

## Preface to the Books of Solomon, 1545 (1534)

Three books bear the name of Solomon.<sup>60</sup> The first is *Proverbia*, “Proverbs” [*die Sprüche*]. It may properly be called a book of good works, for in it he teaches how to lead a good life before God and the world.

He pays special attention to the young people. In fatherly fashion he instructs them in God’s commandments, with reassuring **promises** of how well things shall be with the righteous, and **threats** as to how the wicked will have to be punished. For young people are of themselves inclined to all evil. Because of their inexperience, they do not understand the wiles and wickedness of the world and the devil. They are far too weak to withstand bad examples and the causes of offense, neither are they able to govern themselves. If they are not instructed, they are mined and lost even before they get their bearings.<sup>61</sup>

**Promises** – righteous  
**Threats** – wicked

Therefore young people need and must have teachers and rulers who will exhort, warn, rebuke, and chastise them, who will hold them constantly to the fear of God and to his commandments in order to ward off the devil, the world, and the flesh. This, then, is what Solomon does abundantly and with all diligence in this book. He puts his teaching into proverbs, so that it can be grasped the more easily and kept the more readily. Anyone who intends to become righteous might well take this as **a handbook or prayerbook** for his daily use, read it often, and ponder his own life in it.

**Handbook/  
Prayerbook**

For a man must go **one of two ways**: either he must let his father chastise him or he must let the executioner punish him. As they say, “You may escape me, but you will not escape the hangman.”<sup>62</sup> And it would be good to impress this constantly on the young people, so that they might know without any doubt that they must suffer either **the father’s rod or the executioner’s sword**, just as, in this book, Solomon is constantly threatening the disobedient with death. There is no other way out, for God leaves nothing unpunished. We see in our own experience that disobedient knaves perish in strange ways; they finally come into the executioner’s hands just when they least expect it and feel most secure. Public testimony and signs of all this are the gallows, wheels, and places of execution at the gates of all the cities. Through his temporal government God has put them there to terrify all those who will not obey their elders and let themselves be instructed in God’s word.

1. **Father’s rod** – chastisement
2. **Executioner** – punishment

Therefore in this book Solomon calls **all those who despise God’s word “fools,”** and all those who deport themselves according to God’s commandments “wise.” This does not apply solely to young people—though it is primarily they whom he has undertaken to teach—but to people of all stations from the highest to the very lowest. For just as youth has its own particular offenses against God’s commandments, so every other group has its vices as well; and these are worse than the vices of youth. As they say, “The older they are, the worse they get”;<sup>63</sup> and again, “Age is no cure for folly.”<sup>64</sup>

**Wise** – God’s Word  
**Fools** – Despise it

Even if there were nothing evil in the other and higher stations, no greed, pride, hatred, envy, etc., nevertheless **this one vice would be bad enough, namely, that they try to be shrewd and smart when they ought not to be; everybody is inclined to do something else than what is committed to him, and to leave undone that which is committed to him.** For example, whoever is in the spiritual office tries to be wise and

### Vices

1. Shrewder
2. Do another’s vocation
3. Leave undone

active in the worldly office, and there is no end to his wisdom in this regard; in turn, whoever is in the worldly office has a head too small to hold all his superfluous knowledge about the conduct of the spiritual office.

Of such fools all lands, all cities, all homes are full, and in this book they are diligently rebuked. **Everyone is exhorted to take care of his own affairs and to do faithfully and diligently that which is committed to him;** there is indeed no virtue beyond that of obedience, attending to that which is given him to do. Such people are called wise men; the disobedient are called fools, even though they do not want to be, or be called, disobedient men or fools.

**The second book is called *Qoheleth* [Ecclesiastes],** the one we call “The Preacher.”<sup>65</sup> It is a book of comfort. **When a man would live an obedient life according to the teaching of the first book [Proverbs] and attend to his duty or office,** then the devil, the world, and his own flesh put up so much resistance that he becomes weary and discouraged with **his station in life** and regrets everything he has begun, for things simply will not go as he wants them to. Everything becomes a struggle then; dissatisfaction, impatience, and murmuring arise until a man is ready to give up all hope and do nothing more. **For if the devil cannot prevent obedience through covetousness and desire on the right hand, he will hinder it on the left hand through toil and trouble.**

While in the first book [Proverbs] Solomon teaches obedience in the face of mad lust and desire, so in this book he teaches that men are to be patient and steadfast in obedience, in the face of unpleasantness and temptation [*anfechtung*], and ever to wait out the brief hour in peace and joy. What they cannot keep or alter, they are to let go; it will all work out, etc.

**The third book [Song of Solomon]** is a song of praise, in which Solomon praises God for obedience, as for a gift of God. **For where God is not himself the householder and ruler, there is neither obedience nor peace in any station of life.** But where there is obedience and good governing, there God dwells, he kisses and embraces his dear bride with his word, which is the kiss of his lips. Therefore when things go in a land or a home as nearly as possible according to the first two of these books, then one may well sing this third book and thank God. For God has not only taught us this, but has himself also done it. Amen.<sup>1</sup>

### Preface to Solomon’s “The Preacher” 1524

For the entire book tends to show that the counsels, plans, and undertakings of men are all in vain and fruitless, and that they always have a different outcome from that which we will and purpose. Thus Solomon would teach us to wait in confident trust<sup>76</sup> and to let God alone do everything, above and against and without our knowledge and counsel. Therefore you must not understand this book to be reviling God’s creatures when it says, “All is vanity and a striving after wind.”<sup>77</sup> For God’s creatures are all good, Genesis 1[:31] and II Timothy 4[I Tim. 4:4]; and this book itself says that **a man shall be happy with his wife and enjoy life, etc. [Eccles. 9:9].** It teaches, rather, that **the plans and undertakings of men in their dealings with the creatures all go wrong and are in vain, if one is not satisfied with what is presently at hand but wants to be their master and ruler for the future.** That’s how it always goes—backward—so that a man has had nothing but wasted toil and anxiety; things turn out anyway as God wills and purposes, not as we will and purpose.

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<sup>1</sup>Luther, M. (1999, c1960). Vol. 35: *Luther's works, vol. 35 : Word and Sacrament I* (J. J. Pelikan, H. C. Oswald & H. T. Lehmann, Ed.). Luther's Works (Vol. 35, Page 258-261). Philadelphia: Fortress Press.

Ecclesiastes 9:9 Live joyfully with the wife whom you love all the days of your vain life which He has given you under the sun, all your days of vanity; for that is your portion in life, and in the labor which you perform under the sun.

Psalms 130:4 – “But there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared.”

Proverbs 8:13 – “The fear of the LORD is to hate evil: pride, and arrogancy, and the evil way, and the froward mouth, do I hate.”

Ecclesiastes 12:13 – “Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man.”

Micah 6:8 – “He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?”

Proverbs 3:3–6 – “Let not mercy and truth forsake thee... In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.”

Proverbs 22:3 – “A **prudent** man foreseeth the evil, and hideth himself: but the simple pass on, and are punished.”

The three estates are 1) Instituted by God, 2) with His Word, 3) by which He preserves His Creation. Man works in each of the three estates.

### **Family**

Male and Female

Marriage

Procreation and Rearing of

Children

### **Government**

Established by God

Authority to punish evil  
doers

Protects life and  
possessions

### **Church**

Instituted by Christ

Man called to Pastoral  
Office

Truth of the Word (Sound  
Doctrine)

