

DANGER! BEWARE! FOOL APPROACHING!

PROVERBS 26:1-28

M.I. FOOLS ARE DANGEROUS TO EVERYONE THEY COME IN CONTACT WITH. THEY HAVE THE POWER TO DESTROY LIVES AND COMMUNITIES.

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DANGER! BEWARE! FOOL APPROACHING!

As we have studied through the book of Proverbs, we have had several run-ins with the fool. But since we are just reading the text, we don't really have a feel for how dangerous the fool is. This morning's text wants to warn us about two things. First of all, we should stay far away from fools and never believe what they say. Secondly, we are warned to examine our own souls because if we slip to this level of foolishness, we are doomed never to escape.

The main obstacles that stand between wisdom and us are pride, laziness, and apathy. The more proud we become, the more entrenched we become in our stupidity. We become arrogant and stubborn. We refuse to hear wisdom rebuking us.

As we have said before, the way to wisdom is by way of a lot of hard work. Many of us are just too lazy to pursue righteousness.

And lastly, many of us just don't care. Somehow we think we are living well enough lives and we have come to fool ourselves into thinking we are wise enough.

The real state of affairs is that we have become comfortable with our spirituality.

Let me give you an example of how we resist spiritual growth. I have a friend who pastors a relatively wealthy congregation. The deacon board gave him and his wife a three-month paid vacation to just simply get rested up and rejuvenated. My friend gladly accepted.

Three months later, they returned home to find out that the deacon board renovated the entire church building, inside and out. The head of the deacon board said, "Pastor, this is the best building money can buy." He was right. It was a magnificent building. But there was only one strange thing the pastor noticed. There was only one pew, and it was in the back of the church. "A church with only one pew?" asked the pastor. "Just you wait until Sunday," the deacon said.

When the time came for church, the pastor watched with curiosity. As people filled the pew, the whole pew would move closer to the front as another pew came up from the floor until people filled that pew. Then the pews moved forward and another pew appeared. This went on until all the pews were filled and had made their way up front.

"Wonderful!" said my friend, "Just marvelous!" He was ecstatic.

The service began and it came time for my friend to get up and preach. He launched into his text. When 12 o'clock came, my friend was still preaching with no end in sight. Suddenly, a bell rang, and a trap door opened right underneath where my friend was standing. All my friend heard the congregation say as he slid down the chute was, "Wonderful! Marrrrrvveelllooousssss."

I'm sure none of you feel this way. I know that all of us want to get our Christian walk on track no matter how hard we have to work.

I. HOW STUPID ARE THEY? (VS 1-12)

THEIR PRIDE MAKES THEM SO STUPID, THAT THEY ARE UNTEACHABLE

A lot of people never seem to take their Christian walk seriously. Let me just tell us what's at stake according to this text. The main idea of this morning's passage is this. **FOOLS ARE DANGEROUS TO EVERYONE THEY COME IN CONTACT WITH. THEY HAVE THE POWER TO DESTROY LIVES AND COMMUNITIES.** In other words, the fool is not just a menace; he is a threat to the health and safety of the people he comes in contact with. Fools are dangerous. They are stupid, lazy, and harmful to the community.

A. DUMBER THAN ANIMALS (1-3)

Let's start with stupid. Verses 1-12 answer the question, "How stupid are they?" The answer is **THEIR PRIDE MAKES THEM SO STUPID, THAT THEY ARE UNTEACHABLE.** I want you to catch the full force of the poet's sarcasm. Ronald Reagan used to say, "The Democrats spend money like a drunken sailor. Oh I'm sorry to offend the drunken sailors, they spend their own money." Here, the author is using the same technique. He is saying, "Fools are dumber than the dumbest animals. Oh I'm sorry to offend the dumb animals by the comparison." Animals know how to work and gather food. Animals know when to migrate for the winter and summer. Animals know when to come in out of the cold. They obey God's genetic programming of them. Animals respond to the prompting of their owners.

In our day, musicians, actors, athletes, and politicians receive all sorts of awards. In fact, they give them to one another. And our culture treats them as if they are scholars. Many people today are looking to Oprah, to Dr. Phil, and other pop culture people to give us advise in how to live our lives. People are looking to radio and television talk-show hosts to define the issues of the day for them. Look carefully what verse 1 has to say about this. Think about the Florida Citrus industry. What happens when there is a frost in the growing season? The oranges and grapefruit die. We see farmers trying to keep the groves heated with large gas heaters. What happens to vegetable farmers when it continues to rain during the fall harvest season? They can't get in the fields to harvest the crops. The crops simply rot there in the ground. Snow in summer and rain in harvest represents disaster. It affects not only the farmers; it affects everybody who depends on their crops to eat.

When we elevate people to places of honor, we better be careful, because the Proverb clearly states that when we honor a fool we are inviting disaster.

Please be careful. Don't develop your world-view by watching television, reading the newspaper, or listening to the radio. The sad thing is that most of us are developing our world-views by listening to Oprah, Rush, Sean, Bano, Barbara, and other celebrities. Instead, read your Bibles and start being careful to analyze what you read and hear.

Verse 2 may have a double meaning. It could mean that we don't need to be afraid of curses or predictions fools direct our way. There are always naysayers around who will predict gloom and doom over us. There may be people who actually curse us. Don't be afraid. If we are living upright lives in Christ, the curse will not land on us, nor will it accomplish its negative work in our lives. The Bible asks the question, "If God is for us, who can possibly stand against us?" The answer is of course, "No one or No thing."

But the verse can also mean this. There are all sorts of curses mentioned in the Bible that are meant for the wicked and the foolish. If you have some time, read through the book of Deuteronomy and take in the curses God promises to wreak on Israel if they disobey. Then immediately read through the book of Lamentations to see how literally these curses find their mark. Listen to the last recorded words of Jesus recorded in the book of Revelation,

¹⁰Then he told me, "Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, because the time is near. ¹¹Let him who does wrong continue to do wrong; let him who is vile continue to be vile; let him who does right continue to do right; and let him who is holy continue to be holy."

¹²"Behold, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to everyone according to what he has done. ¹³I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End.

¹⁴"Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life and may go through the gates into the city. ¹⁵Outside are the dogs, those who practice magic arts, the sexually immoral, the murderers, the idolaters and everyone who loves and practices falsehood.

¹⁶"I, Jesus, have sent my angel to give you this testimony for the churches. I am the Root and the Offspring of David, and the bright Morning Star."

¹⁷The Spirit and the bride say, "Come!" And let him who hears say, "Come!" Whoever is thirsty, let him come; and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life.

¹⁸I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds anything to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book. ¹⁹And if anyone takes words away from this book of prophecy, God will take away from him his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book.

²⁰He who testifies to these things says, "Yes, I am coming soon." Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.

²¹The grace of the Lord Jesus be with God's people. Amen" (Revelation 22:10-21).

There is a great reward waiting for those who follow wisdom, those who give their lives to Christ and live accordingly. The promised blessings will find and land on their target. On the other hand, eternal hell and punishment await the foolish, those who reject the commands of Jesus and live in foolishness. The curse pronounced by Jesus on the foolish will find their mark and land on their intended targets as well. Fools simply refuse to get things right. Did you catch that statement by Jesus, “Let him who does wrong continue to do wrong; let him who is vile continue to be vile?” In other words, if the fool is rebelling against God, then Jesus says, “If you want to play the fool, go on and continue to play the fool. Your payday is coming soon.”

What I don't understand is how people can see all the warnings and curses and still do wrong. Look at verse 3. When you want to make a horse gallop or go faster, you give him a light swipe of the whip. The horse responds. When you want a donkey to stop, you pull back on the halter and he stops. Animals respond to the cues. But a fool doesn't respond even if you cane him. Please catch the irony of the poet. Jackasses and horses are smarter than fools. Does God have to hit us over the head with a 2 by 4 to get our attention? I've been thinking about that a lot and although that has been the case in the past in my life, I want to get to the point where Jesus just has to speak to me or give me a little nudge, and I obey immediately. That's one of my spiritual goals for life. I've been called a jackass plenty of times during the course of my life, but I no longer want to play the fool in any area of my life. I want to be in tune with God's will. How about you?

B. UNTEACHABLE (4-7)

I'm sad to say that verses 4-7 indicate that the fool is unteachable. Not only is fool headed for destruction, he doesn't care and refuses to learn. In other words, he is stupid and unteachable. Let's look at verses 6 & 7 first. Again we see the futility of trying to teach a fool about God's ways. Often times fools can quote more Scripture than we can. These two verses are tied together by legs and feet. If you give a godly message to fool, it will never reach its intended destination. And verse 7 indicates that even if the fool can learn the truth of the proverb, it is useless. It won't go anywhere because his legs are useless. The conclusion is that even trying to help a fool understand and live God's truths are futile.

Look how futile in verses 4-5. Verse 4 instructs us that there are times when we should simply let the fool ramble on. Don't give him any credibility by answering him or debating him. Because then we will be giving him the idea we take his nonsense seriously. So one way to respond to the fool is to simply ignore her. A second approach is called for if the fool is attempting to lead someone else astray. There is a time to just give them a short, terse put down to shut them up.

C. DANGEROUS (8-10)

In the end, fools are dumber than animals and the best course of action is simply to ignore them. But verses 8-10 warn us not to simply ignore them, but to stay far away from them because they can be dangerous.

These three verses reinforce everything we have been saying about the fool except they add the element of danger. All three similes talk about weapons; a slingshot, a thorn bush, and a bow and arrow. All these things can harm someone. Verse 8 is meant to be comical; sad, but comical. Picture this. The fool has a sling shot in his hand, The kind you put a stone in, wheel it around and around, then release one side and the stone flies out. Only in this case, the fool has tied the stone to the slingshot. He wields it round and round, he gets up a full head of steam, he releases one side, but since the stone is tied to the other end, it comes right back at him and hits him in the face. A fool who has achieved some degree of success in life or who people find popular has fooled himself into thinking he is really not a fool. He is a danger to himself.

But the next two verses remind us that the fool is dangerous to even be around. Look at the simile here. When fools try to give you some advice, here's how dangerous he is. He is as dangerous as a drunk swinging around a knife in a crowded bar. Someone is bound to get cut.

And even worse is the situation in verse 10. Having anything to do with a fool is like hanging around a crazy person with a gun shooting it randomly. If you are even in close proximity to a fool you could get accidentally hit in a drive-by-shooting. Fools are dangerous to be around. They're stupid, even though they think they are pretty street smart, they're unteachable because they think they know it all, and they are dangerous to be around.

D. DESTINED TO REMAIN STUPID (11-12)

Verses 11-12 drive home a very discouraging truth, that the fool is destined to remain stupid. First look at the reason fools remain stupid in verse 12. They think they are smart. They think they have life all figured out. And then, although I love this proverb in verse 11, I'm sad to say that I know fools just like this. Look at the proverb in verse 11. It says, "*As a dog returns to its vomit, so a fool repeats his folly*" (NIV). When dogs vomit, they immediately go back to it and start eating it and licking it up. How graphic is that? How gross is that? How disgusting is that? That's how stupid fools are. They never learn. No matter what happens to them, they will never change. They keep messing up, but never learn. They live from one disaster to another. The fool is content to smell, eat, and live in her own vomit. Fools are destined to remain stupid. Ultimately it's pride that causes them not to change. Fools could change, but because they have to first admit they're fools and change the way they're living, they rarely escape their foolishness. Their end is an eternity in hell. How stupid are they? **THEIR PRIDE MAKES THEM SO STUPID, THAT THEY ARE UNTEACHABLE.**

II. HOW LAZY ARE THEY? (VS 13-16)

THEY ARE SO LAZY, THEY WILL NEVER BE OF ANY USE TO ANYONE

A. TOO LAZY TO WORK (13-15)

And lazy. How lazy are they verses 13-16 ask? **THEY ARE SO LAZY, THEY WILL NEVER BE OF ANY USE TO ANYONE.** Can you imagine this combination for just a moment, a fool is stupid and lazy? Every verse in this section makes direct reference to the sluggard. In verse 13 the sluggard cannot go to school, get an education, or try and find a job, because there is a lion roaming the street. There are many people who are unemployed today because they are afraid to go to work. Many people lack the motivation necessary to improve themselves. And these people criticize others who are working hard and getting ahead. The fool lacks motivation.

In verse 14 we find the fool lacks any desire to get ahead. Put this picture in your mind as well. It's meant to be comical. The fool is hinged to his bed. He can roll up but then rolls right back into bed. The fool has no desire.

And thirdly, verse 15 describes the fool as simply resigned to his fate. He sits at the table, and just stares at his food. He has neither the motivation nor desire to feed himself.

In the bible culture, the community was responsible to one another. In other words, we would be responsible for one another's well being. These lazy people would simply put a real burden on the rest of us. But once the fool was identified as a fool, all the help would stop. The Apostle Paul put it nicely, "*Whoever does not work should not eat*" (II Thessalonians 3:10, NLT).

Here again, the poet is not telling us to work so we can become worldly, we are to work hard so that we will not be a burden to anyone and so that we can help one another. We must work hard and be diligent in order to give glory to God. We must work hard to be a blessing to the community.

B. TOO LAZY TO LEARN (16)

But again, the fool wants to hear none of this. The fool thinks everybody owes her something for nothing. Verse 16 states once again that the fool is too lazy to learn. Verse 12 stated that the fool is wise in his own eyes. He was too proud to overcome his stupidity because he thinks he is wise. Here verse 16 summarizes the fate of the fool. Again, he thinks he is wise. Even if seven wise, godly people come to him and present the case for wisdom, he will reject it. By the way, the number 7 represents completeness. So what the poet is saying is this. You could send one hundred, one thousand, one million. Every wise person in the world, even God Himself couldn't convince the lazy person that he should not be a drain on his family, his friends, and his family.

Look also at the progression of verses 13-16. Since there is a lion in the street and he can't leave the house, he remains hinged to his bed. He briefly gets up to eat, but he's too lazy to feed himself, so he lies

down again. He gets so entrenched in this lifestyle, that he believes it to be reality. So he will die because he's lazy and stupid. Here is the sad truth about lazy fools. How lazy are they? **THEY ARE SO LAZY, THEY WILL NEVER BE OF ANY USE TO ANYONE.**

III. HOW HARMFUL ARE THEIR WORDS? (VS 17-28) *THEY ARE SO HARMFUL, THEY HAVE THE POWER TO RUIN LIVES.*

Verses 17-28 invite us to ask, "How harmful are their words?" **THEY ARE SO HARMFUL, THEY HAVE THE POWER TO RUIN LIVES.** This section is meant to frighten us enough so that we have nothing to do with fools. They are dangerous.

A. THEY'RE DANGEROUS TO YOU (17-21)

Verses 17-21 illustrate that they're dangerous to you. First of all, they are always sticking their nose in everybody else's business. They tend to think they can solve everybody else's problems when in reality their own lives are in a mess. But the warning for us is not to meddle in their affairs. Don't even allow yourself to get involved in their matters because when you tell them the truth, it's like you have grabbed a big dog by the ears and have shaken him up. You can be sure you have a problem now. As soon as you let go of that dog's ears, you're about to become dog food.

These fools will say all sorts of stuff. When you confront them they say, "I was only kidding." The proverb paints the picture of this guy as a wild man swinging fire around over his head. You don't know who's going to get burned.

And verses 20-21 contain a familiar theme, don't gossip. Fools keep fanning the flames of controversy. They like to see people hurt, angry, and confused. It somehow makes them feel better about themselves. Our job is to bring peace, harmony, and love. We should speak healing words and words of blessings. We should not be using our mouths to hurt others.

B. THEY'RE DANGEROUS TO OTHERS (22-25)

Verses 22-25 remind us that these fools with big, stupid mouths are dangerous to others. Verse 25 commands us not to believe and not to be sucked in by these fools. Although they appear to be sincere and charming, don't get fooled by them because their hearts are wicked and we could easily get drawn in.

Verse 22 reminds us not to get drawn in by gossip. Gossip is entertaining. It can be fun to listen to, and we often fall for it hook, line, and sinker. Once we swallow it, we too will end up vomiting it out. And will we also like the dog, return to our own vomit?

Look at how slick these fools are in verses 23-24. They hide their true intentions. Their one goal is to promote themselves. They will lie, manipulate, and hurt anyone they have to, in order to get what they want. On the outside they appear to be nice, friendly, and holy, but inside they are self-centered, self-absorbed, and calculating. They do not care about anyone but themselves. They don't care who they hurt. So we must be careful. The example the poet gives us is one of a clay pot that had been painted with a gold or silver glaze. The person tries to pass it off as solid gold or silver, but when you get close to it and examine it, the clay is hard to miss. Don't allow yourself to be flattered by the fool's kind words. Examine their lives to see if their words are matching their claims. Fools will always give themselves away. We just need to be watchful enough to catch them.

C. THEY'RE DANGEROUS TO THEMSELVES (26-28)

Which brings us to verses 26-28; they're dangerous to themselves. As long as the fool hangs out with other fools or naïve believers, she may be able to get away with being a fool. However, when the fool is in the company of genuine, mature Christians, they can be spotted a mile away. Look at verse 26-27. The fool tries to stir up dissension by gossiping and spreading stories that may be half true or not true at all. They will drop subtle statements about other people. The real intention of this is to promote themselves by tearing someone else down. But mature believers will smell them out. Their plans will backfire. They blow up in their own faces. Verse 26 says that the fool will be exposed in the community of believers. He digs a pit, but he's the one who falls in it. Like the "Road Runner" cartoon, she will roll a rock up the hill to drop it on some unsuspecting soul, but the rock will roll back and flatten her instead.

These people just love themselves and use other people. I'm warning all of us, be wary of fools. They have no concern for us. They only have concern for themselves. Don't fall for their flattery. These people will often simply tell you what you want to hear in order to put one over on you. But in the end, God will give them what they deserve. How harmful are their words? **THEY ARE SO HARMFUL, THEY HAVE THE POWER TO RUIN LIVES, ... NAMELY THEIR OWN.**

Fools may look at first like they're fun to be around. In fact, they may even be the life of the party. However, the sad truths are 1) they are dangerous to be around, and 2) they are headed for an eternity in hell and they don't even care. **FOOLS ARE DANGEROUS TO EVERYONE THEY COME IN CONTACT WITH. THEY HAVE THE POWER TO DESTROY LIVES AND COMMUNITIES.** Look. At one time or another, we're all tempted to play the fool. We don't guard our thought lives. We don't guard our words, and we don't guard our behavior. I think sometimes we need some very graphic object lessons.

This story was related by a young woman named Sally. It describes an experience in one of her seminary classes.

One day, Sally walked into her class and just knew they were in for a treat.

On the wall was a big target and on a nearby table were many darts. Dr. Smith told the students to draw a picture of someone that they disliked or someone who had made them angry. He would then allow them to throw darts at the person's picture.

Sally's friend drew a picture of a girl who had stolen her boyfriend. Another friend drew a picture of his little brother. Sally drew a picture of a former friend, putting a great deal of detail into her drawing, even drawing pimples on the face. Sally was pleased with the overall effect she had achieved.

The class lined up and began throwing darts. Some of the students threw their darts with such force that their targets were ripping apart. Sally looked forward to her turn, and was filled with disappointment when Dr. Smith, because of time limits, asked the students to return to their seats. As Sally sat thinking about how angry she was because she didn't have a chance to throw any darts at her target, Dr. Smith began removing the targets from the wall.

Underneath the targets was a picture of Jesus. A hush fell over the room as each student viewed the mangled picture of Jesus; holes and jagged marks covered His face and His eyes were pierced.

Dr. Smith said only these words; "in as much as you have done it to the least of these my brothers, ... you have done it to me" (Matthew 25:40).

No other words were necessary; the tears filled eyes of the students focused only on the picture of Christ.

If you are not playing the fool in thought, word, or deed, then stay away from fools. If you are thinking about playing the fool, think about the consequences. If you find yourself playing the fool, repent and turn back to God before it's too late. Playing the fool breaks God's heart.