

Proverbs Chapter 26

Verses 26:1-12: The fool is described in every verse. Most verses compare aspects of natural order that are violated with the behavior of a fool. The deteriorating nature of foolishness is seen as the description progresses from drink to vomit.

Proverbs 26:1 "As snow in summer, and as rain in harvest, so honor is not seemly for a fool."

We know that snow in summer is completely out of place and rain in harvest can ruin the crop. We know that it is completely out of place for a fool to be honored.

These damaging incongruities of nature illustrate those in the moral realm.

Proverbs 26:2 "As the bird by wandering, as the swallow by flying, so the curse causeless shall not come."

We see here, that a curse that is spoken without any foundation for the curse will not be harmful upon the one it is spoken. If any harm at all comes, it will be on the person who spoke it. The "bird" above has no particular place to go (wandering), and so is this curse without a cause.

In other words, a bird's aimless motion without landing is compared to a fool who utters an underserved curse as it does not land either.

Proverbs 26:3 "A whip for the horse, a bridle for the ass, and a rod for the fool's back."

In all cases, these are used to try to control. The whip controls the horse. The bridle controls the ass and makes it go where it should. The rod of correction is to control the behavior of the fool.

Proverbs 26:4 "Answer not a fool according to his folly, lest thou also be like unto him."

Have you ever heard someone say, "That doesn't deserve an answer"? That is about what this is saying here. The question is perhaps intended to trap you. At any rate, a foolish question does not become wiser by giving a foolish answer. You see, to answer his ridiculous question would be as if you are saying this is a worthwhile question.

Taken together, these verses teach the appropriate way to answer a fool who is an unbeliever who rejects truth. He should not be answered with agreement to his own ideas and presuppositions, or he will think he is right. Rather he should be rebuked on the basis of his folly and shown the truth so he sees how foolish he is (verse 5).

Proverbs 26:5 "Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own conceit."

This seems like a direct contrast to verse four, but on a closer look it is quite the opposite. You must be very careful how you answer. As we said above, whatever you do, you must not give the

impression that this foolish question deserves an answer. The only reason to answer at all is to show him not to be conceited.

Proverbs 26:6 "He that sendeth a message by the hand of a fool cutteth off the feet, [and] drinketh damage."

A fool will not take the correct message that you sent, but will cause you so much pain with an incorrect message that you will wish you had never sent him. The damage he might do could be unreparable. The "cut of the feet expression" just shows how useless it is to employ someone who is a fool to carry a message.

Self inflicted wounds come to the person who chooses to depend upon a fool.

Proverbs 26:7 "The legs of the lame are not equal: so [is] a parable in the mouth of fools."

This is just re-emphasizing how slanted the message would be that a fool would bring. He would not be able to understand the parable and would bring a slanted message, leaning to one side or the other like a lame man. The message would be awkward and useless.

Proverbs 26:8 "As he that bindeth a stone in a sling, so [is] he that giveth honor to a fool."

If you bind the stone to the sling, the stone cannot be flung and will never reach the mark. Honor given to a fool is undeserved and is very fleeting in nature. A fool is soon found out, and it would bring shame on the fool and on the one who bestowed the honor because of his poor judgment. The fool somehow never is able to hit the mark.

Proverbs 26:9 "[As] a thorn goeth up into the hand of a drunkard, so [is] a parable in the mouth of fools."

A drunkard takes no care at all and injures himself without even knowing it. This is exactly what is being said of the fool explaining a parable. He injures himself severely in telling it and is so caught up in himself that he is not aware that he has injured himself. Just as the alcohol has dulled the pain of the thorn, pride has dulled the senses of the fool.

Proverbs 26:10 "The great [God] that formed all [things] both rewardeth the fool, and rewardeth transgressors."

Jesus is the Judge of all, the just and the unjust (transgressors). We have mentioned so many times in all these lessons, John chapter one that tells that the word (Jesus), created all things. So we know the rewarder is Jesus.

Matthew 5:45 "That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust."

The reward, here mentioned, is not a good one. The transgressor, unrepentant, is headed for an eternity in hell, and the fool who has turned down salvation is headed there also. The reward of the righteous is eternal life.

Hebrew language is obscure on this so there can be many interpretations of what this verse is saying. Since it is impossible to know exactly what it said in the original, it is impossible to know exactly what it means. The translation might be: "Much brings forth from itself all; but the reward and the wages of the fool pass away."

This could mean, reasonably, that although he who possesses much and has great ability may be able to accomplish all he wants, that is not the case when he makes use of the work of fools, who not only do not accomplish anything, but destroy everything.

Proverbs 26:11 "As a dog returneth to his vomit, [so] a fool returneth to his folly."

Just as a dog is never through with the food that he has expelled and goes back to it, a fool who has momentarily rejected sin in his life, will return to it, as well. A fool must become wise to get rid of sin and stay rid of the sin. A fool will be enticed to sin the same sin all over again as his flesh calls him, because he has not learned anything from the first sin.

2 Peter 2:22 "But it is happened unto them according to the true proverb, The dog [is] turned to his own vomit again; and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire."

Proverbs 26:12 "Seest thou a man wise in his own conceit? [there is] more hope of a fool than of him."

The worst thing about someone wise in his own conceit is that he feels that he needs no improvement. He is in deep sin and is unaware of his need for help.

There are degrees of foolishness, with intellectual conceit being the most stupid and hard to remedy. This is applied to the lazy man (in verse 16 and the rich in 28:11).

At least a fool knows that things are not perfect with him. The fool, who realizes he is a fool, can be helped; but to feel you are perfect leaves no room for improvement at all.

This is a terrible situation: to get help from the Lord, we must repent, humble ourselves, and then the Lord will help us.

Proverbs 26:13 "The slothful [man] saith, [There is] a lion in the way; a lion [is] in the streets."

We touched on this before. It is a feeble excuse to get out of work. There are no lions in the streets. They are in the jungle.

Proverbs 26:14 "[As] the door turneth upon his hinges, so [doth] the slothful upon his bed."

The door is attached to the facing of the door and turns back and forth but goes nowhere. This is also what a lazy man does; he tosses and turns in bed, but doesn't get loose from the bed and go to work.

The lazy man loves sleep so much that he seems to be hinged to his bed. He stays in the bed day and night and tosses and turns going nowhere.

Proverbs 26:15 "The slothful hideth his hand in [his] bosom; it grieveth him to bring it again to his mouth."

The hand in the bosom just means he doesn't have the heart to work even if it is to provide for food for his own table.

Proverbs 26:16 "The sluggard [is] wiser in his own conceit than seven men that can render a reason."

This sluggard is so caught up in himself that he will not take advice from others. He doesn't feel he should work to learn more either. He thinks he has all the correct answers with no effort upon his part at all. Not only 7, but any amount of people with good advice would be rejected by him if they did not totally agree with him.

The ignorant are ignorant of their ignorance.

Proverbs 26:17 "He that passeth by, [and] meddleth with strife [belonging] not to him, [is like] one that taketh a dog by the ears."

Never, and I mean never, jump into someone else's quarrel. Especially when a husband and wife are quarreling with each other. Meddling tells you right off that this is of no concern to the passer-by. Meddling is interfering in something that is none of your business.

If you pull a dog's ear, he will bark and maybe bite you. The same thing will happen if you interfere in someone else's problems. They will turn on you and injure you.

In Palestine, the dog was not domesticated and thus to grab any dog was dangerous. The aggressor deserved to be bitten for his unprovoked act.

Proverbs 26:18-19 "As a mad [man] who casteth firebrands, arrows, and death," "So [is] the man [that] deceiveth his neighbor, and saith, Am not I in sport?"

The serious damage done by deceit cannot be dismissed as a joke.

To say that your ugly words were only teasing is just not enough. To hurt a neighbor is a really bad thing, but to then laugh and say it was a joke, after the damage is done is inexcusable. This type of behavior could cause the damaged person to harm, or perhaps even kill you.

Proverbs 26:20 "Where no wood is, [there] the fire goeth out: so where [there is] no talebearer, the strife ceaseth."

This is just saying, stop adding fuel to the fire and the fire will die down. A rumor cannot damage anyone until it is told, Gossip is like the wood. It causes widespread damage. To stop the damage, stop the gossip. This continues in the next verse.

Proverbs 26:21 "[As] coals [are] to burning coals, and wood to fire; so [is] a contentious man to kindle strife."

We see there, a situation where the coals of gossip have just about gone out, but a contentious man who loves trouble will go in there and rekindle the mess all over again. To make coals re-ignite you blow on them and add a little kindling (gossip), to the fire. This makes an even hotter fire than you had in the first place. This evil man wants to keep the quarrel going so he stirs it up a little and gets it going full blast again.

Proverbs 26:22 "The words of a talebearer [are] as wounds, and they go down into the innermost parts of the belly."

Bearing tales is a very bad sin. The tongue is the vilest part of the body. It cuts at the spirit of man and destroys his inner most being, while a real knife cuts at the flesh of man. Cutting words that cut into our inner most being are hard to heal.

We covered this earlier in Proverbs when we said:

Proverbs 18:8 "The words of a whisperer are like dainty morsels, and they go down into the innermost parts of the body."

Proverbs 26:23 "Burning lips and a wicked heart [are like] a potsherd covered with silver dross."

We see in this a worthless vessel (potsherd), covered with silver to make it seem from the outside to be very valuable. If you are looking at this from the spiritual standpoint, it makes it appear to be redeemed (silver). This person, mentioned here, has beautiful burning lips which seem to be affectionate. They are a deceit coming from a wicked heart.

A cheap veneer of silver over a common clay pot hiding its commonness and fragility is like the deception spoken by evil people. This silver dross may be taken as "glaze." The point is this: just as glaze covers the rough pottery but cannot ultimately change its character, so the evil man cannot change his character by covering it with eloquent speech. This thought is expanded (in verses 24 to 28).

Proverbs 26:24-25 "He that hateth dissembleth with his lips, and layeth up deceit within him;" "When he speaketh fair, believe him not: for [there are] seven abominations in his heart."

These "seven abominations in his heart" just mean that he is completely consumed with an evil heart. This "dissembleth" means that he uses words to tear apart everyone he sees. He is a very evil man. This man flatters you to try to destroy you. This is deceit to the utmost.

Proverbs 26:26 "[Whose] hatred is covered by deceit, his wickedness shall be showed before the [whole] congregation."

We see what modern society calls a two-faced man. He appears to be one thing and is, in fact, something entirely different. We see in this, that this person will be found out. Whether in this life or not, we cannot say, but when he stands before Jesus, all will be known. He cannot deceive the Lord.

Proverbs 26:27 "Whoso diggeth a pit shall fall therein: and he that rolleth a stone, it will return upon him."

This is just one more way of saying, what you sow you will reap. This just warns us that the fate we have planned for others comes home to us. Here again, this result may not come on this earth, but it shall surely come. The Judge of the whole world knows everything you do.

Proverbs 26:28 "A lying tongue hateth [those that are] afflicted by it; and a flattering mouth worketh ruin."

This lying tongue goes along with deceit. Perhaps here we see this going even further to destroy someone. Undeserved flattery causes great problems for the person receiving the flattery. This flattery is ordinarily used to try to con someone.

Proverbs 26 Questions

1. In verse 1, what is compared to honor for a fool?
2. What is meant by "a curse causeless shall not fall"?
3. What is used to tame a horse?
4. What controls the way of the ass?
5. What drives foolishness from a man?
6. If you answer a fool according to his folly, what does it make you?
7. What is a fool apt to be, if you don't answer him correctly?
8. He that sendeth a message by a fool is like doing what?
9. How are the legs of the lame described?

10. What is it compared to in verse 7?
11. What is meant by "bindeth a stone"?
12. How is the drunkard in verse 3 like a parable in a fool's mouth?
13. Who rewards the fool and transgressors?
14. Who is the judge of all?
15. Who is there more hope for than a man wise in his own conceit?
16. What is the worst problem with being wise in your own conceit?
17. What ridiculous excuse did the slothful man make in verse 13?
18. What is meant by a door turning on its hinges?
19. What lesson is to be learned from the slothful who will not remove his hand from his bosom?
20. Why will the sluggard refuse to take advice from the 7 just men?
21. What does the word "meddleth" mean?
22. What happens when you pick up a dog by his ears?
23. Cruel teasing of neighbors is likened to a mad man's what?
24. A talebearer brings what?
25. What is the contentious man in verse 21 attempting to do?
26. Do evil words destroy the body or the spirit? Explain.
27. In verse 23, the potsherd covered with silver indicates what?
28. How can you disassemble with your lips?
29. Hatred covered by deceit will be revealed to whom?
30. What does modern society call the man who covers his hatred by deceit?
31. What does undeserved flattery do to a person?