

## Sermon 64, Shutting Folly Down, Proverbs 17:16-28

**Proposition:** The wise son responds to folly and the sorrow and injustice it causes with friendship, joy, and self-restraint.

- I. The Fool
    - A. No Mind to Learn, v. 16
    - B. No Love for Peace, v. 19
    - C. Corrupt Heart, v. 20a
    - D. Perverse Tongue, v. 20b
  - II. The Friend
    - A. He loves all the time, v. 17
    - B. He helps when he can, v. 18
  - III. The Joyful
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  - V. The Wise
    - A. Keeps his tongue in check, vv. 27a, 28
    - B. Keeps his cool, v. 27b
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- I. Friendship, the Antidote to Ignorant Folly, vv. 16-20
    - A. The Fool
      - 1. No Mind to Learn, v. 16
      - 2. No Love for Peace, v. 19
      - 3. Corrupt Heart, v. 20a
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    - B. The Friend
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  - II. Joy, the Antidote to Sorrow and Injustice, vv. 21-26
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  - A. The wise keep their tongue in check, vv. 27a, 28
  - B. The wise keep their cool, v. 27b

## **Introduction**

Dearly beloved congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, our passage this morning once again talks a lot about the fool. But thankfully, it also says a good deal about the antidote to folly. Indeed, our text presents three things that stop folly in its tracks: friendship, joy, and self-restraint. These goods (and make no mistake: they are goods provided by personified Wisdom, by our Lord Jesus Christ) are more than good enough to overcome the evil of ignorant folly, of blatant injustice, and of idiots who won't stop blithering. In short, the message of our text this morning is that the wise son triumphs over folly through friendship, joy, and self-restraint.

### **I. Friendship, the Antidote to Ignorant Folly, vv. 16-20**

We begin by looking at two proverbs on friendship that are sandwiched between three proverbs on the fool. And indeed, we see that the good provided by friendship triumphs over the folly of the fool.

#### **A. The Fool**

##### **1. No Mind to Learn, v. 16**

The first characterization of the fool is that he has no heart. That's what the Hebrew literally says. Now, that doesn't sound the same to us as it sounded to them. Remember, this book tells us elsewhere "As a man thinks in his heart, so is he." They meant by "heart" everything we mean by "heart," plus everything we mean by "mind." The best capturing of the meaning of this phrase is from a 20th-century translator, and it is along the lines of "Why is there a price in the hand of a fool to buy wisdom when he has no mind to learn?" That's meant in both ways — that he has no intention of learning, but also that he is brainless and doesn't have the intellectual capacity to learn anything.

In other words, you can send a fool to school but you can't teach him squat. You can beat him over the head but he won't learn, as we saw in v. 10. You can educate him expensively, but his folly will remain. That's why some people have started referring to the graduates of our elite American universities as "expensively credentialed" rather than "well educated." There's a difference, folks. The fool just has no mind to learn.

##### **2. No Love for Peace, v. 19**

Nor does he have any love for peace. In fact, he loves to offend. But really, someone who enjoys provoking really just enjoys fighting. That is a hallmark of the fool, my friends. To "raise your door" seems to be a reference to showing off, or maybe to making it difficult for people to enter your home. Basically, the fool is too proud to humble himself and keep the peace. He doesn't care who he offends. But the problem with his attitude is that it will result in destruction.

### **3. Corrupt Heart, v. 20a**

The fool is brainless in the sense of lacking all intellectual aptitude. But he does have a heart, in literal truth. That heart is hopelessly corrupt, though. All find what they truly seek, as C.S. Lewis' Aslan says. Well, the fool with his corrupt heart can never find good. Why not? Because good does not exist? No! Because he's not looking for it. The fool can only see evil because that's the only thing his receptors are tuned to. He complains all day long about how awful his life is, and he never stops to give thanks for the good things that he enjoys.

But in another sense, the corrupt person not only fails to see the good all around him; he also receives less and less real good over time. Precisely because his aptitude for it is diminishing, he quickly gets to the point where God sends him evil upon evil. After all, it's what he's looking for, and it's what he deserves. As we say, he's asking for it. And if you ask for it long enough, God will let you have it.

### **4. Perverse Tongue, v. 20b**

Once again, as it has so many times before, the text underlines for us the connection between the heart and the tongue. A corrupt heart expresses itself through a perverse tongue. This is a tongue that says awful things. Yes, it refers to cursing and coarse language. But it also refers to hurtful language, to words that attack and harm others. And it refers to words that sound pleasant and smooth but are actually evil. Thus, we can say truly that the tongue of Immanuel Kant or John Rawls is every bit as perverse as the tongue of Howard Stern or Adolf Hitler. Though the philosophers may sound mild and plausible, their ideas are far deadlier than the most jingoistic speeches of a political leader like Hitler or a shock jock media personality like Stern. All four of these people came up with their evil words in their corrupt hearts. And none of them has found good from God.

Well, these four characteristics of the fool are heinous and wrong. Brothers and sisters, may it never be that a member of Harvest Reformed Presbyterian Church is found provoking fights or refusing to learn because his corrupt heart and perverse tongue unite in keeping God's wisdom out of his head! Don't let your heart get corrupt; don't let your tongue get perverse. Don't hate peace. How do you do this? By learning to know and love Christ with all your mind. He is personified wisdom, and He alone can overcome folly.

## **B. The Friend**

Indeed, He is the friend who loves at all times. Friendship with Him is the ultimate antidote to folly.

### **1. Loves peace all the time, v. 17**

And thus, the true friend loves peace all the time. We can shorten that and just say that he *loves* all the time. Is there ever a time when Jesus does not love you? A brother is a very handy thing to have when hard times come, the text is saying. He's such a blessing that you would think that it's the whole reason he exists. But even better than a brother, whose blessing is most pronounced in the hard times, is a friend, because the friend loves. The fool does not love. He loves strife; he

loves fighting with people and excluding them. But Christ the true friend always loves — and if we're going to be like Him, we have to learn from Him how to love too.

## **2. Uses his tongue to help when he can, v. 18**

This love is not indiscriminate and uncaring, though. It doesn't write the other party in the relationship a blank check. Thus, Solomon hastens to add that it's not true friendship to promise to cover every expenditure. It's not true friendship to take responsibility for someone who ought to be taking it for himself. Put another way, enabling is not friendship. It's not love. It's abuse. Codependency is not friendship. Cleaning up your drunk husband's barf is not love. It's enablement. Cleaning up your kids' room is not love; it's enablement. And so on. Yes, not every situation of help is black-and-white. God Himself, in the person of His Wise Son our true friend, became surety for our moral behavior and went to the cross for it. But we should never give a friend carte blanche. We should never say "Whatever bill you run up, I will pay it. Whatever damage you do, I will fix it." The only person who says those things is a fool — a man lacking in sense. A true friend loves all the time and helps when he can — but he never lets himself do more harm than good by saying, "Whatever charge you incur, I'll cover it." God said that to us; it's a promise that's beyond amazing. It's literally divine, godlike. For us to say the same is to play God. It's to try to become the wonderful white savior. And the results are pure folly. To try to play Jesus is not the love at all times that's the antidote to folly; real love at all times is the love that says "Look to Jesus Christ for everything you need. I'm here for you; I'm your friend; and I'm friend to enough to tell you that you need somebody a lot more powerful than me to undertake for you."

## **II. Joy, the Antidote to Sorrow and Injustice, vv. 21-26**

Well, true friendship and the love that points a friend to the salvation that's in Christ is the solution to the problem of ignorant folly. But joy is the antidote to the sorrow and injustice that fools wreak on their parents and on society at large.

### **A. The Sorrow of Fathering a Fool, vv. 21, 25**

In two different proverbs, Solomon, the father of the fool King Rehoboam, points out that the father of a fool has no joy. It's downright unpleasant to beget an idiot, particularly the moral kind of idiot that we know as a fool. Brothers and sisters, this is the opposite of the proverb we've heard several times: A wise son makes a glad father. But a foolish son is a bitterness to her who bore him. The point of wisdom is to please your father. Do you want to do that? If not, you're not a Christian; you're a fool.

### **B. The Injustice Done by the Wicked**

Well, Solomon details three forms of injustice that the wicked perpetrate.

#### **1. Taking bribes, v. 23**

The first of them is taking bribes. Now, most of us are not in a position to receive bribes. But the principle here applies to you no matter whether you are ever offered a bribe directly or not. After all, if you are willing to do wrong for financial gain, then you are willing to take a bribe. If you are willing to take a bribe, then you fit the profile of the wicked here. If you're willing to cheat

on your taxes, then that's willingness to take a bribe. If you're willing to make your children eat poorly so that you can have a fatter bank account, that's willingness to take a bribe. If you're willing to stop paying your tithe to God's church, then you're accepting money to do what's wrong.

## **2. Fining the righteous, v. 26a**

Bribery is something the wicked do; so is fining the righteous. It is not good to make good people pay because they are good. A classic example here involves persecution of Christians, making them pay a tax because of their religious convictions. Doing such a thing is not good.

## **3. Flogging upright nobles, v. 26b**

But maybe the most egregious example of the injustice done by the wicked is the flogging of nobles for their uprightness. If you are willing to physically chastise high officials just because they have done the right thing, you are evil indeed.

### **C. The Good Medicine of a Joyful Heart, v. 22**

Well, in a world in which the righteous are fined, the upright are flogged despite their high social position, and the wicked take bribes to pervert justice, how can we keep up our spirits? What is the antidote to this lawless world? A joyful heart. How do you get that? By looking at the king's face, where life is found. By listening and learning wisdom, which brings joy to the one who possesses her. By training your children in wisdom: the father of a fool has no joy, but the father of the righteous will greatly rejoice! Brothers and sisters, a broken spirit dries up the bones. If you are depressed and sorrowful over the woeful state of the world, then you need the good medicine of a joyful heart. And your heart will only be joyful if it's set on Jesus Christ — nothing less.

What's the antidote to the world's sorrow and injustice? The joy of knowing Christ.

### **III. Self-Restraint, the Antidote to Ignorant Folly, vv. 27-28**

Finally, our chapter closes with one last problem and its solution. That problem is the problem of ignorant blabbermouth folly. The fool just opens his mouth and cuts loose, and a stream of folly unlimited pours out *ad infinitum*.

#### **A. The wise keep their tongue in check, vv. 27a, 28**

How do we respond to that? By keeping our tongues in check. The wise keep their tongue; they restrain their words. Even a fool who can refrain from talking is not such a fool as we thought. Wisdom teaches you to keep your mouth shut! Now, the wise speak. Wisdom does not lie in taking a vow of silence. But wisdom does lie in speaking carefully, accurately, correctly, and not too much!

#### **B. The wise keep their cool, v. 27b**

The wise don't just keep their mouth shut; they keep their cool too. A wise man has a cool spirit; put the other way, as our text here does, he who has a cool spirit is a man of understanding. Do you want to get it? Then don't get upset. Self-restraint is the antidote to folly.

Our Lord was self-restrained, joyful, and friendly. He had in abundance all these things that are the opposite of folly and ignorance. So look to Him, trust Him, keep your cool, and you will be blessed. You will have shut folly down. Amen.