

Wisdom for Living: Three Follies and Seven Abominations

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[0 : 00] Good morning, everyone. I have been given a text once more, this passage that was read as our first lesson from Proverbs chapter 6. You might like to turn it up, by the way.

I think it would help if you did. Page 530. And with the text, I've been given a title Three Follies and Seven Abominations. Well, from that title, and indeed from hearing the passage read, you can see that this is a passage of warning of some kind. But we are in the middle of what's going on here.

And it was worth a moment to stand back and see just what that is. The first nine chapters of the book of Proverbs, they form an introduction to the Proverbs themselves.

And the introduction is a speech, in the form of a speech, I mean, from a father to his son.

One imagines Solomon giving it to his son, one of his sons, perhaps earlier on rather than later on in his reign.

[1 : 43] Because, as you know, he slipped at the end. But this is an address, an admonition, very seriously stated, begging the young man to labor to learn wisdom and avoid folly.

And that is actually a basic lesson. It is the basic lesson, I suppose, of the book of Proverbs as a whole. And the reason that we have to take it seriously as a basic lesson, in the way that Solomon presents it as a basic lesson, is that none of us is naturally wise.

And this is an introduction to wisdom and to a book focused on wisdom. wisdom and to become wise means becoming different from what we start out as being.

We are not naturally wise. Naturally, we tend the other way. There are two ways of living and two sorts of people.

And this book of Proverbs is very explicit and strong about that. There is the wise person who seeks and finds wisdom.

[3 : 27] And there is the fool whose attitude actually was defined for us in the first paragraph of the book, which we looked at two weeks ago.

You look at the second half of verse 7 of chapter 1, and you see it written, Fools despise wisdom and instruction.

And that is the mark of the fool. Right the way through the book of Proverbs, He is constantly brought on stage for us to learn what not to do.

And he is presented as a person for whom there seems to be no need and no urgency about learning wisdom.

The good life is doing what comes naturally. And that, so the fool believes, is all that he needs to know.

[4 : 35] Well, that in truth is the way of the fool and is something that we should avoid.

And you could say from one standpoint that the whole book of Proverbs is written to exhort every single reader without exception, don't be a fool.

Don't shoot yourself in the foot by the way that you live. Don't take the path which will lead you to grief.

You don't want to come to grief. Learn that there are some things that God hates, and if those things that he hates mark your life and mine, well, we're going to be in trouble.

It's very basic teaching, isn't it? But that's what Proverbs is concerned to hammer away at, because Solomon believes, and knows what he's talking about, that losing the way of wisdom and following the way of the fool is so easy, so very easy.

[6 : 00] People do it without realizing what they're doing, and we need all of us to be exhorted in the strongest terms to seek wisdom and not to rest until we have, shall I say, our hands on it, or

better, perhaps I should say, until we have wrapped our minds around it.

Now, this chapter, the first half of chapter six that we've been given to work with, spotlights three forms of folly, as the title declares, and actually, as we shall see in a moment, the seven abominations are aspects of the third form of folly which we're going to meet here.

All these forms of folly come natural to somebody, not all of them to everybody, but each of them to some, and all of them have the same source which we'd better note at the beginning.

The source is thoughtlessness every time. Thoughtlessness, you know, was the origin of the original sin.

The world's trouble began with Eve not thinking about what the devil was saying to her, and then Adam not thinking about what Eve was saying to him.

[7 : 53] And thoughtlessness, alas, has become the way of mankind ever since. We must think about the consequences of the actions we take.

The second reading was making that point, remember? Jesus' story about the bailiff who was sacked, and he wanted to make sure that he would have somewhere to go after he was sacked. So as soon as he knew he was going to be sacked, he went round to his employer's debtors and invited them to rewrite the statement of debt so as to reduce it.

And he knew, because he'd thought out this strategy, you see, he knew that by doing that, he would make friends who would be happy to invite him in when his employer had kicked him out.

Well, that's the benefit of thinking of consequences, and that's what Jesus himself is underlining when he says at the end of the story, you see, the children of this world are wiser in their generation than the children of light.

[9 : 29] Paradoxical, but true. Worldly folk think more about the consequences of their actions and plan more for their future than Christians often do.

Well, I'm not going to pursue that. I'm sorry to have to say it, but it's a point that the point that Jesus is making and it's a point which in its own way Solomon is making too as he goes through what he presents to us in the first 19 verses of chapter 6.

Three forms of folly, what are they? The first occupies verses 1 through 5 and I've dared, I hope you won't think this irreverent, I have dared to give it the label Goofy Goodwill.

We all of us like feeling that we're being helpful to people and they're appreciating us. We all like to curry favor with people by doing things to oblige them.

And in the Old Testament world where there were no banks often problems at this point arose with regard to money.

[11 : 03] Persons without money ask someone to go bail for them and that is the form that the goofy goodwill that Solomon speaks about takes.

The goofiness is that the person who undertakes to be security for the guy who's got no funds, he doesn't think about the consequences of what he's letting himself in for.

And that's what makes his action goofy. It's not the goodwill, it's the thoughtlessness that is being fingered here as the folly.

And then in the next few verses, that's verses 6 through 11, you have Solomon turning his searchlight on self-indulgent laziness.

And again, we all of us like relaxing, flopping out, stretching out, taking it easy, letting things look after themselves.

[12 : 21] We all of us know that surely as a very attractive option which pops up in our lives again and again and again. but, says Solomon, rather grimly, a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest and, verse 11, poverty will come upon you like a robber and want like an armed man.

Because of your thoughtlessness, weakness, because of your failure to do things that needed to be done, you find yourself in economic trouble.

Well, there's the second form of folly which is being run before us. And then there's a third form that occupies verses 12 through 19 because verses 16 through 19 are reinforcing the original point, as we'll see in a minute.

But this is rather grimmer than the two forms of folly that we've looked at so far. You might feel that those two forms of harmless, folly, are not very harmful really.

Ah, but now look at this, verse 12. A worthless person, a wicked man, goes around with crooked speech, winks with his eyes, signals with his feet, points with his finger, and all the time with

perversed heart, verse 14, devises evil, continually sowing discord.

[14:20] Hmm, this is a fool to avoid if ever there was one. What's really the trouble here? Well, I suppose the trouble is that this person likes to feel, as I suppose we all of us in some situations like to feel, that in the situation we're dealing with, we're on top.

We're controlling the conversation, we're shaping the situation, we are in charge.

That's a very comfortable feeling, is it not? Now, this wicked person puts on an act in order to make sure that he is always running the show, that he's always giving people the impression that he's the wise man, he's the fool in fact, but he wants to give the impression of being the wise man and the friend, I'm your friend, people love to project that sense of the situation, and in fact, he's manipulating the situation, and so manipulating the person with whom he's dealing.

And in fact, says Solomon, what he's aiming to do all the time is exploit the situation to his own advantage, and one way in which he regularly does this is by sowing discord.

See that in verse 14? With perversed heart, he devises evil, continually sowing discord. That is setting people against each other.

[16:23] And then he's able to fish, you see, in troubled waters, as we say, and to exploit the situation very much to his advantage, which is what he planned to be doing all along.

Solomon's comment is sudden and forcible. It's there in verse 15. Therefore, calamity will come upon him suddenly.

In a moment, he'll be broken beyond healing. In some shape or form, the judgment of God is going to come upon him.

If you look now at verses 16 through 19, you see, this is another way in which Solomon pictures this person.

He does it here in terms of our various faculties and the things that we can do with them. and his point all along is that this way of behaving is something that the Lord hates.

[17:35] God has standards and God hates this kind of action. Look at it.

Verse 17. God hates haughty eyes. that's the pride and vainglory of the wicked person.

He hates a lying tongue where the purpose of the speech is simply to manipulate and get control of what's going on.

He hates hands that shed innocent blood. He hates a heart that devises wicked plans. He hates feet that make haste to run to evil.

In other words, he hates action that is intended to produce evil results for those who are the focus of it, though to bring some benefit to the doer of it.

[18:48] And then verse 19. God with that hates a false witness who breathes out lies. It's the same man in each of these details.

And that's made clear at the end of the verse when Solomon comes back to what he said in verse 14.

God hates one who sows discord among brothers. there's the repeat of that thought that you set people at odds with each other in order to be able to do something which otherwise you wouldn't be free to do.

I always think here of the way that back in the 1930s the Nazis generated hostility to Jews in the community so that they would be free to get rid of the Jews without anybody complaining.

It was a careful conscious strategy and a very wicked one and it illustrates just what Solomon is talking about here.

[20:11] So those are the three forms of folly. Now what are we to do about them? Practical question. Well the first thing we have to do is to learn to think about them, to think about life as such, think about the things we do and the consequences that may follow.

It's a quality of life that used to be called prudence. We don't very often hear the word prudence nowadays because to be honest there isn't very much prudence around.

We live in an era in which the culture that we're part of is very far from prudent. Well the Christian way, the way of wisdom is to learn to be prudent.

Think about the consequences of things that you were thinking of doing and take avoiding action to make sure that the evil which otherwise you're asking for won't come your way.

So what do you do? In the first case, you go to your neighbor for whom, on whose behalf you thought thoughtlessly entered into going bail, acting security, answering for him in financial matters, and you talk as earnestly as you can to get out of the obligation that you've taken on.

[22 : 01] Go hasten, verse three, plead urgently with your neighbor, give your eyes no sleep and your eyelids no slumber, and so save yourself like a gazelle from the hand of the hunter, because if you stay in that relationship, you will find yourself in trouble, you will find yourself, or you will find that a debtor, that the man's debtor, your friend's debtor, is coming down heavy on you, you've taken on the obligation, so you now must pay up, get out of it, as quickly as you can, says Solomon, that is not a wise way to live.

Now, what about the lazy person? Well, there, Solomon urges us to go to the ant, watch the ant at work, and get the message from the message you need from the ant's example.

And if you and I ever watch ants in an anthill, when I was a kid, I used to do this, and I expect that all of us have done it at some stage, well, it's very impressive watching the way that the ants constantly work, bringing in food to stock up with, and so to ensure that there'll be no famine in the anthill or anywhere near it.

Go to the ant, O sluggard, consider her ways and be wise. And he develops that thought over the next two verses. And then says, if you lie there sluggard, when you ought to be up and active, if you ask for a little more sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest, poverty will come upon you like a robber.

anticipate that and avoid it by working, learning to be a hard worker in the things in our life that need work, if, think of the consequences, if we're going to find ourselves in a comfortable life situation.

[24 : 51] And then thirdly, there's the dishonest depravity man.

What should he be doing? Well, Solomon doesn't say, but the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ tells us what should be said here.

And I'll say it now. Go to Christ. Repent of the deceptiveness into which you've slipped.

Repent of the crooked speech in which you've indulged. That's the phrase in verse 12. Repent. Receive forgiveness.

You ask for forgiveness. Repentance is a matter of turning your back on what it is that you've been doing in disobedience and folly.

[25 : 59] You turn your back on that and ask for forgiveness and for wisdom to go straight in future. Our Lord Jesus Christ in his mercy grants what we ask when we say that.

And that's a word for every single one of us I'm sure. Every day of our lives. For none of us perfect and we all of us slip into foolish ways that we do need to repent of.

But then surely you knew that and I need not dwell on it at any length. Now this is a warning against folly.

Not just for young men but for all ages. Let it teach us realism about our own weaknesses. What do I need to repent of?

What do I need to change in the way that I live? Let it teach us realism about God's standards. God hates people who exploit other people.

[27 : 17] That's the word that Solomon uses. It's a strong word. Yes it is. God has standards. Never lose sight of them. And then thirdly let what we've said teach us something realistic about God's mercy.

Something realistic? Well yes. You and I can only live by being forgiven daily because we slip behaviorally every day of our lives.

That's the reality that we're to take to heart at this point. God's mercy through Christ is such that we may live through being forgiven daily as we need daily forgiveness or else we're lost.

So practice wisdom brothers and sisters. That's the lesson here. Think about these things and it comes to mind that Jesus Jesus on the last night of his fellowship with his disciples said to them apropos of the teaching he was giving if you know these things blessed are you if you do them and no preacher can say better than that.

God bless us. Amen.