

Chapters 25-29 consist of the proverbs of Solomon which the men of Hezekiah copied.

We saw last time that chapter 25 has seven parts –  
four sayings, interspersed with three admonitions.

Chapter 26 also has seven parts –  
there seven distinct types of people –  
seven twisted types of humanity.

The man without self-control, the fool, the sluggard, the busybody,  
the mischief maker, the whisperer, and the one who hates.

The fool takes the largest share of the chapter (12 verses) –  
but you can also see the way in which the chapter moves from the opening problem:

### 1. The Undisciplined (25:28)

<sup>28</sup> *A man without self-control  
is like a city broken into and left without walls.*

If you have self-control, then you have a barrier – a wall –  
to protect you from the other sorts of problems.

If you have self-control, then you may still be a fool (sort of) –  
but you won’t reveal it to others.

If you have self-control, then you may still *think* like a sluggard or a busybody,  
but you’ll get up in the morning and get to work –  
and you’ll have the discipline to avoid meddling with things you shouldn’t.

In other words, *self-control* – the ability to restrain yourself – is essential to wisdom.  
And if you can’t restrain your own spirit – if you can’t control yourself –  
then you are like a city broken into and left without walls.

A city without walls is open to attack.

Self-control is like the walls of a city.

Walls do not guarantee that a city is doing well.

Walls simply mean that *outside forces* will not plunder the city easily.

In the same way, self-control does not mean that you are a good person

(after all, the fact that you control your own spirit

only means that you are doing what *you* want to do!).

But self-control provides a context in which you are able to do what you want to do.

By this point in the book of Proverbs, hopefully you have learned enough wisdom  
so that you are not yourself a fool.

Notice that verses 1-12 focus on how *you* (presumably *not* a fool) are to deal with fools.

## 2. The Fool (v1-12)

Verses 1-3 set up what is fitting for fools.

Verses 4-10 offer two admonitions and five sayings regarding how to deal with fools.

And verses 11-12 conclude with the present and the future of the fool

First – what is fitting for fools?

*Like snow in summer or rain in harvest,  
so honor is not fitting for a fool.*

It simply does not make sense – it is not fitting – it is not proper –  
to honor a fool.

It is not supposed to snow in summer.

It is not supposed to rain in harvest.

In the same way –

a fool should not be honored.

The word translated “honor” is the word “*cavod*” –

which is frequently translated “glory” –

but is often translated “honor” –

because both glory and honor have to do with *weight*.

When you treat someone as being important, you are showing them *honor*.

You are saying that you have *weight* with me – you are important to me.

Weightiness is not fitting for a fool.

We saw at the end of chapter 25 that it is not glory to seek your own glory (v27).

In the same way, it is not right to give glory to a fool – to honor a fool.

It’s not just a bad idea – it’s actually dangerous.

Rain at harvest will damage the crops and result in less food for the community.

Honoring a fool will damage the community and result in harm to others.

At first, it may not seem clear how verse 2 relates to verse 1 –

but that’s because it’s a play on words – which doesn’t translate easily!

<sup>2</sup> *Like a sparrow in its flitting, like a swallow in its flying,  
a curse that is causeless does not alight.*

The last word of verse 1 is *kabed* – which means “heavy.”

In verse 2 the word translated “curse” is *qelala* –  
comes from the word which means “light.”  
Indeed, the word *qalal* is often translated swift – with the idea of “flitting” –  
or fluttering.

Verse 1 says do not honor a fool – do not treat him as weighty.

Verse 2 says that a curse that is causeless is light – flighty – flitting – it has no weight.

Words are powerful.

Words have weight.

But a curse that is causeless – has no weight.

In the ancient world it was widely believed that curses were powerful.

Remember Balaam?

He was hired by the King of Moab to *curse Israel*.

Balak believed that he could hire Balaam to curse Israel –

and that Balaam had sufficient “weight” with the gods –  
that if *Balaam* cursed Israel, then Israel would be cursed.

We laugh at that.

And yet we all know how powerful words are!

“Sticks and stones can break my bones – but words can never hurt me.”

No one actually believes that!

You can beat me with a stick, and I’ll recover.

Beat me with words?

Maybe I won’t.

But here the father reminds you:

The curse that is causeless does not alight.

It cannot actually hurt you (beyond the hurt feelings).

If you are being cursed for something you didn’t do –  
then God will come to your defense!

Of course, that means that a curse for good reason *can hurt you*.

If you have harmed someone, and they cry out to God for help –  
then God will deal with you as you deserve!

And what is it that fools deserve?

<sup>3</sup> *A whip for the horse, a bridle for the donkey,  
and a rod for the back of fools.*

As one commentator points out:

“As a whip prods a warhorse and a bit restrains and controls a donkey,  
so a rod restrains fools from their folly  
and prods them to conform their lives to wisdom.” (Waltke 348)

Psalm 32:9 uses this same image:

“Be not like a horse or a mule, without understanding,  
which must be curbed with bit and bridle, or it will not stay near you.”

Do you like getting a beating?

No?

Then don't do the things that lead to those beatings!

Verses 4-5 then provide the way in which this is to be applied:

<sup>4</sup> *Answer not a fool according to his folly,  
lest you be like him yourself.*

<sup>5</sup> *Answer a fool according to his folly,  
lest he be wise in his own eyes.*

Does the Bible ever contradict itself?!

In one sense, verse 5 directly contradicts verse 4.

In successive verses we are told to do precisely opposite things.

But the second half of each verse makes it clear that there are two very different reasons for this.

How should you answer the fool?

Well, it depends on what sort of fool you are dealing with –  
and what sort of context you are in.

When dealing with fools, the basic stance should be silence.

Answer not a fool according to his folly – lest you be like him yourself.

You are almost certainly not going to persuade him – so just shut up –  
don't get sucked into his foolish way of talking and acting.

*But* sometimes you do need to say something!

Sometimes you need to answer a fool according to his folly

‘lest he be wise in his own eyes.’

As Waltke puts it,

“The wise person must expose the fool's distortions...  
and must not silently accept it and thereby contribute  
to establishing his topsy-turvy world against the rule of God.” (W 349)

Often the key is context.

If someone is leading others astray, then you may need to answer them.

But be careful about that!

I remember a time when I felt like someone might lead others astray,  
so I sought to answer his errors and show forth the truth!  
But as it turned out – the “others” were not in the least bit interested in the question,  
and so the net effect was that it looked like I was just as foolish as him –  
and all my efforts were in vain!  
If I had kindly changed the subject and moved on to something of broader interest,  
I would have done better at loving all those present.

The central section of this “mirror of fools” consists of a series of sayings,  
describing the fool – and those who come in contact with him:

<sup>6</sup> *Whoever sends a message by the hand of a fool  
cuts off his own feet and drinks violence.*

If you send a message by way of a fool,  
the messenger will mess things up and anger the one he speaks to.

Likewise, verse 7:

<sup>7</sup> *Like a lame man's legs, which hang useless,  
is a proverb in the mouth of fools.*

A lame man cannot use his legs properly.  
In the same way, a fool cannot use proverbs properly.  
I hope that you are learning how to use the proverbs properly!  
I pray that God is teaching your hearts wisdom as we walk through these chapters.

And, speaking of *improper* uses...

<sup>8</sup> *Like one who binds the stone in the sling  
is one who gives honor to a fool.*

If you bind the stone in the sling,  
then it won't fly out of the sling –  
and so your sling will be useless.  
Even so, the one who gives honor – the one who gives weight – to a fool,  
also becomes useless.

Or worse...  
because what would happen when you let go of one end of the sling

to hurl the stone forth?!  
The stone won't leave the sling – and so the sling will come right back around –  
and hit *you* in the head!

Please do not hit yourself in the head by giving honor to a fool!

Verses 9-10 reflect on the foolish drunkard:

<sup>9</sup> *Like a thorn that goes up into the hand of a drunkard  
is a proverb in the mouth of fools.*

In other words – he just uses proverbs to harm others.  
I'm sure that all of you have heard people use proverbs and wise sayings to harm others.  
“Spare the rod, spoil the child” – can be used to justify abusive behavior.  
You need *wisdom* in order to use proverbs wisely and well!

Likewise:

<sup>10</sup> *Like an archer who wounds everyone  
is one who hires a passing fool or drunkard.*

I have had several neighbors ask for work.  
With a few I gave them a brief trial.  
With others, they are so obviously drunk, that I won't do it.

Verses 11-12 then conclude the section on the fool with the present and the future of the fool:

<sup>11</sup> *Like a dog that returns to his vomit  
is a fool who repeats his folly.*

Don't do it again!  
You know it won't work!  
It never has before!  
But the fool returns to his folly.  
The fool is addicted to his folly.  
It seems ridiculous – it seems ludicrous –  
but that's the pattern of folly.

Folly is a sort of insanity that holds us in its trap.

But Proverbs does not see the fool as irredeemable.  
There is still hope for a fool!  
So long as he does not think that he is wise...

<sup>12</sup> *Do you see a man who is wise in his own eyes?  
There is more hope for a fool than for him.*

The fool who thinks that he is wise is the only truly hopeless case.  
I suspect that this is why narcissism is so difficult.  
The narcissist thinks that he is wise –  
his whole world revolves around himself!

Except... it doesn't.

There is none so blind as those who think that they see.  
Humanity's capacity for self-deception is remarkable.

Verse 12 concludes the discussion of the fool –  
but it also introduces the theme of being “wise in his own eyes” –  
which verse 16 suggests is the characteristic of the sluggard:

### **3. The Sluggard (v13-16)**

<sup>13</sup> *The sluggard says, “There is a lion in the road!  
There is a lion in the streets!”*

<sup>14</sup> *As a door turns on its hinges,  
so does a sluggard on his bed.*

<sup>15</sup> *The sluggard buries his hand in the dish;  
it wears him out to bring it back to his mouth.*

<sup>16</sup> *The sluggard is wiser in his own eyes  
than seven men who can answer sensibly.*

We have heard a couple of these proverbs before.

Verse 13 is drawn from 22:11 –  
the sluggard is paralyzed by irrational fears.

Likewise, verse 15 repeats 19:24 –  
the sluggard will starve to death in the midst of plenty,  
because he lacks the self-control needed to *eat* the food that is in front of him.

Verse 14 then shows how the sluggard is firmly anchored to his comfort zone.  
The sluggard cannot bring himself to get out of bed.

Think about this combination of images in verses 14-15:  
bed and food – sleeping and eating –  
the basic comforts of life.

But the frame – verses 13 and 16 –  
suggests that the fundamental problem is spiritual:  
his irrational fear (verse 13) and his irrational pride (verse 16)  
result in a “fatal lethargy” (W 355)

that cripples his action.

In one sense, the father offers no solution here –  
but think more carefully about the end of verse 16:  
“than seven men who can answer sensibly.”

When you are tempted by sloth –  
when you feel the lure of laziness –  
look for – and listen to – the seven who can answer sensibly!

Listen to wise counsel!

After all, the hallmark of the sluggard is that he thinks that he knows better than others!

The next three types of twisted humanity all deal with relational problems:  
The busybody, the mischief maker, and the whisperer:

#### **4. The Busybody (v17)**

<sup>17</sup> *Whoever meddles in a quarrel not his own  
is like one who takes a passing dog by the ears.*

It's none of your business.

Walk away.

“Oh, I just wanted to help!”

If you want to help, then start by *loving your neighbors* –  
and that doesn't mean “interfere in their personal business” –  
it means bring them some cookies – get to know *them* –  
hang out for a while!

Only then will they trust you enough to welcome you – invite you –  
into helping mediate their quarrel!

I know the temptation!

I'm a pastor!

I can help!

And then I remember the looks that I got when I *was invited* –  
those wary eyes – who does he think he is? –  
and what does he think he has to say to us?

If you're not invited – you are just meddling.

But notice that the busybody really only hurts himself –  
like the one who grabs the ears of a passing dog.

The dog may be inconvenienced.



The one who grabs his ears is mauled.

Of course, in verses 18-19, it gets worse:

### **5. The Mischief Maker (18-19)**

<sup>18</sup> *Like a madman who throws firebrands, arrows, and death*

<sup>19</sup> *is the man who deceives his neighbor  
and says, "I am only joking!"*

The mischief maker is *deadly*.

“Oh, but I was just joking!!”

Have you ever heard that?

Have you ever said that?

Too often, people use “just kidding” as a way of saying things that hurt others.

Children – this is why your parents (and other wise adults)

don’t like it when you say, “just kidding”!

Very little kidding is actually funny.

The Batman comics have a better understanding of the Joker than most people.

The Joker is no joke.

The one who deceives his neighbor is playing a deadly game.

If the deception *works*, then he gets away with it!

If it doesn’t work – if someone catches on – then “I was only joking!” –  
but either way, the harm is done.

And the father says that this is like a “madman who throws firebrands, arrows, and death”  
(a very good description of the Batman’s Joker!).

Make sure that your use of humor is designed to *love others* and build them up!

If you use humor to tear people down or to make yourself look good –  
then you are using humor to destroy.

We can see these themes continue in the Whisperer:

### **6. The Whisperer (v20-22)**

<sup>20</sup> *For lack of wood the fire goes out,  
and where there is no whisperer, quarreling ceases.*

<sup>21</sup> *As charcoal to hot embers and wood to fire,  
so is a quarrelsome man for kindling strife.*

<sup>22</sup> *The words of a whisperer are like delicious morsels;  
they go down into the inner parts of the body.*

Verses 20-21 focus on the theme of the tongue as a fire:  
if a fire runs out of wood, then the fire goes out!  
Likewise, if there is no whisperer, a quarrel ceases.

The whisperer loves to chatter about the problems of others.  
If you want to bring harm to others – if you want to destroy people –  
then talk about their troubles to others!  
You might think, “I just want to help!” –  
but if you want to help, then go to them and ask how you can help!

Verse 22 then shifts the image to that of eating “delicious morsels” –  
thereby turning the focus to those who *hear* the whisperer!

The whisperer – the gossip – offers “delicious morsels” –  
tasty tidbits – that are awfully tempting for the hearer!

You need courage to stand up against slander and gossip –  
but it’s really important!  
You need to resist the temptation to nibble!  
But if you nibble, then you are feeding the fire – you are encouraging strife!

You need to put out the fire!

This also means that if someone comes to you and says,  
“Hey, you shouldn’t be repeating stuff!” –  
you need to take them seriously!  
Don’t be a fool.  
Don’t keep feeding the fire.

Because our seventh and final type of twisted humanity is where all the others are heading:

### 7. **The One Who Hates (v23-28)**

<sup>23</sup> *Like the glaze<sup>[b]</sup> covering an earthen vessel  
are fervent lips with an evil heart.*

Fervent lips with an evil heart.  
That’s a good way to describe the one who hates.  
The picture that’s used is of a glaze used to cover an earthen vessel –  
in order to make it look like silver.

It looks like silver – but underneath, it is a broken potsherd.

In the same way, the one who hates may appear honest and candid –  
but underneath, there is malice and evil at heart.

This is explained in verses 24-26:

<sup>24</sup> *Whoever hates disguises himself with his lips  
and harbors deceit in his heart;*  
<sup>25</sup> *when he speaks graciously, believe him not,  
for there are seven abominations in his heart;*  
<sup>26</sup> *though his hatred be covered with deception,  
his wickedness will be exposed in the assembly.*

Don't believe the one who hates.

But how do you know who this is?

Well, think back to what we have already seen.

The gossip – the whisperer – the one who says “just kidding!” –  
they are all heading down the path to become “one who hates.”

And for that matter – the sluggard who is wise in his own eyes –  
the one who is guided by irrational fear and irrational pride –  
is not guided by love for God and neighbor!

There are seven abominations in his heart –

it doesn't give particulars here –

the point is that irrational fear and irrational pride

also results in irrational hate and deception –

Evil in the heart results in evil in action – which results in a hardening heart –  
and a spiral of hatred and deception and wickedness that ends in death.

But we are starting to see where the solution is found:

“his wickedness will be exposed in the assembly.”

Don't worry – trust God – and trust that God will use the means he has ordained.

Maybe the wicked will get away with it for a little while –

but they will not get away with it forever!

<sup>27</sup> *Whoever digs a pit will fall into it,  
and a stone will come back on him who starts it rolling.*

The Roadrunner cartoons understood the nature of evil – and its punishment!

Wile E. Coyote always ends up under the rock!

That's the way that God made the universe!

Sometimes it takes a while to get there...

but in the end, it will get there!

<sup>28</sup> *A lying tongue hates its victims,*

*and a flattering mouth works ruin.*

Yes, but the ruin that it works invariably ends up being its own ruin!

This is why Jesus taught us to love our enemies.  
You cannot go wrong by loving your neighbor.  
You simply cannot!

Loving your neighbor doesn't mean helping him do evil!  
If one neighbor is pointing a gun at another neighbor,  
    you need to love both neighbors!  
And that's easy: you grab the gun!  
    You love your neighbor by preventing him from killing your other neighbor!  
Usually it's not quite that dramatic...

But how do you love your neighbor when he is whispering...gossiping...  
    Exactly the same way:  
        It is not love to gossip – and so you are loving *both* neighbors  
            by convincing/compelling your neighbor to stop gossiping!  
He is destroying himself (and others) so love for your gossipy neighbor  
    requires you to be one of the wise men of the assembly –  
    and expose the wickedness of the one who hates,  
        so that he stops harming others.

Be one of the seven men who answers sensibly!

You may think that you are alone.  
    Everyone else is just going along with the gossip and putting up with the foolishness...  
        but when you speak up for justice and righteousness,  
            you will generally find that there are more of you  
                than you think there are!  
Sometimes, they have also been working quietly in the same direction.  
Other times, they are emboldened by your wisdom and encouraged by your example.

But when you say something – when you stand firmly for wisdom and righteousness –  
    then you begin to encourage a very good sort of spiral –  
        an upward spiral of love and good deeds  
            that brings life and peace to your community.

I said begin – but of course, this is the spiral that our Lord Jesus began!  
    He is the one whose wisdom and righteousness established the path of life and peace –  
        and we are simply following him by turning away from the death spiral of hate,  
        and loving others the way that Jesus has loved us!