

Sermon 90, Profiles in Folly #7, Proverbs 26:13-28

Proposition: The Wise Son reveals His wisdom by diagnosing, exposing, and responding to half a dozen kinds of folly.

- I. The Root Problem: A Lack of Self-Control, 25:28
- II. Exhibits A-G (Seven Exhibits), ch. 26
 - A. The Fool, vv. 1-12
 - B. The Sluggard, vv. 13-16
 - C. The Meddler, v. 17
 - D. The Joker, vv. 18-19
 - E. The Gossip, vv. 20-22
 - F. The Hater, vv. 23-27
 - G. The Liar, v. 28

Introduction

Dearly beloved congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, we come together this evening to finish the passage we began looking at last Sunday. There we saw a portrait of the fool, and how the wise son responds to the fool by fearing God and thus becoming wise, in his actions and in his answers to the fool. We saw what not to be, and we saw what Jesus is in His glorious wisdom. Well, tonight we finish the text and look at the remaining half-dozen kinds of fools profiled in Prov. 26. Once again, we find that all these sorts of folly warn us about our own behavior and also show us by way of contrast just how wise and disciplined Jesus really is.

I. The Root Problem: A Lack of Self-Control, 25:28

As you recall, our text is headed by a warning about self-control. You need to walk with Christ and seek His Holy Spirit; when you do, He will grow the fruit of self-control in your life.

Without it, you will exhibit all seven of these kinds of folly at one time or another.

II. Exhibits A-G (Seven Exhibits), ch. 26

With that in mind — that the foundation of all wisdom is found in Jesus the wise son, and the Holy Spirit who is the Spirit of Wisdom, let's turn to the specifics of what Jesus isn't and what we oughtn't to be.

A. The Fool, vv. 1-12

The first of these is a fool — someone who doesn't fear God. In addition to not being a fool, we need to not honor fools and not ignore fools. We need to engage with fools when they say foolish things to us and want a response. That response must not affirm their folly and honor it; instead, that response needs to warn them away from the yet deeper foolishness of being wise in their own eyes. Furthermore, we saw last week that proverbs are useless in the mouth of someone who

does not fear God. Without that foundation of wisdom in your life, any wise thing you say is just so much hot air.

B. The Sluggard, vv. 13-16

Second, though, we encounter the sluggard. He is so lazy that he won't get up and go to work, so lazy that he won't get out of bed (he seems to be hinged to it), so lazy that he won't even lift his hand to his mouth. Obviously the portrayal is of an extreme case, something we would probably call mental illness these days. But Solomon and Hezekiah's men are trying to show us the probable outcome of folly. One of my childhood friends flunked multiple semesters in a row at the Colorado School of Mines because of his raging porn addiction. That is an example of the kind of thing this sluggard exemplifies. We can add, by way of contrast, that the wise son is a hard worker. Jesus was not lazy, in the carpenter's shop or in His public ministry. What drives laziness? Why would you try to avoid work, spend hours reading random articles (or worse) on the Internet when you're supposed to be working, deliberately try to conserve as much energy as possible and not work too hard if you have a manual job, and so on? Because something is wrong with your heart. Now, it's good not to waste energy. But God gave us energy precisely so we could work and effect real change in this world. We were made to take dominion, and to do so not by sitting around with large cans of alcohol but by getting off our duffs and getting to work.

But here's the thing about the truly lazy person. He thinks he's really smart! He thinks that his proven ability to avoid work is something to be proud of. He thinks it's a greater skill than the ability to give solid advice. He thinks it's more impressive to get out of as much work as he does than it would be to be a member of the Cabinet.

Are you proud of saving labor? There's a place for that. But if you save labor by neglecting work and letting jobs go undone, then throw that pride out the window and repent! Brothers and sisters, I have a large lazy streak. Some of you do too. How do we tackle this lazy streak? Well, schedules and to-do lists and rewards are all helpful. But at the end of the day, laziness is a result of not fearing God and not wanting to honor Him by working as He designed you to do. So put down the phone, tablet, or computer, stand up, and get to work. Blessed is the man his master finds working when He comes!

C. The Meddler, v. 17

This third type of fool is just as disastrous as the rest. He gets involved in other people's fights, under the name of moral do-goodery. American foreign policy is at least partially premised on this very idea, and has been since the Spanish-American War. It's disastrous in public, and it's equally bad in private. I once was a houseguest who tried to intervene in a quarrel between the man I was staying with and his wife. I'll never do that again! Brothers and sisters, likely many of you have learned the hard way. But it's true: God leaves us to fight it out most of the time. Jesus refused to be a referee for the man who wanted Him to become the executor of his father's estate and make the brother divide the inheritance with him. Don't be a meddler; don't go sticking your nose into other people's business! Now, in this state and particularly in this county, I hardly need

to say that twice. Gillette folks have a pioneer mindset that says “I’ll ask for help when I’m dead.” Let’s just make sure that that doesn’t turn into “I’ll offer help when I’m dead.” You can almost never help by intervening in a quarrel between two of your peers, or two of your superiors. Sometimes you will need to intervene in a quarrel between those under your charge, though. In that case, however, it is partially your quarrel because one or both of them reports to you and you can do something about their tiff. But if the quarrel doesn’t belong to you, leave it alone. Now, to our brothers and sisters in law enforcement, how does this advice apply? The answer is twofold. Usually when you’re summoned to a fight, someone has asked for your help. Often, as I understand it, in domestic situations it’s one of the people fighting who has requested your assistance. But secondly, you serve the state and thus are in the role of superior to everyone involved in the fight. You are not their superior at work, or in their family, but rather in their city or county. Your authority comes from Sheridan County or the City of Gillette. And thus, it is as a superior that you intervene, and as a superior that you are doing the right thing by getting involved in the fight. For the rest of us: Don’t. If it’s not your fight, it’s not your fight.

D. The Joker, vv. 18-19

Here’s one that cuts a little closer to the bone for people like me who love to joke around. If people believe you when you’re joking, those deceptions can damage them as seriously as random shooting of flaming arrows can damage a community. You can look through the gospels in vain for a time when Jesus joked. Paul joked a little more — for instance, in wishing that the Judaizers would castrate themselves, or in saying that it’s better to marry than to burn. But I think the serious points of these jokes are pretty easy to grasp. Probably many of you will say “Yes, he’s done it to me” when I tell you that my friends have informed me countless times that they don’t know when I’m joking, that they’re not used to deadpan humor, and on and on and on. Brothers and sisters, that is not appropriate for a wise son. A joke is acceptable; a joke that leaves people confused, hurt, or with the wrong impression is not acceptable. In fact, it is harmful like fire. Have you ever thought about how dragons’ greatest power is in their deceptive words and their ability to breathe fire? Might there be a connection between those two things? Brothers and sisters, if you’re known as a jokester, watch yourself. That habit can really hurt people.

E. The Gossip, vv. 20-22

So can this perennially popular pastime: gossip. Someone who insists on retailing stories about others creates bad blood, ill will, conflict, and ultimately community destruction. You know what? We all have, do, and say things that other people in this church can’t respect. And if I hear such a thing about one of you, then tell it to another one of you who won’t respect it, then I have just created a condition for the body to be damaged, for community to be undermined, for malice and dislike to spread. If I tell you that so-and-so is a ditz, that so-and-so is a Democrat, that so-and-so believes in too much TV and that so-and-so is a real skinflint with a penchant for purchasing knockoff luxury brands, what am I doing? I’m telling you stories that feel good, that make the teller and his audience feel oh-so-superior to the idiots being described. That goes down real smooth, right into the archives in the belly where it will be remembered for years

when this sermon, this building, even this town are distant memories. Brothers and sisters, this is one of my temptations. I don't enjoy stirring up conflict directly, but I sure love a juicy story. Let's praise God that no one in our body actually loves finding out information and then causing scandal and shame with it. Such a thing would be disastrous. And purpose in your heart that you will not listen to or pass on gossip. That's much harder than simply refusing to openly stir up quarrels. How on earth can you and especially I learn to stop enjoying gossip? The answer is that we have to enjoy something else more. We have to enjoy Christ more than we enjoy lurid stories about the so-and-sos.

F. The Hater, vv. 23-27

The penultimate fool is the hater. He sounds good. He sounds like a friend. But brothers and sisters, that hatred will show itself — in the things he says and does. There are two points here: Don't trust the hater and don't be the hater. When it comes to politics or any other institution in which you're involved, you'll find that some people are motivated by the negative, by what they hate. Whether their hatred targets the traditional family or LGBT activists, capitalism or communism, whether it is rhetorical or physical, whether it is only shared with the insiders or broadcast to the outsiders, know this for sure: Anyone who runs on hate has a heart loaded with seven abominations. That is the perfect number of abominations. That person is a total villain. Don't be that. Don't trust that. Don't honor that or vote for that.

But shouldn't we hate sin? Of course. But we must love the sinner. If you hate the sin but don't love the sinner, then you are a hater and not to be trusted. If you despise the people who want to hurt Christians, that's understandable — but it's still inappropriate. You and I must deplore their evil, but personally wish them the best. And it is never right for us to respond to hate with hate. The last chapter talked about responding to hate by feeding your enemy, giving him a drink, and so heaping coals on his head. This one is referring back to that point.

How can you and I be free from hate when evil people do terrible things to us and our loved ones? By knowing Jesus and trusting absolutely in His promise to deliver us from hate and to get revenge so we don't have to. And if you're involved with the hater? If his bile splashes onto you? Rest assured that it will be exposed in the assembly, at judgment day or even before. His hate will burn him up and kill him. Hitler killed himself. Stalin died because his doctors were unwilling to treat him and mess up.

G. The Liar, v. 28

Well, the final kind of fool is the liar. If you lie to someone, you hate that person. This is true even if the lies sound positive and flattering. A flattering mouth makes ruin. That's right: It's not enough just to abstain from gossip. Brothers and sisters, we also have to abstain from flattery, both speaking it and listening to it. It can feel so good to be flattered. It's probably been done to everyone here. And as a friend of mine used to say, 'Flattery will get you . . . everywhere!' If that's your attitude, repent! The Christian can't say 'Tell me what I want to hear and I'll do whatever you want.' Instead, the Christian needs to say "I serve the truth and I want to hear the truth." Brothers and sisters, speak the truth. Listen to the truth. And that means rejecting the lie.

Is that easy? Not when you have something to hide. But I guarantee that the consequences of telling the truth will be better than the consequences of telling a lie. The other thing is that when you spend time with the Wise Son, you come to love truth like He does. Lies die in His presence, for He is the truth. Being with Him heals, just as being with the flattering liar ruins you. So flee flattery and go to Jesus instead. Listen to His rebuke delivered through this sermon. All of us have folly we need to repent of now. Do that, and then come to this table to find welcome in Jesus. He is the wise Son, and He will receive you. Amen.