

Proverbs 23-11-15b

We'll pick up our study now in Proverbs chapter two. And once again, I can't imagine anything more practical than this. So as we look at this section, if our anger is known at once, if something creates a disturbance, apoplectic negative reaction, and we can't contain it, we can't suppress ourselves, we can't hold our tongue, we can't keep from grabbing something and smashing it, we're a fool.

And that should be a warning sign. That's a dashboard light saying, go check the oil, check the coolant, turn the engine off before you go anywhere or do anything and make sure you're not a fool. So 10 chapters of all of the advantages of wisdom and disadvantages of foolishness.

How do we know if we have inadvertently fallen into the fool category? Well, here is the description. Apply it to me, myself, and I. So if I'm just always right in my own eyes, every time I get into a debate or a discussion or an argument or a difference of opinion with somebody near at hand, a coworker, family member, spouse, child, parent, if I'm just always right, I better go check that I'm not a fool because nobody is always right. But a fool is always right in his own eyes because the heart is deceitful and desperately wicked.

And the way seems right. But if I'm always right, if nobody ever finds something by way of a useful correction, by way of a helpful observation, I need to do this check. Now, I may in fact be right in that particular occasion and the other person was in fact wrong, but doing the check is what counts.

It is like 1 Timothy 2, praying for those who are in authority so that we can lead a peaceable and quiet life. The humility of recognizing God's ordained authorities, it's an exercise in humility. It doesn't even matter so much what you pray.

It doesn't say pray for Nero that God will change his heart and he will become merciful to the Christians and stop using them for human torches. It doesn't say pray that they will pass good laws and that the centurions will go easy on our brethren. It says pray for those in authority so that we can be godly and reverent, so that we can be peaceable and quiet.

And our life that is not violently angry, not obstreperous, not divisive, not corrosive will shine as a light and people will be motivated and drawn to that light. And if there's any hope of them seeking and asking and knocking, finding God, even as believers finding the ways of God, finding the peace of God that maybe they have lost by distraction, the peaceable and quiet life in reverence and godliness, that's what is going to bring it about. Not me venting wrath, not me slandering others, not me playing and being the fool.

So I've got to focus on me. We have to focus on us. The old cartoon, you know, it's not weenie weenie wiki.

It's we have met the enemy and it's us. So the way of a fool is right in his own eyes. Let's watch for that.

Am I too sure of too many things? I had a instructor evaluation to that effect at the Naval Academy and it really struck home. I kept that page. It's in my Naval Academy picture album.

It's a full page, you know, saying some complimentary things about my academic performance. And then I've loved this professor to death. He said, at the same time, Mr. Hall seems too sure of too many things.

Will such certainty limit him? Fantastic observation. I have endeavored to benefit from it from that day to this. Too sure of too many things.

And I was listening to good Bible teaching at the time, at the ripe old age of 21 and 22. I thought I had everything figured out, knew how everything worked. Too sure of too many things.

Such certainty can be a limitation. Will it limit him? Question mark. That's how the evaluation ended.

A better gift could not have been given to me. I revisit it. There's hardly a week that goes by that I don't think about it.

When I start feeling really sure that I've got something parsed, I've got it analyzed, I've got it evaluated. I know what it is. I know what's important.

I know what can be discarded. I've got it all figured out. Such certainty can be a limitation.

The way of a fool is right in his own eyes. He who heeds counsel, that's wisdom. Listen to criticism.

We've got many verses of scripture that we don't have time to look at that talk about faithful are the wounds of a friend. Sometimes we need criticism and it's a wound, it hurts. But it's coming from a friend, that it's well-intentioned, even if it's not always valid, it's well-intentioned.

So what is my reaction? Am I gonna vent my wrath? Am I going to have my wrath known at once, verse 16? Or am I going to have prudence? And this prudence is such an interesting word because it is arum, A-R-U-M. It is sometimes translated crafty. In the old King James, in Genesis chapter three, verse one, it describes the serpent and it's translated subtil, subtle.

In the old King James, it's S-U-B-T-I-L. The serpent was more subtil, it's arum. And if you remember our Genesis study, oh, it was so fascinating in chapter three because you get down to verse seven and once they partake of the fruit, the man and the woman both knew that they were arum.

It's a variation of the very same word, naked. And they're both derived, these two slightly different forms are derived from aram, which means to be open, to be smooth, to be bare, something that is laid bare. So if you are prudent, if you're wise, reality and truth are laid bare.

You see things for what they really are instead of them being concealed and hidden and inscrutable or we hide them from ourselves. Arum, prudent, even crafty, aware of how things work and what will get things done and what won't. The serpent knew how he could get to Eve.

He would appeal to her vanity, to her appreciation for beauty as a distraction. Remember in verse six, when the woman, that's five and six along in there of chapter three of Genesis, the woman saw that the fruit was good to look upon and desirable to make one wise. And that word wise is interesting as well.

We have it in Proverbs. It is shakal, S-H-A-K-A-L. And in Proverbs 10, 19, the one who restrains his lips, the woman thought she could be wise by eating the fruit and disobeying God.

But in 10, 19 of Proverbs, the one who restrains his lips is shakal, is wise. In Proverbs 10, verse five, you have the one who gathers in summer is a son who acts wisely, is shakal. In Proverbs chapter one, verse three, stating the purpose of this collection, it is to give instruction in wise behavior, in ha-shakel, from the same word.

Proverbs does what the fruit could not do for Eve. It was her goal, but she went about it the wrong way through disobedience. You find it in Proverbs 14, 35.

There's favor toward a wise servant, a shakal servant, and so on. You can look this up. It's your Strong's numbers 79, 19.

Shakal, actually, S-A-K-A-L, shakal. First use is Genesis 3, 6, about Eve. And the next time it's used is at the end of Genesis.

Remember when Jacob crosses his hands, blessing Joseph's sons, Jacob is crossing his hands, blessing Ephraim and Manasseh, and he crosses his hands, and he did it wittingly, it says in the King James, with wisdom, with practical understanding, because he knew the difference between Ephraim and Manasseh, and the elder would serve the younger, and so on, as much as has been the case with his own brother. Anyway, that's what we're looking at here. So you have the prudent man who, instead of letting his words flood and his wrath be evident, it's self-control.

This is the whole principle of self-control. Turn with me to Proverbs 30, verse 12. This is gonna be so great when we get there.

Proverbs 30 are the words of Agur, and it'll take us probably a whole session just to get through verse one, when it says, the words of Agur, the son of Jaqay, his utterance, this man declared to Ithiel, to Ithiel and Ukal, oh boy, I got lost for an hour in verse one, but that's not our subject right now. We're going down to verse 12. Verse 12 of Proverbs 30, there is a generation that is pure in its own eyes, yet is not washed from its filthiness.

Think about our day. Think about the generation in which we find ourselves, pure in its own eyes, what a danger. Look around, watch the news, look at people demonstrating on any given side of an issue, whether it's the abortion issue, whether it's Palestine, Israel, whether it's Russia, Ukraine, whether it is this candidate or this piece of legislation, this way forward or this way backward, this continuing resolution or this economic devastation, whatever it is, look at people who are so sure they're right, they don't even listen to the other side.

When the other side is talking, all they're doing is biding their time until they can say their piece. They will shout down the other side. They'll bash the other side with a megaphone and kill them if they can.

They will tear down their posters. They will burn their flag. They're so sure they're right.

This used to be in isolated pockets. There would be an issue in a place at a time that would be characterized by this over-the-top zealotry and bigotry and intense sense of righteous indignation. Do you notice that now this is global? It's global.

Find a place in the world where there is ironic discourse. You can't even find it on TV anymore. They used to have firing line and there would be a genteel discussion from widely differing points of view, but it was courteous, it was respectful.

You think back even, there was a vice presidential debate back, I believe it was the 2000 election. And I think Dick Cheney was one and Lee Berman might've been the other. And they sat down and the vice presidential candidate debate was respectful.

There were smiles, there were gentle jabs, but it was ironic. Its tone was elevated and it was useful because it didn't degenerate into a mud wrestling fist fight. Where is that today? You've got adherence to this or that cause, this or that candidate, this or that issue.

And there is blind viciousness toward anyone who contradicts or opposes. There is a generation, Proverbs 30, verse 12, that is pure in its own eyes. We're always gonna be pure in our own eyes because the heart is deceitful and desperately wicked.

And the heart evaluating the heart is always gonna give two thumbs up and a grade of a

hundred. It is not washed from its filthiness and can't recognize it, doesn't know it, won't admit it when it is pointed out. That's just another part of what I push away and what I defend against and what I will squash and I'll make a counter accusation.

And I will accuse others of what I myself am doing. You see this all over the place. People that are gonna lie and prevaricate and spread disinformation are the first to accuse the other side of lying, prevaricating, and spreading disinformation, as they are actively recruiting big tech and government agencies to squash the truth and to de-platform it and de-incentivize it and de-legitimize it so that you can't find it no matter how hard you search, looking for balance, looking for evidence, looking for science, and then turn right around and accuse the others.

Election interference after having already accused someone else of not accepting the results of an election. And these that were refusing to believe that Mr. Trump got elected in 2016 and said it's not legit, he's not a legitimate president. There's hours of video of these people saying, Mr. Trump is not legitimate.

That wasn't a legitimate election. He didn't win the popular vote. The Electoral College is a farce and we ought to do away with it.

He's not a legitimate president. Person after person after person. He's not real, he's not valid.

He shouldn't be listened to. We shouldn't follow him. We got to do something to get rid of him.

And they spent the next four years doing everything they could to engineer his overthrow by means fair or foul. But then when there are accusations that the 2020 election wasn't on the up and up, how dare you even suggest you're an enemy of democracy? Anybody who even speaks these words should be silenced, deplatformed, deleted, shouted down, canceled, locked up. You carry a sign to that effect, we'll put you in prison.

That's what this is talking about. Now, this is a generation. Whatever side you take in these issues, there is a generation that is not washed from its filthiness.

Notice the context of this. Look at verse eight. Two things I request of you in verse seven.

Deprive me not before I die. Remove falsehood and lies far from me. Give me neither poverty nor riches.

This is so intensively true. Give me neither poverty nor riches. Feed me with the food allotted to me, lest I be full and deny you and say, who is the Lord? Or lest I be poor and steal and profane the name of my God.

But look at verse 11. There's a generation that curses its father and does not bless its mother, repudiating the values of your parents' generation. They were wrong, they were misled, they were brainwashed, don't know what they're talking about, went to war when they shouldn't have, stuck by allies that they shouldn't have, their politics were wrong, their social customs were wrong, everything they did were wrong.

I found two or three things, so I'm gonna dismiss the entire generation. I curse that generation and I don't bless them, my father and mother. Pure in its own eyes, not washed from its filthiness.

Look at verse 13. There's a generation, oh, how lofty are their eyes and their eyelids are lifted up. This is pride, this is self-satisfaction.

I am going my own way, creating my own standards. I've got it all figured out. I am too sure of too many things.

And look at verse 14. This generation has teeth like swords and whose fangs are like knives. To devour the poor from off the earth and the needy from among men.

This is so interesting. We have never had such a rash. They talk about how bad the preceding generations in America were.

We have never had the epidemic of homelessness, of poverty, of hunger, of deprivation, of substance-induced disease and disability that we have under the generation that is wise in its own eyes and says, take this medicine, follow this path, adopt this policy. We've got it figured out. Socialism is the way.

Sponsoring people so that they don't work is the way. Letting people exist without benefit of marriage, encouraging people to dwell on the streets and don't lock them up, let criminals out. All of these policies, all of these views are cursing the father and dismissing the mother, not blessing the mother, wise in its own eyes, not washed from its filthiness, pure in its own eyes and yet completely corrupt.

And in talking a great fight about the poor and the oppressed, it ends up devouring the poor and the needy with their words. Their words destroy the poor and needy. They make great protestations of everything from the war on poverty back in the 60s to social programs that more and more money is thrown at them and there's more and more people not benefiting.

There are more and more people hungry, more and more people in debt that is impossible to overcome, more and more people disabled and deprived. And so, well, what will we do? Well, let's let more poor people in, let's let more homeless people in, let's let more people in that have no job, no skills, no place to stay. We'll just hope that kind people in the community will absorb them and care for them.

Look at verse 15, the leech has two daughters, give and give. This is the leech telling other people, my offspring is gonna suck the life out of you. The leech has two daughters.

Those leeches are gonna go out and suck you dry and suck somebody else dry. Give, give, you ought to do more. What's the matter with you? Why are you not following our policy and our wisdom? And they themselves are leeches and they are producing leeches who are gonna do nothing but suck everyone dry.

And then it goes on to talk about the things that are never satisfied. We'll see this when we get to Proverbs 30, but this is a part of folly. This is a part of folly.

If we're busy telling everybody else what they ought to do instead of concentrating on what we ought to do, if we are the leech with two daughters saying, give, give, there's something wrong. So this is lacking in self-control. We saw that in verse 16.

You can see it in verse 20, verse three, Proverbs 20, verse three, it is honorable for a man to stop striving. When a debate, when a quarrel sparks and starts heating up, the honorable thing is to be the one that stops it. Not getting the last word, not throwing the last tomato.

It is honorable for a man to stop striving since any fool can start a quarrel. Any fool can start a quarrel. It takes somebody wise to stop it.

This is Proverbs 20, verse three. So I look at myself. Don't be busy saying, you know, I know somebody just like that.

I want to look at me. Do I start quarrels or do I find an ironic way to exit stage left and not keep that going? Change the subject, get away from it. Don't be a source of division and strife, heat rather than light.

Proverbs 19, 11. The discretion of a man makes him slow to anger and his glory is to overlook a transgression. You take the hit, you take one for the team.

You don't go beat somebody over the head with it. The discretion of a man makes him slow to anger. A fool's wrath pours out in our verse 16 here.

Discretion implements self-control. So what am I like? Can I look back over my previous days, my previous conversations, my previous interactions, the trend and the pattern in my relationships? What kind of person am I? The fool lacks self-control and is hot-tempered, keeps these things going and running. You know what happens when you grudge-bearing and so on.

The fool is, in verse seven of chapter 24, wisdom is too lofty for a fool. Dad, I don't have time to listen to that. Don't explain it to me.

He does not open his mouth in the gate. I don't wanna, you know, the gate is the place of judgment where the facts are ascertained and true judgments are rendered. Dad, I don't have time for all of that.

I saw something that just made me cringe. They stuck a microphone in the face of a young person who was waving a sign for free Palestine and from the river to the sea and the rest of it. And so they asked this girl a question and they said, so who are you in favor of? And she said, I wanna help the people of Palestine.

Palestine. Very clear, no mistake. Didn't even know the name of the area.

I'm on the side of Palestine, like Hindustan or Pakistan or Afghanistan, Palestine. Wisdom is too lofty for a fool. If you don't know your facts, don't force an opinion.

Don't wave it like a flag, wear it like a crown, post it on a sign. Chapter 15, verse 14, the heart of him who has understanding seeks knowledge. Get the right information, pursue the facts, keep digging until you get both sides.

The mouth of fools feeds on foolishness. And notice it's in the mouth, not in the heart. He's just chewing it, it's like bubble gum.

Foolishness is bubble gum for the fool, might be a modern colloquial way to render this. The mouth of the fool chews the bubble gum of foolishness where the heart of him who has understanding seeks knowledge. Chapter 17, verse 10, this is a great one.

You want a refrigerator magnet, you want a verse for the day. Rebuke is more effective for a wise man than a hundred blows for a fool. If we're wise, rebuke is effective.

Rebuke is more effective for a wise man than a hundred blows for a fool. You can't beat sense into a fool. You can give him the 40 stripes two and a half times, it's still not going to do them as much good as a word fitly spoken like apples of gold and pictures of silver to a wise person.

Even when it's a rebuke, wounds of a friend. Chapter 18, verse two, is this a common theme? Is this important? Is this something that is essential for our self-diagnosis so that we can benefit from those first 10 chapters? A fool has no delight in understanding, Proverbs 18, two, only in expressing his own heart. Just waiting for you to stop talking long enough to express my view, my opinion, my evaluation, my thought.

Just not really even hearing, your blows don't land. Just if you'll pause for half a second, they're going to start talking. A fool has no delight in understanding, but in expressing his own heart.

That's the gratification. Not even in winning you over to their side, which seldom if ever happens. Certainly you don't win wise people over.

Proverbs 26, five. Remember that in 26, you have the two, you've got to make a choice. If you answer a fool according to his folly, you might end up being like him.

So don't answer a fool according to his folly, lest you become like him, or answer a fool according to his folly, verse five of 26, lest he be wise in his own eyes. If there is a chance, this wise in his own eyes is an endemic quality of foolishness. And if there's a way that you can answer the fool to address that notion, maybe you can quote a fact that they were unaware of.

Oh, I didn't know that. And a receptive person can shift from folly to wisdom by a word fitly spoken, by truth delivered in love, tactfully, gracefully, non-confrontationally, in hope of informing and bringing someone along. All of us were foolish in some way, somewhere, somehow, and someone gave us the gospel.

Someone let us know what the word of God says. Someone helped us see the light and see the path and improve and get to where we are. It is possible to answer a fool according to his folly so that he doesn't persist in being wise in his own eyes.

But sometimes you can tell that possibility is just not open. Maybe previous experience, I tried answering and all I ended up was being like him. So I'm no longer gonna try that.

And you get to verse 11 of Proverbs 26. As a dog returns to its own vomit, so a fool repeats his folly. And if somebody has a superficial repentance and then they go back to doing the very same thing, that's when you know not to continue to answer them according to their folly, you'll be like them.

He returns to his folly and you're gonna be returning to the folly of trying to talk him out of it. So you can put verse 11 with those. Proverbs 28, 26, he who trusts in his own heart is a fool.

How many times does the Bible have to tell us this? Don't take your feeling of rightness as a guarantee that you're right. Our compass has a magnet stuck to the side. Our truth detector is bent and broken in our heart.

He who trusts in his own heart is a fool. This is why all of this Disney-esque pablum that gets fed to little kids, follow your heart. If it feels good, do it.

Don't quit, don't let anybody discourage you. If your heart is telling you it's right, Debbie Boone, Ken has a great alternate name for her song, You Light Up My Life, but there's a wincing line in that that says, it can't be wrong if it feels so right. It can't be wrong if it feels right in my heart.

Oh my gosh, facepalm, gobsmack. It's entirely wrong when it feels so right. Often, the fool trusts in his own heart.

Whoever walks wisely, that's the path of deliverance. The wise walk, you will discern and have the power to walk out the door of deliverance, to experience genuine salvation. That's what this section is about.

So when you get to this one who speaks in verse 18, like the piercings of a sword, if we find that our conversation inflicts damage on others, this word for piercing through is just fascinating. It is used to thrust, to stab, to pierce. It means to go right through a thing.

You remember Abimelech? I'll just give you one example. Back in Judges 9, Abimelech is the son of Gideon. And you got this whole thing with Shechem and Abimelech wants to be king and he rules for three years and he's like a little despot, tin pot king.

And the people of Thebes oppose him. And so he goes there and he gets all the people of Thebes go into this tower. And so Abimelech says, I'm gonna light this on fire and kill all these people.

And this is Judges 9. And so he approaches too close. He's trying to set the wood and the doorway and stuff on fire. And there's a woman up there who drops a millstone on his head.

This is kind of an allusion later on. You know, you have stones dropped on you from a height. That's not a good way to die.

And you remember when David wants to send Uriah up close to the wall and Joab says, do you remember what happens when people get too close? Stones get dropped on them. Well, so this woman drops the upper millstone on Abimelech and gives him a fatal concussion. It crushes his skull, but he's still alive.

So he says to his armor bearer, pull my sword and thrust me through lest it be said I died killed by a woman. That would just be a huge, you know, indignity to bear after he's dead that he was killed by a woman dropping a rock on his head. And so his armor bearer does what Saul's would not do and thrust him through.

And when you go to first Kings, I think it's around chapter 25 or so, when Saul at the battle of Mount Gilboa is mortally wounded and he tells his armor bearer, run me through. It's this same word, piercing. Run through with a sword, delivering a fatal wound.

This is a wound, you know, words come back. The impact of what you say creates a permanent injury, a long lasting, devastating, piercing through. That's what this verse is talking about.

And that very same word, the piercing, is in Judges 9 and in Saul at Mount Gilboa, death by being run through. Saul's armor bearer won't do it. He's afraid that he'll be charged with killing the king.

If people had a armor bearer that said, yeah, fine, no problem. But Saul's won't do it. And so Saul has to fall on his own sword to die.

But, and there's some echoing here. This was all history at the point that this piercing through is used in this collection of Proverbs. So the speaking like the piercings of a sword, but the tongue of the wise does the opposite, restores, brings to health, builds up, intensifies healthy relationship, doesn't create this acrimonious, divisive situation.

The truthful lip will be established forever. When it says forever, this is interesting because you would think it might be la'olam, but it's la'ad, which means until whenever. It starts now, la'olam, you start thinking about the far distant future.

But this, the truthful lip, it's establishment now, and it endures. This has more of the idea of enduring forever than it will still be happening in the future. But a lying tongue is but for a moment.

And when we are the victims of a lying tongue, we think, you know, this is a momentary light affliction. I would rather be earning that eternal weight of glory. So let me have a truthful lip, even when others are speaking falsehood.

And in verse 20, deceit is in the heart of those who devise evil. They're operating on a false basis, false assumptions, bad information, thinking that what they do is going to win them a beneficial outcome. It's intrinsically a lie.

And this is what's going to happen to those who reject the truth and believe the lie. Those in Romans 1, who suppress the truth and unrighteousness, God gives them over to the lie. And being rooted and grounded in the truth, as we've seen in 1 Timothy, is so important.

Our perceptions, our evaluations, our conversations, our interactions, and our relationships need to be built on truth, not deceit. Deceit is in the heart of those who devise evil. If you've got deceit in your heart, you're going to consciously and unconsciously devise evil.

Your plans and purposes, what you decide to do, what we decide to say, what we decide to pursue, our goals and values and priorities will all be destructive. They will be evil because we're starting from a false assumption. Look back at Eve in Genesis 3. Verse 21 is wonderful.

No grave trouble will overtake the righteous, but the wicked will be filled with evil. This word overtake, I won't give you the Hebrew, except to say that it's in the pu'al. And the pu'al is a causative passive.

It's a real interesting stem in Hebrew. You don't find it that often. But this word in the pu'al is an allusion and a reference to God.

No grave trouble will be encountered, or the righteous will not be allowed to encounter a grave trouble. Our troubles, if we are righteous, are carefully calibrated so that God works them together for good. And God will not allow us to meet if we are the righteous.

He will not allow us to meet with, and this word basically means to meet or to encounter, not so much to be overtaken as God will send it by another road. The Herod soldiers trying to find the wise men and they departed by another way. That's what God will do for the righteous.

Trouble is looking for you, but God will send you back another way. That's actually what this means. It's all in the form of this one word.

God will ensure that there is no difficulty that overtakes us that doesn't have a way of escape. By escape, meaning coping, we're either delivered out, delivered through, or delivered from. But God is involved.

This pu'al is a reference to the divine presence in our life. God won't let anything happen to us. We will not meet with anything that isn't a part of his plan and purpose.

But the wicked will be filled. And this is the playroh of the Old Testament. This is the Hebrew word that means filled up.

You can't get away from it. It's everywhere. You're soaked in it.

You're full to the brim. When people say you're full of it, well, you're full of evil. Anything you do, squeeze you, nothing but evil comes out.

Lying lips are an abomination to the Lord. And once again, this idea of abomination or pleasantness and being pleasing and being a delight, God is in and around everything that we see in this section. He monitors, he knows if our speech is true or false, if our hearts are true or false, if we are pursuing the good or pursuing evil, if we are a fool or if we are wise.

And God intentionally arranges outcomes and consequences for the fool and for the righteous. So it pays to be wise and not foolish. And you can take this section of Proverbs to the bank.

It is so tightly woven, so intense, so practical. It's worth a look. And I hope that from now on, when we read these verses, they won't spin along like a pastiche or a quilt, but that they will speak to us with meaning and with conviction and with purpose.

Let's close here in a word of prayer. Father, thank you for granting to us the presence and power of your Holy Spirit and the presence and power of your word. We pray that in the hands of the Holy Spirit, these words will accomplish their purpose, that we can be wise and not foolish.

We can reflect your glory and the glory of the Lord Jesus now and in the ages to come.
We ask it in Jesus' name, amen.