon found honey as it were, he had the opportunity to do and experience what he wanted- and he ate so much he became spiritually sick. The allusion may be to Job 20:15, where the man who has gained riches wrongfully vomits them up (s.w.). The same word is used of eating too much honey, and vomiting it up (Prov. 25:16). All this is true, but Prov. 23:8 says that eating the tasty food of the wicked ruler will also lead to vomiting it up. Again Solomon may be cementing his own power, suggesting that any other wealthy ruler is somehow fake, and to sit at his table, in acceptance of him, would be like

eating too much honey, partaking in riches wrongfully acquired. Perhaps he has Jeroboam in view.

Solomon may also have in mind how Jonathan ate only a little honey (1 Sam. 14:29,43), whereas Saul foolishly forbade his men to eat any honey. Again we get the impression that Solomon is inserting a subtext of criticism of the house of Saul, and justification of his father's friend Jonathan.

Pro 25:17 Let your foot be seldom in your neighbour's house, lest he be weary of you and hate you-

This must be connected with :18; the warning is against being such a busybody in your neighbour's life that you end up falsely testifying about him to others.

Pro 25:18 A man who gives false testimony against his neighbour is like a club, a sword, or a sharp arrow-

Solomon has much to say about true and false witnesses (Prov. 6:19; 12:17; 14:5,25; 19:5,9,28; 21:28; 24:28; 25:18). Whilst his warnings are true enough, he surely has an element of self justification in what he writes. Because he was aware that his parents, David and Bathsheba, had been accused of many things which had led to all the opposition against David at the end of his reign, and which opposition Solomon had to contend with in order to retain the throne for himself. David laments the false witness of the house of Saul and his own sons, Solomon's half brothers (Ps. 27:12; 35:11). The continual condemnation of false witnesses must be understood in this context. Whilst it is all true so far as it goes, Solomon is harnessing Divine truth to his own agenda of self justification. And we who claim to hold His truths must take warning.

Pro 25:19 Confidence in someone unfaithful in time of trouble is like a bad tooth or a lame foot-

There are many references to the "day of trouble" in David's Psalms. Solomon appears to be boasting of his father's deliverance from various 'days of trouble'. But the phrase is used of the Assyrian invasion (s.w. Is. 37:3). And this and some of the Proverbs were rewritten at the time by Hezekiah (Prov. 25:1). "Confidence" is the word for "trust" associated with Hezekiah's trust in Yahweh, and perhaps the relevance to his times is that trust in Egypt for deliverance from the Assyrians didn't work out.

"Transgressors" or "unfaithful" is the term used by David of Saul and his supporters (Ps. 25:3; 59:5; 119:158). Solomon uses this term, teaching that "transgressors" must be rooted out of the earth / *eretz* promised to Abraham (Prov. 2:22), and that the "transgressors" are to face judgment (Prov. 11:3,6; 13:2; 21:18; 22:12; 23:28; 25:19). All Solomon says is true, but he clearly has in view the house and supporters of Saul, who were a group he felt he needed to repress in order to keep his own kingdom and power intact.

Pro 25:20 As one who takes away a garment in cold weather, or vinegar on soda, so is one who sings songs to a heavy heart-

The taking away of a garment may be a comment upon the man who demands back the pledge of a garment overnight (Dt. 24:13). We marvel at how the God who is so apparently far removed from this world actually knows and feels for the desperately poor, and imagines their situations. And wishes to legislate on their behalf. And He is no less sensitive today. LXX "As vinegar is bad for a sore, so trouble befalling the body afflicts the heart".

Pro 25:21 If your enemy is hungry, give him food to eat. If he is thirsty, give him water to drink-

This was a radical paradigm break with the general philosophy that enemies were to be hated. Solomon however elsewhere urges strict judgment upon others for their failures; and he showed no grace in his own life. So we see the warning of knowing all about grace, but acting as if untouched by it. Which is a challenging warning to we who profess to live under grace. See on :22.

Pro 25:22 for you will heap coals of fire on his head, and Yahweh will reward you-

"Hot coals" is the word used to figuratively describe condemnation (Ps. 120:4; 140:10; Prov. 6:28; 25:22; 26:21). But God hates having to condemn the wicked, he takes no pleasure in this, but rather wishes their salvation. So although what Solomon says is true enough, and apparently quoted with approval in the New Testament (Rom. 12:20), we wonder whether he really had any kind of a heart for grace and the salvation of others. For he seems to reason as if we should be kind to our enemy so that he might later be condemned- rather than in the hope that our grace might lead him to repentance.

The fire of condemnation at the judgment has already been kindled by men's attitudes now (Lk. 12:49), and hence by doing good to such men when they abuse us we (now) "heap coals of fire upon his head". "Your enemy" here must therefore refer to someone who is responsible to the last judgment. 2 Thess.3:15 implies 'an enemy' was first century vocabulary for a shunned and rejected false teacher. See on Jude 23. By showing grace to your enemy within the people of God / the church who refuses to repent, you are actually making his final punishment worse.

But I don't understand this as meaning that our motivation for such kindness should be the gleeful thought that we will thereby earn for them greater and more painful condemnation at the last day. Such motives would surely be foreign to all we have seen and known in the Father and Son. Rather am I attracted to the suggestion that there is a reference here to the practice, originating in Egypt, of putting a pan of hot coals over the head of a person who has openly repented. In which case, we would be being taught to show grace to our enemies, in order that we might bring them to repentance. This would chime in with the teaching elsewhere in Romans that God's goodness leads us to repentance (Rom. 2:4). And this is how we should be, especially with our brethren. The idea of excluding our brethren seems to me

the very opposite of the spirit of grace which we have received.

Paul quotes the words of Prov. 25:21,22 in Rom. 12:20. But he omits to apply the last part of Prov. 25:22 to us: "And the Lord shall reward you". Paul's point is that we should not resist evil, leave God to glorify His Name- and enable this to happen, without seeking for a personal reward for our righteousness. It's as if Paul is saying: 'The condemnation of the wicked, when *God*, not you, pours out His vengeance, will glorify Him. So do your part to bring this about, don't worry about the reward you're promised so much as the bringing about of His glory'.

Pro 25:23 The north wind brings forth rain: so a backbiting tongue brings an angry face-
GNB "Gossip brings anger". Solomon rightly condemns gossip and the stirring up of divisions. But he is writing up his Divinely given wisdom at the start of his reign, where there were various groups of opposition to him. These groupings had all arisen from the divisions which arose after his parents' sin with each other; they were a consequence for David's sin, which Nathan had prophesied. Inevitably, David's behaviour had invited all manner of gossip and strife. But Solomon seems to blame this on the gossipers, and carefully considers they alone are guilty; for he is ever glorifying and whitewashing his father David.

Pro 25:24 It is better to dwell in the corner of the housetop, than to share a house with a contentious woman-

A man on a housetop recalls the story of David's sin with Solomon's mother, Bathsheba. I detected on Prov. 18:22 Solomon's justification of David's divorce with Michal. And here too there is a subtext, however unconscious even. Solomon appears to have totally whitewashed his parents, and any consequence of David's sins are blamed by Solomon upon his half brothers and foolish men, as if they were totally guilty and David totally innocent; for this was his worldview. See on Prov. 21:8,19.

Pro 25:25 Like cold water to a thirsty soul, so is good news from a far country-

This is one of the Proverbs reapplied to Hezekiah (see on Prov. 25:1). The good news or gospel from a far country could refer to the news from Ethiopia which made the Assyrians withdraw from Jerusalem. But "a far country" in the Old Testament often refers to Babylon, and is the phrase used about the ambassadors from there who were Hezekiah's undoing (Is. 39:3). This could be read as a justification of Hezekiah's wrongful handling of the business of the Babylonian ambassadors; see on :1,2,13.

Pro 25:26 Like a muddied spring, and a polluted well, so is a righteous man who gives way before the wicked-

David in his earlier Psalms exalts and boasts to God that his feet have not slipped, indeed he was overly confident that his feet would never slip / "be moved" (Ps. 17:5; 21:7; 55:22;

62:2,6; 125:1). His more mature reflection is that he had wrongly said "I shall never slip [AV "be moved"]" (Ps. 30:6), and his feet had indeed slipped, not least over the Bathsheba incident (Ps. 38:16; 94:18). Solomon didn't learn this lesson, for he likewise assumed that the righteous would never be moved / slip (Prov. 10:30), although he appears to accept that even a righteous man like his father had indeed slipped (Prov. 25:26). And Solomon himself did so, not learning the lesson from his father's mistaken assumption that the righteous can never slip.

Pro 25:27 It is not good to eat much honey; nor is it honourable to seek one's own honour- See on :16. Solomon was so sure of his own rightness that he just couldn't conceive that in reality he might sin or break the principles he preached. He describes in Ecclesiastes how he indulged every possible desire, and took each of his lusts to its ultimate term. Yet he warned his son to only eat honey in moderation, i.e. don't gorge your natural desires. This sense of the impossibility of spiritual failure is stamped all over Solomon; and it has been the downfall of so many others too.

LXX "It is not good to eat much honey; but it is right to honour venerable sayings". This would suggest that the honey refers to teachings, and Solomon is basically implying that his sayings should be honoured, and any others rejected.

Pro 25:28 Like a city that is broken down and without walls is a man whose spirit is without restraint-

LXX "So is a man who does anything without counsel". Again as noted on :1, this may be a justification of Hezekiah, who dealt with the Assyrian crisis by saying he trusted in God's counsel to overcome the Assyrians (2 Kings 18:20). Like Solomon, Hezekiah's Proverbs are all Divinely inspired and true, but he seems to insert into them a subtext of self justification.

PROVERBS CHAPTER 26

Pro 26:1 Like snow in summer and as rain in harvest, so honour is not fitting for a fool-

We note the apparent contradiction with Prov. 25:13, where snow in the time of harvest is seen as a blessing. This is hyperbole, because it contradicts what we read here in Prov. 26:1, where snow in harvest is a curse. What Solomon says is always true in a sense. But he seeks to exaggerate wisdom and folly to such an extent that he ends up with a simplistic dichotomy between good people and bad people which is unrealistic to the point of being false. Because wise people suffer and fail; and fools are sometimes wise. Human behaviour and its outcomes are not so simply divisible. The wise don't enjoy wonderful lives, nor do fools have miserable lives. The final outcomes are not in this life, as Solomon wrongly implies, but at the last day and in the eternity of God's future Kingdom- which perspective Solomon simply fails to adopt.

Pro 26:2 Like a fluttering sparrow, like a darting swallow, so the undeserved curse doesn't come to rest-

Perhaps as GNB "Curses cannot hurt you unless you deserve them. They are like birds that fly by and never light". As noted on Prov. 25:1, these Proverbs are relevant to the Hezekiah and Assyria situation, and the reference may be to the curses of Rabshakeh against Yahweh and His people. By contrast, Yahweh saved Jerusalem at that time "as birds flying" (Is. 31:5).

Pro 26:3 A whip is for the horse, a bridle for the donkey, and a rod for the back of fools!-

In tandem with Solomon's later lack of conscience and real spiritual mindedness, there arose an incredible hardness in Solomon in his later life. His wisdom initially made him soft and sympathetic, able to empathize with the mind of others (e.g. the prostitute mother of the baby); and even before his endowment with the gift of wisdom he had the humility to recognize that he was but a little child (1 Kings 3:7). But as his apostasy developed, he came to whip his people (1 Kings 12:14), treating them as he thought fools should be treated (Prov. 26:3)- suggesting that he came to see himself as the only wise man, the only one truly in touch with reality, and therefore despising everyone else. 1 Kings 5:13-16 reveals that Solomon had 153,000 full time and 90,000 part time male servants. Israel's complaint that Solomon had whipped them implies that he treated them like slaves, with himself as the slave-driver.

LXX "As a whip for a horse, and a goad for an ass, so is a rod for a simple nation". It was this attitude which led Solomon to beat his own people (1 Kings 12:11). Like many who hold God's truth, the mere holding of it lifted Solomon up in pride, and he came to despise all others who didn't accept his wisdom.

Pro 26:4 Don't answer a fool according to his folly, lest you also be like him-

This verses is clearly intended to be connected with :5, the idea being that there are times

when a fool should be answered according to his folly, and times when he shouldn't be. This is one of the Hezekiah Proverbs (see on Prov. 25:1), and the allusion may be to how Hezekiah commanded the people not to answer Rabshakeh (2 Kings 18:36), who is thereby interpreted as the archetypical "fool". But a fool must at times be answered (Prov. 26:5), and the idea may be that God will answer fools like Rabshakeh in His own way and in His own time; and we don't need to. But we then get the hint that Hezekiah, like Solomon, was using the Divine truth of the Proverbs with a subtext of his own self justification, just as we can. See on :6,7,8,16.

Pro 26:5 Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own eyes-

Solomon may have in view how God resurrected Samuel to rebuke the foolish Saul, the night before his death. Solomon is continually making historical allusions which justify his father and mock his competitors for the throne. See on :4.

Pro 26:6 One who sends a message by the hand of a fool is cutting off his own feet and drinking violence-

I suggested on :4 that this is one of the Hezekiah Proverbs, specifically relevant to the situation during the Assyrian encirclement of Jerusalem. Rabshakeh, the servant of the king of Assyria, is presented as a "fool", and by using him, the king of Assyria was cutting off his own feet. This and other of Hezekiah's Proverbs (see on Prov. 25:1) which mock messengers would then be the reference of 2 Kings 19:21, where we read that the daughter of Zion had mocked at and despised the Assyrians and their messengers. There is no other recorded fulfilment of this. Defeat by Assyria looked certain, and so to mock them at the time when they would [humanly speaking] soon be seeking their grace- was a true act of faith. See on :16.

Pro 26:7 Like the legs of the lame that hang loose: so is a parable in the mouth of fools-

LXX "As well take away the motion of the legs, as transgression from the mouth of fools". This would then continue the mockery of the messengers of the King of Assyria (see on :6). But on a more general level, it is true that parables are actually to confirm the fools in their foolishness; this was the reason the Lord effectively gave when asked why He had started speaking in parables. It was so that the audience might *not* understand (see on Mt. 13:13,14). See on :9.

Pro 26:8 As one who binds a stone in a sling, so is he who gives honour to a fool-

I suggested on :4,6 that the particular fool in view is Rabshakeh, who had been honoured by the king of Assyria. But because of God's anger with this "fool", the military technology of Assyria would be confounded. Not a stone would be hurled at Jerusalem- exactly as stated in 2 Kings 19:32.

Pro 26:9 Like a thorn that goes into the hand of a drunk person, so is a parable in the mouth

of fools-

"Parable" is the usual word for "Proverb" used of Solomon's Proverbs. He is saying that they will do no good to fools, nor will they be effective if taught by the mouth of fools. The idea of the Proverbs is that they are to be as thorns, provoking our response; but the fool is as if were drunk, and it will have no effect upon them. This is true to an extent. But Solomon is effectively saying that there is no point in trying further to educate those he classifies as "fools". And this is seen in the attitude of so many who claim to have "the truth". It is in sharp contrast to the continually searching, seeking attitude of the Father and Son, who approach the lost as if they are going to keep seeking them until they find them.

Pro 26:10 As an archer who wounds all, so is he who hires a fool or he who hires those who pass by-

The reference to the Hezekiah / Assyria situation continues. For the Assyrians hired passers by as their mercenaries in their onslaught against Jerusalem. They are mocked as foolish; see on :4. Their archers would be ineffective because "not an arrow shall be fired" against Zion (2 Kings 19:32). Such mockery was an act of faith, seeing that defeat and begging for mercy from the Assyrians seemed inevitable, humanly speaking. LXX "All the flesh of fools endures much hardship; for their fury is brought to nought". This recalls Is. 51:13 about the Assyrians: "Where is the fury of the oppressor?".

Pro 26:11 As a dog that returns to his vomit, so is a fool who repeats his folly-

This is true, and is quoted in 2 Pet. 2:22. Peter uses it about the Jews whom he had baptized on the day of Pentecost who were returning to Judaism. Their conversion away from Judaism had been a vomiting up of rotting unclean food; and they were now returning to what they had once vomited up. Judaism is not at all spirituality, according to how Peter, Paul, Stephen and others allude to it. The washing of baptism is likened to a vomiting up of rotten food. Again the implication is that the vomiting of the old life was a one off act which occurred at a specific time- their baptism. Baptism is therefore a specific action of the Spirit upon us in moral terms.

But as noted on :9, Solomon is arguing that fools never learn, and so it's not worth trying with them. And this is seen in the attitude of so many who claim to have "the truth". It is in sharp contrast to the continually searching, seeking attitude of the Father and Son, who approach the lost as if they are going to keep seeking them until they find them.

Pro 26:12 Do you see a man wise in his own eyes? There is more hope for a fool than for him-

Not being 'wise in our own eyes' is a major theme of Solomon's Proverbs (Prov. 3:7; 12:15; 26:12,16; 28:11). We are to recognize that there is no inherent wisdom in man; it must be taught to us from God's word. And yet we live in a postmodern world, where what seems or feels good to our own gut is taken to be the highest personal truth. This was what led Judah to condemnation (s.w. Is. 5:21), because trusting in their own opinions and gut feelings left

them insensitive to God's word. Paul quotes the idea in Rom. 12:16; to be wise in our own eyes means that we ignore those whom we naturally consider worthy of being ignored. But that is not necessarily the way of the Spirit. But when Solomon lost his faith, he comments that whether a man has wise eyes or not (s.w.) is irrelevant in the face of death (Ecc. 2:14). He clearly conceived wisdom as only helpful for this life; he had no real personal faith in the resurrection of the dead or the establishment of the future Kingdom of God. And this led him to ultimately despise his own wisdom as futile.

LXX "I have seen a man who seemed to himself to be wise; but a fool had more hope than he". This would imply that a specific individual is in view, and I suggested on :4,6 that it is Rabshakeh in the Hezekiah context.

Pro 26:13 The lazy person says, There is a lion in the road! A fierce lion roams the streets!-
As explained on :14, Solomon's condemnation of laziness is unrealistic in that he is justifying his own works based righteousness, rather than the righteousness of faith. Surely a wise person will not go outside if a lion is roaming around. Solomon clearly overstates his case here. In the Hezekiah context (see on :4,6), the fierce lion that was being feared was the Assyrians. But it seems rather inappropriate to complain that those who feared them were lazy; faithless, maybe, but "lazy" suggests an obsession against this particular vice. LXX "A sluggard when sent on a journey" would continue the theme of criticizing messengers, which as noted on :4,6 has especial reference to Rabshakeh in the Hezekiah context.

Pro 26:14 As the door turns on its hinges, so does the lazy one on his bed-
The Proverbs contain repeated condemnation of laziness. Lack of a zealous work ethic is a rejection of wisdom, according to Solomon. As Solomon explains in Ecc. 1, he was an active person, not lazy by nature. And yet he lacked spirituality. He claimed that his service of God was due to his spirituality, but it was in reality merely a semblance of serving God when it was really just reinforcing his own personality type. His mocking of the "sluggard" or "lazy one" is so frequent (Prov. 6:6,9; 10:26; 13:4; 15:19; 19:24; 20:4; 21:25; 22:13; 24:30; 26:13-16). But it is a reflection of his own works-based approach to righteousness; the 'wise' "do" good things, and the wicked don't do enough good things. Personal spiritual mindedness and relationship with God are simply not emphasized.

Pro 26:15 The lazy one buries his hand in the dish; he is too lazy to bring it back to his mouth-

See on :14. This is a caricature of laziness, and not a particularly convincing one, suggesting the author has an obsessive campaign against it rather than a rational position. Solomon as a personality type was an active person who despised laziness. But laziness or zeal is to some degree an inherited characteristic, and can arise from a host of factors unrelated to the presence or absence of wisdom / true spirituality. Solomon was using the Divine truths given to him to reinforce and confirm his own native personality type, as many do today. And it seems Hezekiah was wired likewise (see on Prov. 25:1).

Pro 26:16 The lazy one is wiser in his own eyes than seven men who answer with discretion-
See on :12,14,15. LXX "A sluggard seems to himself wiser than one who most satisfactorily brings back a message". This would continue the apparent obsession with criticizing evil messengers who are lazy fools. This makes sense when we appreciate what is explained on :4,6; that the reference is to the messengers of the king of Assyria in Hezekiah's time.

Pro 26:17 Like one who grabs a dog's ears is one who passes by and meddles in a quarrel not his own-

LXX "As he that lays hold of a dog's tail, so is he that makes himself the champion of another's cause". As noted on 4,6, this has relevance to the situation at the time of the Assyrian encirclement of Jerusalem. Rabshakeh is presented as championing the cause of others, and treating Judah like a dog; and from his use of the Yahweh Name, ability to speak Hebrew and knowledge of the situation within Judah, it would seem Rabshakeh was an apostate Jew who then championed the cause of Assyria. This is yet again the daughter of Zion mocking those who looked poised to overcome her. See on :19.

Pro 26:18 Like a madman who shoots burning torches, arrows, and death-

This is the language of siege engines shooting these things. The "madman" would refer to Rabshakeh and the Assyrians. Their intention to do these things was stymied (2 Kings 19:32). See on :10. The LXX would allude to the fair but deceptive words spoken by him in offering the Jews a great life in a land like their own: "As those who need correction put forth fair words to men...".

Pro 26:19 so is the man who deceives his neighbour and says, Am I not joking?-

LXX "So are all that lay wait for their own friends". This would again allude to Rabshakeh, the betrayer of his people (see on :17), and those within Judah who had gone over to the Assyrian side. "Joking" is the word for "mockery", and that may be the idea here. Rabshakeh was joining in the mockery of Yahweh and the faithful in Zion.

Pro 26:20 For lack of wood a fire goes out; without gossip, a quarrel dies down-

Solomon rightly condemns gossip and the stirring up of divisions. But he is writing up his Divinely given wisdom at the start of his reign, where there were various groups of opposition to him. These groupings had all arisen from the divisions which arose after his parents' sin with each other; they were a consequence for David's sin, which Nathan had prophesied. Inevitably, David's behaviour had invited all manner of gossip and strife. But Solomon seems to blame this on the gossipers, and carefully considers they alone are guilty; for he is ever glorifying and whitewashing his father David.

Pro 26:21 As coals are to hot embers and wood to fire, so is a contentious man to kindling

strife-

"Hot embers" is the word used to figuratively describe condemnation (Ps. 120:4; 140:10; Prov. 6:28; 25:22; 26:21). Strife between persons can lead to condemnation, because God will finally judge according to our attitudes to others. We must therefore be so careful not to be contentious, for the contentions and strife engendered might well trigger strife and hatred between brethren which leads to their condemnation. Those who endlessly cause contention in the name of "contending for the faith" need to consider this seriously.

Pro 26:22 The words of a whisperer are as dainty morsels, they go down into the innermost parts-

Solomon rightly condemns gossip and the stirring up of divisions. But he is writing up his Divinely given wisdom at the start of his reign, where there were various groups of opposition to him. These groupings had all arisen from the divisions which arose after his parents' sin with each other; they were a consequence for David's sin, which Nathan had prophesied. Inevitably, David's behaviour had invited all manner of gossip and strife. But Solomon seems to blame this on the gossipers, and carefully considers they alone are guilty; for he is ever glorifying and whitewashing his father David. And yet what he writes is so true; throwaway comments of gossip take deep lodgment in the hearers.

LXX "the words of cunning knaves" would have reference to internal court intrigue against his father David.

Pro 26:23 Like the glaze covering an earthen vessel are smooth words with an evil heart-

LXX "Silver dishonestly given is to be considered as a potsherd: smooth lips cover a grievous heart". Solomon probably has in view Absalom, and Hezekiah has in view (as in :18) the fair but deceptive words spoken by Rabshakeh in offering the Jews a great life in a land like their own.

Pro 26:24 A malicious man disguises himself with his lips, but he harbours evil in his heart-

LXX "A weeping enemy promises all things with his lips, but in his heart he contrives deceit". Again (as in :18) this references the fair but deceptive words spoken by Rabshakeh in offering the Jews a great life in a land like their own.

Pro 26:25 When his speech is charming, don't believe him; for there are seven abominations in his heart-

"Abomination" is the common word for idols (e.g. Dt. 7:25,26). Idolatry is here interpreted as things like pride and telling lies (:17). These seven things are the essence of idolatry. There is a recurring nature to them, just as idols got a grip on the mind of the worshipper. Solomon often uses the word for quiet, secret sins, words and the matters of the heart, internal attitudes and judgments (Prov. 11:1,20; 12:22; 13:19; 15:26; 16:5; 17:15; 20:10,23; 24:9; 26:25; 28:9; 29:27). And this of course is the essence of idolatry in our age; this is the practical force to us of all Biblical teaching about idolatry. See on :24.

LXX "Though thine enemy intreat thee with a loud voice, consent not: for there are seven abominations in his heart". Again (as in :18) this references the fair but deceptive words spoken by Rabshakeh in offering the Jews a great life in a land like their own.

Pro 26:26 His malice may be concealed by deception, but his wickedness will be exposed in the assembly-

Solomon's initial reference would have been to the deceit and hatred of his half brothers Amnon (s.w. 2 Sam. 13:15) and Absalom. The Hezekiah context, as noted throughout this chapter, would refer to the betrayal of Rabshakeh. But again we note that for Solomon, the greatest reward for wickedness was shame before others. This was about the only concept he had of punishment, and likewise blessing was understood in terms of glory before others. He has no Kingdom perspective because he considered he was the ultimate judge of all, and his kingdom was, he supposed, the Kingdom of God on earth as promised to David.

Pro 26:27 Whoever digs a pit shall fall into it; whoever rolls a stone, it will come back on him-

This likewise as in :26 had in view the various adversaries to David who had come to a sticky end; and in the Hezekiah context, to Rabshakeh.

Pro 26:28 A lying tongue hates those it hurts; and a flattering mouth works ruin-

The Bible quite rightly emphasizes the extreme power of words. Such emphasis was not seen in contemporary religion. And neither is it today. The "lying tongue" was that of Saul and Absalom in Solomon's context (s.w. Ps. 109:2); for Hezekiah, the "lying tongue" was that of Rabshakeh, and the same phrase is used about him in Ps. 120:2.

PROVERBS CHAPTER 27

Pro 27:1

Don't boast about tomorrow; for you don't know what a day may bring forth-

This could be read in the Hezekiah context (see on Prov. 25:1) as commentary upon the boasts of the Assyrians to return to destroy Jerusalem after defeating the Ethiopians, and various other boasts about what they would do to Zion. In just one night, their army was destroyed.

Pro 27:2 Let another man praise you, and not your own mouth; a stranger, and not your own lips-

Solomon's hypocrisy is complete; for the praise of the "wise man" throughout Proverbs is effectively self praise. Perhaps his desire for praise from a stranger / foreigner was misused by Solomon in order to justify his Gentile girlfriend who praised him, according to the Song of Solomon. And perhaps this was likewise twisted by Hezekiah (see on Prov. 25:1) to justify his acceptance of the praise of the Babylonian ambassadors which was his spiritual undoing. See on :21.

Pro 27:3 A stone is heavy and sand is a burden; but a fool's provocation is heavier than both-

GNB "The weight of stone and sand is nothing compared to the trouble that stupidity can cause". This is a Hezekiah Proverb (see on Prov. 25:1); the "provocation" of his son Manasseh led to the huge burden of judgment upon Judah (s.w. 2 Kings 23:26). Hezekiah's son clearly paid no attention to his father's proverbs. And what Hezekiah aims at others became true for his own family.

Pro 27:4 Wrath is cruel and anger is overwhelming; but who is able to stand before jealousy?-

Solomon has much to say about the evil of jealousy / envy (e.g. Prov. 14:30; 23:17; 24:1,19; 27:4). But true as his condemnations of envy are, he surely has in mind the way that Ephraim envied Judah, and envied his throne (s.w. Is. 11:13). This all came to full term after his death, when Ephraim departed from Judah under Jeroboam. Again, Solomon is harnessing Divine truth to his own agenda of self justification. And we who claim to hold His truths must take warning. But as he faced death, he came to realize that all such envy is as nothing before the reality of death, which he understood as the end of life, as he had assumed this life was the time for reward and expresses no personal hope in a resurrection of the body (Ecc. 4:4; 9:6).

Pro 27:5 Better is open rebuke than hidden love-

David had accepted rebuke and was open to it, notably from Nathan the prophet (Ps. 38:1; 141:5); and so again Solomon's Proverbs are true, but he harnesses them to the justification of himself and his father. But Solomon was only to remain the prophetic son of David if he

accepted reproof (s.w. 2 Sam. 7:14); and he didn't. He refused to personalize his own wisdom, as we can.

Pro 27:6 Faithful are the wounds of a friend; although the kisses of an enemy are profuse-
As noted on :5, the allusion is to how David had accepted rebuke from Nathan, but had been betrayed by the kisses of Ahithophel, who was the great grandfather of Solomon, and who had turned against David. Again Solomon's Proverbs are true, but he harnesses them to the justification of himself and his father.

Pro 27:7 A full soul loathes a honeycomb; but to a hungry soul, every bitter thing is sweet-
This may be another connection with the parable of the prodigal son; see on :8. "Loathes" is 'tramples upon', a may be a critical comment upon how Saul had forbidden his men to eat anything, but Jonathan disobeyed and ate a honeycomb. All the time we observe Solomon's implicit criticism of his enemies.

Pro 27:8 As a bird that wanders from her nest, so is a man who wanders from his home-
But the Lord's parable of the prodigal son again seems to deconstruct Solomon's attitude here (see on :7); for all the same, the loving Father sought the return of such a man. LXX is even more appropriate to this: "As when a bird flies down from its own nest, so a man is brought into bondage whenever he estranges himself from his own place".

Pro 27:9 Perfume and incense bring joy to the heart; so does earnest counsel from a man's friend-

This is true, but Solomon may again be using Divine truth to justify himself; for he had appointed the son of Nathan the prophet, loyal to David his father, as "the king's friend" (1 Kings 4:5).

Pro 27:10 Don't forsake your friend and your father's friend. Don't go to your brother's house in the day of your disaster: better is a neighbour who is near than a distant brother-
As noted on :6, this is true, but Solomon is clearly alluding to himself and his father. David's loyal friends such as Hushai (s.w. 2 Sam. 16:17) were the ones who established Solomon in power, whereas his own half brothers were competitors for his throne.

Pro 27:11 Be wise, my son, and bring joy to my heart, then I can answer my tormentor-
The "tormentor" suggests a specific reference to the Assyrian / Hezekiah situation (Prov. 25:1). The idea was that the sons of the faithful would at that time would speak with the enemies in the gate (Ps. 127:5). We note that David wanted to answer his tormentors / reproachers by receiving God's grace (Ps. 119:41,42). Solomon instead wants to answer them by having a wise son. Again we see his lack of focus upon grace. LXX "And remove from thyself reproachful words".

Pro 27:12 A prudent man sees danger and takes refuge; but the simple pass on and suffer for it-

As noted on Prov. 25:1, these proverbs of Hezekiah are true, but tend towards his own self justification. Here the reference seems to be to the wise taking refuge within Jerusalem during the Assyrian invasion, whilst those who didn't were overrun and suffered.

Pro 27:13 Take his garment when he puts up collateral for a stranger-

The law of Moses didn't forbid giving or taking collateral for loans, it accepted this would happen (Ex. 22:25-27). But Solomon in the Proverbs is quite obsessed with forbidding it in very strong terms (Prov. 6:1-3; 11:15; 17:18; 20:16; 22:26; 27:13- all quite some emphasis). Perhaps Solomon recalled some bad experience in his family because of this. There is the otherwise curious statement in 1 Sam. 17:18 that David's brothers, Solomon's uncles, were to return a collateral. Perhaps this ruined the family and Solomon's wisdom has some human element in it, reflecting his own bad experiences in his family life. But there is nothing wrong with giving or taking collateral for a loan; what is condemned in God's law is the abuse of the debtor and the abuse of the situation. Indeed David and Hezekiah ask God to be collateral for their needs and debts in various ways (Ps. 119:122; Is. 38:14). And God gives the Holy Spirit in our hearts as collateral on His debt, as He sees it, to save us (2 Cor. 1:22; 5:5; Eph. 1:14); and in response we give our hearts as a pledge to Him (Jer. 30:21 Heb.). So forbidding the practice seems out of step with the spirit of grace. It would mean asking of God what we are unprepared to do for others. Solomon had not known need, neither material nor spiritual, and it shows in his attitude to this matter. It makes hollow all Solomon's exhortations to be generous to your poor neighbour and to be a brother in adversity to your neighbour (Prov. 14:21; 17:17). Solomon is here reasoning from the viewpoint of secular wisdom.

Hold it for a wayward woman!-

The blindness of Solomon is driven home time and again; he knew Divine truth, but the more he knew it, the more he lived the very opposite, failing to grasp the deeply personal relevance of truth to himself. A whole string of passages in Proverbs warn of the "strange" (AV) woman (2:16; 5:20; 6:24; 7:5; 20:16; 23:27; 27:13). Yet the very same word (translated "outlandish", AV) is used in Neh. 13:26 concerning the women Solomon married. The antidote to succumbing to the wicked woman was to have wisdom- according to Proverbs. And Solomon apparently had wisdom. Yet he succumbed to the wicked woman. He was writing Song of Solomon at the same time as Proverbs. The reason for this must be that Solomon didn't really have wisdom. Yet we know that he was given it in abundance. The resolution of this seems to be that Solomon asked for wisdom in order to lead Israel rather than for himself, he used that wisdom to judge Israel and to educate the surrounding nations. But none of it percolated to himself. As custodians of true doctrine- for that is what we are- we are likely to suffer from over familiarity with it. We can become so accustomed to 'handling' it, as we strengthen each other, as we preach, that the personal bearing of the Truth becomes totally lost upon us, as it was totally lost upon Solomon.

Pro 27:14 He who blesses his neighbour with a loud voice early in the morning, it will be taken as a curse by him-

This is a Hezekiah Proverb (see on Prov. 25:1); the phrase "with a loud voice" is that used of Rabshakeh in 2 Kings 18:28. The "blessing" he hypocritically announced was the offer of a wonderful new life for Judah in Assyria. He is the one presented by Hezekiah as the fool.

Pro 27:15 A continual dropping on a rainy day and a contentious wife are alike-

LXX "On a stormy day drops of rain drive a man out of his house; so also does a railing woman drive a man out of his own house". I detected on Prov. 18:22 Solomon's justification of David's divorce with Michal, from whose house he had to flee the night her father sent to murder him there. So here too there is a subtext, however unconscious even; however true Solomon's observation may be in more general terms.

Pro 27:16 restraining her is like restraining the wind, or like grasping oil in his right hand-

Solomon does the very opposite of what he says here; for he uses the word for "oil" or "ointment" about the ointment of his illicit Gentile girlfriend, which he found so attractive (Song 4:10). Yet in Prov. 27:16 he warns that a bad woman has such oil; but he falls for her. He utterly failed to personalize his wisdom, it flowed through his mouth and mind without taking any personal lodgment within him. And we must be warned by this ability of human nature.

Pro 27:17 Iron sharpens iron; so a man sharpens his friend's countenance-

Perhaps this is to be connected with the teaching about the shape or face of men in :19, where a man's face is his heart. We don't read that a file or whetstone makes iron sharper; but rather than iron sharpens iron. The idea may be that is because we are of the same nature that fellowship sharpens us. This was why the Lord Jesus was of the same nature as ourselves, so that His fellowship with us can change our face into His, as Paul says in 2 Cor. 3:16-18.

Pro 27:18 Whoever tends the fig tree shall eat its fruit; he who looks after his master shall be honoured-

This could be a reference by Hezekiah (see on Prov. 25:1) to the false offer by Rabshakeh that his "master", the king of Assyria, could give Judah a land of fig trees where they could enjoy the fruit.

Pro 27:19 As water reflects a face, so a man's heart reflects the man-

This continues the great Biblical theme that the heart is the man; the face [the external] is the heart [the internal]. The critical importance of the heart / mind is unique to the Bible and true Christianity. Other religions focused upon the external and tokenistic, the behaviour alone; whereas the passion of Yahweh is for the human heart. The great emphasis upon the work of

the Spirit in the New Testament likewise reflects this. LXX "As faces are not like other faces, so neither are the thoughts of men".

Pro 27:20 Sheol and Abaddon are never satisfied; and a man's eyes are never satisfied-

The lack of "satisfaction" is a major theme in the descriptions of condemnation for those who break the covenant (s.w. Lev. 26:26). And it is the principle we must live by today; that the only satisfaction is in the things of God's Kingdom. Even in this life, the eye is not "satisfied" with seeing or wealth (s.w. Prov. 27:20; Ecc. 1:8; 4:8; 5:10). And those who seek such satisfaction from those things will find that dissatisfaction is the lead characteristic of their condemnation (Ps. 59:15). Tragically Solomon knew the truth of all this but lived otherwise; just as so many do who give lip service to the idea that the things of the flesh cannot satisfy.

Sin never satisfies. "Hell and destruction are never satisfied, and the eyes of man are never satisfied" (Prov. 27:20 RV), Solomon wrote in his youth; and then in old age, he came to basically the same conclusion, having spent his life working back to the truth that he had been taught in his youth (Ecc. 1:8; 4:8). And there are many men and women who have done the same. We all tend to be empirical learners; and yet this is the great power of God's word, that through it we need not have to learn everything through our failures; but we can receive His Truth, trust it, and simply live by it. Otherwise we shall be like Solomon...

Pro 27:21 The crucible is for silver, and the furnace for gold; but man is tested by his praise-

This must be connected with Prov. 17:3: "The refining pot is for silver and the furnace for gold, but Yahweh tests the hearts". The idea is that Yahweh seeks purified hearts, spiritual mindedness, more than anything else; and the fire of affliction is used to purify our thinking. Purified hearts or spirits is the aim of the work of the Holy Spirit as taught in the New Testament. Yet a man must use the refining pot when he receives praise (Prov. 27:21 AV "so is a man to his praise"). We have some election over this refining process, we are to work together with God in it; but the end result is the purification of the heart / mind / spirit.

I suggested on :2 that there is reference here to the praise Hezekiah received from the Babylonians. This Proverb was twisted by Hezekiah (see on Prov. 25:1) to justify his acceptance of the praise of the Babylonian ambassadors which was his spiritual undoing. He was tested by the receipt of praise- and failed the test.

Pro 27:22 Though you grind a fool in a mortar with a pestle along with grain, yet his foolishness will not be removed from him-

LXX "Though thou scourge a fool, disgracing him in the midst of the council, thou wilt still in no wise remove his folly from him". Solomon sees public shaming fools as the only possible way to get them to accept wisdom. And he laments that even this doesn't work, and so one must give up with fools. But all this is at variance with the unending searching of the Father and Son for the lost, as taught in Lk. 15. And love seeks to shield from shame, just as the Father sought to do for his foolish prodigal son, rushing out to accompany him on the walk home through the village, lest he be shamed. There are today those like Solomon who

think that their mere possession of Divine truth justifies them. And they have the same tendency- to write off people as foolish and not worthy of further effort. This not only stymies their entire approach to evangelism, but makes them wrongly judgmental of those they consider to be foolish, and to have an over exalted view of themselves.

Pro 27:23 Know well the state of your flocks, and pay attention to your herds-

As explained on :24, this appears to be Solomon veering towards the spirit of Ecclesiastes, urging every effort to get wealthy in this life, because that is all you have. Neither he nor Hezekiah (see on Prov. 25:1) have any Kingdom perspective. Solomon liked to think he was God's Kingdom, and Hezekiah was content with his extra 15 years of mortal life and enjoying them as far as he could (Is. 39:8).

Pro 27:24 for riches are not forever, nor does even the crown endure to all generations-

This is true, and evidence enough that Solomon was not in fact the eternal Messianic "son of David" who would reign eternally. And yet despite knowing this, Solomon acts exactly as if his kingdom is the eternal Kingdom of God. And yet on the other hand, he admits here that he has no hope of eternal retention of his wealth or crown. Therefore he urges to zealously count your wealth and work as hard as you can to get wealthy now, in this life, and enjoy it. So we have here the spirit of Ecclesiastes.

Pro 27:25 The hay is removed, and the new growth appears, the grasses of the hills are gathered in-

See on :23,25. The idea again seems to be a glorifying of human labour, so common in Proverbs. Hence LXX "Take care of the herbage in the field, and thou shalt cut grass, and gather the mountain hay". Solomon has no understanding of grace or of relationship with God without works. He was a naturally hard working person, and his many Proverbs glorifying labour and hard work appear to be merely justifying and reinforcing his own native personality type. And we can abuse God's truth likewise. The new growth appearing may be a picture of a new restored situation in the land appearing after the Assyrian invasion had been overcome.

Pro 27:26 The lambs are for your clothing, and the goats are the price of a field-

As suggested on :25, this appears to continue a description of an ideal situation which would come upon the land at the time of the "new growth" of :25. It is perhaps Hezekiah's vision of how things would be under his rule. But it falls far short of Isaiah's prophecies of the Kingdom of God which all could have come true after the Assyrian defeat. Sadly Hezekiah wanted to think, like Solomon, that the reward for righteousness and wisdom was mainly in this life; he has no Kingdom perspective. LXX "That thou mayest have wool of sheep for clothing: pay attention to the land, that thou mayest have lambs".

Pro 27:27 There will be plenty of goats' milk for your food, for your family's food, and for the nourishment of your servant girls-

This is a picture of happy agricultural self sufficiency after the Assyrian threat has been dealt with. But it falls so far short of the Kingdom potential; see on :26.

PROVERBS CHAPTER 28

Pro 28:1 The wicked flee when no one pursues; but the righteous are as bold as a lion-

This was the situation promised for Israel if they were obedient to the covenant. But they were not at Hezekiah's time; the victory was by grace, but he gives no space for that consideration. This is a Hezekiah Proverb (see on Prov. 25:1), and the allusion would be to the remaining Assyrians fleeing after the Angel slew 185,000 of them. The lion was a symbol of Assyria, but as the remnant raced out of Jerusalem to gather their spoil, they were the bold lions. But Hezekiah likes to think that the Assyrians are the wicked, and the Jews were the righteous. He has the same overly simplistic worldview which Solomon also had, whose Proverbs are now being reused by him. For the prophets condemn the Jews at that time; there was only a tiny righteous minority, and the whole salvation of Zion at this time was by grace and not their own righteousness. See on :12.

Pro 28:2 In rebellion, a land has many rulers, but order is maintained by a man of understanding and knowledge-

When Solomon laments that a sinful land has many rulers, but stability comes from a wise ruler, he is stating an inspired truth; but it is inevitable that he framed it in such terms as justified his own dictatorial rule, as if his wisdom justified him in crushing any opposition leaders. It was really Solomon's self-justification. And in the Hezekiah context (see on Prov. 25:1), this becomes a prophecy of how his descendants were to indeed be "many princes" (AV) just before the Babylonian overthrow of the kingdom.

For "order" the AV has "the state thereof shall be prolonged". Like Nebuchadnezzar (Dan. 4:27), Solomon could have prolonged his days as king over Israel if he walked in the ways of David (1 Kings 3:14), which we are specifically told he did not. Seeing Solomon reigned 40 years, this promise of prolonged days surely implied supernaturally prolonged life, beyond usual human lifespans. Indeed the term is used of how the Lord Jesus "prolonged his days" eternally (Is. 53:10). Hence Solomon twice uses the word to speak of how wise rulers could prolong their reigns (Prov. 28:2,16). He surely has himself in view; but failed to realize this potential. Indeed he cynically uses the word in Ecc. 7:15; 8:12 in claiming that it is the wicked and not the obedient who have their days prolonged.

Pro 28:3 A needy man who oppresses the poor is like a driving rain which leaves no crops- Oppression seems to have been a characteristic of the reigns of Saul and Absalom. See on Ps. 62:10. This was the equivalent of how Saul oppressed David (Ps. 119:121,122,134). Samuel's insistence that *he* has not oppressed the people is in the context of his warning that Saul would do this (1 Sam. 12:3,4). When Solomon later condemns the 'oppressors' (s.w. Prov. 14:31; 22:16; 28:3,24), he has in view a wishing of judgment upon the house of Saul. "The poor" whom they had oppressed would easily refer to David (1 Sam. 18:23; Ps. 34:6). But Solomon failed to personalize all this, so obsessed was he with justifying his father. For Solomon ended his reign oppressing his own people.

Pro 28:4 Those who forsake the law praise the wicked; but those who keep the law contend with them-

Solomon condemns those who "forsake the law" (Prov. 4:2; 28:4), and he likely has the house of Saul in view as his father David did when using this phrase (Ps. 119:53). But he speaks in Prov. 4:2 of those who forsook *his* law; as if he was playing God, considering any inattention to himself as inattention to God. David by contrast continually emphasizes the need not to forsake *God's* law.

Pro 28:5 Evil men don't understand justice; but those who seek Yahweh understand it fully-
This is true, but Solomon had established himself as the judge of Israel, and considered that his judgments were ultimately just and beyond criticism. He condemns any who did criticize him as not seeking Yahweh and evil.

Pro 28:6 Better is the poor who walks in his integrity, than he who is perverse in his ways, and he is rich-

This must be placed alongside Solomon's common theme that the wise are blessed with riches, and the poor are poor because they are foolish. So he admits that some wicked people do get rich, but comparing it with the other Proverbs, he sees this as only temporary.

Pro 28:7 Whoever keeps the law is a wise son; but he who is a companion of gluttons shames his father-

This desperate avoidance of shame at all costs is a major theme in Solomon's Proverbs, and reflects his overall focus upon the external rather than the internal. He does indeed talk about the heart, but on balance I would conclude that he is more concerned about appearances before men than before God. And this led to his own spiritual downfall. The Lord's parable of the prodigal son appears to deconstruct Solomon's approach here. For the prodigal was a companion of sinners and didn't keep the law; but his father wasn't unduly worried about the shame on him, and didn't therefore disown the son. Instead he watched constantly for his return, and when he sees him, he runs out [it was shameful for an older man to run in public] through the streets, in order to escort his son home and protect him from shame in the village. And the elder son who claimed to have kept the law was the one who finally rejected himself from the Father's house.

Pro 28:8 He who increases his wealth by excessive interest gathers it for one who has pity on the poor-

Solomon on one hand teaches pity towards the poor (Prov. 14:21,31; 19:17; 28:8). But on the other, he mocks the poor as being poor because of their unwisdom, believing that wealth is given in response to wisdom. He is very conflicted in his attitude to the poor. The Divine revelation of truth to him was clearly that he should be generous to the poor. But he fences against this in other places by saying that the poor are being punished for their unwisdom. So

like us when we encounter need that requires our generosity, he hedges his position very carefully; rather than accepting the simple force of the wisdom given to him, that pity to the poor as it were transfers our wealth from earth to heaven, and we will receive it back in due time (Prov. 19:17). And he is quite obsessive about not being collateral for the poor. Solomon had not known need, neither material nor spiritual, and it shows in his attitude to so obsessively forbidding the giving of collateral to guarantee a loan (Prov. 6:1-3; 11:15; 17:18; 20:16; 22:26; 27:13- all quite some emphasis). It makes hollow all Solomon's exhortations to be generous to your poor neighbour and to be a brother in adversity to your neighbour (Prov. 14:21; 17:17). Solomon is here reasoning from the viewpoint of secular wisdom. The law of Moses didn't forbid giving or taking collateral for loans, it accepted this would happen (Ex. 22:25-27).

Another approach is to understand Solomon's positive comments about helping the poor as historical allusion to his father David. "The poor" would easily refer to David (1 Sam. 18:23; Ps. 34:6).

Pro 28:9 He who turns away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer is an abomination-

"Abomination" is the common word for idols (e.g. Dt. 7:25,26). Idolatry is here interpreted as things like pride and telling lies (:17). These seven things are the essence of idolatry. There is a recurring nature to them, just as idols got a grip on the mind of the worshipper. Solomon often uses the word for quiet, secret sins, words and the matters of the heart, internal attitudes and judgments (Prov. 11:1,20; 12:22; 13:19; 15:26; 16:5; 17:15; 20:10,23; 24:9; 26:25; 28:9; 29:27). And this of course is the essence of idolatry in our age; this is the practical force to us of all Biblical teaching about idolatry.

Pro 28:10 Whoever causes the upright to go astray in an evil way, he will fall into his own trap; but the blameless will inherit good-

Both Solomon and Hezekiah (see on Prov. 25:1) doubtless had individuals in view, who were the subtext of this wisdom. But to describe the wise as "blameless" is an example of their over simplistic worldview. All have sinned, none are blameless (Rom. 3:23), as David reflected in his Bathsheba Psalms. But Solomon had whitewashed his parents' sin, and knew nothing of the grace David had discovered at that time. The Lord's parables of the lost in LK. 15 may be seeking to deconstruct Solomon's attitude. The self righteous older son, who considered himself blameless, connects with the 99 sheep who "need no repentance". But "all we like sheep have gone astray", those 99 only thought they needed no repentance, and being so snug in their sheepfold actually only enhanced their sense of self righteousness, and that they were not in fact the lost. The phrase "inherit good" is only found again in 1 Chron. 28:8, where David says that this is to be the outcome for those who "seek" for obedience to God's ways. But 'seeking' is not being "blameless". None are blameless, but the spiritually minded seek for God's ways and will therefore "inherit good". Solomon totally lacked this humility and spiritual reality of David. And so did Hezekiah (see on Prov. 25:1), who never seems repentant for any of his failures [such as giving the gold of the temple to buy off invaders].

Pro 28:11 The rich man is wise in his own eyes; but the poor who has understanding sees through him-

Not being 'wise in our own eyes' is a major theme of Solomon's Proverbs (Prov. 3:7; 12:15; 26:12,16; 28:11). We are to recognize that there is no inherent wisdom in man; it must be taught to us from God's word. And yet we live in a postmodern world, where what seems or feels good to our own gut is taken to be the highest personal truth. This was what led Judah to condemnation (s.w. Is. 5:21), because trusting in their own opinions and gut feelings left them insensitive to God's word. Paul quotes the idea in Rom. 12:16; to be wise in our own eyes means that we ignore those whom we naturally consider worthy of being ignored. But that is not necessarily the way of the Spirit. But when Solomon lost his faith, he comments that whether a man has wise eyes or not (s.w.) is irrelevant in the face of death (Ecc. 2:14). He clearly conceived wisdom as only helpful for this life; he had no real personal faith in the resurrection of the dead or the establishment of the future Kingdom of God. And this led him to ultimately despise his own wisdom as futile.

Pro 28:12 When the righteous triumph, there is great glory; but when the wicked rise, men hide themselves-

The allusion was to the way that Saul "rose up" against David (s.w. 1 Sam. 25:29), and David hid himself from Saul. The same word is used in :28. But this is a Hezekiah Proverb (see on Prov. 25:1). The reference would be the glorious triumph over the Assyrians, after the 'arising' of the wicked Assyrians which had led the Jews to "hide themselves". But Hezekiah likes to think that the Assyrians are the wicked, and the Jews were the righteous. He has the same overly simplistic worldview which Solomon also had, whose Proverbs are now being reused by him. For the prophets condemn the Jews at that time; there was only a tiny righteous minority, and the whole salvation of Zion at this time was by grace and not their own righteousness. The "triumph" and "glory" was God's and not that of the Jews. See on :1.

Pro 28:13 He who conceals his sins doesn't prosper, but whoever confesses and renounces them finds mercy-

"Mercy" is the word for "compassion". But the basis for that compassion was to be Israel's repentance (s.w. Dt. 30:13 etc.). But God's compassion / mercy was often given to His people anyway, because they were His children, by grace. His compassion is therefore on the basis of His mercy and grace, rather than a proportionate response to steel willed human repentance and self reformation (s.w. Ps. 116:5). His compassion is actually always there for His children, even when they are in exiled punishment from Him (s.w. Jer. 31:20; 33:26). Solomon failed to perceive this grace, instead focusing solely upon the aspect of God showing compassion to those who are repentant (s.w. Prov. 28:13). He may have in view his father's confession of sins. For David uses the same phrase about how *God* had covered his sins (Ps. 32:1,5). But it was confession of personal sin which was so lacking in Solomon and Hezekiah, and was the basis for their spiritual undoing. It's one thing to know the theory of grace and repentance, another to actually personalize it and live and feel by it.

Pro 28:14 Blessed is the man who always fears; but one who hardens his heart falls into trouble-

This may be true, but Solomon ended up terrorizing his own people, allowing no opposition, beating them into submission (1 Kings 12:11), and thereby inculcating a culture of fear. And he was abusing wisdom such as this to justify that climate he wished to create for his own ends. Both Solomon and Hezekiah hardened their hearts in that they decided that they would maintain a set psychological attitude to spiritual things until their deaths. And so they did, as witnessed by Ecclesiastes and Is. 39:8.

Pro 28:15 As a roaring lion or a charging bear, so is a wicked ruler over helpless people-

The book of Proverbs has in view a bad ruler (s.w. Prov. 28:15; 29:2,12,26; Ecc. 9:17). And this bad ruler offers deceitful food (Prov. 23:3), which Solomon in Prov. 23 advises against eating. We need to recall that eating together was seen as a sign of fellowship and acceptance of each other within the same cause. Solomon may have in view Jeroboam, who clearly sought to usurp Solomon as king. Or he may be alluding back to the various people like Absalom and Adonijah who had feasted to celebrate their apparent usurping of David's throne. The LXX in Prov. 23:1-8 reads rather differently to the Masoretic Text, and speaks much of the evil of the ruler in view.

Pro 28:16 A tyrannical ruler lacks judgment. One who hates ill-gotten gain will have long days-

"What hath the wise more than the fool?" (Ecc. 6:8) shows how effectively Solomon despised his wisdom; he lost sight of the Kingdom which it led to ultimately, and the God manifestation which it could enable in this life. He had written in his Proverbs that the ruler who lacks wisdom will oppress his people (28:16 AV); and although his wisdom remained with him right to the end, in terms of knowledge (Ecc. 2:9; 12:10), yet at the end of his reign Solomon was the ruler who did oppress his people. And he had gone on in Prov. 28:16 to warn against covetousness in a ruler, even though he went ahead with practicing every conceivable form of it in Ecc. 2. See on Prov. 8:6.

In the same way as Solomon criticized flirting with Gentile girls but then went and did this himself, so he said many other things in his wisdom which actually condemned himself. Thus "the prince that lacketh understanding is also a great oppressor" (Prov. 28:16 AV). Yet Solomon did oppress the people (1 Kings 12:11)- despite possessing wisdom. He insists that throughout his life, his wisdom had remained with him (Ecc. 2:9 RVmg.). So what does this indicate? Surely that the wisdom which he had did not affect his life practically, and thus it was as if he lacked wisdom completely. Mere possession of truth leads to great temptations- for like Solomon, we can reason that this alone justifies us in any behaviour.

Pro 28:17 A man who is tormented by having taken life blood will be a fugitive until death; no one will support him-

David's prayer of repentance and request to be saved from "blood guiltiness" (Ps. 51:14) is literally 'from blood'. He was a man of blood and was guilty of Uriah's innocent blood. David had asked for 'men of blood' to be slain (Ps. 55:23 s.w.), those who had taken the blood of the innocent (Ps. 94:21), and for 'men of blood' to be expelled from his presence (Ps. 139:19). And it is not at all clear whether all those Psalms were written before his sin with Bathsheba. God was trying to teach David that he was the type of person whom he condemned. And yet it is unclear if he learned that lesson. Solomon liberally condemns the man who sheds innocent blood (Prov. 6:17; 28:17), refusing to recognize that his much lauded father had done just this, and was only saved by grace and not by any obedience to wisdom. There is so little grace in the book of Solomon's Proverbs because Solomon had failed to perceive the grace shown to his father.

Pro 28:18 Whoever walks blamelessly is kept safe; but one with perverse ways will fall suddenly-

We wonder at the possible arrogance in assuming that he or any man can walk blamelessly. Only the Lord Jesus fits this. And yet this is the phrase used in God's command to Abraham and his seed (Gen. 17:1). It was only possible for Abraham to do so by his faith in imputed righteousness, by grace through faith. David only realized that after he had to learn it through reflection upon the wonder of how God had counted him righteous after the sin with Bathsheba.

Pro 28:19 One who works his land will have an abundance of food; but one who chases fantasies will have his fill of poverty-

Solomon speaks often of how hard work will "satisfy with bread" (Prov. 12:11; 20:13; 28:19). David his father uses the phrase in the context of saying that being 'satisfied with bread' is part of God's gracious blessing (Ps. 132:15). We see here how Solomon became focused upon works, rather than faith in the blessings which come from Divine grace. And yet he uses the words his father had used; but he interprets them as justification of works rather than acceptance of grace.

Solomon repeatedly sees poverty as being the fault of the poor, and their refusal of his teaching of wisdom (s.w. Prov. 6:11; 10:4,15; 13:7,8,18,23; 24:34; 28:19; 31:7). Many of these passages are effectively mocking the poor, which Solomon condemns in Prov. 17:5. He fails to take his own wisdom, as we also see in his behaviour with foreign women. Again we see Solomon's works based approach to righteousness, and lack of grace; refusing to accept that we are all poor men before God, as David himself exemplified when he cried to God as a poor man (Ps. 34:6). But his much beloved father David was unashamed to say he was a materially "poor man" (1 Sam. 18:23); and Uriah, whom he wronged, is described also as a "poor man" (2 Sam. 12:1). The poor were to be defended and given to (Ps. 82:3), and the Bible is clear that poverty isn't necessarily a result of sin or unwisdom. But Solomon fails to appreciate this, so obsessed is he with works, and the idea that obedience to his anthology of Proverbs will make the poor prosperous, as if God's truth is a kind of wealth creation scheme.

Pro 28:20 A faithful man is rich with blessings; but one who is eager to be rich will not go unpunished-

This states clearly Solomon's position that the faithful are blessed in this life [note "is rich"], and the blessings for faith are riches. But this is simply not true to spiritual reality. The righteous are often poor, and the wicked prosper. And the blessings promised to Abraham were of forgiveness of sins and a future eternal inheritance of the earth at the resurrection of the body. And the patriarchs died without having received what God promised in this life. These most basic aspects of the Gospel of the Kingdom were not at all appreciated by Solomon nor Hezekiah. Hezekiah was blessed with wealth after his sickness, as was Solomon at the start of his reign; but he is wrong to thereby deduce that he was a "faithful" and the wealth was some kind of reward for that.

Pro 28:21 To show partiality is not good; yet a man will do wrong for a piece of bread-

See on :22. Solomon was famous for his wise judgment of the two prostitutes. He showed no partiality in that judgment. And so again, whilst what he says is true, he is using Divine truths to justify himself. And he is also having a swipe at his competitor Absalom, who set himself up as the judge of Israel and yet showed partiality towards his potential supporters (2 Sam. 15:5,6).

Pro 28:22 A stingy man hurries after riches, and doesn't know that poverty waits for him-

Both Solomon and Hezekiah [after his deliverance from the Assyrians] were suddenly given great riches by God. They didn't have to seek wealth, because it was just given to them. And yet here they criticize those who seek wealth and are "stingy" in order to attain it. It's easy to criticize people in situations which we haven't been in, and to moralize against them. So whilst the Proverbs warning against seeking to become rich are true enough, they were clearly used by Solomon and Hezekiah as self-justification.

Pro 28:23 One who rebukes a man will afterward find more favour than one who flatters with the tongue-

This may be Solomon justifying how David gave favour to Nathan who rebuked him, whilst rejecting those who merely flattered. The same phrase is used of Ahithophel (Ps. 55:21). And yet Solomon uses the phrase about the danger of Gentile women who flatter with the tongue (Prov. 2:16; 7:5). But he honoured exactly those women. He is a stellar example of assuming that truth possessed does not need to apply to me. It is beyond hypocrisy; it is a psychological situation whereby the person considers themselves beyond the truth which they themselves assent to and teach to others, even demanding it of them. It is pride and conceit in their worst form.

Pro 28:24 Whoever robs his father or his mother and says, It's not wrong is a partner with a destroyer-

See on :3 and Ps. 62:10. David likely has in view Absalom and other brothers of Solomon who were seeking to usurp Solomon. The "destroyer" uses the same word which is applied to the Assyrians in Hezekiah's time (2 Kings 18:25; 19:12; Is. 51:13; 54:16). The Assyrians become the epitome of evil and foolishness in Hezekiah's Proverbs. But he fails to take on board the fact that the Jews were as wicked as them. His simplistic dichotomies take no account of this.

Pro 28:25 One who is greedy stirs up strife; but one who trusts in Yahweh will prosper-
AV "He that is of a proud heart". Perhaps Hezekiah has in view the Assyrians, with himself as the prospering one who trusted in Yahweh (2 Kings 18:5). Again he is using these truths to justify himself.

Solomon correctly implies here that pride is an outcome of lack of faith, and this was exactly true in Solomon's case. His lack of faith in the future kingdom led him to be proud. An example of indirect reference to Solomon's pride is found in the way the record points a similarity between Paul and Solomon. Each was given wisdom, and each was given a Satan to humble them because of the way wisdom bloats a man's ego. The fact that we have 'the truth' in basic doctrinal terms - plus a fair bit of other Divine wisdom - really will tempt us to be proud. This is the sort of thing we individually and collectively need to exhort ourselves strongly about. Like us, Solomon knew theoretically the paramount danger of pride; he lists it as the most fundamental of the seven things God hates (Prov. 6:17 cp. 16:5,18).

Pro 28:26 One who trusts in himself is a fool; but one who walks in wisdom is kept safe-
"Trusts" is s.w. "trusted" in Prov. 3:5. Hezekiah is commending himself again (2 Kings 18:5). Trust in God is indeed predicated upon some form of "understanding" or 'wisdom', for faith comes by hearing the word of God; although not necessarily of the abstract, academic type which Solomon had in view. Trusting and having wisdom are parallel; to trust in Yahweh requires "understanding" and 'having wisdom'. For faith must have some basis, there are things which need to be believed before "faith" can be faith. Thus David predicates "trust" (s.w.) upon knowing Yahweh's Name, His character (Ps. 9:10). But David's "trust" in God was connected with his trust or belief in God's mercy to him regarding his sins (Ps. 13:5; 21:7; 32:10 s.w.). But Solomon doesn't seem to have had any conscience of personal sin, and so trust in the Yahweh whose lead characteristic is grace and forgiveness was not elicited within him.

Pro 28:27 One who gives to the poor has no lack; but one who closes his eyes will have many curses-

David predicates "no lack" upon fearing Yahweh and simply trusting in Him (Ps. 34:8,9). Solomon picks up the idea of the righteous experiencing "no lack" but instead claims it is a reward for generosity (s.w. Prov. 28:27). This is a parade example of the difference between David and Solomon. Solomon picks up his father's words and conclusions, but reframes them to justify himself and works rather than faith.

Pro 28:28 When the wicked rise, men hide themselves; but when they perish, the righteous thrive-

Saul 'rose up' against David (s.w. 1 Sam. 25:29; 26:2), and then evil men 'rose up' against David out of his own family (2 Sam. 12:11 s.w.), especially Absalom who rose up against his father (2 Sam. 18:31,32 s.w.). But David has a tendency to assume that all who rose up against him were arising against God. It's not always so that our enemy is God's enemy. Relationships and the hand of God in human affairs and relationships is more complex than that. And David in Ps. 139:21 goes further, to assume that his hatred of people is justified, because they must, he assumes, hate God because they are against him. Solomon seems to make the same mistake when he alludes to such 'risings up' in Prov. 28:28. We must note that "all in Asia" turned away from Paul personally (2 Tim. 1:15), and yet according to the letters to the seven churches of Asia in Rev. 2,3, there were many faithful individuals amongst them.

PROVERBS CHAPTER 29

Pro 29:1

He who is often rebuked and stiffens his neck will be destroyed suddenly, with no remedy-

This sounds like a criticism of Solomon's political enemies in the family of Saul. Being broken without remedy (as in Prov. 6:15) suggests that what is in view is an earthen vessel smashed, a figure used in the prophets of the last judgment. Israel were likewise smitten without remedy at the hands of their invaders (s.w. 2 Chron. 36:16; Jer. 8:15; 14:19). Many of Solomon's warnings of judgments in the Proverbs come exactly true for the Israel whom he wrongly assumed would be his eternal kingdom. The "remedy" Solomon has in mind is giving heed to wisdom.

Pro 29:2 When the righteous thrive, the people rejoice; but when the wicked rule, the people groan-

This surely refers to the way the people rejoiced at Solomon's ascension to power (2 Chron. 9:7); again he is justifying himself. All the knowledge of God which we quite rightly seek after must be *personally applied*. The very possession of it and teaching of it to others can of itself make a man or woman demotivated to personally apply it. He foretold that the people would sigh when a wicked man ruled them (Prov. 29:2 RV)- and they did "sigh" because of the heavy burdens he placed upon them (1 Kings 12:4). See on :4,12.

Pro 29:3 Whoever loves wisdom brings joy to his father; but a companion of prostitutes squanders his wealth-

At the end of his days, Solomon recognized that although he had loved the theory of wisdom, the image of a spiritual life, the wisdom of God had never really impacted his soul: "I said, I will be wise (referring back to his request for wisdom in 1 Kings 3); but it was far from me" (Ecc. 7:23). His request for wisdom had only been so that he could do the job of leading Israel, living out the parental expectation of his father, whom he admits in Proverbs 4 had taught him to ask for wisdom. In Prov. 19:12 he speaks as if his own wisdom was like the dew coming down- as if he felt that the mere possession of wisdom made him the Messiah figure which his father had so hoped for him to be in Ps. 72:6. And he says as much in Prov. 29:3: "Whoso loveth wisdom [exactly what Solomon was commended for doing] rejoiceth his father".

The Lord's parable of the prodigal son appears to deconstruct Solomon's approach however. For the son who squandered his wealth with prostitutes was the one who was finally saved; whereas Solomon seems to just give up with those he considered fools and sinners. Whereas the love of God is ever seeking and waiting for them.

Pro 29:4 The king by justice makes the land stable, but he who takes bribes tears it down-

Solomon imposed the "yoke" of tribute upon the people (2 Chron. 10:4), whereas he himself had warned that a king that imposes tribute [NEV "bribes"] on his people "overthrows" a

country (Prov. 29:4 RV mg.). He saw it all as true- and yet it was far from him personally. See on :2.

Pro 29:5 A man who flatters his neighbour spreads a net for his own feet-

In the Hezekiah context, this would refer to Rabshakeh, the apostate Jew who knew Hebrew, used the Yahweh Name and knew the situation in Judah. His flattery was in offering the Jews horses, and to 'emigrate' to Assyria, to receive there a land like their own.

Pro 29:6 An evil man is snared by his sin, but the righteous can sing and rejoice-

As in :8, in the Hezekiah context (see on Prov. 25:1), the snare in view is the Assyrian encirclement of Jerusalem, which led to their own destruction. The joy of the people of Jerusalem is therefore in view. But Hezekiah likes to think that the Assyrians are the wicked, and the Jews were the righteous. He has the same overly simplistic worldview which Solomon also had, whose Proverbs are now being reused by him. For the prophets condemn the Jews at that time; there was only a tiny righteous minority, and the whole salvation of Zion at this time was by grace and not their own righteousness.

Pro 29:7 The righteous care about justice for the poor; the wicked aren't concerned about knowledge-

This sounds like a self justifying reference to the way Solomon judged the two prostitutes. LXX "A righteous man knows how to judge for the poor".

Pro 29:8 Mockers stir up a city, but wise men turn away anger-

"Stir up" is AV "bring into a snare". Hezekiah is referring to the judgments upon Jerusalem, encircled by the snare of the Assyrians. But he sees the "wise men" in Zion as turning away God's wrath from the city. This was true to an extent, but he fails to engage with the massive dimension of God's salvation of Zion from the Assyrians by grace.

Pro 29:9 If a wise man goes to court with a foolish man, the fool rages or scoffs, and there is no peace-

LXX "A wise man shall judge nations". Solomon has in view how all the nations came to him for instruction in justice, and Hezekiah was visited by the leaders of the surrounding nations after the destruction of the Assyrians. They see themselves as "the wise man", in self justification.

Pro 29:10 The bloodthirsty hate a man of integrity; and they seek the life of the upright-

Solomon again alludes to those who sought the life of his father, whom David in his Psalms describes as "bloodthirsty"; for it was the same family groups of Saul and Absalom / Adonijah who were the potential opposition to Solomon. He constantly uses his Proverbs to justify the integrity of David and himself, and to bring down his potential opponents.

Pro 29:11 A fool vents all of his anger, but a wise man brings himself under control-

LXX as GNB "but the wise reserves his in part". The implication is that the anger of the wise is still there and will be expressed later; perhaps a warning that Solomon the wise man would express in due course his anger with all who had opposed his father and himself.

Pro 29:12 If a ruler listens to lies, all of his officials are wicked-

The book of Proverbs has in view a bad ruler (s.w. Prov. 28:15; 29:2,12,26; Ecc. 9:17). And this bad ruler offers deceitful food (Prov. 23:3), which Solomon in Prov. 23 advises against eating. We need to recall that eating together was seen as a sign of fellowship and acceptance of each other within the same cause. Solomon may have in view Jeroboam, who clearly sought to usurp Solomon as king. Or he may be alluding back to the various people like Absalom and Adonijah who had feasted to celebrate their apparent usurping of David's throne. The LXX in Prov. 23:1-8 reads rather differently to the Masoretic Text, and speaks much of the evil of the ruler in view.

Pro 29:13 The poor man and the oppressor have this in common: Yahweh gives sight to the eyes of both-

In the Hezekiah context, "the oppressor" was the Assyrian and Judah were the poor man. But Hezekiah takes comfort as does David in the fact that all men are no more nor less than human. "Oppressor" is elsewhere "creditor", and may refer to the abuse of the poor by the rich in Hezekiah's time, a vice which the relevant prophets comment upon.

Pro 29:14 The king who fairly judges the poor, his throne shall be established forever-

Solomon is clearly referring to the promises to David, which he assumed were about him. He thought that because he had judged the poor harlots wisely, therefore he would be the promised Messiah. And this was just what David his father had hoped and expected of him. David had even asked Solomon to "do wisely" i.e. to show wisdom, in order that the promises to him about Messiah would be fulfilled (1 Kings 2:3 RVmg.). So *this* was surely one of Solomon's motives in giving them justice and being 'wise'; he sought to live out his father's expectations and to fulfil the requirements of the Messiah figure.

"Established forever" is the language of the eternal establishment of the Davidic line through his Messianic son; which Solomon wrongly assumed must automatically refer to himself. David led him into this wrong assumption by dedicating "Kingdom" Psalms like Ps. 72 to Solomon. Solomon's fulfilment of the role of David's greater prophetic son was strictly conditional; and he failed totally to meet those conditions. But he uses his possession of wisdom, and teaching of it with his lips, as a reason to wrongly think that he fulfilled the role (Prov. 12:19; 29:14).

Pro 29:15 The rod of correction gives wisdom, but a child left to himself causes shame to his mother-

This appears to be an out of context allusion to David's words in Ps. 38:14, reflecting on his sin with Bathsheba, and how he felt unable to give reproof to others: "Yes, I am as a man who doesn't hear, in whose mouth are no reproofs [s.w. "correction"]". Solomon was obsessed with David his father, speaking hundreds of times of "David my father". But he failed to have his humility; he endlessly dishes out reproofs in Proverbs, indeed he sees his Proverbs as reproofs to people (e.g. Prov. 1:25; 6:23; 10:17; 12:1; 13:18; 15:5,31; 29:15); whereas David humbly felt unable to do so because of his awareness of his sins. And at the time David wrote the Proverbs, when he received wisdom at the start of his reign, he was sinning likewise [in essence] by marrying foreign women.

Discipline and punishment of the unwise is a big theme in Solomon's Proverbs. He took it to the extent of whipping his own people (1 Kings 12:11). This abusive attitude to people arose from his obsession with the idea that he had wisdom, and people generally are fools, idiots, unwise- and therefore he could abuse them. This abusive attitude to people is another outcome of believing that mere possession of truths about God justifies us, and declares all other people foolish, unwise and able to be legitimately abused by us. In contrast, the heart of God (as of David) bleeds for such people and wants to save them rather than gloat in their un wisdom and punish them for it.

This desperate avoidance of shame at all costs is a major theme in Solomon's Proverbs, and reflects his overall focus upon the external rather than the internal. He does indeed talk about the heart, but on balance I would conclude that he is more concerned about appearances before men than before God. And this led to his own spiritual downfall.

Pro 29:16 When the wicked increase, sin increases; but the righteous will see their downfall-
The first part of this verse is axiomatic, and seems inserted in order to emphasize the reality of the second half, which is what Solomon wants to emphasize. Again Solomon implies that the downfall of the wicked is in this life, so that it is seen by the righteous. But this will only finally be true at the day of judgment, which Solomon has little place for in his thinking as he considers himself the ultimate judge of all. And it was this attitude which led him to major moral failure as he refused to judge himself; and there are many examples of such a path to ruin in Christian leaders.

Pro 29:17 Correct your son, and he will give you peace; yes, he will bring delight to your soul-

As will be explained on :19, this is true so far as it goes, and is a fair enough commentary upon the Mosaic instruction to stone to death a disobedient son. But Solomon took this idea of physical chastisement too far, to the point of not giving due weight to the power of God Himself through His wisdom to discipline or chastise a person.

Pro 29:18 Where there is no Divine revelation, the people cast off restraint; but one who keeps the law is blessed-

The parallel is between "Divine revelation" (AV "vision"), and "the law". But "the law" of

Moses was already in existence and available. This seems another case of where Solomon effectively places his words, the Divine revelation of wisdom to him in a vision of the night, as being the effective replacement of God's law. And he often teaches that "blessing" comes from obeying his teachings about wisdom, rather than directing attention to keeping the covenants with Moses and Abraham which were to be the basis for Divine blessing.

Pro 29:19 A servant can't be corrected by words; although he understands, yet he will not respond-

Solomon has so much to say about "correction" or "instruction" coming from the possession of wisdom (Prov. 8:10,33; 10:17; 12:1; 13:1,24; 15:5,10,32; 16:22; 19:20,27; 22:15; 23:12,13). But in the end he chastised or corrected his people by whipping them (s.w. 1 Kings 12:11,14). Solomon initially asked for wisdom in order to guide his people, but he ended up whipping / physically chastising them into conformity with his wishes rather than allowing wisdom to correct. Again, he was playing God; for it is God through His wisdom who chastises, and not man. But Solomon thought he was effectively God to his people. This is why Solomon argues that servants cannot be corrected by words (Prov. 29:19 s.w.), and a child must be physically chastised (s.w. Prov. 19:18; 29:17 cp. Prov. 13:24; 23:13), regardless of his screams of pain. This kind of thing is a denial of his claims elsewhere that it is Divine wisdom which chastises / corrects, and such correction is from God and not man. Solomon's final description of himself as an old and foolish king who refuses to be admonished says it all (Ecc. 4:13); he admonishes others (s.w. Ecc. 12:12), but refuses to be admonished or corrected by his own wisdom. He failed to personalize it.

Pro 29:20 Do you see a man hasty in his words? There is more hope for a fool than for him- Solomon now creates a category lower even than "a fool". What he says is true, but he seems to rejoice in categorizing idiots and placing the majority of society in those categories. This all arose from a persuasion that he was the ultimately "wise" because he possessed Divine truth; and such hyper judgmentalism became narcissism, and was his undoing. Those who are proud and judgmental in their possession of "truth" are liable to the same path.

Pro 29:21 He who pampers his servant from youth will have him become a son in the end- GNB "If you give your servants everything they want from childhood on, some day they will take over everything you own". This sounds very much like Solomon's reflections upon Rehoboam, who was his servant but who then tried to overthrow Solomon and take power. Again, Solomon states Divine truth, but as ever inserts his own agenda of self justification into the way he uses it.

Pro 29:22 An angry man stirs up strife, and a wrathful man abounds in sin- LXX "digs up sin", perhaps Solomon having a swipe at anyone who dared to make an issue about David's sin with his mother Bathsheba. As noted on :21, he is always seeking to justify himself through the truth which he states and preaches.

Pro 29:23 A man's pride brings him low, but one of lowly spirit gains honour-

GNB "You will be respected". Solomon's idea is that the advantage of wisdom is that it gains the holder respect and honour in this life, whereas the fool will be brought low in this life. But the ultimate humiliation and honour are not now, but at the last day, of which he has little to say.

Pro 29:24 Whoever is an accomplice of a thief is an enemy of his own soul; he takes an oath, but dares not testify-

The sense is as GNB "He will be punished if he tells the truth in court, and God will curse him if he doesn't". Solomon's wisdom was given him so that he might wisely judge Israel. And he here outlines how he will judge, as the supreme judge of Israel. But as in :23, he sees sinners as destroying themselves. This is true, but he assumes that sin and righteousness have their reward right now in this life; whereas this is only part of the story. Solomon usually omits the final and more important perspective, of God's final judgment and the eternal outcomes of human behaviour in His Kingdom.

Pro 29:25 The fear of man proves to be a snare, but whoever puts his trust in Yahweh is kept safe-

Solomon presents his father David's being 'set on high' (Ps. 69:29) as programmatic for the exaltation of all the righteous; he sees David as the epitome of the righteous, and thereby justifies the Davidic dynasty (s.w. Prov. 18:10; 29:25).

LXX "Ungodliness causes a man to stumble: but he that trusts in his master shall be safe" would be Solomon again seeking to inculcate personal loyalty to himself through his Proverbs.

But GNB is also helpful: "It is dangerous to be concerned with what others think of you, but if you trust the LORD, you are safe". Worry about image and the opinion of others is a lack of faith. Because

Pro 29:26 Many seek the ruler's favour, but a man's justice comes from Yahweh-

See on :12. Solomon was the judge of Israel, and through this Proverb he insists that his justice is directly from Yahweh. This may have been true initially, or insofar as he judged according to the Divine wisdom he had; but it led him to consider himself generally infallible. He thereby lost any sense of personal sin, possibility of failure or self examination. And this led him to personal spiritual disaster. This is still a Hezekiah Proverb (see on Prov. 25:1), and would refer to the ambassadors of the nations coming to Hezekiah to seek his favour.

Pro 29:27 A dishonest man detests the righteous, and the upright in their ways detest the wicked-

"Abomination" is the common word for idols (e.g. Dt. 7:25,26). Idolatry is here interpreted as

things like pride and telling lies (:17). These seven things are the essence of idolatry. There is a recurring nature to them, just as idols got a grip on the mind of the worshipper. Solomon often uses the word for quiet, secret sins, words and the matters of the heart, internal attitudes and judgments (Prov. 11:1,20; 12:22; 13:19; 15:26; 16:5; 17:15; 20:10,23; 24:9; 26:25; 28:9; 29:27). And this of course is the essence of idolatry in our age; this is the practical force to us of all Biblical teaching about idolatry.

LXX adds: "A son that keeps the commandment shall escape destruction; for such an one has fully received it. Let no falsehood be spoken by the king from the tongue; yea, let no falsehood proceed from his tongue. The king's tongue is a sword, and not one of flesh; and whosoever shall be given up to it shall be destroyed: for if his wrath should be provoked, he destroys men with cords, and devours men's bones, and burns them up as a flame, so that they are not even fit to be eaten by the young eagles. My son, reverence my words, and receive them, and repent". The additions of the LXX are at times quoted in the New Testament. So we can take this quite seriously, as a reference to how Solomon and Hezekiah (see on Prov.. 25:1) feared their sons were going astray. And they both did, Manasseh especially. We also have an insight here into what Solomon thought kings had the power to do to their people, and he ended up therefore not reigning for God but for himself, and abusing his people (1 Kings 12:11).

PROVERBS CHAPTER 30

Pro 30:1

The words of Agur the son of Jakeh, the oracle-

In identifying Agur, we must give full weight to the statement in Prov. 1:1 that this book of wisdom sayings compiled by Solomon is all the wisdom of Solomon. I will suggest on Prov. 31 that the "Lemuel" is Solomon. And so likewise here. "Agur" means "the collector", and Solomon is clearly the collector or compiler of this work. The mention of his father makes little sense if he is totally unknown; so I suggest this is a code for "David".

The man said to Ithiel, even to Ithiel and Ucal-

These names are not attested as Hebrew personal names at the time, and so as noted above, we can understand them to be symbolic persons. The relevance of the meanings of their names may have been more apparent to the original readership than it is to us. But the text is hard to understand, and can be rendered "God is not with me, God is not with me, and I am helpless" (GNB); "The man declares, I am weary, O God; I am weary, O God, and worn out" (ESV).

Pro 30:2 Surely I am the most ignorant man, and don't have a man's understanding-

LXX "For I am the most simple of all men, and there is not in me the wisdom of men". The style of these words of Agur / Solomon is different to the Proverbs generally. But this doesn't mean it is not by Solomon. It may be that this chapter is Solomon's reaction to the gift of wisdom he was given (see on :8), and the rest of the Proverbs are his transcription, with editing, of that wisdom. Or parts of it. He may here be reflecting as in :3 that he had not attended any school of wisdom, as was common for an oriental wise man. All his wisdom, therefore, was a direct gift from God.

Pro 30:3 I have not learned wisdom, neither do I have the knowledge of the Holy One-

As noted on :2, Solomon had not attended any school of wisdom, as was common for an oriental wise man. All his wisdom, therefore, was a direct gift from God. Hence LXX "God has taught me wisdom, and I know the knowledge of the holy". This could as well be "the holy ones". He has a place amongst the holy ones, the sages, although a young man; because God had given him wisdom.

Pro 30:4 Who has ascended up into heaven, and descended? Who has gathered the wind in his fists? Who has bound the waters in his garment? Who has established all the ends of the earth? What is his name, and what is his son's name, if you know?-

This is very much the language of the book of Job. The conclusion there, as here, is that no man has done these things. Only God, and not even Moses, despite his ascents and descents to God in Sinai. And that God had given that wisdom to His spiritual child Solomon. Hence GNB "Have any ever mastered heavenly knowledge? Have any ever caught the wind in their hands? Or wrapped up water in a piece of cloth? Or fixed the boundaries of the earth? Who are they, if you know? Who are their children?".

It is tempting to see in this verse a prophecy of the Lord Jesus. The language of ascending and descending is that of God manifestation and theophany. And this theophany comes to its ultimate revelation in the Son of God, whose name was not then known. For He is made of God "wisdom" to us (1 Cor. 1:24).

Pro 30:5 Every word of God is flawless. He is a shield to those who take refuge in Him- "Every word of God proves true" (ESV). This is very much the sentiment of David in Ps. 119, expressing faith that his promised kingship would come about because God's word would come true. And Solomon likewise saw his kingship as due to the fulfilment of the word of God promised to David. Hezekiah likewise saw his kingship and survival as king as the fulfilment of God's word to Isaiah. The fulfilment of those prophetic words had involved God being a shield to those who trusted in His prophetic word.

Pro 30:6 Don't you add to His words, lest He reprove you, and you be found a liar- This is alluded to in Rev. 22:19. Solomon may have in mind those who might try to add to the promises to David in order to justify their power grabs or taking of his throne from him. Always in Proverbs Solomon seems to use God's truths to bolster himself and his position of power, just as can be done today.

Pro 30:7 Two things I have asked of You; don't deny me before I die- LXX "take not favour from me before I die". This could imply that Solomon felt he as David's Messianic son [as he liked to imagine himself] was covered by grace / Divine favour all his days. And this led him to behave in the unspiritual way he did in his private life.

Pro 30:8 Remove far from me falsehood and lies. Give me neither poverty nor riches. Feed me with the food that is needful for me-

Even if Agur isn't Solomon (but see on :1), the words of Agur were selected by Solomon for inclusion in his anthology. Solomon is here alluding to the way that he did not ask for riches, but wisdom (see on :2); and was rewarded with the gift of riches. But this is but false humility. For he boasts about his riches in Prov. 14:24 "The crown of the wise is their riches, but the folly of fools crowns them with folly". It was Solomon who was the king and wore the ultimate crown in his society. And he implies that his fantastic riches were a result of his wisdom, and that his pattern should be followed by others. But he fails to remember that his desire for wisdom was recognized by God in that He gave Solomon riches. Those riches were a gift from God, by grace, and not acquired or generated by his own application of wisdom (1 Kings 3:13). He therefore misused his possession of wisdom and experience of grace to justify himself, and present himself as a self made man; when he was not that at all.

Pro 30:9 lest I be full, deny You, and say, 'Who is Yahweh?', or lest I be poor, and steal, and so dishonour the name of my God-

But this is what happened to Solomon, as it did to Hezekiah. When he was "full", his wives

turned his heart away from Yahweh, and he wrote the denial of true faith which we have in Ecclesiastes.

Pro 30:10 Don't accuse a servant along with his master, lest he curse you, and you be held guilty-

This may be a reference to Rehoboam, Solomon's trusted servant who then turned against him. This is why the Proverbs have much to say about servants. Solomon would be asking that the exiled Rehoboam not be seen as representative of himself. And he threatens that he as the master will then curse any who did so. But LXX has simply "Deliver not a servant into the hands of his master". This would be tacit admission that there were unreasonable masters, and an abused slave had the right to run away.

Pro 30:11 There is a generation that curses their father, and doesn't bless their mother-

Solomon may be alluding to his half brother Absalom and others in the family who had revolted against David their father, and who were against Solomon's kingship. This means that Solomon is here using Divine truths with a subtext of justifying his own rulership and lineage through David. And this is always a temptation to any who have God's truth; to use it for their own justification. LXX "A wicked generation" is a phrase quoted by the Lord Jesus about the Israel of His day and the last days. Attitudes to family life and parents are seen as the litmus indicator of wickedness.

Pro 30:12 There is a generation that is pure in their own eyes, yet are not washed from their filthiness-

LXX "A wicked generation"; see on :11. The idea of being washed from their filth is alluded to by Peter in 2 Pet. 2:22. Solomon ended up abusing his people, whipping and beating them because he considered them fools (1 Kings 12:11). He seems to imply here that his generation were impure, filthy and therefore worthy of such treatment. The heart that bleeds for sinners will be ever seeking to save them, not categorizing them in various compartments of wickedness and then mocking and judging them, as Solomon does in the Proverbs.

Pro 30:13 There is a generation, oh how proud are their eyes! Their eyelids are lifted up-

"A proud look" is exactly what Solomon's father David didn't have (s.w. Ps. 131:1). He is justifying him, and the word for "lifted up" is a theme here (:13,21,32). It is that used to refer to the various attempted coups against David and Solomon (e.g. 2 Sam. 18:28; 20:21; 1 Kings 11:26). But :32 uses the same word for "lifted up" and appears to offer the chance of repentance and forgiveness to such people, which is not typical of Solomon, who generally condemns all opposition to him or David.

This however is the language used in Song of Solomon of the eyes of his illicit Gentile girlfriend (Song 4:1,9; 7:4); indeed he was overcome by her eyes (Song 6:5).

Pro 30:14 There is a generation whose teeth are like swords, and their jaws like knives, to devour the poor from the earth, and the needy from among men-

Even if Agur isn't Solomon (but see on :1), the words of Agur were selected by Solomon for inclusion in his anthology which is the book of Proverbs. The language here is very similar to that used by David about his persecution by Saul. Solomon may be implying that that "generation" continued, it was the same group who opposed his kingship.

Pro 30:15 The leech has two daughters: 'Give, give'. There are three things that are never satisfied; four that don't say, 'Enough': -

LXX "The horse-leech had three dearly-beloved daughters: and these three did not satisfy her; and the fourth was not contented so as to say, Enough"; GNB "A leech has two daughters, and both are named "Give me!"". The leech was a blood sucker. But Solomon's criticisms of animals in :19 (see note there) are because he likens bad women to them. He appears to have in mind a particular woman, perhaps one he codenames Aluqah [translated "leech"], who he found insatiable, along with her daughters. See on :16. Solomon had over 1000 wives, and slept with whom he chose. But he finds this particular woman and her daughters have broken his heart and irritate and anger him because they are so insatiable. Solomon, the apparently powerful over women, becomes ensnared by them, as he laments in Ecc. 7:26.

Pro 30:16 Sheol; the barren womb; the earth that is not satisfied with water; and the fire that doesn't say, 'Enough' -

Solomon's 1000 wives would not have seen much of him. He slept with a girl he fancied, and she became his wife, shut up in the harem and perhaps never called for again. And so she was left without children, a barren womb being like a parched land, with an ever burning fire of resentment against him which as it were burnt to the grave, *sheol*. Solomon, the apparently powerful over women, becomes ensnared by them, as he laments in Ecc. 7:26.

Pro 30:17 The eye that mocks at his father, and scorns obedience to his mother: the ravens of the valley shall pick it out, the young eagles shall eat it-

We will read in Prov. 31 of Bathsheba's commands to Solomon about women and wine. But he scorned obedience to this.

Pro 30:18 There are three things which are too amazing for me, four which I don't understand-

The things listed in :19 all leave no trace of their path or movement. And they all point forward to the way of an adulterous woman (:20). Throughout Proverbs, Solomon is very hard on women and the behaviour of prostitutes and adulterous women. It's quite an obsession with him, and he expresses great bitterness at them, confessing here that their behaviour is beyond even his understanding. Yet he had every woman he fancied, with a harem of 1000 women. But he is so bitter against women who commit adultery. It was

inevitable that those women became adulterous, and would hardly remain faithful to Solomon. He likely never saw most of them in the course of a year. And their adultery, as he imagine or fears it, becomes so painful for him. And yet it was the direct result of his unbridled lust in taking so many wives. He who considered himself in power over women was in fact revealed as powerless before them.

Pro 30:19 The way of an eagle in the air; the way of a serpent on a rock; the way of a ship in the midst of the sea; and the way of a man with a maiden-

These things all leave no trace. "The way of a man *within* a woman" (Heb.) would refer to the sexual act. As discussed on :18, Solomon lived in fear that his many wives were adulterous but with such large numbers, he could never actually prove it. If a king slept with a woman, she became his wife, and was therefore shut up in the harem, perhaps never to be called for by the king ever again. And yet Solomon therefore lived in fear of those women, because he suspected them of adultery but could never prove it as there was no outward sign of it, just as birds, snakes and ships leave no evidence of their path. His reference to the ship in the midst of the ocean may be a wry commentary upon how his mother had described his ideal wife (Prov. 31:14).

Pro 30:20 So is the way of an adulterous woman: she eats and wipes her mouth, and says, 'I have done nothing wrong'-

LXX "who having washed herself from what she has done, says she has done nothing amiss". There is a strange connection with Bathsheba ritually washing herself *before* David slept with her (2 Sam. 11:4). This may be some psychological reflection of the way Solomon continually seeks to whitewash the sin of his father David with his mother Bathsheba. "Wipes her mouth" is GNB "takes a bath". The woman has a quasi spiritual image to her, as found in the whore of Prov. 7 who likewise outwardly appears ritually obedient to the Mosaic law. In the Song of Solomon, Solomon describes his illicit Gentile girlfriend in the language of Israel and Mosaic laws; he fell for the very kind of woman he so bitterly curses here. Again we see that he comes the parade example of a man who does the very opposite of the truth he has received from God. This is a stage beyond mere hypocrisy; it is the narcissism of someone playing God, who considers themselves personal obedience to the Divine principles they teach. And this is for all time an acute temptation to those who have God's truth, especially in the area of sexuality.

Pro 30:21 For three things the earth trembles, and under four, it can't bear up-

The idea is that these are things which should not be lifted up in the earth / *eretz* promised to Abraham. The word for "bear / lift up" is that used to refer to the various attempted coups against David and Solomon (e.g. 2 Sam. 18:28; 20:21; 1 Kings 11:26).

But LXX "By three things the earth is troubled, and the fourth it cannot bear". This would make the handmaid of :23 the most awful of all these scenarios.

Pro 30:22 For a servant when he is king; a fool when he is filled with food-

GNB "a slave who becomes a king". The allusions would be to Jeroboam Solomon's servant who wanted to become king (1 Kings 11:26); and to Nabal the fool. If Solomon had truly trusted in God's prophetic word to establish his throne, he wouldn't have needed to continually be fencing and defending himself by sniping at his opponents through his Proverbs.

Pro 30:23 for an unloved woman when she is married; and a handmaid who is heir to her mistress-

The allusions are to Leah, and then to Hagar and Sarah. Solomon's harem of 1000 women doubtless contained many who felt they were "unloved women". He sees truth, but lived otherwise. But LXX "or if a maid-servant should cast out her own mistress; and if a hateful woman should marry a good man". It was the mistress Sarah who cast out Hagar the maidservant; the LXX suggests that if it were the other way around, this would have been a terrible thing. Solomon's justification of Sarah's actions seems wrong; for she was not right in what she did, even though the incident is given typical significance in Galatians 4.

Pro 30:24 There are four things which are little on the earth, but they are exceedingly wise-

LXX "Wiser than the wise". I will note on :26 that all the animals mentioned are seen by Solomon as representative of himself as a hard worker; and he sees himself as the preeminently wise one in Israelite society.

Pro 30:25 The ants are not a strong people, yet they provide their food in the summer-

Even if Agur isn't Solomon (but see on :1), the words of Agur were selected by Solomon for inclusion in his anthology of Proverbs. This statement repeats that of Solomon in Prov. 6:6. The Proverbs contain repeated condemnation of laziness. Lack of a zealous work ethic is a rejection of wisdom, according to Solomon. As Solomon explains in Ecc. 1, he was an active person, not lazy by nature. And yet he lacked spirituality. He claimed that his service of God was due to his spirituality, but it was in reality merely a semblance of serving God when it was really just reinforcing his own personality type. His mocking of the " sluggard" or "lazy one" is so frequent (Prov. 6:6,9; 10:26; 13:4; 15:19; 19:24; 20:4; 21:25; 22:13; 24:30; 26:13-16). But it is a reflection of his own works-based approach to righteousness; the 'wise' "do" good things, and the wicked don't do enough good things. Personal spiritual mindedness and relationship with God are simply not emphasized.

Pro 30:26 The conies are but a feeble folk, yet make they their houses in the rocks-

"Rock badgers" (ESV), "rabbits" (LXX). To have a house in rocks was an allusion to royal palaces (Is. 33:16) and summer palaces carved in mountains. Solomon had such a palace in the Lebanon mountains, and likewise the royal palaces of Babylon (Jer. 51:25) and Edom (Obadiah 3) were houses in the rocks. Allusions to kings and their palaces continue in :27,28. The idea is that by hard work (see on :26), a man rises up from lowly beginnings to the throne

and palace. This is Solomon presenting himself as having attained his throne and palaces by his hard work. But he misses the point; that he was exalted by grace, because he was David's son, and was given wealth and glory by God, and not because of his hard work.

Pro 30:27 The locusts have no king, yet they advance in ranks-

LXX "march orderly at one command". As explained on :26, the idea is that a tiny locust works his way up to be a leader. Or just reading it as it stands, the idea may be that unity is not brought about by human leadership but by obedience to God's word; which Solomon sees as being taught by his mouth through his Proverbs.

Pro 30:28 You can catch a lizard with your hands, yet it is in kings' palaces-

LXX "is easily taken". As explained on :26, the idea is that a tiny lizard works his way up to be a king in a palace, even though earlier it would have been easy for men to catch him. But he persevered and got into the palace. This is Solomon presenting himself as having attained his throne and palaces by his hard work. But he misses the point; that he was exalted by grace, because he was David's son, and was given wealth and glory by God, and not because of his hard work.

Pro 30:29 There are three things which are stately in their march, four which are stately in going-

"Stately" implies these animals are to be compared to kings in regal procession; and as noted on :30, Solomon clearly has himself in view, as in all these allusions to animals.

Pro 30:30 The lion, which is mightiest among animals, and doesn't turn away for any-

Solomon again has himself in view, seeing himself as the lion of the tribe of Judah against whom there can be no opposition as king of beasts. But this language was only finally appropriate for the Lord Jesus as the true Messianic son of David (Rev. 5:5). See on :32. Solomon assumed the promises to David were totally fulfilled in him, and he was perhaps encouraged in this by David's fantasy that this would be the case in Ps. 45,72 etc. He whitewashed in his own mind the much laboured conditional nature of those promises; he assumed he was right and acceptable before God. This is a particular tendency for some, although not for all. For some struggle to have any positive view about themselves, whereas others are over confident and arrogant in their self perceptions.

Pro 30:31 the greyhound, the male goat also; and the king against whom there is no rising up-

This is Solomon implying that revolt against his kingship is futile; there can be no opposition to him, and any such rising up against him or his father was the work of fools without wisdom (see on :30,32). LXX "a cock walking in boldly among the hens, and the goat leading the herd; and a king publicly speaking before a nation". ESV "a king whose army is with him".

Pro 30:32 If you have done foolishly in lifting up yourself, or if you have thought evil, put your hand over your mouth-

The one who exalted or 'lifted up' himself would refer to the various attempted coups against David and Solomon (e.g. 2 Sam. 18:28; 20:21; 1 Kings 11:26). "Thought evil" is the word used by David for his enemies within the camps of Saul and Absalom (Ps. 10:2,4; 21:11; 31:13; 37:7). See on :13,21. But :13 uses the same word for "lifted up"; but here in :32 there is the apparent chance of repentance [with hand over mouth] and forgiveness to such people. But this is not typical of Solomon, who generally condemns all opposition to him or David.

On one hand Solomon condemns mirth (Ecc. 7:4; Prov. 20:32 LXX "If thou abandon thyself to mirth, and stretch forth thine hand in a quarrel, thou shalt be disgraced"). But this is exactly what Solomon did in Ecc. 2:1,2; 8:15. He refused to accept his own wisdom. It was merely a teaching position, and he felt the need to empirically find its truth. he failed to personalize the wisdom he taught, and therefore turned away in the end .

Pro 30:33 For as the churning of milk brings forth butter, and the wringing of the nose brings forth blood; so the churning of wrath brings forth judgment-

GNB "If you hit someone's nose, it bleeds. If you stir up anger, you get into trouble". This is as ever true as far as it goes. But the Proverbs often seek to instill a spirit of conservatism into Israelite society, which would quash opposition, criticism of the leadership and thereby leave Solomon established in power. If he had truly trusted in the promises about the Divine establishment of David's throne, he wouldn't have needed such intrigues.

PROVERBS CHAPTER 31

Pro 31:1

The words of king Lemuel; the oracle with which his mother warned him-

Bathsheba was a spiritual woman, married to a man of faith (Uriah). Solomon (the Lemuel of the book of Proverbs) was brought up by a very spiritual mother. The spiritual woman of Prov. 31 whom Solomon likens to his mother is a cameo of the sort of woman Bathsheba was. Note how Lemuel's mother (Bathsheba) warns her son not to give his strength to women, to those relationships which destroy kings. She surely said this with a sideways glance back at her own failures with David.

The poem is an acrostic, each verse starting with a different letter of the Hebrew alphabet. In terms of style, it's been observed that this was typical of the "heroic hymn." "It is the kind of hymn that typically would celebrate a soldier's mighty deeds and his victory in battle" [Waltke]. Domestic work is being lifted up to heroic status, which was not at all how the male based societies of the time saw it. Her "strength" (:17,25), fearlessness (:21,25) etc. are praised, and the Hebrew word translated "virtuous" is elsewhere translated as army, [military] company, band of soldiers, valiant, strong, war etc. (Ex. 14:4, 9, 28; Num. 31:14; 2 Sam. 8:9; Is. 10:14; Mic. 4:13). The military sense there in the word is clear. The word is used three times in Ruth; Boaz was a man of "power" (Ruth 2:1), and Ruth is called a "virtuous" woman who would "do mightily" (Ruth 3:11; 4:11). She appears to be the prototype of the woman of Prov. 31, but she is given the same title as the powerful Boaz. The point is, the strength was in different ways, but none the same, the power was joint between them, they were in a spiritual and psychological sense as equals. It appeared, of course, that Elimelech was the man of power and Ruth was the powerless female Gentile. But the record is making the point that they were equals.

LXX removes all reference to "Lemuel": "My words have been spoken by God—the oracular answer of a king, whom his mother instructed". In this case, Solomon is claiming that he is inspired by God because his mother was.

Pro 31:2 Oh, my son! Oh, son of my womb!-

LXX "What wilt thou keep, my son, what? the words of God. My firstborn son, I speak to thee". Solomon was Bathsheba's firstborn son by David; perhaps because she was more of a daughter to Uriah, he had not had children by her (2 Sam. 12:3).

Oh, son of my vows!-

GNB "the answer to my prayers". After the loss of her first son by David, she would have prayed and vowed to God to give any other son to God.

Pro 31:3 Don't give your strength to women, nor your ways to that which destroys kings-

Prov. 31 was perhaps written by Bathsheba as advice to her son Lemuel (Solomon). In it she seems to be rebuking Solomon for his ways; or giving him commands which he broke, despite all his emphasis in Proverbs upon obeying the law of one's mother: "What, my son? and what, the son of my womb? Give not thy strength unto women, nor thy ways to them that

destroy kings (i.e. women and adultery; surely this was said with a sideways glance at her own relationship with David)" (Prov. 31:3 RVmg). Prov. 31 goes on to describe the ideal wife for Solomon, based upon his mother; exactly the opposite of the women Solomon married. We are left to imagine Bathsheba's grief of mind, especially recalling her husband's special pride in Solomon. This was not just a case of protective mother checking out Solomon's girlfriends in a disapproving manner. She knew, through the inspiration of the Spirit as well as her own personal experience, the seriousness of messing with women. And she could see her ever so spiritual son going wrong in this.

He praises his mother for teaching him not to give his strength, "nor to them [women] who destroy kings" (Prov. 31:3 RVmg.), and yet he must surely have perceived that this was just what he had done. But he praises his mother for having taught him this truth; all the emphasis was upon academic teaching and acceptance of positions, rather than upon personalizing these things.

Pro 31:4 It is not for kings, Lemuel, it is not for kings to drink wine; nor for princes to say, 'Where is strong drink?'

Her warnings against alcohol were totally disregarded by Solomon in his later search for fulfilment in the flesh (Ecc. 2:3). Despite condemning those who ignore the teaching of their mother, Solomon did just that. He was a stellar example of a man who does the very opposite of the truth he has received from God. This is a stage beyond mere hypocrisy; it is the narcissism of someone playing God, who considers themselves personal obedience to the Divine principles they teach. And this is for all time an acute temptation to those who have God's truth, especially in the area of sexuality and addiction.

Pro 31:5 lest they drink and forget the law, and pervert the justice due to anyone who is afflicted-

She pleads with him not to drink lest he "pervert the judgment of any that is afflicted" (:5 AV). And yet on his death, the complaints about his hard oppression of the people indicate that he did just this (due to his taking to drink, according to Ecc. 2:3?). And yet Prov. 31 has Solomon praising his mother for her wisdom; he was proud of his mum, and yet he so miserably disobeyed her. He seems to have a mindset in which he felt it was impossible for him to be disobedient. The all important thing for him was who his parents and pedigree were.

LXX "forget wisdom, and be not able to judge the poor rightly". Perhaps he has this in mind when he protests in Ecc. 2:9 that his wisdom remained with him. He didn't forget it, in that he still remained aware of it on a theoretical, intellectual level. But he was not thereby justified; and he failed to judge the poor rightly in that he whipped them and abused his people (1 Kings 12:11).

Pro 31:6 Give strong drink to him who is ready to perish; and wine to the bitter in soul-

Bathsheba's appeal is for Solomon not to act like one who has no hope for future life, nor as one "bitter in soul". But he takes to alcohol in Ecc. 2:3 exactly because all his wisdom had taken no personal lodgment within him and he failed to have the perspective of eternity in God's Kingdom. It was those who followed David who were described as "bitter in soul" because of their sharing David's afflictions (1 Sam. 22:2; 2 Sam. 17:8). But David himself despaired of his men being like that; Solomon was to act as king, assured of God's love and final salvation, and not as David's initial followers and those condemned by Divine judgment (Ez. 27:31 s.w.). Uriah, Bathsheba's first husband, would have been amongst them and she knew their mindset. Hezekiah uses the same phrase about himself in his final 15 years of life (Is. 38:15), when as often noted (see on Prov. 25:1), he followed the sad path of Solomon.

Pro 31:7 let him drink, and forget his poverty, and remember his misery no more-

By taking to drink (Ecc. 2:3), Solomon was acting as if he was a poor, miserable man with no wealth. This is the basis of so much destructive behaviour; a refusal to accept what God has blessed us with. Solomon repeatedly sees poverty as being the fault of the poor, making it parallel here with "misery" as if poverty is the worst calamity. He sees poor people as poor due to their refusal of his teaching of wisdom (s.w. Prov. 6:11; 10:4,15; 13:7,8,18,23; 24:34; 28:19; 31:7). Many of these passages are effectively mocking the poor, which Solomon condemns in Prov. 17:5. He fails to take his own wisdom, as we also see in his behaviour with foreign women. Again we see Solomon's works based approach to righteousness, and lack of grace; refusing to accept that we are all poor men before God, as David himself exemplified when he cried to God as a poor man (Ps. 34:6). But his much beloved father David was unashamed to say he was a materially "poor man" (1 Sam. 18:23); and Uriah, whom he wronged, is described also as a "poor man" (2 Sam. 12:1). The poor were to be defended and given to (Ps. 82:3), and the Bible is clear that poverty isn't necessarily a result of sin or unwisdom. But Solomon fails to appreciate this, so obsessed is he with works, and the idea that obedience to his anthology of Proverbs will make the poor prosperous, as if God's truth is a kind of wealth creation scheme.

Pro 31:8 Open your mouth for the mute, in the cause of all who are left desolate-

LXX "Open thy mouth with the word of God, and judge all fairly". Solomon initially did this, as shown by his judgment of the two prostitutes. But Solomon finally departed from his mother's command to care for the poor and desolate (:9) by abusing and whipping his people (1 Kings 12:11), considering them all fools.

Pro 31:9 Open your mouth, judge righteously, and serve justice to the poor and needy-

Solomon liked to imagine that he was perfectly obedient to his mother's command to open his lips in right judgment. But he went further, to assume that whatever he spoke in whatever context was right and true (see on Prov. 8:6-8, where the same words are used). Bathsheba speaks as David does in Ps. 72, where he fantasizes that Solomon will be the Messianic king

characterized by righteous judgment for the poor and needy. But she realizes that Solomon must consciously act like this, he must be obedient to her command about this matter. Whereas David, and Solomon, assume that merely by being the favourite son of David he is going to automatically be like this.

Pro 31:10 Who can find a worthy woman? For her price is far above rubies-

"More precious than jewels" is the very phrase used about wisdom in Prov. 3:15. The virtuous woman here is portrayed as the embodiment of the 'woman wisdom' with which Proverbs starts. Indeed Prov. 1:8 begins with an appeal to heed our mother's teaching, and concludes with Solomon claiming to have done so himself. Solomon respected Bathsheba his mother (1 Kings 2:19) and appears to be justifying her as the most wonderful 'wise woman' ever- and he did so in the context of the sons of David's other wives pretending to the throne and being his political opponents.

"An excellent wife who can find?" (ESV) is perhaps Solomon cynically observing that none of his wives were like her, similar to his comment to this effect in Ecc. 7:28, which uses the same word for "find": "... which my soul has sought repeatedly, but I have not found. One man among a thousand I found, but a woman among all these I have not found". And yet, as noted throughout Prov. 31, he finally disobeys all the commands him, to the letter. He becomes like the man who for ever upholds his mother's Christian wisdom and grace, but acts in the opposite way.

Pro 31:11 The heart of her husband trusts in her; he shall have no lack of profit-

"No need of spoil" (AV) could imply that he will not be tempted to go looking for other relationships because he trusts in his wife. And that feature of trust in our partner is a unique glue which binds a relationship together. But I noted on Prov. 30:18,19 that Solomon was sceptical of his 1000 wives; he suspected them of adultery, but couldn't prove it. His heart didn't trust in them, and so he looked for other women. He took whoever he fancied, slept with them, and thereby the girl became his wife, entered the harem, was maybe hardly ever called for again. And thus she was left without children and bitter against Solomon. This was all a direct result of Solomon departing from the teaching of his mother on this matter.

Pro 31:12 She does him good and not harm all the days of her life-

A swipe at David's other wives from the household of Saul? Solomon speaks in Ecc. 2:3 as if he were on a journey of discovery as to what would be "good" for a man "all the days of his life"; and yet in Prov. 31:12 he spoke of how the way of wisdom and having a wise wife will bring "good" for a man "all the days of his life". Perhaps this is a tacit admission that Solomon had not had a wise wife; and it is also an admission of the way the wisdom he taught had taken zero lodgment in his own heart. It was all just theoretical truth. This is such a warning to us. Solomon, the apparently powerful over women, becomes ensnared and deeply harmed by them, as he laments in Prov. 30:15,18,19; Ecc. 7:26. This was all a direct result of Solomon departing from the teaching of his mother on this matter.

Pro 31:13 She seeks wool and flax and works eagerly with her hands-

The ideal wife for Solomon is presented as someone like him, hard working and industrious. This fits in with the obsession with works and achievement which fills the Proverbs. There is nothing wrong with it of itself, but there is no emphasis here upon faith in God and spirituality as the lead characteristic a man should look for in a woman.

Pro 31:14 She is like the merchant ships; she brings her food from afar-

GNB "She brings home food from out-of-the-way places, as merchant ships do". The idea may be that she prepares a wide range of dishes for her husband; something unusual in a society which basically ate the same kind of food each meal. Solomon appear to allude to this when he likens his wives to merchant ships who leave no trace of their path, in that he suspects them of adultery but can't prove it (see on Prov. 30:19). He is admitting that his wives were simply not as his mother had suggested; but she had taught him to focus upon one wife, and he had ignored this.

Pro 31:15 She rises also while it is yet night, gives food to her household and portions for her servant girls-

Despite having female servants and a husband "in the gate" (:23), presumably wealthy, this woman gets her hands dirty with making things with her own hands (:19 etc.). The "portions" are really things to do, assignments. She becomes the basis of the Lord's parable of how He gives His servants tasks when He goes away. He was unafraid to take the description of a woman as a role model for Him as a male.

Pro 31:16 She considers a field and then buys it. With the fruit of her hands she plants a vineyard-

The Lord Jesus spoke of the wise man buying a field with hidden treasure in it; and it is God who planted the vineyard of Israel. Again we see how the Father and Son are unafraid to take the description of a woman as a role model for themselves.

Pro 31:17 She arms her waist with strength and makes her arms strong-

Her body is characterized by muscles, with strong arms and waist. This is not what Solomon finds attractive when we find him praising his Gentile lover in the Song of Solomon. He finds attractive the very opposite of the woman presented here by his mother. The lover of his Song appears to be the very antithesis of the virtuous woman.

Pro 31:18 She perceives that her merchandise is profitable. Her lamp doesn't go out by night-

GNB "She knows the value of everything she makes, and works late into the night". LXX continues Solomon's emphasis upon justification by works: "And she finds by experience that working is good". Solomon's romance with the Gentile woman of the Song of Solomon

contains only praise of her outward appearance and choice of cosmetics and jewellery; there is no mention of her work or industrious characteristics, which his mother tells him to be attracted to.

Pro 31:19 she lays her hands to the distaff, and her hands hold the spindle-

The idea may be as GNB that "She spins her own thread and weaves her own cloth", rather than buying it ready made. Again, the woman of the Song of Solomon is absolutely different, arrayed in the clothing of Egypt and other imported adornments, rather than in clothes she has homespun.

Pro 31:20 She opens her arms to the poor; yes, she extends her hands to the needy-

She is to support her husband in his focus upon the needy (:8,9). But Solomon's Gentile girlfriend of the Song of Solomon is not at all characterized by this. David had seen himself as "poor and needy", needing grace after his sin with Bathsheba and its consequences (Ps. 40:17; 70:5; 86:1; 109:16,22). He wished Solomon to likewise have pity on the "poor and needy" amongst the Gentiles, those who had likewise repented (Ps. 72:13). And David was especially desirous to himself see the "poor and needy" blessed and accepted as he had been (Ps. 82:3,4; 113:7). It is our personal experience of needing grace which leads us to have a heart for those like us, the poor and needy. Any other motivation will ultimately not abide. Solomon appears to glorify his mother Bathsheba for likewise pitying the poor and needy (Prov. 31:9,20).

Pro 31:21 She is not afraid of the snow for her household; for all her household are clothed with scarlet-

LXX "Her husband is not anxious about those at home when he tarries anywhere abroad: for all her household are clothed". This again would be the basis of the Lord's parable about Himself as the householder who goes abroad "to a far country". As noted on :15,16, the woman is given a very high status; she is presented as completely managing the household herself in the husband's absence, rather than a household manager assuming that responsibility.

Pro 31:22 She makes for herself carpets of tapestry, her clothing is fine linen and purple-

LXX "She makes for her husband clothes of double texture, and garments for herself of fine linen and scarlet"- rather than buying ready made clothes. But this contrasts with what Solomon found attractive in his illicit Gentile girlfriend in the Song of Solomon. There may here be allusion to the materials of the tabernacle, as if domestic life is but an extension of life in the tabernacle and formal worship of Yahweh.

Pro 31:23 Her husband is respected in the gates, when he sits among the elders of the land-

An allusion to Ruth and Boaz. The implication is that this respect is largely due to his wife and his domestic situation under her good care. This contrasts with attitudes then and now,

where a man's domestic life and relationships aren't seen as significant compared to his performance in the job. But the qualification of New Testament elders likewise takes into account domestic life, because this is the litmus test of spirituality in practice.

Pro 31:24 She makes linen garments and sells them, and delivers sashes to the merchant-
LXX "She makes fine linens, and sells girdles to the Canaanites: she opens her mouth heedfully and with propriety, and controls her tongue". The impression is that rather than buying ready made clothes from foreigners, she makes her own clothes, and also sells her produce to other nations. This all contrasts with the woman Solomon falls for in the Song of Solomon, who comes over as a painted doll, clothed in ready made clothes from other lands.

Pro 31:25 Strength and dignity are her clothing, she laughs at the time to come-
LXX "and rejoices in the last day". Unlike Solomon, his mother Bathsheba realizes that life is to be lived in the perspective of a "last day" of judgment, when there will be eternal outcomes for how life is lived today. It was Solomon's failure to realize this which led him to so much arrogance, and the hypocrisy and disobedience which comes from assuming that judgment day will not come at the last day.

Pro 31:26 She opens her mouth with wisdom, faithful instruction is on her tongue-
She is to likewise teach as her husband does. Again, a very high view of women is presupposed here, quite different to that held in society at the time. But we note that David so often talks about *God's* "law", using the word *torah*. But Solomon so often speaks of his own *torah*, and that of his mother and his wife, the mother of "my son" (s.w. Prov. 1:8; 3:1; 4:2; 6:20; 7:2; 13:14; 31:26). Yet elsewhere in the Bible, the well over 200 occurrences of *torah* are always about *God's* law. Solomon applies the word to his own teachings and that of his wife, and thereby plays God. whilst it could be argued that Solomon's teachings were Divinely inspired, all the same he ought surely to have spoken of them as *God's torah* rather than his own *torah*. This kind of playing God is seen so often in the teachers of God's people.

Pro 31:27 She looks well to the ways of her household, and doesn't eat the bread of laziness-
To eat the bread of laziness was and is a particular temptation for the wife of a wealthy leader. But Solomon was to look for a woman who would not be like that. Yet the impression we get of the girl he fell for in the Song of Solomon is that she was a "prince's daughter" who was not at all a hard worker.

Pro 31:28 Her children rise up and call her blessed. Her husband also praises her-
LXX "And her kindness to them sets up her children for them, and they grow rich, and her husband praises her". The 'setting up' of their children would be because of the wife. There may be some reference to the repeated emphasis upon God 'establishing' the line of David- if they were faithful. There was no way that a Gentile wife could achieve this, and yet Solomon married hundreds of them. He hardly praises his wives; Prov. 30:16-19 is full of suspicion of

them regarding their possible adultery. In fact, Solomon is very down on women in Proverbs, assuming many of them are adulterous and no better than prostitutes. But it was his sleeping with whoever he chose and thereby making them his wives which led to this situation.

Pro 31:29 Many women do noble things, but you excel them all!-

Again we note the positive view of women by Bathsheba, noting that many women do noble things. This was all the more radical, being said at a time when men dominated the public arena and were typically associated with doing noble deeds. LXX "He says, "Many women are good wives, but you are the best of them all"". This is quite contrary to the spirit of Solomon's experience in Ecc. 7:26,27, where he as it were goes through all his "many women" one by one, and can't say that a single one of them is "good". Bathsheba clearly has in mind that Solomon would have but one wife, whom he would praise as the best of all women. He totally rejected this ideal.

Pro 31:30 Charm is deceitful and beauty is vain; but a woman who fears Yahweh, she shall be praised-

Yet Solomon fell for the external beauty of the Gentile woman in the Song of Solomon. David fantasized about Solomon's marriage in Ps. 45:11, where he says that Solomon would greatly desire his Gentile bride because of her "beauty" (s.w.). But Bathsheba here says the opposite; that such beauty is vain, and her fear of Yahweh should be the basis of Solomon's attraction to her. Solomon took David's perspective, which was simply wrong.

Pro 31:31 Give her of the fruit of her hands! Let her works praise her in the gates!-

LXX "Let her husband be praised in the gates", as in :23. This is another allusion to Boaz, whose marriage to Ruth produced the line which led to David and Solomon. She is asking Solomon to continue in that spirit; but he didn't. Solomon failed to be the true spiritual seed of David because he didn't at all live in the family spirit which began with the marital example of Boaz and Ruth.