

PART 239 ~ FOOLS—CORPORAL PUNISHMENT

Proverbs 26:3

A whip for the horse, a bridle for the ass, and a rod for the fool's back.

The Bible does not forbid what we call “corporal punishment.” While it places clear limits on its application, it does require some use of the rod for children. Since children have a problem with foolishness, Proverbs 22:15 recommends the use of the rod for taking care of that problem. But what happens to the young man who never learns wisdom at all? He refuses to work. Worse yet, he steals from his employers. According to biblical law, this man should be sentenced to restitution for his crimes. Our present systems would rather take the “more liberal approach” in dealing with these problems, so they put him in a cell with other convicts who teach him to be a life-long criminal. The state provides a warm bed, clean clothes, hot meals, health care, and suitable entertainment for him in the prison at an average cost of \$45,000 per year (charged to the taxpayers). In a biblical system, the man must work to restore up to five times the value of what he stole. These just, biblical courts would even permit him to live with his wife and children. During the daytime hours, he would be required to work. If he still refused to work, one of two things would happen. Seeing that the man refuses to abide by the instructions of the judge, the court may sentence him to execution (Deut. 17:8–13). There is, however, one last-ditch alternative for salvaging the incorrigible rogue, and that is the rod. His employer may encourage him to work by the application of the rod. The Bible limits all corporal punishment to no more than forty stripes (Deut. 25:3).

Obviously, all of this is in lieu of a heart change on the part of the fool. In order for social systems to function, there must be some law and order in the land. Hence, every social system will use prisons, restitution, work camps, or execution to keep their nations from degrading into economic and social anarchy. It would be ideal to function without beatings, prisons, and executions, but the social systems in this fallen

world could never survive without them. Of course, the most effectual change of all is the heart change that comes by the witnessing of the Gospel and the work of the Spirit of God.

Family Discussion Questions:

1. What happens in our present system to the rebellious young man who refuses to work? What happens to him in a biblical system?
2. How does a system of restitution differ from the modern prison system?
3. How do you change the heart of a fool?

PART 240 ~ FOOLS—APOLOGETICS WITH ATHEISTS

Proverbs 26:4–5

*Answer not a fool according to his folly, lest you also be like unto him.
Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own conceit.*

Here is some highly useful advice for those who live amongst fools. Following the “Christianized” medieval period in Europe, a new age of skepticism, agnosticism, and outright atheism flourished. And since the 1700s, most people in Western nations refuse to begin their thinking with Proverbs 1:7. They do not fear God, and they challenge God to prove His own existence before they will believe in Him. C.S. Lewis was tracking this emerging agnosticism when he wrote, “For modern man, man is the judge and God is in the dock. The trial may end in God’s acquittal, but the point is man is on the bench and God is in the dock.”⁵ The modern fool does not assume the existence of God as his basic foundation for knowledge. The fool has said in his heart, “There is no God,” and there are plenty of fools about today.

This Proverb informs our conversations with fools. First, we do not answer the fool according to his folly. We must not

5 C.S. Lewis, “God in the Dock” from *God in the Dock: Essays on Theology and Ethics*

seriously consider any assumption that God does not exist. The key word here is “seriously.” If we were to do this, we would jettison the most important and basic presupposition of all our understanding. The fool believes in his own ability to interpret data and make decisions about important matters such as God’s existence, his own existence, and so on. Before he would believe in God’s existence, he assumes the integrity of his own mind. What wisdom is telling us here is to avoid playing the game that Lewis described. Do not take the game seriously. The fool thinks he is sitting like a judge at the bench and God is trying to argue His own existence before the fool. You must not succumb to the temptation to play defense attorney for God. If God is who He says He is in His Word, how would He prove His existence? Should He show you His driver’s license? Then again, who would issue a driver’s license to God and how would you prove that guy’s existence? Should the fool ask God to do a few miracles? Would that be enough to prove the case? In the parable of Lazarus and the Rich Man, Abraham speaks to the Rich Man in Hades and tells him, Abraham saith unto him, They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them. And he said, Nay, father Abraham; but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent. And he said unto him, If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead” (Luke 16:29–31). The hearts of fools are in such rebellion towards God, and their minds have been so blinded by sin, that they can never be trusted to think rationally concerning these things. While proud men demand all the proof in the world to substantiate His existence, God needs no defense attorneys. This is an example of *not* answering a fool according to his folly.

But then we are *told* to answer the fool according to his folly, lest he be self-confident in his own foolishness. Usually, atheists and agnostics are very certain in their rebellion. They consider themselves the supreme rationalists and laugh in the face of Christians who believe in a God they cannot see! We hear them taunt Christians all the time with their arguments,

“Why don’t you believe in the great spaghetti monster in the sky?” Occasionally, Christians might enter into a discussion with the fool to remind him of the incoherencies in his own thinking. Although we will not seriously consider the truthfulness of the fool’s way of thinking, we certainly can point out the weaknesses of it. We should ask him how he can assume ethical absolutes if there is no God over all to establish those absolutes. We should ask him how cosmic dust could ever live for a purpose if, indeed, everything is only matter in motion. Without a Creator and without a purpose communicated to us by God, how can we ever find any ultimate purpose for life at all? How can we retain human responsibility for our actions if everything that happens in this world is linked to indeterminate or determinate causes? These are called “ultimate questions.” By asking these ultimate questions, we point out that the fool’s worldview is insufficient to answer them.

Consider that everybody lives in some sort of house of knowledge, and some houses are better-built than others. When we answer the fool according to his folly, we enter his house of knowledge and begin to kick the pillars around. As we ask our pointed questions, huge pieces of the building start falling around us and it quickly becomes obvious that his house of knowledge is intolerably flimsy. Then, we invite him into *our* house of knowledge. We don’t feel any obligation to defend any one proposition. Our house of knowledge holds together very well because we can explain our basis for ethics, purpose, logic, and truth. We show him that our God predestines the free actions of men, thus retaining human responsibility and order and purpose for the universe. We have answers—he doesn’t. However, at the end of the conversation, we may not have convinced him of our way of thinking. You have to remember that the fool has a fundamental bias against God. As the old saying goes, “A man convinced against his will is of the same opinion still.” The important thing is that we have dislodged the fool a bit in his self-confidence.

Family Discussion Questions:

1. Does God need a defense attorney? What evidence would it take to convince a fool that God exists?
2. How do you challenge the fool in his folly? What sorts of questions might you ask Richard Dawkins or any other well-known atheists if you were sitting next to him on an airplane?
3. What is the goal of apologetics when interacting with foolish men and women (according to these verses)?

PART 241 ~ FOOLS—LOUSY EMPLOYEES

Proverbs 26:6

He that sends a message by the hand of a fool cuts off the feet, and drinks damage.

Before you read these proverbs, you should remember several important contextual points. First, the proverbs were directed towards the son of a king who would have servants working for him. Anyone who works in leadership and management today must communicate constantly through e-mail, faxes, and phone calls, but none of this was available to kings in 960 B.C. when these proverbs were written. There were no airplanes or trucks to carry the mail. All messages were hand-carried by dependable servants who wouldn't wander from the task.

To hire a fool as an employee is akin to sawing off your foot with a hacksaw. It would be agonizingly painful. Like poison in the body, a fool will eventually corrupt the organization. Of all the decisions made by leaders in business organizations, the hiring decisions are the most important. Therefore, a proper analysis of a man's character is critical before introducing the man to the organization.

But who is this fool that is so unreliable? As mentioned above, he is a man who either denies God's existence or challenges it. But there is more to say about the fool. So far we have learned

that the fool is not teachable and he is utterly entrenched in his own folly (Prov. 10:8, 17:12). He despises instruction (Prov. 15:5). He is completely confident in his own knowledge (Prov. 12:15). He trusts in his own heart (Prov. 28:26). He cannot think that he could ever make a mistake (Prov. 17:10). He cannot control his tongue, but pours out foolishness (Prov. 12:23). He flaunts his own folly (Prov. 13:16). He destroys himself and his relationships by the words he speaks (Prov. 18:7). In sum, the foolish man is dull, stubborn, obstinate, boorish, and stupid. You would never want to hire such a fellow for your business. Be aware that fools may show up anywhere and everywhere, including church leadership, government, and the business world.

Children will always flirt with foolishness when they are young. Given years of neglectful parenting, that foolishness will be solidly entrenched in their lives. Sadly, this is not an uncommon condition in our day. Generally, children are unreliable messengers and helpers until they are trained to faithfully follow through on the instructions they are given. Therefore, it is important for parents to patiently work with them until they have learned to complete a task and do it with excellence.

Family Discussion Questions:

1. What makes an employee dependable? Would you be a dependable employee?
2. How might parents train a child to follow through on his tasks?

PART 242 ~ FOOLS—HANDLING TRUTH BADLY

Proverbs 26:7

The legs of the lame are not equal; so is a parable in the mouth of fools.

A parable is a story used to illustrate truths that cannot be explained very well through a set of logical propositions that are systematically presented in outline form. The parable gives

insight. It cracks the door of knowledge a little. It shines a little light on extremely complex and difficult issues that the minds of men will never completely comprehend. Our understanding of the kingdom of Christ and the efficacy of His redemptive work relies heavily on the parables of the New Testament. But when fools begin to teach these things, beware! There is a reason why there are so many pseudo-Christian cults and hundreds of contradicting explanations for the simple Gospel of Christ! Ever since the coming of Christ in the 1st century, a good many fools have had access to the biblical accounts and they have not handled them well. Instead of carefully contemplating the deep truths contained in a parable, they jump to quick conclusions as to its meaning. The fool is far too confident in his own wisdom. He turns the parable to say what he wants it to say. If it doesn't comport with his preconceived system of truth, he'll twist it some more until it fits. His over-reaching confidence in his own abilities to rightly interpret Scripture and comprehend truth is actually fatal error. Such heart attitudes have produced innumerable deceptions and heterodoxies in the history of religion.

To those of us who wish to get the truth out, is it sufficient to hand out Bibles? Do we assume that all who receive the parables will handle them rightly? It is the teaching of the Word of God and the work of the Spirit of God that brings about true conversion. Above all other means, the Apostles emphasized the teaching and preaching of the Word as the primary means by which men were saved (Rom. 1:9, 10:14; 1 Cor. 2:14, 9:18, 15:14; Gal. 2:7; 1 Tim. 3:16, 4:13, 5:17; 2 Tim. 4:2; 1 Pet. 1:12, 25, 4:6). But churches must be careful not to hand the mysteries of the kingdom over to a fool. The Apostle Paul warned Timothy not to give the eldership or the diaconate over to the novice (1 Tim. 3:6, 9). What the parable really said and the fool's interpretation of the parable may be two different things. The incongruity of his thinking comes across like a crippled person hobbling along with one leg six inches shorter than the other.

Family Discussion Questions:

1. Why are there so many cults in the world?
2. Could we misinterpret the Word of God ourselves, or are we immune to such mistakes? How might we avoid starting another cult based on a bad interpretation of God's revelation?

PART 243 ~ FOOLS—UNWORTHY OF HONOR

Proverbs 26:8

As he that binds a stone in a sling, so is he that gives honor to a fool.

The sling is used to hurl stones in hunting or warfare. Of course, David knew how to use a sling, and we assume Solomon was versed in its function as well. If some foolish soul were to tie the stone up securely in the sling, the stone would not be properly released at the critical moment. Such foolish actions would probably result in serious injury to the fellow handling the sling. There really are people in the world lacking basic, common sense. Take the genius who jams a rod into the muzzle end of the gun for example; he advances a bullet into the chamber and pulls the trigger. Of course, the resultant explosion in the barrel will do catastrophic damage to the man holding the gun. This is the sort of analogy used for the fellow who gives honor to a fool. When you honor a fool it undermines your own credibility. Initially, others may not be aware of the fact that the man you honor is a fool, but when others discover the true character of the fool whom you honored, they will think less of you.

Many of the Nazi officers who fawned over Adolph Hitler saw their reputations ruined after World War II. Some were imprisoned. Many left the country in shame and spent their remaining years in South America. Sadly, they chose to honor the wrong man, a godless, Nietzschean megalomaniac who sought to build a utopia without Christ. When will men learn that all these socialist schemes will end in ruin? Be careful how much honor you bestow on arrogant university

professors, entertainers, politicians, and pastors. The honor should be commensurate with the position the man retains and his character. And no man must ever receive more honor and glory than the King over the whole earth—the living, resurrected Christ of God. This is why Christians will worship Jesus Christ daily and gather weekly on the day that we celebrate His resurrection from the dead.

Family Discussion Questions:

1. Why is it important not to give too much honor to certain people?
2. Why do you think people gave Adolph Hitler so much honor?

PART 244 ~ FOOLS—NOT IMPACTED BY TRUTH

Proverbs 26:9

As a thorn goes up into the hand of a drunkard, so is a parable in the mouths of fools.

On a Sunday morning, the pastor preached his heart out to the congregation, drawing an impacting message from one of the Psalms. Truth was set against error. The rebellion of sin was described in its true colors. By the end of the sermon, God's redemption salvaged the sinner from complete ruin and many hearts rose in unison to praise God for His goodness to men. However, several young men in the congregation yawned through the whole message. Occasionally, the preacher's impassioned cries awakened them from their slumbers and daydreams, but only for a brief moment. They heard a few of the words, but those words didn't mean anything to them. They had no impact. These men were not struck to the heart and they didn't fall down on their faces and worship God (1 Cor. 14:24–25). They didn't get it. Here the Proverb draws the comparison to the drunkard who falls on a nail that punctures his hand. He doesn't even say, "Ouch!" As the alcohol dulls his brain to any physical sensations, even a nail pounded through his hand would hardly get a reaction out of him. So is the

fool who comes into contact with the deep truths of divine revelation. As Paul explains it, these truths are foolishness to the natural man, for “they are spiritually discerned” (1 Cor. 2:14).

How does one explain the phenomenon of sight to a blind man? The believer may scream into the faces of the fools who reject the truths of God’s existence, His justice, and His great redemption. Earnestly, he warns them to flee the wrath to come! He speaks of a hell where there will be gnashing of teeth and where the fire is never quenched. The fool gives him a blank stare and tries to change the subject to some professional football game. How, then, does the believer witness to a dead man? There is no use in screaming. If you believe that the dead can come to life (Eph. 2:1–2) then you will poke a man with the truth on occasion to see if he will say, “Ouch!” If he fails to respond, then wait a little while and poke him again. Listen for “Ouch!” Without the Spirit’s internal work, there will be no life in the corpse and no response to the Word preached.

Family Discussion Questions:

1. Why are fools impervious to the most impassioned warnings and exhortations from the Word of God?
2. How does a dead man react when you poke him with a sharp stick? How do believers witness to dead men?

PART 245 ~ FOOLS—CAN’T GET AWAY WITH FOOLISHNESS

Proverbs 26:10

The great God that formed all things both rewards the fool, and rewards transgressors.

Some people have suggested that the famous evolutionist Charles Darwin was a deist of sorts. He could have been satisfied with a distant god who created a formless mass of matter and

energy, but Darwin didn't want the God whose hands formed creation. By the 19th century, many Europeans and Americans agreed with him. Intuitively, people understand that a god who did not form every creature and every valley with his own hands would distance himself from his universe. Sure, he may have tossed a few planets in a solar system deep in the recesses of the Milky Way Galaxy, but then he forgot where he put them! According to these deistic thinkers, the various species of life forms develop without divine intervention, by chance evolutionary processes. The idea that God's hand is providentially active in every birth and in every catastrophe is reprehensible to the naturalistic evolutionist. If God's hand is involved in the tiny details of every creature's life, then of course He is interested in the actions of that creature. Indeed, that is what Jesus meant when He told His disciples that the heavenly Father is vitally interested in every sparrow that falls to the ground (Matt. 10:29). While the sparrow is amoral and unable to sin against God, that is not the way it is for human beings. Men are moral creatures and they know they are moral because they talk about morals all the time. If, therefore, the actions of men are moral and God is vitally interested in their actions even more than those of the sparrow, then there will be a good many rebel sinners in serious trouble. And this is exactly what Charles Darwin wanted to avoid. So the entire scheme of evolution served as a "scientific" apologetic for deism. Assuming that God was uninvolved in the evolution of the creatures, then man must have appeared on the scene by random cause-and-effect processes.

In this verse we read that the great God formed all things and He did it by the Word of His power (Ps. 33:9; Heb. 1:3). His hands carefully formed every creature just as a potter deliberately, carefully works a piece of clay into something beautiful. There are no accidents in God's world. Therefore, we can be sure that nothing and nobody will escape His all-seeing eyes. Our ethical accountability is directly tied to God's absolute sovereign, providential hand on history. If you remove God's hands from history, you will create a