

ABIGAIL – GODLY PATIENCE

Introduction

The Book of Proverbs remarks, 'A stone is heavy, and the sand weighty; but a fool's wrath is heavier than them both.' And in 17:12 the writer prefers meeting a bereaved mother bear than a fool in his folly. That is what David experienced in this incident concerning Nabal and Abigail.

David and his men had protected Nabal and all his possessions in a part of the country where banditry was rife. When he asked for a little help at a time when Nabal was prospering he found himself rebuffed. Nabal acted in a most unreasonable and churlish manner, even pretending he did not know who David was. His spirit was the opposite of David's and was extremely provoking. Even his name meant 'Fool'.

Folly and sin are provoking. They are difficult to put up with. The danger is that we will retaliate as David did, and make matters worse. Godliness is patient, and it is not the loser because God is judge and will put matters right.

Folly provokes

Some people you try to help because you care for them, but they always do the opposite of what is good for them. Some people are demanding, but never lift a finger to help or think about the difficulties they are causing. Some people seem never to think; and cause no end of trouble for others. Some people are just unreasonable; they apply one standard to themselves and a different standard to others. Some people deny what they know to be true. Some are quarrelsome. Some never show kindness even though they are well able to do so. Such things are hard to bear.

Jesus understands. He came to teach the people the good way but they rejected him and destroyed themselves. They demanded miracles and signs to prove who he was, but they never judged themselves. They took from him, but they never gave to him. The Scribes made demands on people but gave them no help. When Jesus came face to face with a man whose hand was paralysed it was obvious that he should heal him; but the Scribes resolutely denied that was the right thing to do.

Sin and folly are closely related. The sinner and the fool lack truth in their heart. They cannot be reasoned with. 'Though you grind a fool in a mortar with a pestle along with crushed grain, yet his foolishness will not depart from him' (Proverbs 27:22). They can only be fought or ignored, and if neither is possible it is a heavy burden to carry. To add to the frustration – the fool is a worthless person, yet we have to put up with him, or her.

The writer to the Hebrews tells us to 'consider him who endured such contradiction of sinners against himself lest you be weary and faint in your mind (Hebrews 12:3). On one occasion Jesus said, 'How long shall I be with you; how long shall I suffer you?' (Mathew 17:17).

Fallen humanity retaliates

We instinctively try to protect ourselves from what gives us pain. David decided to get rid of Nabal.

Sin and folly bring angry words. But the fool never admits to being in the wrong. It harms relationships. People walk out of their marriage as a result of the other person's folly and unreasonableness, or if they stay they are almost destroyed. If one party tries to put matters right the fool retaliates, and a cycle of destruction begins.

This is what leads to violence. In his frustration David went so far as deciding to kill Nabal and his men. 'Oppression destroys a wise man's reason' (Ecclesiastes 7:7). David tried to justify murder.

The Bible recognises this is a constant feature of human life. There are warnings against taking revenge. It calls us to live in peace and blesses the peacemakers. But God knows we cannot always succeed; that is why the Spirit tells us 'If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men' (Romans 12:18).

Godliness is patient

Abigail showed a godly spirit. She encouraged David to show patience by confessing her husband's folly and reminding David that when he became king he would have no more trouble from Nabal. She fitted Jesus' description, 'Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God.' God calls us not only to bridle our tongue so that we avoid hostility, but to use our tongue to dispel hostility.

Godliness reflects God's own Spirit and conduct. Our sin and folly provoke him. We see that in his reaction to Adam's sin. The prophets show his exasperation with his people. Through Hosea he compared his people to an unfaithful spouse and threatened complete rejection. He said, 'O Ephraim, what shall I do unto you? O Judah, what shall I do unto you? For your goodness is as a morning cloud, and as the early dew it goes away' (Hosea 6:4). Yet he could not bring himself to abandon them completely.

Our relationship with God is deeply strained by our lack of love and lack of truth. When his church is merely lukewarm he threatens to vomit it out (Revelation 3). We are not the only ones who feel the weight of folly.

Yet the 'the LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy' (Psalm 103:8). He has not dealt with us as our sins deserve. Instead, he gave his son to be our Saviour, to act on our behalf and please him in our place. What love! Thus we can find forgiveness – and more – a new heart so that our folly becomes a thing of the past.

This is his example and command for us – 'that you love one another; as I have loved you' (John 13:34). We must not receive his mercy but refuse to show mercy to others. Or receive his friendship but refuse friendship to others. We are 'not his type' much more than they are 'not our type'.

God receives much provocation from us. We often fail to heed his Word. We often fail to cast our cares on him. We often demand that he cares for us but refuse to care for others. We often profess his name but refuse to show the love and truth of God to a watching world. Yet God shows us mercy still.

David was both rebuked and encouraged. He repented of his rash anger. He hoped in God's promise realising he could afford to show patience towards Nabal the fool.

God will judge at last

God has the last word. Jesus' parable of the unmerciful servant (Matthew 18) shows that. And the Lord's Prayer has a reference to the importance of forgiving if we want to be forgiven.

A few days after this incident Nabal died. If we refuse to take revenge we will find that God clears our name in his own time. 'He who touches you touches the apple of his eye' (Zechariah 2:8).

Peter in his 2nd epistle makes the point that God is waiting patiently for people to repent. But he will judge the world at the time he has appointed.

If we find ourselves provoked as David was we can afford to commit the matter to God and wait his time. Beware of acting out of character – the most patient person can lose the place unless the Spirit of Christ keeps them.