

The law of unintended consequences is always at work but so too is the law of intended consequences and what grace may be about is the happy coincidence of the two - for Solomon is prompted to ask God out of a real need, a real insufficiency, and the miracle is that he knows it; grace indeed is already at work when he asks God for wisdom rather than riches. The unintended consequence here is that he gains riches also, but sadly the unintended consequence of this will be to lead him astray. You see how it's a never-ending interplay of various forces, those for the good and those for the bad, though we can never in this life be entirely sure which is at work in us - such is the nature of grace and hence the beauty of Solomon's request.

We can see something of this dynamic at work in the other two readings as well as the psalm

*'We know that by turning everything to their good God cooperates with all those who love him, with all those that he has called according to his purpose.'*

Goodness is God's intended consequence - the grace we receive by God's grace and yet already at work in our need, in our impoverishment. Again the beauty of the parables of the treasure in the field and the pearl of great value is that their significance, their beauty, is immediately recognised and acted on - like Solomon, already grace is at work, God's call for us to act according to God's good purpose. This act of cooperation is both new and old at the same time, intended and unintended also. Paul is at pains in his letter to the Romans to hold onto the idea that God has not abandoned his Chosen People but because they, or some of them, have failed to embrace the messianic nature of Jesus, the new work that God is now doing in him, their failure has the unintended consequence, for them, of gaining entry for the Gentiles into the kingdom of God, and the intended consequence from God for us is to take both the new, that is Jesus as Messiah, and the old, that is the law which is a mark of God's election, seriously and know that God's choice remains open for all. The beauty of it all is that God is at work in both the intended and unintended consequences of our actions - this isn't a recipe for sin, as Paul will also strenuously deny, but it is a recipe for prayer, for realising our impoverishment and our perennial need to call on God for enlightenment.

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