

Preface To The Proverbs Of Solomon (1524)

Because this book deals especially with fools and wise men and everywhere praises wisdom and rebukes folly, it is necessary to consider its language and its words, to see what he means by fools and wise men. Therefore, in order that this profitable book may be the plainer, I shall here sketch this out in a few words, as clearly as I can.

It is the way of King David, in the Psalter, and especially of King Solomon (and perhaps it was the manner of speaking in their time) to give the name of fool not to those whom the world calls fools, or who are born fools, but to all kinds of loose, frivolous, heedless people, most of all to those who live without God's Word and act and speak according to their own reason or purposes; though usually these are, before the world, the greatest, wisest, mightiest, richest. and holiest. Thus Paul calls the Galatians, and Christ the Pharisees, and even His own disciples, fools, so that you may know that when Solomon speaks of fools, he is speaking not of plain or insignificant people, but of the greatest people in the world.

That which Solomon here calls wisdom is nothing else than the wisdom of God, which is taught in God's words and works; therefore he is constantly citing God's commandments and works. Besides, no proverbs have their origin anywhere else than in God's words and works, since all human proposals are vain and deceptive, and nothing comes out of them except what God wills and does; as we say in German, *Es ist dir bedacht, abet nicht bescheret*, and *Wer das Gluck hat, fuhrt die Braut heim*. These and like proverbs come from the fact that men have to see and learn that men's proposals and hopes constantly fail and turn out otherwise than they intend, and they have at last to observe that another turns the wheel. Some, then, have called this Other God, some Fate. Accordingly the proverbs in all tongues and languages are sure and certain, since they are founded on God's works and come out of God's works, even though God's Word is not there. On the other hand, by folly he means nothing else than what takes place without God's Word and works. A wise man is one who guides himself by God's Word and works; a fool one who presumptuously guides himself by his own mind and notions.

From this we see what a splendid, wise, and fine man King Solomon was. He took things so seriously that amid so many royal duties, he undertook to be a teacher, and especially a teacher of the most necessary thing of all, teaching and training the young people how they should act blessedly before God according to the spirit, and wisely before the world with body and goods. For this is the most important thing that men can have on earth, as King Solomon saw very well; and they cannot have it unless they are trained in youth. This book, therefore, ought early be impressed on the young people throughout the world and put into daily use and practice; undoubtedly it was for this purpose that it was made and written by King Solomon, as an example to all kings and lords to take an interest in the young people. To this may God give His grace. Amen.