

091, Our Relationship to Fools

Proverbs

By Max Doner

sermonaudio.com

Bible Text: Proverbs 26:1-12
Preached on: Sunday, October 23, 2005

Sovereign Grace Bible Church
30375 Fairview Road
Lebanon, OR 97355 USA

Website: www.sovereigngracebible.com
Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/sovgrace

Let us turn in our Bibles, please, to the book of Proverbs 26. The book of Proverbs, the 26th chapter. We're going to consider this evening an extended section, Proverbs 26:1-11 because this section deals with a single subject and that is the subject of fools and it tells us how we should view them, their nature and characteristics, and their end and their outcome. And the reason, of course, why God gives us this information is so that we can beware of them, so that we not be like them, and so that we know how to interact with them when we come into contact with them. So follow along then as I read Proverbs 26:1-11.

1 As snow in summer, and as rain in harvest, so honour is not seemly for a fool. 2 As the bird by wandering, as the swallow by flying, so the curse causeless shall not come. 3 A whip for the horse, a bridle for the ass, and a rod for the fool's back. 4 Answer not a fool according to his folly, lest thou also be like unto him. 5 Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own conceit. 6 He that sendeth a message by the hand of a fool cutteth off the feet, and drinketh damage. 7 The legs of the lame are not equal: so is a parable in the mouth of fools. 8 As he that bindeth a stone in a sling, so is he that giveth honour to a fool. 9 As a thorn goeth up into the hand of a drunkard, so is a parable in the mouth of fools. 10 The great God that formed all things both rewardeth the fool, and rewardeth transgressors. 11 As a dog returneth to his vomit, so a fool returneth to his folly.

Now as we go through life, we encounter a great variety of people. People vary greatly in size, in shape, and in appearance. People vary greatly in occupation, in interests, and in activities. People vary greatly in culture, in color, and in condition. But the one critical dimension in which they vary and the one that we ought to especially take note of is the way in which they vary in character. Character, of course, is critical because character determines behavior in choices and those characteristics, those behaviors, those choices, have a huge impact on outcomes both for the individual under consideration and for all those around. Whether someone is good or bad, whether someone is evil or righteous, whether someone is wicked or virtuous is of immense consequence as to the choices they make and as to the behavior that they engage in. One man has well said, "Character is

destiny." He's correct. Your character will determine your choices and your choices will determine your outcomes. Now when we measure by biblical standards, people with good character have good outcomes and people with bad character have bad outcomes.

Now our passage today speaks to the issue of character and what it addresses is the nature of fools. Fools are people that we have to interact with on a frequent basis. We run into them constantly, often every single day. Fools are at work, fools are our neighbors, fools are our leaders, frequently fools are our family members. Such people are a tremendous danger to us. The danger is that we would listen to them, that we would make friendships with them, that we would learn their ways, and this is something that must be avoided at all costs. Proverbs 13:20 says "a companion of fools shall be destroyed."

So fools are not benign individuals. They are dangerous people. They are dangerous to our spiritual and our emotional and even our physical health. Our passage gives extended treatment to the nature and the punishment of fools. It gives us extended instruction as to how we are to treat such people and the reason why it spends so much time talking about fools and their nature and how we should treat them and what their end is going to be, is because we can learn a great deal from negative examples. A large part of learning wisdom is learning about its opposite which is, of course, folly, and so we do well when we pause to consider how not to be, how not to do it, and how to respond to those who are doing it wrong. So the reason for studying what a fool is like is so that we may learn to recognize them, so that we may learn to avoid them, so we may learn to escape being destroyed by them, in sum, so we may learn how to respond to them, and so what we want to do together this evening is to consider what our passage teaches us about fools and how we are to respond to them and what their end ultimately shall be so that we may learn not to be like them and, in fact, to practice the opposite positive virtues that they exemplify in the negative.

In the first place then this evening, let us consider together the nature of fools. The nature of fools. Now as we've gone through the book of Proverbs, we've talked a lot about wisdom and what wisdom is and we have said that a wise man is one who sees and responds to life's circumstances from God's frame of reference. He sees life from God's frame of reference and he responds to life from God's frame of reference, and such a man who does so can be called and considered a wise man. Now if a wise man is one who sees life and responds to life from God's frame of reference, then a fool is someone who does not. He has his own frame of reference from which he views and responds to life's circumstances and that frame of reference which he has is entirely contrary to God's frame of reference. His frame of reference is usually self-invented so as to justify his own pride and his own sin, or it is adopted from other people who have invented one to do the same.

So he sees and responds to life's circumstances from his own depraved frame of reference, he is filled with confidence that his frame of reference is the right one. As it says in Proverbs 12:15, "The way of a fool is right in his own eyes." That's not right in God's eyes but it's sure right in his own eyes. He's confident. Of course, when his responses to life's circumstances result in bad outcomes, as they inevitably will, he

immediately starts to declare that it's someone else's fault. He never questions his frame of reference when it produces choices that generate painful results. It says in Proverbs 14:16, "The fool rages and is confident," and he may be very unhappy about how things are going but he's very confident in himself and the choices he's made and if things aren't going well, it's got to be someone else's fault. The fool never stops and thinks, "Huh, if my way of thinking led to this result and my choices led to this outcome, maybe my thinking is wrong." He never thinks like that. No, he continues to stubbornly persist in his defiance in biblical principle all the while blaming everyone else and everything else for his problems and his poor outcomes except himself. In a word, he is marked by incredible stubbornness.

Notice verse 3, "A whip for the horse, a bridle for the ass, and a rod for the fool's back." There is similar language contained in Psalm 32:8-9. God's speaking, he says, "I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go: I will guide thee with mine eye. Be ye not as the horse, or as the mule, which have no understanding: whose mouth must be held in with bit and bridle, lest they come near unto thee." And so the picture here is that the fool can only be made to do the right thing by external force because he has no internal heart for it. Just like a horse or just like a mule doesn't want to do what his master wants him to do unless he's forced into doing it with external coercion of a bit and a bridle, so the fool will not do the right thing unless he is forced into it from without, and this is why fools need abundant rules, strong sanctions, and close supervision in order to get them to do what they ought. They will not learn from their bad outcomes the need to modify their behavior voluntarily and as a result, they have to be governed by force and by fear. They have to be governed by prisons and by police. Because they will not rule themselves, they must be ruled from without with the rod.

Proverbs 1:7 says that "fools despise wisdom and instruction." Proverbs 1:22 that "fools hate knowledge." Proverbs 18:2 says that "a fool has no delight in understanding." The point is, these folks don't want to learn and they have no intentions of learning from their mistakes. The result of all this is that they never learn from their own mistakes or from those of others, even when those choices they make produce awful outcomes. Notice verse 11 of our passage, it says, "As a dog returns to his vomit, so a fool returns to his folly." So we see the nature of a fool is that he doesn't learn, he doesn't want to learn, he's not going to learn, and he just keeps going back to the same set of stupid choices over and over and over again, even though those choices have greatly harmed him again and again.

Now when a fool makes a choice and he gets clobbered by it, initially he may repent of the choice, he may vomit it up as our text uses the metaphor, they swear off of it, they will never do it again, they're through with it, but do you know what? Before long they're right back at it again, eating up the same thing that made them sick before. They quickly forget its pain and they begin to long after its pleasure again and soon they embrace it again and the cycle starts all over again once more. They never learn. They will not learn. They do not want to learn. It says in Proverbs 29:9, "If a wise man contends with a foolish man, whether he rage or laugh, there is no rest." So you can point out the folly of the fool in the clearest of terms, using either the sweetest persuasions or the most stern

rebukes, but the result is you get nowhere because they're fools and they keep going back to that same disgusting, sickening behavior that they've vomited out before but now they're taking it back in.

So this, then, is the nature of the fool: he never learns from his mistakes and he will only do the right thing if he is forced to do so by external constraint; he stubbornly persists in his self-destructive behavior, and that brings us to our second major point. Having seen the nature of fools, notice secondly, the treatment of fools. The treatment of fools. Now, since the fool is of the nature that I've just described as our passage says, we must be careful how we treat such a person and how we interact with such a person and our passage gives us several lines of counsel. First of all, we are not to render honor or respect to such an individual. We are not to render honor or respect to such an individual.

Notice verse 1, "As snow in summer, and as rain in harvest, so honour is not fitting for a fool." Now if we were to see it snow in the middle of July, we would say, "Wow! This is completely out of character. This is completely strange. This is not fitting. This is summertime. Snow belongs in the winter, not in the summer." But of course, when the farmers are trying to get in their hay and they've cut it and it's laying in the field and the rain starts pouring down, they're not happy about that either. So as inappropriate as snow is in summer, as harmful as rain is during the harvest, so inappropriate and harmful it is to give honor and esteem and praise to one who lives in defiance of God's law and God's counsel.

Now verse 8 reinforces this concept when it says, "As he that bindeth a stone in a sling, so is he that giveth honour to a fool." Now when someone takes a rock and they put it in a sling, guess what they're going to do next? They're going to whip that thing around their head and they're going to hurt you with it. In other words, you put a stone in a sling in order to do some damage and so someone who is giving honor to fools is, as it were, taking a rock and throwing it at and attempting to smash the morality and the righteousness of those who obey and follow God. So the point is of these metaphors is that to honor a fool is both inappropriate and it is destructive. It is as inappropriate as snow in summer. It is as destructive as someone who is preparing to throw a rock.

Now it's harmful and destructive in three ways. When we give honor to fools, to those who live in defiance to God's law, we give them praise, we give them accolades, we give them awards, we build them up and show them honor, it's harmful, first of all, to the fool because when he acts like a fool and then he's honored, it encourages him and affirms him in his folly and says to him, "Carry on, brother." Secondly, it's harmful to others because when they see the fool getting honor, guess what? They want some of that honor so they start acting like the fool and it encourages others to imitate him in his foolish ways. Finally, it's harmful to the cause of God because when those who defy God's laws are exalted, then it makes a mockery of God's laws saying, in essence, that they may be safely ignored and those who ignore them are going to be advanced in the eyes of society and of men's esteem.

Now the world glorifies fools in the awards and in the honors that it places upon them and in the notice that it takes of them. People ooh and people awe and people make over and people fawn over the movie stars and the musicians and the politicians and the people of prestige and power like they were little gods. They give them Emmys and they give them Grammys and they put them on the front of magazines and they're held up to the world as being people to look up to even though they live in open willful defiance of God's laws. Well, we must not be among them. We must not give any honor to fools, any recognition, any approval, any elevation, any favorable comments. Our praise and our honor and our esteem is to be given to God and to people of godly character. They are the ones that are to be held up and given honor, and those who live in defiance of God's laws are not to have honor given to them in any way, shape or form.

The second line of counsel that we are given in the treatment of fools is that we are not only to not render honor or respect to such people, secondly, we are to carefully consider how we respond to their speech. We are to carefully consider how we are to respond to the speech of a fool. Notice verses 4 and 5. Verse 4, "Answer not a fool according to his folly, lest thou also be like unto him." Verse 5, "Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own conceit." Now in verse 4 we are told, "Answer not a fool according to his folly," now it is do not fall into the temptation to answer him and to respond to him in like terms that he is speaking to you with. In other words, if he brags on himself, do not begin bragging on yourself. If he gossips about other people, don't start gossiping about other people. If he uses foul language, do not use foul language along with him. If he tells filthy stories, don't tell filthy stories along with him. In other words, do not enter into his line of speech and reflect it and mirror it in your speech "lest," it says, "thou be like him." So we must not imitate his speech in either its character or in its content because he who begins to talk like a fool very soon becomes a fool. And that's what the text says, you talk like him, beware, you're going to become like him.

So we have to be careful that when we're around fools we don't fit in and start talking like they do. Oftentimes you'll see somebody and when he's with a rough crowd, he talks rough; when he's with a godly crowd, he talks godly; when he's with a worldly crowd, he talks worldly. He just talks like whoever he's around because he has no internal core of character, he just simply let's those around him push him into their mold because he has no moral substance in and of himself.

But then verse 5 says, "Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own conceit." Now we were told to answer not a fool according to his folly in verse 4, in other words, don't talk like him and go along with his pattern of talk, verse 5 is saying, but that doesn't mean stand there silent as a post. He says, "Go ahead and answer him according to his folly," that is, respond in an appropriate fashion to his folly. And sometimes that would involve reproof, telling him, in essence, "You know, you need to shut up and quit talking like that." Sometimes it involves correction, "You know, what you're saying is not right and here is the error and here is the fallacy of your position and your statements." The goal here is to recover this person from his folly or to show others the fallacy of his statements, or at the least to stop him from speaking further folly by showing the complete bankruptcy of the position that he's taking. To let him talk without reproof or

without correction is to lead him to think that you agree with him; it is to lead others to think that you agree with him; and it is to lead him to think, and others to think that he is very wise and he is very victorious and he has just shut your mouth because, you know, you just have no response and thus he engages in triumphalism and those around him go, "Ooh, well, I guess since he won the argument, we'd better follow his line of reasoning."

So he needs to know that others do not think him to be wise as a check upon his arrogance and his influence upon others. He needs to have his folly exposed. He needs to have it defeated and if at all possible, he needs to have it brought to a halt. Answer the fool. Don't let him rattle on and you stand there and say nothing in defense of the truth and in defense of righteousness. It says in Ephesians 5, "have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness but rather reprove them."

Now there is a time to be silent. We are counseled that we are not to reprove a scorner lest he hate us, and when this person moves from being a fool to being a scorner, when they begin to not only take your pearls and trample them under their feet but then they turn and begin to rend you, there is a time to not inflict further injury upon yourself by continuing to rebuke a man who will not hear rebuke, but to offer no rebuke at all and not test the waters to see if at least there cannot be a stop put to this, or a change made in the man's character, is to fall short of our Christian responsibility to speak a word in season.

Thirdly, not only are we to not render honor to such a person, not only are we to carefully consider how we respond to his speech, but thirdly, we are not to extend trust to a fool or place any confidence in him. We are not to extend trust to a fool or place any confidence in him. It says, first of all, we are not to trust his work, verse 6. In verse 6 it says, "He that sendeth a message by the hand of a fool cutteth off the feet, and drinketh damage." In other words, what's being said here is fools are not fit for employment. They are not fit for any errand nor are they to be entrusted with any business. A fool cannot apply his mind with any care or seriousness or thoughtfulness to anything, much less can he be responsible or diligent. You know, people judge you by those you send to represent you. You own a company, you hire a bunch of fools to work for you, people will think you're a fool because these people who are representing you are the face that you have to the customer. So if you send fools to represent you, you will injure and damage your own reputation.

So it says here in verse 6 that when you send a message by the hand of a fool, it's like cutting off your own feet and drinking damage to your own cause. I mean, imagine someone who just decided, "Well, you know, today I think I'll whack my feet off. Today I think I'll drink a cup of poison." You say no rational man would engage in such self-destructive behaviors and how incredibly destructive it is to one's own cause to employ a fool to carry out some assigned task. So if you have something to do, something that needs to be done, don't assign it to a fool. You only injure yourself when you do so.

Secondly, we are not to trust his wisdom. Not only are we not to trust his work, verse 6, but we are not to trust his wisdom, verses 7 and 9. Verse 7, "The legs of the lame are not equal: so is a parable in the mouth of fools." Verse 9, "As a thorn goeth up into the hand

of a drunkard, so is a parable in the mouth of fools." Now twice he addresses the subject of parables in the mouth of fools. Now the parable that's mentioned here in this passage is a wise saying, and for a fool to presume to communicate wisdom is like a thief who presumes to lecture on the sanctity of private property. It is just simply gross hypocrisy. Fools are not fit to deliver wise sayings and for him to deliver them is to disgrace them and to distort them because the vessel communicating them is not fit to carry them or deliver them.

Now the metaphor is used in verse 7 of the legs of the lame are not equal, and what is being said here is that there is an incongruence and an imbalance between what this person is saying and how this person is living which makes him, as it were, stagger around in his effort to deliver oh so wise sayings. In verse 9, the metaphor is changed, as a thorn goes into the hand of a drunkard, just as a drunken man cannot handle a brier without injury to himself. I can hardly do it when I'm sober, go out in the woods and there is the blackberry vine and you just grab it and you try to move it out of the way and half the time you get gouged up when you're sober, much less is a drunken man confident to remove something that is injurious out of his way, instead he winds up just jamming his hand into it. Then of course, he's insensible to it because he's drunk. So a fool cannot handle wisdom without injury to his reputation as being a complete hypocrite and he's completely insensible to the fact that this wisdom he's uttering, he's living entirely in contradiction to it. The point is: don't listen to or follow the advice or the counsel of fools. They'll come along and say, "Oh, you ought to do it this way. Or this is..." You don't need their advice. You don't need their counsel. You don't need their instruction and you sure don't need their wisdom. They are not fit to deliver it and all they do is twist it and pervert it. So when someone is a fool, mark it down: you don't need to listen to them and you sure don't need to be involved in cooperative enterprises with them.

So then, we are not to render honor or respect to such an individual. To do so sends a wrong message to them and to others that their folly is acceptable. We are to carefully consider how we respond to the speech of a fool. We are not to participate in it, but instead we are to reprove it. And we are not to extend trust to a fool or place any confidence in him. We are not to trust his work nor are we to trust his wisdom. This, then, is the counsel of our passage as to the treatment of fools and that brings us to our third and final point this evening. Having seen the nature of fools, that they are stubborn and unteachable, that they keep going back to the same destructive behavior over and over again, having seen the treatment of fools, we are not to honor them, we are not to justify or enter into their speaking but rather reprove it, we are not to place any confidence or trust in him and his work or his wisdom, in the third place let us consider together the punishment of fools and the punishment of fools is contained in verse 10. Notice it says, "The great God that formed all things both rewardeth the fool, and rewardeth transgressors."

Now the text makes it clear that God is a great God and part of the greatness that God possesses, that God has the power to create. It says, "The great God that formed all things." If it's been formed, it's been formed by God. He has the power to create. He has

the power to govern his creation and he has the power to destroy his creation and he will not suffer fools forever.

Fools are transgressors of his law. We see this from the parallelism in verse 10, he rewards the fool and rewards transgressors, clearly fools and transgressors according to the parallelism are one and the same. So fools are transgressors of the laws of God and in their folly, they treasure up wrath against the day of wrath and the revelation of the righteous judgment of God who will render to every man according to his deeds. Psalm 5:5 says, "5 The foolish shall not stand in thy sight: he hates all workers of iniquity."

So what is God's attitude towards fools? He hates them. People say, "Oh, I thought God loved everybody?" God loves his elect and all others are rightly hated by him. You will recall in Romans 9, God says, "Jacob have I loved and Esau have I hated," and the amazing thing is not that God hated Esau, the amazing thing is that God liked Jacob because he was just as bad as Esau.

The fool mocks at the idea that there is coming a day of judgment or else he flatters himself that he shall be able to pass through that judgment unscathed, but our passage makes it clear that he shall not. Every foolish thought, every foolish word, every foolish deed, has been recorded and will be recalled on that great day of judgment and God will not spare the execution of his wrath and the execution of his justice. Those who seemed so wise and so sophisticated in the world's eyes, who were put up in the lights and honored in spite of their defiance of God's laws, they will be exposed as the utter fools they are for having ignored and defied God in the day of judgment and they will be cast into hell and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever without remission or rest.

Well, what do we conclude from all of this? Proverbs 9:6 counsels us, "Forsake the foolish, and live; and go in the way of understanding." You run into a foolish person, forsake him. Cut yourself off from him. Get away from him because that's the only way you're ever going to go in the way of understanding is to depart from the way of fools. It says, "Forsake the foolish, and live." Guess what that says about the foolish? They're not going to live. They're going to die. They're going to be damned. They're going to destroy their lives in this life and then they're going to destroy them in the next. Have nothing to do with such a person lest you become like him.

The Bible says, "He that walks with wise men shall be wise, but a companion of fools will be destroyed." You become like the people you hang out with and so do not company with them. They are dangerous people. They are dangerous to your spiritual, your emotional, and your physical health. They will damage you and so we must depart from them.

Well, this is just a little piece of all that the Bible has to say about dealing with fools. You can get out your concordance sometime and just look up the word "fool, fools and folly," hundreds of verses in dealing with such individuals, warning us, "Don't be like them. Depart from them." Go in the way of understanding and the way of understanding is the

way of seeing the world and life's situations and life's choices from God's frame of reference. Therein lies the wisdom. Any other way is the way of folly and the way of folly is the broad way that leads to destruction. May we depart from it, and such people that are on it, and may we follow in the path of life and go in the way of understanding.

Let us pray together.

Our Father, we thank you for your kindness and your goodness in setting your love upon us and sending your Son to die for us and redeeming us. Thank you, Father, for not giving us over to the folly which we all were born into for the Bible tells us that foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child. Every child is born a fool and only those who have the rod of correction from the hand of the parent and from the hand of God will have it driven from them. Father, we recognize that folly does not depart from us easily, it has to be driven from us. Father, we pray that you would continue to drive it far from us and that we would continue to run away from it. May we study, consider and reflect upon the fools that we know and the fools that are described in the Scripture such as Nabal and others, Ahab, and may we recognize, Father, that the path of the fool is the path of death. Help us then to turn from it. Help us to give no honor to such people. Help us never to enter into their conversation but rather to correct it and reprove it. And help us, Father, to be people who do not follow their wisdom and counsel or entangle ourselves with them in some sort of a venture of mutual representation. Father, I pray that you would deliver our young people in this church from marrying fools and that you would cause each of us to raise our children so that they don't have this label attached to them because of their defiance of God's laws. Thank you that the rod and reproof does drive foolishness far from the child. May we employ it faithfully so that our children grow up wise instead of growing up as fools and reap the destruction that fools receive both in this life and the next. Father, we pray for wisdom. It says in the book of James, "If any man lack wisdom, let him ask of God who gives to all men liberally and upbraids not and it shall be given to him." Lord, I pray that you would give us wisdom. Help us to increasingly depart from folly. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.