

Proverbs

Part Two

Chapters 10 - 31

Continuing summary of Bible Studies in Proverbs
undertaken at Allander Evangelical Church

Spring 2024

Introduction

During the winter of 2023 - 2024 we have been studying the Book of Proverbs – not an easy task considering the nature of the text with its ‘theoretical’ first nine chapters and collection of separate sayings in the second. However, during our study of chapters 1 – 9, precious lessons emerged about the nature of wisdom as the gift of God given to believers as a guide to help them “*know where to place their feet in the dance of life*”. (Dominic Smart). Those precious insights kept us enthralled over several months and are summarised in the booklet, Proverbs, Part One issued in November 2023.

Some of those lessons emphasised the fact that Wisdom – Divine Wisdom – was, and is, offered by God to fallen man. It is the secret of true life. It begins with the “fear of the Lord”; acknowledging God as supreme and the author and source of life. Without it, we are lost and doomed.

However, it has to be received by faith and actively believed; held precious as a core possession and an effective means OF SALVATION. It is transmitted and offered through the witness of others who have gone before and proved its efficacy as the true source of life and light. It does not occur naturally: it needs to be sought, believed and practised. The classic text: *Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not unto your own understanding*” (Proverbs 3: 5) is the secret.

Sadly, it can be missed, with devastating consequences. One way is simply by refusal, whether deliberate or by indifference. Another, much more subtle, is to be tempted astray by the allurements of alternatives – attractive at first but leading to destruction.

Put very simply; Wisdom is the life generating gift of God which has to be received, believed, used and expressed in the various situations of life. Those who do pay attention and heed its message will be enlightened and blessed: those who, for whatever reason, ignore its message and potential are doomed. The former are deemed wise: the latter designated fools.

Thinking of its application to us in our situation today. the principle is the same. From outside of our normal life with its limitations God, in His mercy and grace, bestows his gift: it is not of ourselves. For example theSE scriptures illustrate that. (*As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world ...*” Ephesians 2: 1,2) “*God so loved the world that He gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life*” (John 3: 16) “*God was in Christ*” (2 Corinthians 5: 19) and “*Christ is made unto us wisdom*” (1 Corinthians 1: 30) And Paul could say, “*the life I now live, I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me*” (Galatians 2: 20) and followed it by affirming to the Colossians, “*Christ in you, the hope of glory*” (Colossians 1: 27). The starting point is to “*repent and believe the*

gospel” (Mark 1: 15) in a process that Jesus defined as being “*born again*” (John 3: 3). It is a new beginning which implies a life-long process to follow. That is echoed in Proverbs.

PART TWO

The second part of Proverbs (Chapters 10 – 31) is concerned with this “life following birth”. It is full of examples of life situations and what to do – and what not to do – in ordinary living in the “Fear of the Lord”.

The Structure of the Book of Proverbs

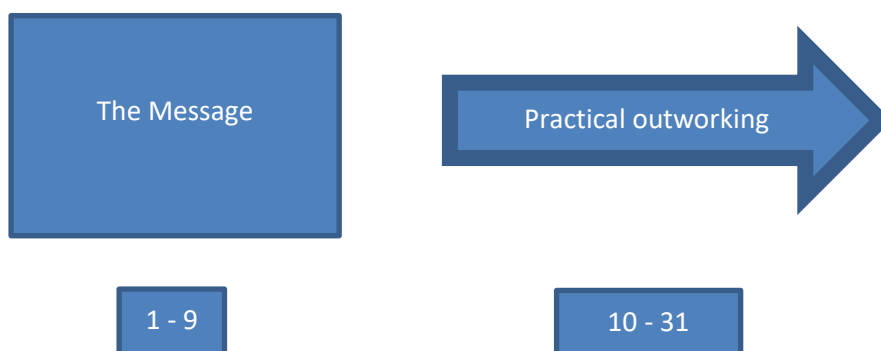
The Book of Proverbs can be presented as two distinct sections. The first is chapters 1 – 9 which outlines Wisdom as the gift of God offering insight and enabling to those who heed, believe and espouse it; and warning to those who do not avail themselves of the offer.

That is then followed by 22 chapters cataloguing actual proverbs - sayings based on observation and experience of how that wisdom is lived out in both its positive (those who accept and practise it) and negative reception (those who don't). The sayings are apparently disjointed, free standing, statements attributed to Solomon, the ‘Wise’, Agur and Lemuel. They contain pithy, graphic and memorable sayings often quoted by people in everyday situations. They do not seem to form a sequential narrative, only a collection of discrete ‘truisms’; and yet they provide a comprehensive picture of spiritual growth.

Notwithstanding, there seems to be a distinct pattern in the structure of the Book. It starts with substance, the message, the Wisdom. It is the enlightening truth of God that can illuminate how to live in this world if trust is placed in God rather than in one’s own groping, futile, endeavours. It is the core message. As Dominc Smart once put it: *It tells us where to put our feet in the dance of life.*

That message is then followed by practical outworking in a whole range of situations with examples galore being offered of its practice – positive or negative – in different contexts.

It can be illustrated in this way:



That is a precursor to New Testament teaching (and echoes OT teaching as well: *Be ye holy etc.*) about the nature of Christian life and witness. It begins with the gospel message. That is the source and foundation which must be received (and given scope) and leads to maturity. Becoming a Christian through the new birth needs to lead to its outworking in practical daily life whatever the circumstances or situation. *“If any man is in Christ, he is a new creature”* (2 Corinthians 5: 15). And, *“Walk worthy of the vocation”* (Ephesians 4: 1).

The Content of the Book of Proverbs: The Practical Outworking

While the first part of Proverbs (Chapters 1 – 9) is essentially narrative and the sequential presentation of teaching and exhortation, this second part is a collection of discrete sayings based on general observation (by Solomon and others) preserved and cherished over time. It does not constitute a logical sequence nor are there obviously direct connections from one to the other. They all, however, relate to some aspect of human behaviour and can be grouped into themes and categories. They provide a model for understanding spiritual growth.

Sections

Within Part Two there is a range of sections with the example behaviours listed in different ways and presented from varying perspectives. The major part (Chapters 10 – 22: 16) are the proverbs of Solomon spoken, no doubt at different places or times, and now gathered together in this collection. That is then followed by a section (titled in modern Bibles) as *“Thirty Sayings of the Wise”* (Chapters 22: 17, – 24). Who the wise were is not known nor is the provenance of these sayings but they seem to be focused on direct instruction to the ‘converted’ in that they are less concerned with contrast or rebuke as with exhortations for positive practical behaviour. It is followed by a subsidiary section called *“More sayings of the wise”* (Chapter 24)).

Solomon’s sayings and proverbs were clearly widely known and held currency for many years. Various leaders who came after, valued them and would gather them in memorable collections. One such was collected by Hezekiah’s men (Chapters 25 - 29) whose collection of Solomon’s proverbs are included as the next section. They seem to take the perspective of a ruler and an appreciation of the advice given and teaching offered as they apply to what happens in a realm governed by the king and others. They refer to general benefit.

Finally, two chapters (30 and 31) contain two individuals’ sets of proverbs. What their connection with Solomon is, is not clear but they present very telling scenarios.

The first of these, that of Agur, (Chapter 30) depicts an individual full of despair, presumably because of a sense of failure to live up to the high standards set by Proverbs. Yet, as he meditates, he begins to see the greatness of God, especially in the natural world, and develops a new and dynamic *“fear of the Lord”*.

The second (Chapter 31) is advice to King Lemuel from his mother and leads to a well-known and cherished description of “a good wife”.

Although these two chapters appear to be interlopers in the Book they do serve to complete the picture. More of that below. For now, we will look at these sections in turn and note some of their chief features and substantive teaching.

The Proverbs of Solomon: Chapters 10 – 22: 16

Reading these together in preparation for one of the studies, Allyson Flett listed the following observations.

There is a difference between the wise and the foolish. The wise are commended for their righteousness gleaned from following instruction as opposed to fools who despise it. Notably their righteousness brings benefit, their wisdom is an example; and their speech brings a blessing. That is a challenge for us in our daily testimony and conduct: to be wise in every aspect.

Taking this whole section of the proverbs of Solomon, Manuel described it as Applied Wisdom. It outlines wisdom in practice in various situations. Essentially it highlights the different practices, motivations and consequences of the wise and of the foolish.

It makes it very clear that there is a distinct difference between the behaviour of the wise and that of the foolish. The one lives in the fear (respect for) the Lord while the other is driven by self-centred and short-term motives. Those who are wise are guided and governed by the divine insight given to them when they “*commit their way to the Lord and lean not to their own understanding*” (Proverbs 3: 5). That should be true today of Christian believers whose lives are lived in response to the leading and enabling of the Lord through the Scriptures. No longer should they “*live unto themselves but unto Him who loved them and gave himself for them*” (2 Corinthians 5: 15). That is a testimony to God’s “*more excellent way*” (1 Corinthians 12: 31).

A significant characteristic of the new way is humility and teachableness. It is not an innate quality in human beings but is the result of acceptance of the insight that comes from God in the wisdom that he is and gives. Recognising that, paying attention to its teaching, adopting and assimilating it, is a work of grace and far from the unbeliever’s boasting and short-sighted perspective.

This section is also characterised by contrasts between the behaviour of the wise and that of the foolish. Nowhere is this exemplified more than in the difference between the speech of the one and that of the other. In the case of the wise, it is sourced from insight and divine knowledge and guidance. It is also moderated because of that understanding and appreciation of a new dimension, as well as of its effects and relation to a purpose. That of

the foolish, by contrast, is often harsh, impulsive and damaging, paying little attention to sensitivities. Love – the chief feature of spiritual life – is notably absent.

As part of her contribution to the consideration of the role of speech, Ava drew up the following outline of its significance as one aspect of 'Applied Wisdom'.

Some thoughts from Ava Aldegunde based on the study on Proverbs

'The tongue has the power of life and death, and those who love it will eat its fruit' (Pr. 18:21). Our tongue and mouth hold the power of LIFE and DEATH, which certainly highlighted the importance of this lesson for living a skilful life.

Proverbs made a point mainly by drawing a contrast between two groups of people, the Wise (Righteous) and the Fool (unrighteous). The Wise speak with wisdom (10:13, 31), adorn knowledge (15:2), is even tempered (17:27) and gracious (15:26). The Fool conceals violence (10:11), spreads slander (10:18)/gossip (16: 28), is chattering (10:8), speaks rashly (13:3), with pride (14:3), and lies (10:18).

Through many contrasts, Proverbs warned of the danger of letting our tongue and mouth loose; and praised those who guard theirs. *Gracious words are a honeycomb, sweet to the soul and healing to the bones* (16:24).

The words of the Wise are a fountain of life (10:11, 13: 14), a choice silver (10:20), nourish many (10:21), bring healing (12:18) and find favour (10:32). The words of the Wicked/Fool invite ruin (10:14), destroy their neighbours (11:9), a city (11:11), pierce like swords (12:18), crushes spirit (15:4), brings strife (18:6) are a snare (18:7) and of little value (10:20).

The contrast is a clear and powerful one, so what do we choose?

We have also learnt from the first part of the study last year that what comes out of our mouth reveals what's in our heart. To guard our tongue and mouth is to guard our heart. *'Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it.'* (4:23). We also read in the New Testament that Jesus said: *"Listen and understand. What goes into someone's mouth does not defile them, but what comes out of their mouth, that is what defiles them"* (Matthew 15:10-11).

As the redeemed people of the Lord, we are given a new heart. However, with pressure from the world, many times, perhaps, we speak rashly, voicing our opinion with only partial knowledge. Proverbs teaches us to hold our tongue and be gracious so we can bring 'healing to the bones'.

As believers we have the inward working of the Holy Spirit transforming our thoughts, heart and mind, making us more like Jesus, if we let it. The fruits of the Holy spirit will be manifest in our living and will show through our words, which are not just for witnessing to unbelievers but also for encouraging each other, and to other believers, bringing unity to the Church. As Paul instructed the early churches, *do not let any unwholesome talk come*

out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.’ Ephesians 4:29.

Another contrast is seen in the area of “work ethic”. The wise, informed and disciplined as they are through insight and wisdom, are always industrious, reaping its reward. In stark contrast, the foolish are lazy, ill-disciplined and suffers because of it.

This industriousness and diligence is characterised by its reach into minor practices – like just weights and honest scales – that are essential to integrity. Wisdom spreads into and operates in all the remotest corners. It is not a cosmetic lifestyle but holy in the sense of its being ‘whole’ as well as special.

These proverbs are both practical and extensive. The wide range covered by them shows their aptness in helping us *“to know where to put our feet in the dance of life”*. They are the source of life.

They also bring comfort in that they assure the believer that God know every situation: brings down where necessary, lifts up where appropriate. Human weakness and sinfulness work against that but God is sovereign and will work out his purpose.

All this has a relevance for us. The characteristics of the OT Proverbs world are also true in our sphere today. There is to be a distinctive, positive, difference between believers and unbelievers, driven by an insight and inspiration that is the gift of God at salvation. Behaviour should be godly, reflecting that *“more excellent way”* as opposed to the ungodliness of the unbeliever. And, it reaches into every area *“till all this earthly part of me glows with Thy fire divine”*. How can that be?

It is because all wisdom is embodied in Jesus. He is *“made unto us wisdom”* (1 Corinthians 30). He is the *“express image of God”* (Hebrews 1: 3). All that God is and wants to bring about is in Jesus who is the Light of the world. He is made unto us wisdom and righteousness, sanctification and redemption, applied by the Holy Spirit.

A significant feature of this section, presenting a whole range of behaviours, is its objectivity. It describes what is – or is not – happening and includes both good and bad. The next section, however, focuses on the good and contains much more direct instruction.

The Sayings of the Wise Chapters 22: 17 to 24

Following the general presentation of ‘Solomon’s Proverbs’, with their description of what constitutes wise and foolish behaviour in general, this section is directly addressed to the individual in the form of Thirty Sayings of the Wise, plus an additional half a dozen or so similar ones. These sayings are quite selective. They are addressed as commands in relation to certain situations where ‘applied wisdom’ is practised. They are directly addressed “to my son”, in second- (you) not third- (them) person statements covering a range of behaviours.

Not surprisingly there is considerable repetition of truths and instructions from earlier chapters in Proverbs. Themes like obedience, paying attention to commands and precepts, the value of wisdom, etc, abound. Warnings are given against the deceitfulness of riches and their pursuit. Contrasts are drawn between the wise and the foolish, between the righteous and the ungodly. Many of these, based on a wide selection of verses, were shared during this particular study.

Taking this section (22: 17, to 24) as a whole, there is clearly a difference in the presentation. Whereas in the previous section a general description was given of a world where both wisdom and 'foolishness; co-exist; and where there are different responses to them, this section is characterised by direct instruction to "my son". They are commands as to what is required in order to act positively, what to do and what to avoid, peppered with gems of encouragement.

In the general pattern of things these are an example of a distinct message being directed towards an individual, presumably one who has espoused wisdom and now has a responsibility to practise it. Contrasts in this section are incidental: the emphasis is on the positive.

In the same way there is a progression in Christian experience of responsibility by the individual believer to demonstrate righteous living and to "*seek things which are above*" (Colossians 3: 1). The words of the Lord Jesus to Peter are relevant here: "*What is that to thee; follow thou me*" (John 21: 32). And of Paul in Colossians "*As you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him*" (Colossians 2: 6). Contrary to popular characterisation, Christian testimony should be positive with the believer endeavouring to manifest the new – informed and inspired – life of the regenerate.

The 'Thirty sayings' cover a range of topics. Their source is the wisdom that comes from fearing the Lord and is transmitted from experienced to novice. To benefit from that, obedience is essential.

It means recognising what is valuable and productive. Knowledge, insight and teaching are key ingredients. The secret of an effective testimony is "*Christ in you*" (Colossians 1: 27).

Implicit in so much that is said is discipline. Living the new life requires deliberate action, informed by wisdom, and enabled by the power of God. Temptations come in different guises but the righteous must resist and demonstrate what the NT calls 'patience' (Hebrews 6: 12).

Part of that discipline is linked to instruction not to fraternise with the ungodly or their wrong practices lest they corrupt. Godless behaviour can inadvertently lead to subtle bad influence. The words in Hebrews about "*laying aside the sin which so easily befalls us and running with patience the race set before us, looking unto Jesus*" (Hebrews 12: 1, 2) reaffirm this.

In stark contrast two pictures are given of wasted lives - that of the drunkard and that of the sluggard.

While discipline inevitably means attending to the self, a vital part of the testimony also entails thinking of others. Boundaries and landmarks are to be protected. The poor are to be recognised and helped. After all the two summary commandments contain “*Love thy neighbour as thyself*” (Matthew 22: 29). And, that concern for others extends to disciplining children to ensure that they benefit from proper guidance.

If the essence of the Book of Proverbs is the presentation of Wisdom as God’s gift to sinful and fallen humanity to enable them to be ‘born again’ and follow ‘a more excellent way’ by believing the message and putting it into practice, then the pattern of the Book suggests a progression from acceptance to action, with the individual exercising discipline in the pursuit of holiness. That requires constantly heeding the instruction that is wisdom and living in the fear of God.

More Proverbs of Solomon collected by Hezekiah’s servants (Chapters 25 – 29)

By its definition, this section contains selected proverbs of Solomon that have endured the test of time, been preserved, and clearly regarded as being important. Why that should be is not clear but the fact that they have become the prized possession of kings and rulers a long time after Solomon’s reign shows that they have relevance to their situation.

From the general tenor of the section, and specific examples within it, it seems that the frame of reference is the kingdom and the perspective is that of kings and rulers. In particular, it reflects on the behaviour of individuals, whether that is appropriate or inappropriate; whether they make good or bad citizens.

In the discussion which formed part of the study, it was noted that there is little reference to God, as such, in these chapters. They are concerned with human behaviour and attitudes as determined by those individuals and their understanding. Among the many examples given, the question of **integrity** is dominant. What kind of life people live is obvious for just as water reflects an accurate image, so does the face reflect what manner of life is being lived.

The first chapter in the section sets the scene of the role of a ruler and the value of his servants. Removing dross from among them ensures the prospect of establishing a good regime and sound community. Examples of good, circumspect, behaviour are given, acknowledging that such demeanour is not without its vulnerability. In contrast, the chapter which follows (26) demonstrates how utterly inappropriate the **behaviours of fools** is and the potential danger that they bring. Chapters 27 – 29 cover further examples of behaviour.

Little is said here about listening and paying heed to instruction. It is assumed that wisdom is being recognised: this section is more concerned by how it is being **lived out**.

Appropriate behaviour has a number of characteristics. One of the main ones is a **sense of responsibility**. To be responsible, one has to be good, for proper action comes from integral being. Foolishness, self-regard, disregard of others clearly inhibits any responsible behaviour. They are differently motivated.

Responsible behaviour is welcome and is often associated with **good news**, encouragement and positivity. It is refreshing. But it has to be circumspect, for mistakenly practised it can be counterproductive. Glad tidings, though welcome in themselves, become an irritant when conveyed at inappropriate times or ways. Straying into another's domain can also be unwelcome.

Linked with that is the issue of **discipline and discernment**. As the NT emphasises, discipline is under the control of the person even though the actions are motivated and energised by wisdom and divine enabling. Interesting examples given in this section highlight the need for discernment. Discipline entails rejecting the inappropriate and adopting that which is sound.

Along with responsibility and discipline, **relationships** are seen as being important. That brings out the corporate nature of the community and kingdom for it is comprised of many, each unit of which needs to act and relate in a constructive (sometimes corrective or compensating) manner.

It is no wonder that kings, like Hezekiah, valued these proverbs as they highlighted and pointed to positive (and negative) aspects of an effective kingdom. They also have much to teach us, for God's instrument for revealing his 'wisdom' is the church in all its corporate form. It is often depicted in the NT as a body – a single integrated whole - comprising many and very different members or constituent parts. Each member has to be 'born again' into such a body and, by the accomplishments of Christ's substitutionary atoning death and victorious resurrection, be "*translated from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of his Son*" (Colossians 1: 13).

Just as membership is important: so is function. That is often the area where the problems arise.

It means on the one hand the need to ensure personal holiness (wholeness both in the sense of complete and mature). That is required in order to be in a position to contribute to the wellbeing of the whole. And, that contribution requires responsible behaviour that is appropriate because it serves the right purpose as embodied in the wisdom that should govern it. It may be marked by excessive enthusiasm but must always be moderated in the light of the teaching and revelation of the Word of God. The lesson here is not just a recommendation of God's word as compared with any other advice, but the obligation to make it work in practice and to "*be holy as I am holy*" (Leviticus 19: 2) and "*to work out your own salvation with fear and trembling for it is God at work within you according to his good pleasure and purpose*" (Philippians 2: 12). Ephesians speaks of the body' *fitly framed*

together and made effective and complete by that *'which every joint supplies'* (Ephesians 4: 16).

Such cooperative functioning and collaboration highlights the need for good relationships. The 'new commandment' that Jesus taught was to 'love one another' – a phenomenon that was to distinguish the Lord's people.

As in earlier sections, one of the main features of this section is the contrast emphasised between the acceptable and the futile. Citizenship of the kingdom requires effective functioning from good practitioners while foolish behaviour is exposed for what it is.

The key to that difference in practice is motivation and inspiration. It is not spontaneous, natural, behaviour but the outcome from being obedient to, and guided by, the 'wisdom' that God gives. In essence it is the essential difference between trusting in God and depending on one's own understanding. When the righteous exercise their wisdom-informed life then the kingdom benefits while following their own insights causes others to be frightened at the prospect of the outcome. It means standing out. Fearing man and seeking conformity means being snared while trusting in God – and His word – means safety.

Similarly, that is valuable teaching for us. We need to be good *"citizens of heaven"*. (Philippians 3: 20) and *"walk worthy of the vocation wherewith we have been called"* (Ephesians 4: 1). That means *"Trusting in the Lord with all your heart and leaning not to your own understanding"*. (Proverbs 3: 5). It means being familiar with and obedient to the Word of God and being in constant communion with Him. As the old children's chorus put it so clearly, *"Read your Bible, pray every day if you want to grow"*

Two personal examples: Chapters 30, 31.

The final section in the Book of Proverbs contains two 'oracles' which are very different in style from the rest of the book but illustrate some of its main message. While previous chapters, especially 10 – 29, are made up of discrete sayings, often unconnected but relating to the general theme, this section is made up of coherent stories of the experience of two separate individuals.

An obvious question is: Why these two? There could be many examples of individual experiences but somehow Providence has ensured that these two are included.

We can deduce that they represent two situations that are related to the two main causes of not responding positively to the wisdom that is offered to guide people in the pathway of life: being indolent or being tempted astray.

Agur

Virtually nothing is known about Agur but the content of the chapter is very familiar. It starts with despondency, a looking inward, a resorting to 'one's own understanding'. He declares "*I have not learned wisdom, nor have I knowledge of the Holy One*" (Proverbs 30: 3). The result of that is a sense of unworthiness and failure. Failure to trust inevitably leads to that.

Truth, however, as Romans 1 reminds us, makes its presence felt. And, that was true for Agur; for he turned away from introspection to thinking of God and all that God is and does: something he never had doubted but, like Peter, had started to 'look down' rather than keep looking to Jesus, when walking on the water. That change of direction led Agur to declare that "*Every word of God is flawless*" (Proverbs 30: 5). Conscious of that, he prays for discipline and discernment to walk circumspectly and realises that, by observation, God's world that he lives in is full of wonderful features that inspire confidence in God and His ways. His observations amaze him and restore him to the right path. It is reminiscent of the effect of the revelation and insight gained from watching God work that is recorded in Romans 9 – 11 and ends in the wonderful doxology of "*Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God*" (Romans 11: 33).

Lemuel

The other single-chapter collection is that attributed to King Lemuel (another name for King Solomon?) *comprising "an oracle that his mother taught him"*. It is strong and sound advice. It consists of two parts.

In the first, his mother has concern that he is in danger of succumbing to the ways of the world by consorting with women and indulging in strong drink. Such behaviour is unacceptable – and dangerous – for a king. Rather, he should be concentrating on being a help and provide a lead where it is needed.

Reflecting the fact that God is always redemptive, she paints a beautiful picture of the good wife: she is virtuous, industrious, and plays a significant and complementary role. She is a good companion to her husband and brings to him - and her children - great joy. Why "*squander his money in riotous living*" (Luke 15: 13) as opposed to being a "*new creation*" – "*created for good works*" and to "*the praise of His glory*. (2 Corinthians 5: 17; Ephesians 2: 20; 1: 12)

And so Proverbs ends with these two chapters representing the two major factors leading to deviancy: self-centredness (*leaning unto your own understanding*) and "*letting this world squeeze you into its mould*" (Romans 12: 1 J B Philipps' paraphrase) Jeremiah puts it differently when he says, "*My people have committed two sins: they have forsaken me, the fountain of life, and have hewn out for themselves cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water*" (Jeremiah 2: 13).

These final two chapters have a relevance for us, today when we remember that the key text for Proverbs and for Christian life is *“Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not unto your own understanding”* (Proverbs 3: 5). Having received the wisdom that comes from God initially in Christ, the secret is to subsequently live in the fear of the Lord and let Him be our guide. That word leads to life in all its fulness. However, human nature tends to ‘lean unto its own understanding’. Despite being a believer, Paul cries Out *“O wretched man that I am”* citing the fact that *“the good I would do I do not and the evil that I don’t want, that I do”* (Romans 7: 18 – 24). Even Peter, with his unique experience of having walked with Jesus in the flesh, was warned that he, too, would be tempted. And the churches in Revelation were all, for the most part, guilty of yielding to temptation. Some of that is wilfulness, some of it the outcome of not resisting temptation and being drawn to alternative, *“whate’er that idol; be”*. Hebrews has the antidote; *“Let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance (diligence, discipline, informed motivation) the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith”*.

In that way we shall be the people God has redeemed and will manifest the fruit that should characterise the people of God , so that He *“will see of the travail of his soul, and be satisfied”* because his *“so is my word that goes out from my mouth. It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it”*. (Isaiah 53, 55)

That is what Proverbs was intended to promote.

POST SCRIPT

So, how can we sum up the Book of Proverbs and its message for us today?

Clearly, it is a wonderful picture of God’s redeeming work, both then and now. To a fallen world of lost sinners God offered good news; in their case – wisdom in ours the gospel; of Jesus Christ. It stands out in stark contrast to this world’s folly. It is redemptive.

When that message is received and believed in spite of stiff opposition then its effect has to be lived out in a whole variety of situations. Thus the truth of the gospel is recorded in a myriad of mini-testimonies demonstrating the excellence of spiritual wisdom in contrast to ignorant folly. Applied and nurtured it produces fruit which is pleasing to the Lord and typified in the picture of the good wife reminiscent of the old hymn which speaks of the day *“when He will call me to His side, to be with Him, His holy Bride”*.

When that happens redemption will be complete and He will *“see of the travail of His soul and be satisfied”*.