

The Words of the Wise vs the Words of Fools

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[0 : 00] Well, turn back with me to the passage we read in Proverbs chapter 15. Proverbs 15, and I'll read again the first two verses.

A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger. Again, page 538. The tongue of the wise commands knowledge, but the mouths of fools pour out folly.

And God willing for the next few evening services, Sunday evening services, I want to turn to the book of Proverbs, and in particular to look at some of the teaching in the second half of this book and explore some of the sayings of King Solomon, Solomon the author, certainly much of the book of Proverbs, I want to look with you at sayings, many of the sayings that have resonated with God's people over the years.

These sayings that encompass, if you like, the whole of life wisdom, what it means to live wisely in the world, in the places, the situations where God has placed each one of us.

How we apply, how you apply God's word in the daily ongoing life that you live, and you seek to glorify God through love for him and love for your neighbor.

[1 : 37] And as I'm sure you've seen us, you've read, even as we're reading this evening, these are short sayings. But short sayings that, you know, are really quite easy to remember, but certainly necessary to apply if you're going to serve God faithfully, if you're going to live under that great motivation of living wisely for God, that great motivation, of course, being the fear of God, the true reverence for God.

And this book certainly highlights the beginning, the foundation of wisdom. And as we look at, you know, some of these wise sayings of King Solomon, remember this, of course, that this forms part of Holy Scripture.

This is the word of God. This is a word that's words that have been inspired by God. So that when you see that these proverbs that tell of wisdom, what the wise do to glorify God, then remember this, that ultimately they point to the Lord Jesus.

Because Jesus is the embodiment of wisdom. Wisdom is fulfilled and was fulfilled and is fulfilled in the Lord Jesus. And remember when we look at the way that these proverbs are written, then you see what's highlighted.

You see what wise living looks like to the glory of God. To see what wise living looks like in contrast to the foolishness of life in dishonouring God.

[3 : 12] That life, that mindset, that lifestyle that has nothing of any desire to serve God, to glorify God and to truly love our neighbour.

And that's, you know, what we're seeing here in these proverbs, the way that the proverbs set out, wise versus foolish. Now, this, of course, in the context of scripture here, it points to something far more important than mere human wisdom and mere human foolishness.

I mean, we know that in everyday thinking, you know, you can talk about what's wise in relation to good sense or appropriate action. You know, something like a wise decision or a wise choice to bring out the best in something or somebody.

And foolishness, of course, being the opposite of good sense. But when you see here in scripture this whole aspect of wisdom as opposed to foolishness, then what we're seeing here, what we're seeing pointing to in a person's life, is that whole aspect of a person's relationship with God.

The one who's wise, the person who's wise, is a person whose faith is in God. His life is lived or her life is lived to the glory of God.

[4 : 36] Her conduct, his conduct, seeks to direct others to God and to know the God of all grace, the God of all truth. For us, the fool, the foolish person, the foolish person is the one who has no saving relationship with God.

The fool is someone whose glory is in self and won't build his or her life on our Lord and Savior. Now, of course, you know that from the New Testament.

You know that when Jesus preached when he gave his parables. Of course, you know the famous one, the wise man, the foolish man, the wise man who built his house on the rock, and the foolish man who built his house on the sand.

And you've got that same focus here in Proverbs. Wisdom's seen in the person whose life is grounded on God the rock. For us, the foolish person is the one who leaves God out of his life, building on whatever he builds on.

But that building collapses. Because without God, there's no security. There's no eternal security. The foolishness of seeking to live your life apart from the one true God.

[5 : 57] So, when we look at some of these Proverbs, we'll try and grasp what it means to live wisely. To live as those whose lives are grounded in the grace and love of God.

And to do so, as opposed to living as fools. To live as those who have no desire to live for the Lord of grace.

And to see the utter folly of that foolishness, whose end and whose end is everlasting destruction. So, as I said, we're going to look carefully, I hope, at some of these latter Proverbs in the book here. And as we do so, obviously bring what we read to yourself.

Know yourself. And in knowing yourself, know the Saviour. Know Jesus. Because as we said, and I'll repeat it again, in Jesus we see the ultimate form, the ultimate example of true wisdom.

[7 : 04] And if you're to follow Jesus, you're going to seek to follow Him in all wisdom. You're going to seek to be like Christ. To live as wise and not as fools.

And so in the context of the Proverbs here, these wise sayings, well, this evening, we could take, I suppose, many examples of the subject, but this evening we're going to look at the subject of communication.

Including, excuse me, including, of course, our speech. We're going to look at the words we use.

And of course, we again have to recognise that ultimately, what these wise sayings point to is the Lord Jesus, who's all wise, whose wisdom was revealed, even the very speech that He used, even the words that He spoke.

The speech of Jesus that we see recorded in Scripture, that we see in all His grace. You think, for example, when the temple guards, who refused actually to seize Him early on in Jesus' ministry, the Pharisees had wanted Jesus captured, seized, taken out of the picture, as it were, but the temple guards wouldn't seize Him, wouldn't arrest Him.

And this is what they said, and they gave their reason because of Jesus' speech. No man ever spoke like this man, they said. No man ever spoke like this man.

[8 : 28] And again, remember when Jesus was on the cross, His words seasoned with grace.

Father, forgive them, for they know not what they're doing. So, in the speech of the Christian, you're to be like, I'm to be like the Lord Jesus.

Yes, in our conversation, in our responses, in every kind of communication that we're involved in. Think of what the Apostle Paul wrote to the church in Colossae, as he was directing them concerning their communication.

You go to Colossians 4, verse 6. Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt. Gracious speech. Speech that reflects the God of all grace.

And in the context of what Paul's saying about the speech seasoned with grace, of course, you know, the old properties of salt, the preserving from decay, the giving flavour.

And so, when you speak, when you write, whatever your communication is, the consequences of your communication have to have that property of salt, you know, wisdom, attractiveness, preventing spiritual decay.

[9 : 42] It's all there. It has to be there in the way that you communicate. So, well, we've spent enough time sort of giving an introduction. Let's just focus now in on the very words that we're going to look at.

Firstly, the consequence of words and then the presentation of our words. Consequence of words. We'll see that. We'll look particularly at verses 1 and verse 4.

Let's read them again. Verse 1, a soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs our anger. And then verse 4, a gentle tongue is a tree of life, but perverseness in it breaks the spirit.

So, let's try and understand, first of all, what these words are indicating before we look at how we apply these words. How we are to live wisely before our all-wise God.

And so, well, as you see there in verses 1 and verse 4, there's so many of the proverbs. Look at how they were written. The first statement that conveys what's wise as opposed to what's foolish.

[10:50] The first statement was, if you in verse 1, a soft answer. Well, that's wisdom, that's wise, opposed to the harsh words. And that's foolishness, the opposite of wisdom.

And then go to verse 4. The gentle tongue. That reveals a person who's wise. And then, well, the opposite, what's foolish? Perverseness or twisted words.

And then, once we've established what constitutes being wise in our speech and our communication, as opposed to what's foolish, then we've got to understand what the consequences of our speech are.

The consequences of wise speech, as opposed to the consequences of foolish speech. So, let's try and understand what Solomon's writing here.

The soft answer. The soft answer as opposed to the harsh word. You know, I think sometimes so often softness is misunderstood.

[11:52] You know, sometimes the suggestion is, oh, softness is just weakness. You know, a kind of lack of backbone. I know when I was growing up, you know, the term a softie.

A softie. Someone, you know, who didn't get involved in sport and the games that we used to play. You know, someone who kept apart from the action. Somebody who was considered weak, a weakling. And to be soft was considered to, you know, something in a negative light.

But here, when we read the soft, soft speech, it has nothing to do with any kind of negative connotation. because here, when we see a soft answer, this speaks of strength.

This speaks of grace. It speaks of a heart that's not going to repay evil with evil. And it speaks of that response to hostility and negative criticism and barred comments.

And your response as a believer is to respond with grace, with meekness and kindness. And there are examples, of course, in the Bible of that very thing.

[13:02] I think at a prayer meeting some time ago we looked at one example in the book of Judges. You go to chapter 8 in the book of Judges and we see there one of the tribes of Israel, the Ephraimites, they were angry at being, apparently being overlooked by Gideon in a battle campaign against the Midianites, against the enemy of Israel.

Israel. And the Ephraimites had been asked to help Gideon very late on in the conflict. And the Ephraimites even late on had actually killed two of the Midianite commanders.

But they were angry. You know, as if they were saying, well, another tribe has got the glory for this victory. So there's Gideon faced with an angry tribe. They'd accused them of poor leadership.

They'd accused them of not being impartial. They'd accused them of overlooking them as an important clan in Israel, an important tribe in Israel. And so would Gideon respond in the same way?

Is he going to hurl abuse and invective and is he going to use strong words of censure and some will belittle the Ephraimites for their conduct? Absolutely not.

[14:16] He used soft words that averted wrath. And if you look at that passage in Judges 8, you'll see that Gideon's speech was restrained. He reminded the Ephraimites that God had given them success over the Midianite princes.

Gideon reminded them that he from the clan, a particular clan that you use in verse 2, that he actually hadn't killed any of the Midianite commanders. The Ephraimites had.

So Gideon exercised wisdom. He dealt with a potentially rebellious situation. He dealt with it in grace and in soft words. And he averted a division within the tribes of Israel.

And of course, if that had happened, they'd given, you know, an advantage to the enemies of God's people. If he'd reacted in anger, if he'd reacted anger with anger, he would have destroyed that unity amongst God's people.

And of course, the ultimate example of a soft answer in the face of wrath, of course, is found in the Lord Jesus. Remember what Isaiah prophesied of Jesus?

[15:28] Isaiah 53, verse 7. He was oppressed and was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth. Like a lamb that's led to the slaughter, and like a sheep before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth.

And then you know, think in Jesus' ministry. Think when Jesus was reviled by his enemies, he responded in grace. There was that tight rein in his tongue. There was no unrestrained fury. Yes, he did express, we know that he expressed at times words of condemnation against those who used harsh words against him. But still, Jesus' speech was with restraint and control. And even when he was in trial, before his execution, he exercised that grace of restraint. He displayed his sinless grace in the face of the hatred of his enemies against him. And of course, so his speech, and even in his silence, even in his response of silence, he showed that pure heart, the pure heart of the sinless Son of God. [16:37] And if you're going to follow the Lord Jesus, you must take to heart that way of wisdom. You know, when you're dealing with hostility, when you're dealing with, you know, maybe negative criticism for you as a Christian, even unjustified accusations, the soft answer will overlook the wrong.

The soft answer will show forth the grace of the Lord Jesus, even in the very words you use. And you know, we live in an age when I think less and less we carry out our business through the spoken word and of course we're much, much more in the written word. But still, there's that need for Christians to show the grace of the soft answer when you're opposed, whether it's opposed face to face or through various media channels. then surely you still retain that following the Lord Jesus in the grace of communication. Because if you're going to do the opposite of the soft answer, if you're going to use the harsh word, then there's going to be just an escalation of anger rather than a quenching of that anger. So that's what we see there in the second part of verse 1. A harsh word stirs up anger. You say, oh, what's King Solomon right enough here? I mean, it's more than just being abrasive in our speech. [18:05] It's more than just being, you know, irritated if we're upset about anything. This is language that's designed to hurt. This is language that's used to wound somebody, to cause pain.

And we have to say that, you know, in the kind of world that we live in, this kind of language is becoming more and more endemic. You see it in the world of social media, for example, the barbed comments that are designed to hurt and destroy rather than build up. The language that fuels the fire of further hatred and resentment. The language that no person who professes the name of the Lord Jesus should be using. because you see the consequence here of harsh words, these words that are designed to wound rather than heal. They stir up anger.

They fan the flames of hatred. Now the soft answer fans the flame of grace. Harsh words do the opposite. And we have to say and say it with such sadness that often the harsh words even are seen within the witness of the wider church, within even the body of believers itself.

[19:26] You who are a Christian, a brother or sister in Christ, you are to build one another up. Build one another up. Be an encourager in the body of Christ.

Don't be a discourager. Don't use harsh words that cause someone else to have a wounded heart. Because it happens. It happens even within the fellowship of a church.

And it's no blessing to the church of the Lord Jesus when a brother torments a brother whether it's through harsh spoken words or words that have been put in print. Anger, when anger boils over and years and years of pain and hurt are caused even through the pain of someone who we might have known sweet fellowship with.

But now there's only that division, that bitter division through harsh words. And yes, we have with shame to confess before God.

Yes, I'm sure all of us can say this. I can. Times when we've used harsh words against a brother or sister in Christ. Even when we've been provoked and instead of giving that soft answer of grace, we've turned and we've given harsh words in reply.

[20:45] Words that in heart have broken the seventh commandment. It does happen. It does happen. Whether, you know, in one-to-one relationships, whether even in church courts, a lack of grace between fellow believers, that spilling over and what are we doing?

We're disgracing the name of the Lord Jesus. We're disgracing the name of the Prince of Peace. Because the consequence of a lack of grace, you know, that lack of grace that's seen in venom, the poisoned speech against a brother or sister in Christ, that has caused so much grief in the church, it's damaged the cause of Christ.

We are living before a watching world. And yes, when we have our conversation seasoned with grace, the world will watch and we pray be impressed and attracted to the gospel. But before a watching world where the church is seen just to promote harshness, harsh words, then the church is going to be seen as a group of odd people rather than a haven of peace and love in Christ.

And you see, as we go on, we see the argument there in verse 4 in relation to verse 1. You see that, the argument continues where harsh words wound, gentle words heal.

[22 : 12] The sense of gentleness here, it speaks of soothing, healing, words of encouragement, words that are devoid of hurt and pain and, well, it's the words that this verse tell us, words of gentleness, of grace, as a tree of life, this picture of healing, of restoring, words that bring life to a troubled soul, words of love, words of grace, words of faith, words of truth, words that come from the very word of God itself, from God who gives that healing to his people even through the very word of God itself.

love. And of course you know that God's word does give healing to the wounds of his people through the very truth of the word of God.

And that's why every Christian must speak gentle words one to another. Whether it's the preacher in the pulpit, whether it's the Christian in the pew, it's for you and for me to bring healing, to bring that gospel message of forgiveness, yes, to the one who's troubled in sin.

It's to bring the gospel message of reconciliation to the person who's wandered far from God. Yes, of course we must warn and we must identify sin where sin lies within the human heart.

But still, we have to bring these words of healing, to bring Christ's healing to wounded souls. not to be as those who send thunderbolts of vengeance from on high.

[23 : 58] I probably mentioned this before, the 19th century preacher Thomas Guthrie in one of his sermons, he was so utterly opposed to that kind of thunderbolt of vengeance preaching.

He said that kind of preaching may quench a sinner's hope and extinguish the light that's dawning on a darkened soul. And certainly one of my own former professors, he pleaded with us as students, he pleaded with us to bring encouragement, to bring hope, to show grace and to show the love of God and the Lord Jesus towards poor, helpless sinners and not to cause further discouragement or to cause further trouble to already troubled souls.

And these troubled souls need the balm of the healing of Christ's words of grace. And that's why the presentation of our words is so absolutely crucial.

As we see explained here in verses 2 and 7, the presentation of words. Let's read verse 2 and verse 7. The tongue of the wise commends knowledge, but the mouths of fools pour out folly.

And then verse 7, the lips of the wise spread knowledge, not so the hearts of fools. Because it's not just what we say, it's not just what you communicate, that's important of course in itself, it's how you express these words, how you communicate.

[25 : 24] And this next couplet of verse 2 and the couplet of verse 7, you see just how important presentation is in your communication. I mean, you're a Christian, you want others to know Jesus.

You want others to know Jesus as you have known him. you want to commend even what is read of Jesus here in scripture, the knowledge of Jesus.

And, you know, you want, as the proverbs here indicate, you want to commend knowledge. We want to commend, you might say, that knowledge of salvation in Christ alone.

How are you going to make that presentation? Are you going to make Christ attractive? Or are you going to repel others, you know, with an expression, a tone even in your voice that, as one of my colleagues wrote, I think just the other day, when he was writing us, some preachers, he said, they preach with all the fervour of cabin crew giving a safety notice.

You know, no enthusiasm at all. And then, of course, there's the shouting, as he said, and the hope that sheer volume will compensate for lack of substance. How you present the message of salvation, and you present scripture, whether you're a preacher, whether you're one-to-one in your relationship with others.

[26 : 50] And yes, of course, those here who are preachers, we've all got different personalities. And we'll preach and we'll speak through our personalities. We all here have different personalities.

We thank God for the different personalities. And you'll witness through your personality, because God has gifted you that particular personality. I know some are animated in the pulpit, and some are more measured, some are more thoughtful.

But you know, whoever you are as a Christian, you must show that enthusiasm, you who know the Lord Jesus. And if you're going to commend Jesus, then surely even the way you present the gospel is important.

You're to make Christ attractive by being attractive yourself. Are you attractive in getting the message across? A few days ago, some of us here were at ETS, and we attended a lecture by the evangelist Roger Carswell.

And those are you who were there. You'll know how infectious his enthusiasm for the gospel was, his enthusiasm for the Lord Jesus. That was so evident. It wasn't just in what he said, but the way he spoke.

[28 : 06] And we couldn't but be enthused for the Savior. It really was infectious as we heard the servant of God proclaim the gospel. And if you know the Lord Jesus, you'll want to commend knowledge.

You'll want to commend that knowledge of Jesus. Well, show it. Show it in your words. Show it how you communicate, how you live. Let others see what Jesus means to you.

And so be enthusiastic. for the Savior. Because you see, there's the opposite kind of presentation that we're warned against. The presentation of fools.

The mouths, as we're told here, the mouths of fools pour out folly. In verse seven, the lips of the widespread knowledge, not so the hearts of fools. Who are the fools again?

The fools, those who will not seek the honour of God. Fools are those who are absorbed in the God of self. Fools are those who don't have the wisdom of others who are building their lives in the rock.

[29 : 11] It's the Lord Jesus. Yes, the wise will seek to attract others to Jesus through their enthusiasm for the Saviour. Fool does the opposite.

He'll utter words of foolishness. He'll utter, he'll speak in repulsive speech. He'll reveal where his heart truly is in relation to the Saviour. By his words, he'll show that he's utterly opposed to the Lord Jesus.

It's the kind of communication you see and read, for example, if you read anything, a militant atheist writes, for example, they pour forth speech that's folly, whether it's vocally or written speech.

There, you see the heart that hates Jesus because the words are so unattractive. The speech, the communication reveals a heart that's so utterly contrary to the grace of the Lord Jesus.

And that is the kind of speech that pours forth folly. So be wise. Be wise. You know, many a deceiver will come, a deceiver will come and try and draw people away from Jesus through devious words.

[30 : 28] Well, don't be swayed by people whose words appear plausible, but when they come out, you see that they're utter foolishness. I think it's the kind of person that David the psalm writer warned us against when he wrote in Psalm 55 verse 21, his speech was smooth as butter, yet war was in his heart.

His words were softer than oil, yet they were drawn swords. But we listen to the one whose very words, whose very enthusiasm for the Savior comes across clearly.

glory. So, listen to those who know the Lord Jesus and who will pour forth the grace of Jesus and do it by speech, by words, and will do it with joy and gladness.

and will see the transparent love of the person whose speech pours forth that wisdom and grace of God. So, ask yourself, is that me?

Is that you? Are you that wise person who will communicate in grace, who will communicate in love, who will communicate in a manner that draws people to the gospel?

[31 : 49] seek the more to be like Christ, to dwell in Him, yes, and to commune with Him. Seek the more to know Him, and in your knowing Him, to pour forth speech that shows that you have that intimate knowledge and love of the Savior, and do it to the glory of God and the praise of Him.

Amen. Let us pray. Lord, we give you thanks and praise for your mercies towards us, even in the exercise of speech.

We thank you, Lord, that through grace, not of ourselves, but through your grace, we are enabled to pour forth soft words, gracious words, gentle words.

But forgive us, Lord, for the times when we have used harsh words, when we have sought to hurt rather than heal. so, Lord, be with us, even in our very conversations we have after this service.

May they be to your praise and to your glory. Hear us as we call upon your name. Hear us in all these things as we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

[33 : 05] Amen. Well, let's close in Psalm 55. We were referring to that psalm just a moment ago. Psalm 55 on page 72.

And we're going to sing from verse 16 to 22. But as for me, I call to God. The Lord will save me now at evening, morning, and at noon in prayer to him I bow.

Distressed, I cry. He hears my voice. He ransoms me unharmed from battle waged by many foes who are against me. Are my God enthroned forevermore.

We'll hear and we'll repay those men no fear of God and never change their way. And so on 16 to 22 to God's praise.