

Dr. August Konkell, Proverbs, Session 16

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This is Dr. August Konkell in his teaching on the book of Proverbs. This is session number 16, Living with Fools, Proverbs 26.

Welcome to a short little meditation on the books of Proverbs. We've been talking about the collections of Proverbs that have been made in the name of Solomon. We've been talking about those collections that were done in the court of Hezekiah, which is a long time after Solomon.

The book of Proverbs, of course, has an awful lot to say about the fool. It uses about three or four different words for fool, all the way from the person who is somewhat naive to the person who is a complete scoffer, who actually scorns the idea of wisdom. But there is one chapter in Proverbs that is somewhat dedicated to the nature of fools and their ways.

And so, in this little talk, we want to spend a little bit of time talking about these people. As we've said a number of times in our previous talks, we shouldn't try to think of these individuals as lacking education, lacking in knowledge, or lacking in intelligence. That isn't any of their problems.

They can be highly educated. They can be very intelligent. They can have a lot of knowledge, but they can still be very unwise.

They can still be absolute fools and do the wrong things. And of course, sometimes it is the people in the highest and most prominent places who best exemplify these characteristics of the fool. But the chapter here begins with the verse that shows how inappropriate it is to give honor to a fool.

That's just not the right thing to do. It's like snow and rain at the time of harvest. It also warns us about the ways in which some things shouldn't be a concern to us.

So, we may be threatened in various ways. But if those threats and those curses are empty, it's just like the swooping of a bird. Fools, of course, try to control us, but we need to be careful about our attempts to control them.

The problem is very clear. Coercion doesn't always work. You may need it sometimes if you, in fact, have the authorization for it, but it isn't going to change people.

It may only control them. But here's a couple of verses that are fairly well known to many of us, juxtaposed side by side, verses four and five of Proverbs 26. Do not answer a fool according to his folly, lest you be as vain as him.

Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he become wise in his own eyes. So what does this mean when you're dealing with a fool? Are we supposed to talk with them or are we not? I like to illustrate these two Proverbs with a discussion between Richard Dawkins and Alistair McGrath. Now, Richard Dawkins, you know, was the biologist in the 70s who personified a gene, called it selfish, and then from there perceived to analyze all of human conduct as if he understood people thoroughly and to mock the idea that there could be anything to the notion of the creation of life and the creation of human people so that they live the way that they do.

And so, he was famous for his book, *The God Delusion*. Now, the one thing that a theologian like Alistair McGrath would not do is debate Richard Dawkins. They had very interesting pilgrimages because Dawkins went from a Christian to becoming an avowed cynic, whereas Alistair McGrath moved from being a skeptic to becoming a Christian.

They moved in exactly opposite directions. McGrath wrote a little book called *The Dawkins Delusion*, and all he did in that little book was point out that Dawkins' conclusions were all based totally on premises that he had assumed. He assumed that the biology of life was inherent within the universe itself and that therefore everything we see about cells and their function is all that there is to know about cells and their function, and we can analyze it accordingly.

And then he explained it in a rather absurd way as if cells independently had a mind of their own. All McGrath did was point out the absurdity of some of these assumptions. One of the stories that McGrath has in his book is of a student coming to his lectures and was a devotee of Dawkins.

The result of his hearing McGrath's lecture was that he became furious because everything that he had trusted had just been undermined. It was pulled out from under his feet. And so, what does McGrath do? Well, he doesn't try to change Dawkins' mind.

You don't answer a fool according to his folly. And frankly, he didn't argue with this student either because this student was simply responding in rage at the feeling of having been betrayed, and he was in no position at that point that he was going to change his mind. But what did McGrath do? He answered the fool according to his folly because he pointed out to an audience that needed to know what all was wrong with Dawkins' argument and was so effective at doing it that a Dawkins devotee had to question, had to realize that his own faith that he had placed in all these fallacious biological arguments was misplaced.

So, there are ways that we need to be careful about in answering those people who simply aren't going to change their minds. We have other proverbs that speak about

the drunkard and the way in which, as we noticed from the poem, the drunkard injures himself. And there's a little proverb about that.

Fools repeat their stupidity. Fools have all of their own presumptions, which we've already illustrated. But they're also dangerous.

They're a dangerous messenger. The proverb says, you send a message with a fool, you're cutting off your own feet. Proverbs can be very dangerous in the mouth of a fool because they use them in ways that are totally inappropriate.

Status is dangerous when given to a fool. Kind of a repetition from verse one. And here again, the same idea that a sharp and pointed saying can be very menacing and misused by someone who doesn't understand it.

The sluggard. It is interesting. I've been lazy in my own life at different times, but creative at making excuses.

Can't go outside. There's a lion in the street. Knows how to avoid responsibility.

So inert and inactive that they won't even feed themselves. And yet the sluggard may think that they are very smart. Fools are contentious.

They'll take sides and enter into the quarrels of others where they have no business. They don't understand the deadly power of deceit. They fail to understand the trouble that slander or complaint causes.

It's like adding fuel to a fire. And then of course sometimes, you know, we think it's smart to be fraudulent. And sometimes fraudulent with our friends, which is the worst kind of fool of all.

Flattering speech is like impure silver on a pot. You know, I always find it difficult to know how to take compliments because I'm often not quite sure if someone is just being nice because they feel that they need to or if someone is saying something that they really believe to be true. But too often, all we're doing is saying things that are nice in order to try to build some kind of response that we are looking for.

We need to be careful that we don't trust flattery and be careful about hatred that is concealed by deceit. In the end, liars actually hate those that they abuse. So we do need to remember that speech and talk are not always what it seems to be.

Fools are very clever at using these things in ways that are a detriment to everyone, but especially to themselves. So, Proverbs 26 really gives us a lot to ponder when it comes to thinking about the ways in which fools behave. And unfortunately, there are tendencies we can all have.

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