

Proverbs of Solomon – Proverbs 26:1-12

Arguably all of these 12 proverbs deal with the same kind of person – “*the fool.*” We have a few **descriptions** of the man and some of the **effects** of his actions. A couple of verses seem to be unrelated to “*the fool*” until we think about them a little while. Then we have **ways** in which he should be **treated** – some sounding contradictory, but they are not.

But first a word or two about the Hebrew words for “*fool.*” In my library there are two concordances which I regularly use – James Strong’s and Robert Young (not the 20th century actor, but the 19th century Bible student Robert Young). They are both helpful because their presentations are different. **Strong** takes an English word like “*fool*” and lists its every use from **Genesis** to **Revelation**, and behind each reference is a number which we must take to the back of his book to research the original language. I like Strong’s thorough definitions. **Young**, on the other hand, takes each word and lists its use from Genesis to Malachi, beginning with the original word, as opposed to ending with it. It is not necessary to look to addenda or other tables for more information, because it is arranged according to the original word. Young makes it very easy to study all the scriptures which use that particular word. And he **also** gives a **concise English definition** with each Hebrew or Greek word.

So with Young’s Concordance we easily see that there are six Hebrew words translated “*fool,*” and he shows that they are all slightly different in meaning. “*Nabal*” may be familiar to you; coming from the history of David, that was the name of Abigail’s husband. “*Nabal*” was a name, but it is also translated “*fool*” in other Old Testament scriptures. And Young’s quick definition declares that this word speaks of an “*empty person*” as in “*empty-headed.*” The man “*Nabal*” was definitely an “*empty-headed*” man. A completely different Hebrew word Young defines as “*thickheaded*” as opposed to “*empty-headed.*” Another word which is used only once means “*boaster.*” The **second most common** “*fool,*” according to Young, means “*evil*” – this kind of fool is an evil person. **Ps 107:17** – “*Fools because of their transgression, and because of their iniquities, are afflicted.*” That is, “*Evil fools should expect the judgment of God.*” This word is used 15 times in **Proverbs**, but not at all in **chapter 26**. By far **the most common** Old Testament word for “*fool*” is “*kesil.*” Young says that it refers to someone who “*self-confident*” in contrast to someone humble and placing his confidence in the Lord. “*Kesil*” is used 45 times in the **Proverbs**, and it is the only “*fool*” found here in **chapter 26**. “*As snow in summer, and as rain in harvest, so honour is not seemly for a (self-confident) fool.*” “*Answer not a (self-confident) fool according to his folly, lest thou also be like unto him.*” “*As a dog returneth to his vomit, so a (self-confident) fool returneth to his (evil) folly*” – Solomon used a relative of the **EVIL fool** for “*folly.*” The last use of this word – **verse 12** – essentially describes the kind of fool of this chapter. “*Seest thou a man wise in his own conceit: There is more hope of a (self-confident) fool than of him.*”

Now let’s consider what the Holy Spirit says here about this kind of fool.

Verse 1 – “*As snow in summer, and as rain in harvest, so honour is not seemly for a fool*” – it is not appropriate. I was talking to our organic farmer member, Chris Martenson, last week. He was saying that 2019 may have been the rainiest, the wettest, on record for eastern Montana. What started out very well, didn’t end quite as well, because of the rain that fell during harvest season. It bogged down his combine; it delayed his harvest by several weeks, and it hurt the quality of the grain. Rain in harvest time is not helpful. On the other hand, snow in summer is just – weird. And so is honour when given to a self-confident fool. In other words, don’t give that man any encouragement, any praise, any honor. It is as out of place as a jewel of gold in a swine’s snout. To praise, or encourage, a fool is to become foolish ourselves.

Verse 8 – “*As he that bindeth a stone in a sling, so is he that giveth honour to a (self-confident) fool.*” The interpretation of this “*sling*” is a bit difficult, but the intent of this verse is same as **verse 1**. Maybe it means that like a child with a slingshot, the honor we give to fools will be shot into space and lost. Or perhaps we need to stress the word “*binding*” – our honor of fools will be bound up and buried – hidden in a sling – like a the candle under a bushel basket. It will be smothered and rendered useless.

Verse 6 – “*He that sendeth a message by the hand of a fool cutteth off the feet, and drinketh damage.*” Whose feet are being cut off? The sender’s? The fool’s? Perhaps it might be best to think of the message as having feet, which are cut off. The message is rendered crippled because it was being conveyed by a fool. The sender might have well drink a dose of poison – or perhaps a powerful laxative.

The application of **verses 7** and **9** is essentially the same. “*The legs of the lame are not equal: so is a parable in the mouth of fools.*” “*As a thorn goeth up into the hand of a drunkard, so is a parable in the mouth of fools.*” Parables inherently contain danger, because they tell the truth in a fuzzy sort of way. They are illustrations, similes, or

metaphors which are naturally open to various interpretations. They can add color to a truth or doctrine, but they can't be effectively used to prove that doctrine. And when that parable is being conveyed by a fool, the danger of misinterpretation is intensified. Because this man has an agenda, he often takes only one or two scriptures to build his new doctrine. Because he is so lacking in scriptures, he uses those two passages as though they were parables. Or he quotes the ideas of other men, using them as illustrations, with the implication they are scripture. Such a misuse will soon stab him in the hand.

Verse 11 – *“As a dog returneth to his vomit, so a (self-confident) fool returneth to his (evil) folly.”* Let's say that someone is convinced that the earth is flat – the earth is like a plate rather than a globe. He has read the ancient writings of men who have believed in a flat earth. He has found a website which quotes modern scholars, some with PhDs, and he re-quotes them. He says that all the pictures of the earth from space are fakes. *“It's a global conspiracy,”* he says. He is convinced that the earth is flat and doesn't mind arguing with you because you cannot prove otherwise. He may be an *“empty-headed fool”* for holding such a position. But he becomes an *“evil fool”* for continuing, over and over again, to force his assertions on you. And when finally people refuse to argue with him, but he continues to joust against that wind-mill, he makes himself to appear even more *“conceited”* and *“foolish.”* He would be far more effective, if he just stated his position then shut up and walked away. But because he is what he is, he continues. Because of his conceit, he cannot stay silent. A dog licking up his own vomit is disgusting – walk away; don't pet him; don't praise him.

But what if he curses you for your sanity – which he considers to be insanity? Just remember **Verse 2** – *“As the bird by wandering, as the swallow by flying, so the curse causeless shall not come.”* Christians don't need to fear the curses of Balaam. Balak, the King of Moab, tried to bring down Israel by the curses of a disgraced and fallen prophet. But when it was all said and done, God actually blessed Israel because of Balaam.

The causeless curse of the fool shall not come to pass, because God loves Israel, and He loves His churches. He has *“a whip for the horse, a bridle for the ass, and a rod for the fool's back”* – **verse 3**. **Verse 10** – *“The great God that formed all things both rewardeth the fool, and rewardeth transgressors.”* The reward to which Solomon referred is not a good one. *“Seest thou a man wise in his own conceit? there is more hope of a fool than of him,”* because no man can survive if he is fighting against God.

Verses 4 and 5 seem to convey contradictory lessons.

Is that possible? Can the Lord or the Word of God be self-contradictory? Of course not. We know that the Lord cannot lie, and the Bible cannot contradict itself. So we have to discover the error in our thinking which momentarily caused us to imagine such a thing. *“Answer **NOT** a fool according to his folly, lest thou also be like unto him. Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own conceit.”*

*“Answer **NOT** a fool according to his folly, lest thou also be like unto him.”* Apparently, sometimes even wise men need to be directed as to the best way to deal with fools. And probably there is never more need of wisdom than when we are dealing with *“conceited fools.”* When should we speak, and when should we be silent? When the self-confident fool is *boasting in himself*, or his *wisdom*, or his *ability* to see the *truth* which is hidden from most other men's eyes, if the wise man replies in kind he becomes *“like unto him.”* If the fool *rants* and *raves*, it would be foolish on your part to reply in the same sort of ranting way. Of course, if he *lies*, we are forbidden to do the same, but what if he merely *exaggerates*? It is easy, horribly easy, to misquote or partially quote others – Anyone might become guilty of this. But it is nearly impossible to misquote the Bible; God says what He says. We might misinterpret the Bible, but misquoting it is impossible for the honest man. Stick with the word of God when dealing with the fool; don't resort to statement from the *“experts.”* He might attack our friends or our *“experts,”* and we might be tempted to attack his, but don't *“lest thou also be like unto him.”* Stick with the Word of God. If he banters or badgers, don't answer him in that same sort of way. And don't raise your voice the way he does. Perhaps not to answer at all is the best approach.

But what then should we do with **verse 5** – *“Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own conceit.”* When there is hope of doing good, correcting some error, straightening some crooked path, go for it. But when that fool has consistently and sufficiently rejected your counsel, at some point answering him becomes no longer productive, and we become *“like unto him”* if we continue. If he has refused to listen to anything you have said for years, and it has become obvious that he will not listen now, turn away. Silence may be the best reproof. But what if he claims that your silence is proof of your error or weakness? Just remember: *“Sticks and stones may break your bones, but names will never hurt you”* – unless you permit it. When the self-confident fool becomes

incorrigible, it becomes useless to continue to debate or try to instruct him. At some point the matter must be left in God's hands.