

# SUMMER 8 - Plans of the Heart

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- [ 0 : 00 ] Well, imagine if the book of Proverbs was written by children. Never trust a dog to watch your food.
- When your dad is mad and asks you, do I look stupid? Don't answer. That's from a nine-year-old. Never tell your mum her diet's not working.
- When your mum is mad at your dad, don't let her brush your hair. This is one I like particularly from a nine-year-old.
- You can't hide a piece of broccoli in a glass of milk. Naomi, age 15.
- If you want a kitten, start out by asking for a horse. And finally, again, this is from a 13-year-old.
- [ 1 : 05 ] When you get a bad report at school, show it to your mum when she's on the phone. Well, Proverbs chapter 16.
- And for those not here the last couple of weeks, we looked firstly at chapter 10 and then at 14. And we find in chapters 10 to really most of the rest of the book a whole range of Proverbs.
- And they don't always sort of show a relationship verse to verse to verse. That is, there's an element in which they do jump around a bit from topic to topic. Having said that, there are Proverbs that tend to be grouped together a little bit.
- And we'll see quite a bit of that tonight in chapter 16. And also, we do find some themes become more prominent in different sections. So, tonight's Proverbs are not just more of the same.
- There are some themes that come to the fore tonight that we haven't seen so much of thus far. One of the features we saw last week and the week before was that pretty much all the Proverbs we looked at had two lines and the first line within the verse was, in a sense, the negative or positive of the next line.
- [ 2 : 19 ] So, often you get something is something but something else is not something else. And the contrast was meant to draw out our thinking. Because sometimes, as we've seen the last two weeks, the contrast is not obvious.
- And so, it's the line one and line two, when they're not quite obvious, are actually helping our understanding of each other. Tonight, we don't get that pattern hardly at all.
- We get different sorts of connections between the lines in the verses. Less contrast, more similarity, more line two building on line one.
- So, that's enough by way of introduction. Let's start looking. Chapter 16, verse 1, sounds probably the most important theme in this chapter.
- One that's picked up again at the very end of the chapter. The plans of the mind belong to mortals, but the answer of the tongue is from the Lord.
- [ 3 : 16 ] Now, that is actually a contrasting statement, line one and two. But it's not an obvious contrast. Clearly, the parallels lie between the mind in line one or the heart.

It's the same thing, mind and heart together in Hebrew. In contrast to the tongue, something that we have already seen and we'll see a bit more of tonight. We get mortals in line one, but the Lord in line two.

And the plans in line one compared to the answer in line two. What this verse, I think, is driving at, as other verses in this chapter and elsewhere also drive at a similar sort of point, is that though human beings can plan all they like, in a sense the final word belongs to God.

That is, human plans are only human plans. God is sovereign. He has the final word, so to speak. He's in charge. In charge, human plans may or may not come to fruition.

And in a sense, the answer lies with the Lord, not with humans. Now, in one sense, we, I guess, as Christians, would see the obvious point that's being made here.

[ 4 : 31 ] But remember, one of the basic starting points for wisdom is the fear of the Lord. And remember that description of the fool in the Psalms. But the same sort of description of a fool comes through the book of Proverbs is that someone who doesn't fear the Lord or has no fear of God in their heart.

So, what this is telling us is that the wise person is a person who plans, in effect, acknowledging or underneath the sovereignty of God.

That is not planning with full confidence that their plans will eventuate and come to fruition, but planning knowing that God is sovereign. And he has the final word. There's also perhaps a hint of a tension here between the sovereignty of God and yet at the same time, rightly so, the activity and plans of human beings.

This proverb is not telling us not to plan. It's not saying because God is sovereign, stop all your plans. It's saying that the wise person plans knowing that God is sovereign.

The fool is the one who plans and thinks that their plans will necessarily come to fruition because they're in charge and can make it happen. So, it's not saying don't plan. It's saying plan, acknowledging the sovereignty of God and the fear of the Lord, in effect.

[ 5 : 49 ] And therefore, it's a sense of tension between the knowledge that God is sovereign and yet human beings are responsible for their actions as well. The sovereignty of God in the scriptures never, ever abrogates human responsibility to act or behave or even plan to act in different ways, in right ways.

We are always responsible for our actions, culpable for our errors and mistakes and sins, but that doesn't detract from the sovereignty of God either. But both are true. And even probably though we're not philosophers and our minds cannot quite grasp how it is that God is absolutely sovereign yet I'm responsible for my actions and so on, the wise person is not the person who understands how that works.

The wise person is the one who plans under the sovereignty of God, takes action, but acknowledges that God is sovereign at the same time. Well, verse 2 continues on from verse 1.

There may be a sense of progression here. Verse 1 being about the plans. Now, verse 2 being about the actions that may result from the plans. All one's ways may be pure in one's own eyes, but the Lord weighs the spirit.

Now, the word for spirit at the end of the verse may be better translated as motives. That is, it's not about, in a sense, the human part of you that is the spirit that relates to God's spirit.

[ 7 : 11 ] It's perhaps more about intent or the motive behind the plan or that leads to the action. And again, what this is saying is that for all our own understanding, even of ourselves, God actually knows us better.

And not only that, God actually judges us more fairly and rightly than we could ever judge ourselves. That is, we don't know the full depth of our own spirit or our own motives when we act in different ways.

All too often our actions are with mixed motives, sometimes with good, maybe even occasionally with pure. Very often with a mixture of motives, good or ill, together.

What this is saying to us is that God actually knows us better than we do. God is sovereign, even over our hearts. Not only is he sovereign, though, he actually weighs the spirit.

That is, he judges. He weighs up what is right, what is wrong. He brings justice to people. Not only for their actions, but also for their motives.

[ 8 : 12 ] Now, of course, two people could do the same thing, but with completely different motives. Somebody could, you know, lead the singing, for example, in a church service with a very sincere motive to praise God and to encourage the congregation in praising God.

Another person could do exactly the same thing, at exactly the same level of competency, and yet be doing it for their own ego. That may well be, of course, somebody's doing it for a mixture of both, maybe not even consciously.

So what this is telling us is that not only our actions that arise perhaps from the plans of verse 1, but even our motives are under God's sovereignty and justice. Motives that we may not always totally detect within ourselves.

And then perhaps building again on verses 1 and 2, maybe now giving something slightly more positive as a balance to the warnings of verse 1 and 2.

Commit your work to the Lord and your plans will be established. Now, it doesn't say that whatever we plan to do, so long as we commit it to the Lord, it'll happen. But it is saying that, in effect, the positive from verse 1, your plans must be under the sovereignty of God, committed to Him, in all you do to bring glory and honour to God, as various verses in other parts of the Scriptures urge us to do.

[ 9 : 30 ] Indeed, verse 3 here is a command, whereas verses 1 and 2 are what we might say proverbs or perhaps observations. Verse 3 is a command for us to do.

All our work, whatever that is, is to be committed to the Lord and your plans will be established. But committed to yourself, plan to do things yourself without an acknowledgement of the sovereignty of God, well, maybe your plans might come to something.

There's no guarantee of that if you've ignored God, the sovereign God. Well, verse 4 again refers explicitly to the Lord, something that's not all that common throughout the book of Proverbs, but quite a lot of these opening verses of chapter 16 refer to the Lord explicitly.

The Lord has made everything for its purpose, even the wicked for the day of trouble. This is a verse that may well trouble some of us, I suspect, as we think about this.

It's one thing to say that God made the world, and as Genesis 1 tells us, made it good, indeed made it very good, in the last verse of Genesis chapter 1. This is telling us, though, not only did God make it good or fit for its purpose, as I think Genesis 1 is on about, as the first line of verse 4 is on about, but the Lord also, we're told, he made the wicked for the day of trouble.

[ 10 : 49 ] Now, there's a statement about the sovereignty of God that we may want to shy away from, I find in experience. Can we say, really, that the Lord made the wicked and made them for the purpose of the day of judgment?

That doesn't seem, some would argue, to be fair on those who are wicked. But as I hinted at before, the Scriptures testify fully to the sovereignty of God in all things, but never, ever use the sovereignty of God to take away human responsibility.

So, it's fairly clear elsewhere through the Scriptures that the wicked who face the day of trouble or the day of judgment are culpable or guilty for their wrongdoing, even if at the same time we can honestly and truthfully say, the Lord made them for the day of trouble or the day of judgment.

I think St. Paul argues along similar lines when he talks about Jews and Gentiles in Romans chapter 9, verses 21 to 23. You can look it up at your leisure if you wish to do so.

Well, moving on to verse 5, all those who are arrogant are an abomination to the Lord. Be assured they will not go unpunished. Now, again, we have here the sovereignty of God, implicit at least in the verse.

[ 12 : 08 ] That is, God will judge. All things are under His judgment. All people are under His judgment. So, again, the writer of Proverbs has a very clear and confident view that God is sovereign and that sovereignty of God includes a strong faith in a day of reckoning at some point in the future.

Here we have a common theme in Proverbs for the first time tonight about the arrogant or the proud. The word used to describe them, the abomination, is a very strong word.

An abomination is something that brings the highest of offense to God. It is usually used, not always, but usually used to describe a sin that is involved with sins of idolatry.

So, for example, in the book of Deuteronomy, the sins that are referred to as an abomination against the Lord are usually things that are involvements with Canaanite religion, the worship of other gods and so on.

So that if the people of God went out from God's place and started building shrines to the Canaanites and worshipping the Canaanite gods, that would be an abomination to the Lord, something of the utmost offense to Him.

[ 13 : 20 ] Well, a strong word is used here for a proud person. I don't think we should water that down or ignore the strength of the word abomination because in the end a person who is arrogant or proud is involved in what we might call self-idolatry.

That is, the person who's proud and arrogant is practicing in a sense a form of self-worship, that they are kingpin, that they are tops. And pride throughout the Scriptures is usually regarded as a highly serious sin against God.

It's not just sort of one of those lapses in character or whatever. It's actually quite a significant sin, pride. And of course, it's so common. We ought not lose sight of the fact that time and again in both Old and New Testaments, when lists of sinners are there, usually there's something along the lines of the proud or the arrogant in different ways.

Now, pride is something that we're all guilty of and probably more often than we care to admit. And remember that God is the one who knows our motives and hearts better than even we do.

And I suspect that for each of us, he will detect within us the motives of pride where we may not even be aware of it. We like to think we're proud. We like to think that we've done something worthy.

[ 14 : 41 ] We like to think that we've contributed to salvation, that we've done something of eternal merit. Of course, the gospel pulls the rug of pride out from under our feet and tells us that we have no merit to stand on.

We've got nothing to be proud of within ourselves. Our only boast is to be in the gospel of Jesus Christ. Pride is something that we ought to take measures to counter in our lives because so often we read that God is against the proud, that Jesus came to bring down the proud in their conceit.

Now, of course, it may not be the person who goes around polishing their fingernails on their lapels, smug and arrogant and boastful like that, but maybe the person who, in more subtle ways, draws attention to themselves, wants to make sure that people know that they've done that job, that they are good at doing that thing, putting themselves forward in ways that may actually be motivated by pride, a false humility sometimes, or a false modesty, like Uriah Heep in David Copperfield being but an humble person.

He was far from humble, very proud indeed. So this is a warning for us, one that will recur in this chapter. Pride is a sin that we have to work hard to overcome, to resist, and of course, where wisdom begins with the fear of the Lord, there is, in essence, a relationship of humility under the Lord that ought to be feeding our relationships, not only with God, but with others as well.

And this is also saying that, hinting, I think, in verse 5, that in this life, here and now, sometimes sinners seem to get away with their sin. There seem to be the arrogant, it seems to me, from the way this is written, who seem to be just breezing along in life, enjoying perhaps some sort of adulation from their pride, or some gain from it.

[ 16 : 27 ] The way the second half of verse 6 is said is to give us confidence of a future justice and judgment from God. Be assured, they will not go unpunished. That is, it may look as though now they are not being punished.

It may look now as though their pride is being undetected by God. Far from it. He knows, as verse 2 says, he weighs the spirit in hearts of people.

They will surely not go unpunished. That is, you can trust in the sovereign judgment of God. Well, then comes a difficult verse, I think, verse 6, by loyalty and faithfulness, iniquity is atoned for, and by the fear of the Lord, one avoids evil.

In one sense, the second half of the verse is easier perhaps to understand and agree with than the first. That is, when our path is fearing the Lord, then we are indeed more likely to be avoiding evil.

Fear of the Lord is set on the path that especially chapters 1 to 9 makes clear, and thus, straightforwardly, avoiding evil at the wayside. But the difficulty probably lies in how we understand the first line.

[ 17 : 33 ] By loyalty and faithfulness, iniquity is atoned for. Well, those of us who have an understanding of atonement from the scriptures know all too well that atonement is something God does for us entirely by grace through the death of Jesus.

And in the Old Testament, atonement is something again done in effect by God, but through the sacrificial system of offering of animals. Does this seem to be saying that by our works of loyalty and faithfulness, somehow we can deal with our own sin and thus on our own merit stand righteous before God?

Well, the words loyalty and faithfulness are strong words about trusting in God and trusting in God's provision for us. And the person who is loyal and faithful to God is somebody who we might simply say trusts in the Lord, as the words of that song we've just sung said, or has faith in the Lord.

And that trust or faith is a trust or faith that includes a trust or faith that God forgives. That's part of trusting in the Lord is trusting in an essential part of His character, His mercy, or indeed, God's own steadfast love or loyalty.

So I think the expression by loyalty and faithfulness, I think it is a person's loyalty and faithfulness, not God's, by our loyalty and faithfulness in response to God's loyalty and faithfulness, sin is atoned for by God, not us, not actually by our works, but it's our response to God's work that I think lies underneath this proverb.

[ 19 : 07 ] When the ways of people please the Lord, He causes even their enemies to be at peace with them. We've seen those who do things that are abhorrent or abomination to the Lord in verse 5, now the favour of the Lord.

And when the ways of people please the Lord, then as a result, we're told, He causes even their enemies to be at peace with them. I must say that that's not obvious because Jesus promises, and we know in our world today that Christians in many, many places experience persecution and opposition and consistent enmity even though their ways may be pleasing the Lord.

Now there are some examples in the scriptures of where this has happened, perhaps Joseph and his brothers in Genesis, maybe I think it's part of the prayer of Solomon at the dedication of the temple when he prays for God's forgiveness and that as a result of the people living in response to God, even the enemies will come to trust in the Lord and come to the temple.

That's in 1 Kings 8 as part of Solomon's prayer. I think that what this is saying is that pleasing God is of a greater priority than seeking to win our enemies.

If you think about how would you try to win your enemies over, that is, not just personal enemies but enemies of the faith or enemies of you because you're a Christian, well we'd probably try to go out of our way to please them, to love them or to be generous to them.

[ 20 : 36 ] But maybe the danger of such a course of action would be that we come to serve them and seek their favour ahead of seeking the favour of the Lord. And I suggest that what this proverb is perhaps directing us to is that ultimately this fear of God that should be our driving force and it is God alone who can actually bring enemies over to win them over into friendship or reconciliation.

Not us, but God. And it's in pleasing God that we should be directing our lives. And I suspect that that's a difficult verse for some but for those who face persecution I think it remains an encouragement to continue seeking the favour of God not trying to appease enemies directly.

Oh yes, it means being wise in the way you live with enemies but never compromising obedience and service of God and weeding the favour of God. It's his job to win the enemies over.

He is sovereign after all as the opening part of this chapter is making so clear. Verse 8 better a little with righteousness than large income with injustice.

In one sense straightforward, it's telling us that what values, what is of value more than anything else is not riches but righteousness. If you have righteousness then poverty with it, you're better off than being rich without righteousness.

[ 22 : 04 ] It may be a reflection on the way that large income is gained, that is unjustly or wrongly but I think it's just saying to us that righteousness is worth a lot more than in effect riches, temporal wealth.

Righteousness of course is lasting, a solid joy and lasting pleasure and as Paul writes in 1 Timothy 6 it is godliness with contentment that is great gain rather than greed for wealth.

The human mind plans the way but the Lord directs the steps. Very similar to verse 1 and verse 33 as we'll finish tonight but verse 1 again confident in the sovereignty of God it's not saying that don't plan your way it's not against human plans but it's a contrast of the effectiveness.

What is effective is the Lord's hand. He's the one who directs the steps. We can plan and we can plan good things and we ought to plan good things but always under the sovereignty of God and submitting our plans to God as verse 3 said.

For those opening 9 verses all but one of them refer to the Lord and they all have a similar sort of theme running through them about the sovereignty of God in all sorts of ways. The next 5 or 6 verses deal with one exception with the king verses 10 to 15 with the exception of verse 11.

[ 23 : 22 ] All of them refer to the king. Again not a common theme through Proverbs though there are Proverbs about the king that crop up from time to time but here a group of them put together.

I think that this the flow is probably deliberate so that the sovereignty of God is the theme in our minds as we come to see the sovereign of the nation being addressed.

So that the context of understanding the king is that he is under the sovereignty of God. I think that too is the context in Romans 13 where Paul speaks about submission to earthly governing authorities and so on very much under our offering of ourselves in worship and sacrifice to God as living sacrifices in chapter 12.

Same sort of context here. The king is spoken of in very exalted terms here but he is underneath the sovereignty of God and that is the right context with which to read these verses and also to tell us that kings who rule must themselves be like the wise person of verses 1 to 9.

They commit their ways to the Lord. They may well plan but God is sovereign. They may think they're in charge. They probably run the greatest risk of all of any human beings of thinking they have the power ultimately but it is under God's authority and that's the context I think here.

[ 24 : 43 ] It's a very lofty view of the king in these verses and I think that's because we've got to remember that it's not speaking about any king but the king of Israel that is the king in the line of David to whom extraordinary promises were made in 2 Samuel 7.

Promises of an eternal dynasty the promise of building the house for the Lord and ultimately through that a promise of the Messiah to come. So the speech about the king here is addressing the Israelite king in the line of David Solomon traditionally is the author of these words the son of David direct son of David so that is the king being addressed not the king of Assyria or Egypt or Aram or Edom or anywhere else for that matter the king of Israel particularly.

Inspired decisions are on the lips of a king his mouth does not sin in judgment. That's an amazing statement to make. Is that saying that for every single thing that the king of Israel utters or decides he is infallible?

Well I'm not sure that that's actually what it is saying. It's hard to know how to read this because it does jar. I suspect the way the proverbs are written they often are meant to jar. We're meant to sit up and take notes and say gosh is that really true?

We're meant to mull over what is this about? I think it's probably right to read it in the context of the king being the representative of God over the people of God and foreshadowing the anointed king messiah to come.

[ 26 : 14 ] I don't think it's saying the king is infallible because that would clearly be contradictory with very clear statements about some of the kings of Israel descended from David who were far from infallible indeed thoroughly evil.

Certainly the king is under obligation to meditate on the Lord day and night according to the instructions for kings given in Deuteronomy 17. I think probably in the end what this proverb is saying is what ought to be the case not what necessarily is always the case making a king infallible.

It is what ought to be the case because of the king's role as God's representative over God's people a person who meditates on God's word day and night but of course that's not always true and I think it's written this way to jar to make us sit up and take notice and probably to make the king sit up and take notice as well.

The next one doesn't talk about the king though the four verses that follow do. Honest balances and scales are the Lord's all the weights in the bag are his work. Basically what that is saying I think is again a moral imperative that God expects people maybe the king especially but people generally to be honest in their dealings.

That is when you buy something in those sorts of days and ages you would weigh it out on old fashioned scales of some sort. You didn't necessarily have nice electronic scales that the Coles cashier so that you can check how much your broccoli that's not in milk weighs and therefore feel that it's actually a fair scale or something like that and we know from say the prophet Amos amongst others that at times the Israelite trades people had two sets of weights one for selling one for buying so that if they were buying say a kilogram of broccoli they would have a weight to mean that they could buy more than a kilogram but then they get out their other weights which would be less than a kilogram when they wanted to sell a kilogram of broccoli.

[ 28 : 18 ] Amos of course chastises such a view. What this is just saying to the people of Israel and to us is that we must be fair in our dealings we must be honest in our dealings we mustn't be trying to be deceitful to cheat on people in our dealings generally in our trade but also beyond that I think it's also like the earlier verses hinting that God is the one ultimately who judges justly honest balances and scales are the lords yes we must therefore practice honesty in our dealings but ultimately it is a statement of confidence that God in his judgment and justice is fair and honest and will weigh the spirit as verse 2 said and so on justly honestly and fairly then we go back to the king it is an abomination to kings to do evil for the throne is established by righteousness I think this verse is to be a warning to kings not to do evil

I think it again is saying what ought to be the case because no doubt for some kings abominations would not be to them evil it's telling us that or the king that the only secure throne is one that is built on righteousness not on military might or their own ingenuity or anything else for that matter so it is a warning to the kings of Israel that their throne is secure when they practice righteousness because God will protect them and that evil works which may be a temptation to do maybe to secure their throne we see kings practicing evil to do that in the scriptures they must not do that that's an abomination again a strong word verse 13 righteous lips are the delight of a king and he loves those who speak what is right again we could find numerous examples in the scriptures where kings are not like that they don't delight in good speech here again there is this imperative about what ought to be the case this is what is meant to be but not what is necessarily usually the case and again it is the role of the king as God's anointed person over the people of God so that the king especially as the leader of God's people must reflect the character of

God so just as God delights in righteous lips and loves those who speak what is right just as God finds evil and abomination and so on in verse 11 and 12 the king must do that I mean God's people must do that but there is always a greater onus placed on the leaders of God's people to practice more rigorously if you like the righteous standards of God so if you're a leader of God's people in some way a leader of a group within a church or some group of Christians in some form then there is a higher obligation or responsibility or accountability placed on you as a Christian leader than there is for those Christians who are not and I think that that's part of what's being said in these verses verses 14 and 15 reflect the immense power that a king had in the ancient world a king's wrath is a messenger of death and whoever is wise will appease it then contrast verse 15 in the light of a king's face there is life and his favour is like the clouds that bring the spring rain it's hard to know whether the wrath of the king is fair or unfair in verse 14 maybe it doesn't matter what it's saying is that certainly in ancient



Israel the king had that power in the end to determine people's fate if you incur his wrath then death will be perhaps the result now practice righteously it doesn't just mean that you do the wrong thing and it's trivial and off with your head sort of thing like a Henry the eighth type character or Henry the second with Thomas a Becket but certainly it is saying that the king exercises great power here and the wise person will appease the wrath I think that suggests that the king's wrath may not be fair on times at times righteous anger probably ought not to be assuaged or appeased perhaps we can think of examples in the scripture Daniel assuaging the wrath of Nebuchadnezzar in Daniel 2 or Abigail assuaging the wrath of David against her husband Nabal in 1 Samuel 25 as instances of wisdom at work perhaps on the opposite side if you win the king's favour that is the light of a king's face then there is life and the king is able to bestow that and then the simile his favour is like the clouds that bring the spring rain something that's so necessary for the barley harvest in ancient

Israel what it's showing is the power of the king in the context of the verses preceding the power of the king is under the sovereignty of God and the power of the king ought to be a reflection of the standards of righteousness not a capricious wrath or favour or verse 16 how much better to get wisdom than gold to get understanding it is to be chosen rather than silver not dissimilar from verse 8 in one sense these little proverbs that crop up from time to time reminding us that wisdom is worth pursuing it is worth more than all the gold or silver that you can get so it is worth the effort to get wisdom or insight rather than gold or silver and that verse just let me point out is very clearly a synonymous parallelism example last week the week before I showed how most of the verses we saw line one is then expressed in a negative or opposite way in line two here line one and line two actually say the same thing in effect we shouldn't press the distinctions between gold and silver between wisdom and understanding how much better to get wisdom than gold and then in effect it says the same thing but uses different words to get understanding is to be chosen that is preferred rather than silver so it's saying the same thing line one and line two in that verse verse 17 is the central verse of the book some of the traditional medieval jewish writers sort of had great fun with those sorts of things and you know pivotal verses here and there and they would count the numbers of verses and words and so on to try and see patterns often not sure that that was always a helpful thing but here we find the middle of the book for what that is worth which may be nothing but I thought

[ 34 : 47 ] I'd tell you that anyway the highway the highway of the upright avoids evil those who guard their way preserve their lives in one sense that's a summary of chapters one to nine it's telling us that the path that God determines the wise path is a highway you don't get here in the proverbs the idea of the road to heaven being narrow as Jesus uses a parable to say not that this is in contradiction to Jesus but the idea of it being narrow is never in proverbs that it's straight that matters it's an easy road it's an encouragement to walk down it the highway and those who are on that highway they guard their way and preserve their lives again there's a sense in which it's God who's determined the highway but we have responsibility to guard our way and to keep on it there is both the sovereignty of God as well as and God who determines our destination as well as our responsibility to keep on that way and to guard our way from going off and chapters one to nine are full of illustrations and about not going off the right track and going down the path of evil and temptation verse 18 is very famous well known pride goes before destruction and a haughty spirit before a fall

I remember years and years and years ago thinking gosh I think that that expression pride comes before a fall was from Shakespeare and then discovering that's actually in the book of proverbs Shakespeare of course got a lot of his stuff out of the bible and maybe I don't even know whether he quoted this proverb but a lot of Shakespeare's about pride going before a fall here we get it pride goes before destruction and a haughty spirit before a fall again it's synonymous parallelism line one line two says the same thing we shouldn't make a distinction too much between pride and haughtiness shouldn't worry too much about distinctions between destruction and fall it's talking about the same thing in the end it's talking about us being careful to not be proud as we saw earlier on in verse five it may be that it's suggesting a natural fall comes as a result of pride I think in the end the idea of destruction more clearly points to God is the one who'll bring about the fall and we find that in the scriptures

God sending Jesus as Mary sang in Luke 1 to bring down the proud that is the fall that comes to the proud is God's doing he is the judge and he will bring justice as verse five assured the reader would happen so here comes the statement in effect of certainty that it will be God's doing we see of course good illustrations of this proverb in the scriptures we see it in Nebuchadnezzar boastful in Daniel chapter four we see it perhaps in Saint Peter boastful about always being faithful to Jesus within a few hours denying him three times probably the best example is that of Haman in the book of Esther Haman the prime minister in effect to King Xerxes so boastful a comic fool really if ever you want to see a sort of almost like a pantomime of the book of Proverbs the book of Esther is it and Haman is the archetypal fool boastful to the utmost degree to his friends and his family and of course his fall is dramatic and very public Esther chapter six brings about his fall that is a very strong warning in this verse not to be proud not to be arrogant it's not just saying you might fall it's saying you will and God will bring you undone in the end the theme of the theme of avoiding pride continues to an extent in the next verse it is better to be of a lowly spirit among the poor than to divide the spoil with the proud dividing the spoil is something you do after a victory in battle it seems to be suggestive that you've won a battle the proud here probably they're boastful about their own achievement in winning the battle not acknowledging that it's

God's and indeed in many of the so-called holy wars or Yahweh wars in the scriptures when God brought the victory the Israelites were not allowed to touch the spoil because it was an acknowledgement that it belonged to God because he brought the victory so here to divide the spoil with the proud is clearly saying I've won the victory I've won the battle it's my strength that has gotten me this wealth to quote Jeremy 8 so here is it is better to be poor and stay away from the proud than it is to associate with them and be rich as a result so that's again a very strong warning not to be proud 20 those who are attentive to a matter will prosper and happy are those who trust in the Lord this is a bit bit tricky a little bit ambiguous it doesn't make clear what the must be to do with the Lord because verse line two and line one go together so it's talking about being prosperous or happy same idea in effect so trusting the Lord and being diligent in the affairs that you're doing or your plans whatever that matter is they go together again we see what we saw earlier on human activity or responsibility at the same time as God's sovereignty he's the one to whom we submit if we're to be happy and prosperous in the end and of course trusting in the Lord at the end of verse 20 is something that a proud person would not do continuing that theme of not being proud moving on verse 21 and we get here in verse 21 and then 23 and 24 some ideas about speech that is good do with speech that is not good so again some themes that run through a few proverbs those are person is able to convey with effectiveness that wisdom to others it's persuasive verse 22 wisdom is a fountain of life to one who has it some we've seen similar verses already in proverbs but folly is the punishment of fools again that line is a little bit ambiguous it may be saying that if you punish a fool then what they'll actually receive by way of punishment will be more folly or it may actually be saying that it's folly to punish a fool because it's not actually going to discipline or reform them they're that foolish and maybe the ambiguity is deliberate because these proverbs are so pithy that it leaves open little doors to explore and think about and reflect upon back to the theme of speech in 23 the mind of the wise makes their speech judicious and adds persuasiveness to their lips notice there the parallel of the mind in the beginning of the verse and the lips and speech in the rest of the verse that is what we saw last week and the week before I think out of the mind or heart comes our speech our speech often is a reflection of what's in our heart words that Jesus himself said as well so the wise person's speech is not only judicious that's more than being true or wrong that is there are times as I said last week where saying the right thing can be quite blunt or affronting or rude or offensive or something so the wise person not only says what is true but also what is judicious what is carefully thought out maybe similar idea is expressed I think it's in Ephesians 4 the expression speaking the truth in love might be another way of describing that but more than that the the wise person's speech is not a liar from their speech they're very vivid words scoundrels concoct evil it's not just that they lapse into evil we're not talking about those who just sort of fall occasionally type stuff these are people who actually plan and concoct it verse 28 a similar sort of thing like verse 27 and the verse that follows it begins with literally a man who and both times the first bit of all three times the first bit of the verse says what the man does and the effects of that or the damage of it comes in the second half so the perverse man spreads strife compare that to the wise person who spreads harmony and and builds

relationships this is a person who spreads strife who creates division in effect it's building on verse verse 27 so therefore it's somebody who whose words may be false certainly not judicious and certainly not pleasant this would incorporate people who are slanderers people who are gossips people who turn other people against up against their friends that's the creation of strife and and the second half of the verse the whisperer separates close friends a divisive and hateful thing to do and maybe without substance although maybe not person who may be full of lies or mistrust or innuendo that's where it's a subtlety of the person who's a perverse person comes out the most somebody who who won't perhaps quite say a lie but somebody who just give enough innuendo to cause a friend to doubt their other friend very subversive perverse behavior and again we must be aware that time and again in the New Testament Jesus

[ 43 : 59 ] Paul and others condemn those whose speech is like this the slanderers the gossips the people who break confidences the people who who who seek to tear apart the reputation of other people people who can't keep secrets to themselves people who can't keep their mouth shut the right time they're the fools don't think that this is an easy thing and that we somehow this is not about us we're all guilty of uttering words sometimes we wish immediately we could retract them we never can sometimes later on sometimes we don't ever realize we have to be so careful with our speech if I can tell a story against myself I discovered when I was at a theological college in the middle of one year that another student was not speaking to me I must confess I hadn't noticed this but discovered that had been going on for several months it was not a person I was particularly close to you can guess but I discovered from somebody else who knew about this I didn't but I had said something highly offensive to this person when it was reported to me what

I said I couldn't believe that I'd ever said it and I think if I ever did it was probably as a very tongue-in-cheek joke that obviously was not understood to be a joke I apologized in one sense the damage there was reconciliation and I couldn't retract the words I guess the caution is sometimes we can say things that that we may never realize the harm they will do how careful we must be that our speech is right truthful judicious pleasant and not in any way demeaning of other people's reputations dividing people friendships and so on causing strife breaking confidences gossiping I think there's too much of it that goes on in society and within churches as well the traditional way of people joke about this is that really asking for prayer points is an excuse for gossip well we have to be careful if we're asking for prayer points that we're not trying to gossip about things and keeping confidences well verse 29 building on verses 27 and 28 the violent entice their neighbors and lead them in a way that is not good same sort of people in effect trying to destroy other people the sense of deceit that is going on in the enticement is suggested in that word and and back in chapters 1 to 9 especially chapters 1 and 2 you see quite some illustrations of that sort of behavior 30 similar sort of thing but maybe style of proverb is not quite the same pattern as the previous three one who winks the eyes plans perverse things one who compresses the lips brings evil to pass well never compress your lips whatever that means I think what it's saying is that those sorts of facial expressions might be deceitful in communication the nudge nudge wink wink sort of stuff we must be straightforward in what we say winking as we saw was it last week the week before is associated often with deceit it seems and so it seems that this person like the previous three verses is creating mischief creating division in the way they speak verse 31 is a comfort to me grey hair is a crown of glory it is gained in a righteous life well I a few years ago I thought that

I had a grey hair for each parishioner and that was the trouble with the growing church I think now I've got grey hairs that probably relate to the building project as well it's not actually talking just about grey hair because there are some people who are elderly without grey hair and some who are young with it it's saying in effect old life old age I should say is a crown of glory and it is gained in a righteous life and it doesn't mean that every person who's old is righteous and it doesn't mean that the older you are the more righteous you are either don't be proud those of you who are over 41 we must remember that time and again the the promise of righteous behaviour is long life in the land that the Lord your God is giving you so long life will typically but not in every case mean righteous living now there are plenty of exceptions there are exceptions amongst the kings of Israel and Judah in fact one of the longest reigning kings was actually thoroughly evil and one of the best kings died tragically young in his 30s so it's not saying that every person who dies young is not righteous and every person who lives to a good old age is but it's saying it's reflecting that promise of God for righteous behaviour long life in the land 32 one who is slow to anger is better than the mighty and one whose temper is controlled better than one who captures a city strange comparison you might think maybe it's saying that if you conquer yourself that's actually harder than conquering another or conquering another city self-control of anger is not easy but it is worth working at and it is more to be prized if you like than military expansion or conquering another person and then finally verse 33 rounding off the chapter continuing the theme of the sovereignty of God compared to the plans of people the lot is cast into the lap but the decision is the Lord's alone now in the Old

Testament casting lot occurred a number of times you would have two flat stones they would have a marking on each side basically if you like a yes and a no on each side and you would toss the stones and it seems that if the two yeses came up that was treated as guidance to do whatever the course of action was if the two noes came up that was treated as guidance not to pursue that action and if one of each turned up then you would hold fast or maybe toss again I'm not quite sure it's a bit unclear because we're not actually given all the instructions in the Old Testament the names of these stones were called Urim and Thummim and they occur just a few times in the scriptures and they're often kept by the priest to determine guidance and they're used in cases when Saul was chosen as a king when the land was divided in the book of Joshua when there was an identification needed to be done for Achan and his sin in Joshua 7 and also to identify Jonathan at a cause of sin a stupid act of Saul really in 1 Samuel 14 as well it was also used to choose offices to help build the temple in 1 Chronicles 24 and 5 and probably its last instance is when Lot was cast to determine who would be the replacement apostle for Judas who had betrayed Jesus in Acts chapter 1 nowhere else really is the Lot used by the people of

Israel and nowhere else in the New Testament is it used generally speaking people regard the tossing of the Lot as something that probably passed away before Pentecost given that the choice of the replacement for Judas Matthias was immediately before the day of Pentecost and so the giving of God's spirit in a sense supplements and fulfills that role of guidance that is sometimes used in the Old Testament.

[ 50 : 43 ] The only other time where the casting of Lot is really important in the Old Testament is in the book of Esther where the Lot is cast by Haman the evil prime minister to determine the day of fate of judgment against all the Jewish people because Mordecai has got up his nose so much and it was cast and it was 11 months ahead which shows the folly of casting Lot because you think if you're going to try and destroy your enemy why not just go and do it straight away but why rely on fate or the casting of stones. What this proverb is saying which is very much to I think how the book of Esther deals with the casting of Lot called Pur and hence the feast of Purim is that ultimately it is we do not live in a fatalistic world we don't live in a world of chance we live in a world where God is sovereign and you can cast Lot in your lap all your days if you like but in the end the decision is the Lord's. Now in the Old Testament where they were under instruction to do this there is a right sense in which the casting of Lot is not because of a fatalistic or chance or casino mentality worldview it is because God is sovereign and he determines what comes up on the stones but there is a big warning here I think too that those who think that this world is a world of fatal chance as I say a casino mentality which is very prevalent I think in our society this is saying you may well cast a lot it may come up yes or no or indifferent but in the end the one who is in charge is not some lucky star or lucky number it is the Lord and he is sovereign and that in the end is the dominant theme of this chapter and a crucial theme for being wise God is sovereign all too often in our world human beings are trying to be sovereign and part of our frustration may be at the fires in

Canberra is that something has happened beyond human control and the desire to see humans control this world may be reflected in the fact that people are trying to blame humans for the fires damage God is in control and time and again in world history he makes it evident in order I think to bring human beings and the world society onto its knees and know that he is God and not us our world is no different from the early world of the Bible's days St Paul reflected on that sort of world in Romans chapter 1 words that I think are still highly relevant to today's society what can be known about God is plain to them because God has shown it to them ever since the creation of the world his eternal power and divine nature invisible though they are have been understood and seen through the things he's made so they are without excuse although they knew God they did not honour him as God or give thanks to him but they became futile in their thinking and their senseless minds were darkened claiming to be wise they became fools and they exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling a mortal human being or birds or animals or reptiles what Paul says is what the psalmist says the fool says there is no God what Paul says and the psalmist says is what the writer of

Proverbs has said and we've seen these three weeks so far the plans of the mind belong to mortals but the answer of the tongue is from the Lord a lot is cast into the lap but the decision is the Lord's alone let's trap that in this place and that the psalmist says there was only one long term control normal and then at the moment there is one card and then man became the one card coordinator whoever does not my own crowned find the beginning of the tongue of the tongue is structures and that point there is Iowa's around there so many will allow you to understand that it's somehow the point like in the remember holding that silver piece too look at the side and Stephen Box found it's not so many words there's not ever false that the point of fact imagine did yes you Duty also views us so much, looking forward to me slowly like in pirates of the Redoubt by the way up in the set of the main movement