

What is Foolishness?

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[0 : 00] Okay, let's turn back for a little while tonight to Romans chapter... Romans, sorry, Proverbs chapter 9, I was just checking, you were awake.

Proverbs chapter 9, and the... We're really going to focus at some point in the sermon on the latter few verses from verse 13.

But Corrie finishes sermon last Sunday evening when we introduced the theme of Proverbs and what's in Proverbs with the question, how then should we live?

And that's really, in many ways, what the book of Proverbs is about. It speaks about the way that we live.

That is core in everything. Because it sets out, as Corrie looked at last week, it sets out wisdom and God's wisdom for life and for living. And in so doing, points us to the only one who is wisdom personified, or the way, and who is truth and who is the Word, and who reveals to us not only perfection but also salvation in order that we can be empowered to live his way.

[1 : 17] So really, I'm just following up what Corrie started last week, and it's a second introductory sermon really, in many ways. Because Proverbs is a book that portrays contrasts all the time.

So it's a book of relentless contrasts, the way of life, which is the way of wisdom, and the way of death, which is the way of foolishness.

It's very simple. And I just want to remind ourselves, as we look at this passage tonight, who we are as Christians and what we wear as Christians, and how that changes everything, and how it changes the way we live.

And I think you'll find, it's a difficult study, because we're not going through each chapter of the book, we're not following the book through it. We're kind of thematically looking.

You have to look at Proverbs that way, you have to kind of deal with themes. But you will find, and it's a great book to take and learn a verse every day.

[2 : 21] If you learn a verse from Proverbs every day as a Christian, you're molding your conscience in your life and your thinking towards Jesus Christ and towards his wisdom for us.

In other words, it's a seringly relevant book, and you can take it with you when you step out into the world tomorrow and into our lives tomorrow and out of the house tomorrow.

And by way of introduction, I want to speak about something again that Corrie mentioned last week, to remind ourselves who we are, okay? Who we are as Christians, because we are children of the King.

That's who we are. If you were here last week, you'll recall that it was explained to us that Proverbs, in all probability, was written for young boys, young men, in ancient Near East royal household.

This is written by Solomon, the king with the greatest God-given, unparalleled wisdom of all times.

[3 : 31] And this book was then a handbook, a book that these young princes were given to learn how to live.

My son, it says right through the book, and it gives that piece of advice. And I wonder, as Corrie was speaking about that and was explaining that, whether you thought, well, not sure how relevant that is for me.

Not sure how relevant that will be for my own life, the wisdom of how to live in an ancient Near Eastern palace, a young boy, young man.

Well, I think the reality is that we need to recognize two things within that. The first being that this advice given by Solomon is embraced in the Scripture.

So it's embraced as part of God's Word. And I think that's significant in chapter 8 and verse 4.

Solomon says, To you, men, I call, and my cry is to the children of mankind, to all mankind in other words.

[4 : 45] So even within this, it is broadened not just to that particular group of young people, but to all humanity.

And we recognize that really what we have here is God's insight, God's common sense. I would call Proverbs, if you call it anything, I would just call it God's Book of Common Sense, or the Book of God's Common Sense.

As we seek to live our lives, we find in this His wisdom for our living. So it's embraced in Scripture, therefore, as this wider application for us. But also in a more spiritual application, if you want, broadening it, we are also children of the King.

Okay? We're the children of Solomon's greater son of the Lord Jesus Christ, who is the King of Kings, the greater one than Solomon is here.

And we are reminded of that. And we are people as Christians who have been adopted into his family and who have that great privilege. We're indwell by his spirit. We're heirs of his salvation.

[5 : 48] We are divine royalty at that level. We have that huge privilege and significance of being children of the King. And so this amazing book reminds us of how we then should live.

Not in order to earn our favor with God or make us right with God, as you well know, but because we've been made right by the King of Kings, by Christ who is the righteous one, we are alive.

We are under his Lordship. He has given us his spirit by which we can live. And it's his intention that we are responsible to live his way in his joy and with his common sense because it is the way of blessing and goodness.

So Proverbs provides us with two ways to live, really. That practically is what Proverbs is all about. And so you will find that tomorrow, today, tonight, whenever, you will always have choices to make.

You'll be making choices at every day, at every level. And these choices that you make in God's eyes will either be wise or will be foolish as he sees us and he looks at us.

[7 : 10] And every choice we make on a daily basis has a consequence, spiritual consequence in our lives. And what we recognize, and what Proverbs helps us, I hope, to recognize is to grasp the constant need we have of the redeeming grace of the Lord Jesus Christ to rescue, equip and help us to make good choices daily.

So when we shrug our shoulders and say, well, I don't really need contact with God today. I'm not sure that I need to open his word. I feel no desire or real need to pray.

When we are failing to recognize the constant choices that we make and the wisdom we need to make these choices, his way brings blessing into our life and into our thinking.

And he wants us because he loves us to avoid folly, foolishness and sin. Because what Proverbs makes clear is folly isn't only self-destructive, it is destructive of others as well.

So the choices we make are not only our own and don't simply affect how we live, but also affect the way other people see us and also relate to us and sometimes are damaged by us.

[8 : 39] And that is counterintuitive. It's counterintuitive to our sinful natures. And so for as often reading Proverbs is like the rubber hitting the road for us spiritually.

It's where we really put into practice, as it were, grace and favor. So chapter 9 that we read, Corrie read for us. And I'm not really going to look at the first section which is about wisdom, but I just wanted it to be read because you have a strong contrast there between wisdom and foolishness and folly.

And Corrie spoke about wisdom last week. But we see in chapter 9 that wisdom and folly, or these two ways, they continue to be personified.

So we have the concept of wisdom and the concept of folly and they are personified as women in this chapter. And we see that Proverbs is a tremendous book as it employs our imagination and reminds us, as Corrie was praying indeed earlier, of God's great creativity beyond our capacity to understand.

But he gifts us with our imagination to think about wisdom and foolishness, folly and wisdom, in this personification. So you've got wisdom and folly as personified as women calling out to attract people to their lifestyle, to their way of living.

[10 : 08] It's a marvellously imaginative chapter. And it's important for us to recognize that God uses all of our different capacities and intelligences and imaginations to try and bring home His truths to us, and so should we.

So how then should we live? So we should live in two ways, we should get wisdom and we should understand foolishness and avoid it.

And that's really the simple message from this evening. In Proverbs chapter 4 and verse 5, and again this is thematic throughout the book of Proverbs, get wisdom, get insight, do not forget and do not turn away from the words of my mouth, get insight, get wisdom.

And that's the great cry of Proverbs as it was last week's theme. And supremely we see and know that that is channeled through our relationship with Jesus Christ.

It is His gift for us and as we recognize the choices we make each day, we recognize our need for His wisdom.

[11 : 32] Don't leave your relationship with Jesus Christ in the church on a Sunday evening and pick it up at the door on a Sunday morning when you come back the next week.

Don't leave His relationship with you on the shelf during your week. But be someone who recognizes the ongoing need for grace and wisdom and if you lack wisdom as each of us do, then let's not be afraid to ask God for His wisdom who gives generously without finding fault, as He says in James 1 verse 5.

So we can ask for this. So as you go to different stages of your life seeking His wisdom about how you should live, then you find it in relationship with Him.

But also then it's important to understand foolishness. And the interesting thing about foolishness is that it's much easier to understand than wisdom because it's much more inherent within us.

It's much more natural. Our sinful tendencies are much more attracted towards foolishness in many ways. But we do need to understand it, we can recognize it, but I think we need God's help to understand it, to expose it and to avoid it.

[12 : 56] I think one of the greatest challenges we have as Christians is to avoid reverting to an old lifestyle.

A lifestyle that we employed and enjoyed and lived before we were Christians. I think it's a great challenge for us as Christians to not be naive about temptation, which we'll go on to speak about.

And also not to grow in cynicism about our own inherent goodness.

I think it's important that we remain cynical about our own inherent goodness, in other words, our own ability to rely on our own strength without the wisdom and grace of God.

So how does Proverbs help us with respect to foolishness and what it says about foolishness? I think in two ways Proverbs does that.

[14 : 01] First of all, it does it by practically giving us lots of examples of foolishness, of being foolish in God's eyes. And practically we can learn about God's will through Proverbs because it's very simple and it's very clear.

And the Proverbs are very sharp and short and easy to understand. And it's revealing and it's unfolding for us God's revelation of living as a fool.

I'll say a little bit more about that in a while. But also it gives us some, I think in this chapter particularly in this last few verses, some of the deeper principles that underpin foolishness.

And I think that they are important as well. But it does practically tell us a lot of things that exposes foolish living. So we're going to be doing this for a number of weeks looking through the book of Proverbs.

Can I encourage you at some point to take time to go online, open up Bible Gateway or one of these online concordances and type in fool or foolishness or folly and it will give you all the references throughout the whole Bible.

[15 : 19] We'll click on Proverbs and it will have 72 or so references to foolishness or folly. Just go through them. Go through all of these references in Proverbs which explain very simply the references to foolishness from God's eyes.

And it gives you a working understanding of what God thinks. You know we spoke this morning about seeking God's will and knowing God's will. And that's one of our tasks as believers is to in an ongoing way know what he thinks.

What does God think about this? What does God think about wisdom? What does he think about foolishness? Well you'll get lots of references in Proverbs about what God thinks is foolishness, foolish behavior and foolish living and foolish characteristics.

This says things like despising knowledge, not being willing to learn, not taking time to hear what older, mature people, particularly maybe sometimes our parents think, speaks about a fool being someone who's disruptive in their family, who rejects and despises the advice of their parents, who has an unguarded tongue, who is full of hate, who's scheming, who's proud, who is a temper that is

uncontrollable, big mouths, who choose to have bad company, who mock and are undisciplined, who gossip, who are gluttonous and untrustworthy and who don't learn from their mistakes and so on and so on.

So it's very practical. And Proverbs gives us very practical advice about the kind of things we should do and not do as Christians. I think sometimes we're a bit stupid about our Christianity and we want God to tell us more than He does.

[17 : 07] And yet He gives us so much clear and unmistakable grace-filled teaching on how practically we should live.

So it does give us practical insights into folly, but I think it also gives us the deeper principles behind folly, foolishness, that lie behind these practical outworkings in our lives, to live like a fool, the philosophy of life that we have that makes us act in these ways.

So it's the one step deeper beyond simply the outward actions that manifest a deeper attitude of mind. Can I say that look at this few verses here in Proverbs chapter 9.

The woman folly is loud. This is the personification of foolishness and she is inviting people to come into her stay, will come into her home and follow her.

She's seductive and knows nothing. She sits at the door of her house. She takes a seat on the highest places of the town, calling those who pass by who are going straight on their way. Whatever a simple leturn in here, to Emmaulac's sense she says, stolen water is sweet and bread eaten in secret is pleasant.

[18 : 25] Does not know that the dead are there, that her guests are in the depths of Sheol. So there's three brief things here we see that are the deeper principles of folly that are exposed throughout Proverbs.

And in verse 16, the first principle of folly and foolishness is a lack of judgment, just a lacking judgment. Whoever is simple, let him turn in here and to him who lacks sense she says.

Now it's not speaking here about intelligence, it's not speaking here about our brain power. It's this whole idea of being insensitive to learning from God.

It's lacking sense, the sense to learn from God. It's the whole idea of, and you'll see that through Proverbs, the fool is someone who chooses to reject wisdom and reject God's revelation of their own heart and of their own need.

In other words, the fool is someone who doesn't know themselves, who really don't know themselves, who will not look in the mirror of Scripture and who will not accept what Scripture exposes and reveals about their need, their spiritual condition and their need for the brokenness to be healed and to be in relationship with the living God.

[20 : 00] So there's that great deep seated spiritual ignorance where they, instead of taking God's verdict of their need and of their hearts, they judge themselves favorably.

They just look at themselves and think they're fine. And they lack judgment to recognize what needs to change in their lives. They proudly tell, and we, I include myself, of when we're like this, we proudly tell God that we know better.

It's a simplistic way of living, and it's a rejection of His revealed knowledge, which is given to us because as our maker He knows.

He knows the intricacies of our hearts. He knows why we act in certain ways publicly, and He exposes our great need. And so the fool is someone who lacks judgment in that they're not willing to accept their brokenness, not willing to accept God's diagnosis of their condition of their need, and they're not willing to learn and come under the Spirit's guidance as to who they are and what they must do.

So the fool lacks judgment, and that brings difficulties and problems into our lives as we fail to acknowledge God's own diagnosis and remedy of our need.

[21 : 35] And you see that sometimes when people just mock, children maybe, mock the faith of their parents and deny it and say it's just old fashioned and rubbish, and they rebel against their Christian upbringing completely and go against it and go out of their way to reject everything that they were taught and that they were brought up to know and love and become a great heartache and a great source of pain to their parents, to their mothers and to their fathers.

And Proverb speaks a lot about that, that whole kind of rebellion you reject, the nonsense that you were taught as you were brought up in church and in your home.

And there's that deep seated rebellion that ultimately is a rebellion against God. God says that's foolishness, it may be cool, but it's foolishness in God's eyes, not recognising the need for Him lacking judgment.

That's the first thing. The second thing is sensuality. A lack of judgment, the second thing is sensuality. In verse 17, she says to Him, a lack sense, she says, stolen water is sweet and bread eaten in secret is pleasant.

And I think this is a critical exposition of the source and the foundation of foolishness.

[23 : 12] It's a recognition of the power of temptation and the beauty there can be in living without God and without His wisdom.

It's a recognition that there's much about life that can be sweet and can be pleasant, but it's stolen. It's not from God and there's no recognition of God within that. Life is enjoyable. How often have you heard that? Life is so enjoyable without the burden of church and of God and of guilt and of all that He brings into it and just being content, foolishness has been content with life that is stolen. In other words, taking all the good gifts of God and all the pleasures of God and just taking them, but throwing God out of the picture altogether. And that's sweet and that is pleasant. And there's a satisfaction and a self-indulgent there that is attractive to us, but is the way of foolishness.

[24 : 26] But we see that, don't we, all the time and we see it in our own hearts. I think we're ludicrously unrealistic and naive if we think temptation isn't sweet and pleasant.

If we don't think that there's temptation to be had in the things of this world without God, otherwise it wouldn't be temptation, would it? And yet what we find is the fool is someone who swallows that, who glies in the sinker and ignores God and says, well, I'm just going to live for today.

I'm going to take all that God has given me, all the water of life that He's given me and I'm going to slake my thirst to the full, but without any reference to Him. Because stolen water is sweet.

And being self-indulgent, in other words, taking that bread that is stolen or taking that bread that's eaten in secret that nobody else can have. Being self-indulgent, that is pleasant.

That is attractive to our sinful natures. So living out our own ideals, living for our own desires, living for fun, living just to choose life and choose life any way we want to live without spiritual accountability, without reference to God.

[25 : 40] And the straight jacket that God is, that living and letting others live even, enjoying being in control, making our own choices, that's sweet and pleasant and enjoyable to us in life.

But yet to give into that and to live for that reason alone is foolishness and it lacks judgment because it fails to see that it's stolen and it fails to see that it is secret.

Sin is always going to be sweet and tempting and easy, and as Christians if we choose to go down that road because somehow we feel it's better fun than being a Christian, or since I've become a Christian there's nothing but battles and the way of unbelief seems to be full of sweetness and pleasantness.

And if we don't recognize God within that and the reality of living in relationship with God then we are choosing the path of foolishness, folly not wisdom.

So I think in our society materialism, materialistic living, the first world, I think it's turned people's heads and hearts to a great deal, to a great degree, so that there's a great deal of folly in the philosophical thinking and underpinning and foundations that people have, a stealing of glory, a rejecting of the giver.

[27 : 19] It is ultimately, it is a selfish and a shallow way of living. And it's foolishness because it's mere sensuality.

It's living as if all we are is sensual beings. All we need to do is have our appetites met and our thirst slaked. Not recognizing that God is the great giver and that we are body and soul, that these things are great and good as we recognize the giver and as we use them wisely the way the giver seeks and wants us to use them.

So folly is sensuality. If you're living simply to satisfy your appetites, living because it feels good. How many people use that as the philosophy of their life today?

If it feels good, if it feels right, living for pleasure, living for satisfaction, living for sweetness and pleasantness without recognizing where these things come from and why we have been given them.

So sensuality and a lack of judgment and I think linked into that the fool is someone in God's eyes who does these things but also who ignores the shadowlands, who ignores the shadowlands.

[28 : 43] But he does not know that the dead are there, that her guests are in the depth of Sheol, the dead are those in the shadows, the ghosts.

And I think that's a very powerful recognition of how God describes and exposes the folly of living without Him because there's no recognition and no acknowledgement of spiritual deadness when we live without Him.

There's no recognition of judgment that goes along with that. And so that great reality will always underpin the choices we make if we understand that we are more than sensual beings.

If we know that without Him we lack discernment and insight and also if we recognize that living without Him is to live in the dark and it's to live in the dead places, it's to live in unbelief and in danger.

And so we are influenced by the choices we make and by who we listen to. We either listen to God in these things or we listen to our own hearts and conscience or the world around us.

[30 : 08] And the appetites that we feed, the company we choose, the philosophies we imbibe, all reflect where we are spiritually and whether we are thinking with the wisdom of God or acting foolishly.

And we are all asked to be discerning. We are all asked to make judgments in life and decisions in life that are not lacking in discernment, that we are to be people who see who we are before God in the mirror of Scripture and who recognize His verdict on death and sin and its destructive power. However tasty, however pleasant, however sweet it is for us in our lives and however much we struggle sometimes with the Christian way, we recognize that His glorious love and His gift of life is the way of wisdom.

Wisdom is to value and benefit from knowing Him and knowing His people and living under His Word and His wisdom within the community of grace.

So I think Proverbs is a great book and it's a great book because we are people who make choices every day. You will make many choices tomorrow and so will I. And they will reflect our understanding of God as our King.

[31 : 45] They will reflect His Lordship. They will reflect whether we follow His way of wisdom which is the way of life or whether we follow very often our sinful inclinations which are folly.

And sweet though they may be they are folly. And I think it's good to remind ourselves that we belong to our royal community and there are two ways to live but there is only one way of life.

So Proverbs 13 verse 20 says, who are you walking with? And that's the question I would leave for all of us tonight. Who is it that we're walking with?

Are we walking with lady wisdom or are we walking with the woman folly? And these questions have eternal consequences for us and are hugely significant.

Let's pray and ask God to bless His Word. Lord God help us to understand Your truth and understand Your way.

[32 : 51] Help us to know this is not moralistic teaching, that it's not about outwardly living and doing certain things that might appear right or wrong.

But it does come down to a much deeper understanding of who we are, the insight that God gives us, the wisdom to know our need and to understand and listen to His voice, choose wisdom.

He says, and to understand that we are not merely physical beings, not merely sensual, but we are those who take our sensuality and give it to Christ and are governed by Christ in it for that is the way of life.

And Lord remind us where life is and where death is, where light is and where darkness is, and may we be aware of the subtleties of temptation and the great insight of Satan and darkness and the evil one to hook into our sinful inclinations which we find are so easily drawn aside from the way of wisdom.

Lord give us security in Your truth and as we stand on You as our rock, may we find that we are not crumbling and that when the storms and darknesses come that we stand firm because we know who we are, we know who's we are and whom we serve.

[34 : 37] And grant us Lord in our foolishness much wisdom and much wisdom to confound even ourselves and others as we seek to live our lives under the laws of love that govern us, the laws of Your redeeming love enabling us to love You and love one another.

We ask it in Jesus' precious name. Amen.