

The Lord's Sovereignty and Human Folly

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[0 : 0 0] we took a one month break from the Proverbs series and during that time I also took my paternity leave so it's been a while since I've been back to preach and I want to thank you all for being so supportive and releasing during that time and we definitely needed that time for him to recuperate and for us to get used to the new rhythm of our family even though we're still not quite used to it it's a joy and an honor to preach God's word to you this evening we're in Proverbs chapter 17 so please turn with me there Proverbs 17 verse 7 to 28 fine speech is not becoming to a fool still less is false speech to a prince a bribe is like a magic stone in the eyes of the one who gives it wherever he turns he prospers whoever covers an offense seeks love but he who repeats a matter separates close friends a rebuke goes deeper into a man of understanding than a hundred blows into a fool an evil man seeks only rebellion and a cruel messenger will be sent against him let a man meet a she-bear robbed of her cubs rather than a fool in his folly if anyone returns evil for good evil will not depart from his house the beginning of strife is like letting out water so quit before the quarrel breaks out he who justifies the wicked and he who condemns the righteous are both alike an abomination to the Lord why should a fool have money in his hand to buy wisdom when he has no sense a friend loves at all times and a brother is born for adversity one who lacks sense gives a pledge and puts up security in the presence of his neighbor whoever loves transgression loves strife he who makes his door high seeks destruction a man of crooked heart does not discover good and one with a dishonest tongue falls into calamity he who sires a fool gets himself sorrow and the father of a fool has no joy a joyful heart is good medicine but a crushed spirit dries up the bones the wicked accepts a bribe in secret to pervert the ways of justice the discerning sets his face toward wisdom but the eyes of a fool are on the ends of the earth a foolish son is a grief to his father and bitterness to her who bore him to impose a fine on a righteous man is not good nor to strike the noble for their uprightness whoever restrains his words has knowledge and he who has a cruel spirit is a man of understanding even a fool who keeps silent is considered wise when he closes his lips he is deemed intelligent this is God's holy and authoritative word let's pray heavenly father we come to your word to which is before our face which the word the wisdom of God that you have revealed to us and we want to humbly listen to hear your voice

to align ourselves to it so please God speak to us address us as your people as your children that we might wise up and live in accordance with your will in Jesus name we pray amen biblically speaking a fool is someone who does not acknowledge God someone who lacks sense with regard to God so the fool says in his heart it says in Psalm 14 1 there is no God that's the definition Bible's definition of a fool and that fundamental folly of not acknowledging God makes them foolish in all their dealings with other people it's like a crossword puzzle in a crossword puzzle the vertical and horizontal lines are interrelated so that if you get a word a vertical line wrong it's going to throw off the entire puzzle all the horizontal lines that come off of that vertical line you're going to get wrong similarly if we don't get our vertical relationship right with God you're going to get the horizontal relationship with other people wrong and that's what this passage is about it's about human folly and some variation of the word fool occurs nine times in this passage and it teaches us that human folly because it is anti-God it's profoundly anti-social anti-humanity and our world teams with fools we were all once fools but how should a wise person relate to them and interact with them that's the question this passage answers and it teaches us that those who trust in the sovereign judgment of the Lord can be loving and self-controlled even in the face of folly even in the face of human folly that's the main point we're going to look at folly in speech and folly in justice and folly in relationships and learn how to deal with each situation so first verses 7 and 9 introduces us to three different kinds of fools that I just mentioned that the rest of the passage will expand upon so first folly in speech then justice then relationships and the three are interrelated as we'll see it says in

verse 7 and 9 fine speech is not becoming to a fool still less is false speech to a prince a bribe is like a magic stone in the eyes of the one who gives it wherever he turns he prospers whoever covers an offense seeks love but he who repeats a matter separates close friends so first on this list is the following speech it says fine speech is not becoming to a fool still less is false speech to a prince fine speech eloquent speech well spoken speech it doesn't fit a fool it's like a gold ring in a pig's snout as one proverb puts it or it's like tying a garbage bag with a little bow tie it doesn't fit the fool is better suited for silence but that's not all it says still less is false speech to a prince if fine speech is not becoming of a fool then it's even more the case that false speech is not becoming of a prince a prince doesn't necessarily refer to a monarch it's someone who has a noble bearing a noble character so later in verse 26 the same Hebrew word is translated as the noble which is parallel to a righteous man so Solomon is assuming here that it's insufficient for a member of the royal family or the aristocracy or a ruler to be noble simply by virtue of their birth or heritage rather they should be noble in their character his noble character should match his noble station and it's unbecoming of a noble person to lie even more than fine speech is unfitting for a fool false speech is unfitting for a wise person brothers and sisters we must remember this as the children of God we are children of the God who never lies as Titus 1-2 says false speech is beneath your dignity whenever you are tempted to lie in order to get the better of a situation or someone remember how degrading it is for you to lie we ought to instead live in a manner worthy of our identity in Christ and if the fact that false speech is unbecoming of our character and it isn't enough that if that's not enough of a motivator for us verse 20 warns us of the consequence of false speech a man of crooked heart does not discover good and one with a dishonest tongue falls into calamity usually people lie in order to get out of trouble right or to avoid trouble but this is short sighted because this proverb tells us that in the long run in light of God's sovereign rule it's the dishonest tongue that falls into calamity verses 27 and 28 continue to address folly in speech it says whoever restrains his words has knowledge and he who has a cool spirit is a man of understanding even a fool who keeps silent is considered wise when he closes his lips he is deemed intelligent so these verses call for a cool spirit and closed lips in the engineer east as we do now people often use the words hot and cool to refer to people's temperaments a hot spirit person is a short tempered and hot headed person and a cool spirit person is a patient and even keeled person and so a cool spirit and closed lips together represent self control and restrained speech and we have to understand this proverb in context because this passage throughout speaks of fools who lie to get their way fools who pervert justice fools who bring grief to their parents and others in authority their close friends as well and even in the face of such human folly it says we are to be restrained in our words and self controlled but where does such restraint come from according to verses 27 and 28 this restraint is the characteristic of the person who has knowledge a person who has understanding and what is knowledge and understanding proverbs chapter 2 5 to 6 said that if we heed the words of this book then you will understand the fear of the lord and find the knowledge of god for the lord gives wisdom from his mouth comes knowledge and understanding so what is knowledge and understanding then they are in proverbs the knowledge and understanding of god and his word it begins with the fear of the lord living before the presence of under the authority of and for the glory of god that's what it means to live with the fear of the lord this knowledge of god and expectation of his sovereign judgment is what restrains our words and makes us self controlled even in the face of human folly we don't need to vent because of god's vengeance we don't need to fight because god defends us we don't need to win the argument because of god's judgment and he says even a fool who keeps silent is considered wise this proverb might be behind the aphorism often misattributed to abraham lincoln quote it is better to remain silent at the risk of being thought a fool than to talk and remove all doubt of it if even a fool can be thought wise by being silent how much more should a wise person hold his tongue in the face of folly this doesn't mean that we should never speak up of course verse 10 qualifies this it says a rebuke goes deeper into a man of understanding than a hundred blows into a fool it implies that we should rebuke a man of understanding the bible calls us to exhort one another to correct one another in god's people among god's people so the person who will listen and gain knowledge we ought to offer rebuke because wise person is suited for that but a fool on the other hand is suited it says only for a beating it says a hundred blows that's hyperbole of course the old testament never stipulates such steep punishment but even when a fool receives the proverbial hundred blows the teaching does not penetrate it doesn't go very deep into the fool one the 19th century

English pastor Charles Bridges illustrated the comparison this way he says a simple word of rebuke was enough to make king David repent in 2 Samuel 12 just a look from Jesus' eyes was enough to make Peter repent after his denial of Jesus in Luke chapter 22 but the hundred blows a hundred blows wasn't enough to teach the Egyptian Pharaoh in Exodus chapter 9 the wise person knows not to waste his breath he knows better than to rebuke a fool in his folly this is what verse 16 is speaking of why should a fool have money in his hand to buy wisdom when he has no sense Proverbs sometimes uses the imagery of buying wisdom to tell us to cherish it more than silver and gold it's asking us why should a fool be able to buy wisdom when he has no mind to learn it what's the use of giving

[14 : 40] Shakespeare to an illiterate person what's the use of playing Mozart for a deaf person a fool will not grasp wisdom so the wise person knows when to spare his words so that's what Solomon has to say about folly in speech but in verse 8 he introduces a second kind of folly folly in justice a bribe is like a magic stone in the eyes of the one who gives it wherever he turns he prospers like it or not bribes are an integral part of how society runs throughout much of the world and it works works like a charm money talks to the one who gives it it's like a magic stone but note the important phrase in the eyes of a bribe is like a magic stone in the eyes of the one who gives it that phrase reveals Solomon's true attitude toward bribes because frequently throughout

Proverbs that phrase in the eyes of is used to describe the fool it warns us in chapter 3 verse 7 not to be wise in our own eyes it says that the way of a fool is right in his own eyes Proverbs 12 15 it says in Proverbs 16 2 all the ways of a man are pure in his own eyes but the Lord ways the spirit the briber is wise in his own eyes he thinks he knows a secret that others are ignorant of his ways are pure in his own eyes and he is unaware that the Lord will bring his actions to judgment the Bible consistently condemns bribery verse 23 later says in our chapter the wicked accepts a bribe in secret to pervert the ways of justice justice is perverted when someone who can afford to give a bribe and is willing to stoop to giving a bribe is able to manipulate justice because then people who cannot afford it and people who are too principled to give it are deprived of justice there's a reason why bribes are given in secret even the apostle

Paul in Acts chapter 24 when he was being held in prison by governor Felix it says that Felix hoped that money would be given by Paul so he sent for him often and conversed with him in hopes that Paul would pay him a bribe bribery was normal and expected in that culture but Paul never pays that bribe instead he stays in prison for two more years and instead you know what Paul does he says in Acts 24 25 he says that Paul reasoned with Felix about righteousness self control and the coming judgment a bribe is often effective when it is used but this doesn't make it right verse 26 says to impose a fine on a righteous man is not good nor to strike the noble for their uprightness the briber ignores the sovereignty of God over human folly he does what he sees fit with his own eyes and not what is fitting before the eyes of

God and for that he will pay a much dearer price than his bribe on judgment day so this is how we are to deal with fools who pervert justice verses 11 to 15 go into greater detail about that so please follow along with me verses 11 to 15 an evil man seeks only rebellion and a cruel messenger will be sent against him let a man meet a she-bear robbed of her cubs rather than a fool in his folly if anyone returns evil for good evil will not depart from his house the beginning of strife is like letting out water so quit before the quarrel breaks out he who justifies the wicked and he who condemns the righteous are both alike in abomination to the Lord these verses inform one another a fool in his folly says like a she-bear robbed of her cubs in other words there is no reasoning with the fool think about it when you meet a raging she-bear robbed of her cubs you don't stand there and reason with her saying hey

I was just petting your cute cub hey I was actually just trying to save your cub from extinction that's a good way to get mauled by a bear likewise there's no reasoning with the raging fool there's no need to fret however because it says though an evil man seeks only rebellion against God and his appointed authorities a cruel messenger will be sent against him this is a messenger of judgment from God God's justice will prevail in the end and overtake the rebellious fool so don't fret when someone returns the good that you do for that person with evil even when they repay evil for good we are not to repay evil for evil as Romans 12 17 to 19 says it says here in this proverb

[20 : 12] God will repay and evil will not depart from his house from the house of the person who repays good with evil evil will become a permanent unwelcome guest in his household so verse 14 says the beginning of strife is like letting out water so quit before the coral breaks out the beginning

of strife is like a hole in a dam though the seepage is negligible at first the pressure mounts up quickly and it bursts open the dam causing an uncontrollable torrent so it says quit before the coral breaks out don't can be consumed with confronting a fool in his folly who is like a she bear robbed of her cubs quit before the coral breaks out and we're able to do this because we trust in

God's sovereign judgment verse 15 says he who justifies the wicked and who condemns the righteous are both alike an abomination to the Lord in this sinful upside down world fools might get their way at times wicked people might be justified and righteous people might be condemned but such perversion of justice is like an abomination to the Lord the Lord detests them both letting a wicked person go free and punishing an innocent person they're equally abominable to God because his justice is perfect and because we know this we can avoid quarrels and not repay evil for evil because we trust in God's sovereign judgment so this is how we are to deal with fools who pervert justice and the third kind of folly in relationships verse nine says whoever covers an offense seeks love but he who repeats a matter separates close friends an offense in this passage an offense has been committed between friends and there are two contrasting responses that we can take first it says whoever covers an offense seeks love this is similar to

Proverbs 10 12 which said that hatred stirs up strife but love covers all offenses but there's a slightly different emphasis in chapter 10 verse 12 the covering up of the offense was motivated by love but here in chapter 17 verse 9 the covering up of the offense happens with the goal of love whoever covers an offense seeks love or fosters love as the NIV the new international version translates it the offense caused has already threatened the friendship once if you cover the offense the relationship will survive and love will continue but if you go and repeat the matter it will sever even a close relationship the expression repeat the matter is wonderfully ambiguous it's like the similar Greek expression which means double tongue or to speak twice it means to repeat something that shouldn't be repeated whether it's betraying someone's confidence and revealing a secret or berating someone by harping on that person over and over again about something that person did wrong when you repeatedly remind your friend of how he offended you when you retell something that they have confided in you or the way they have offended you to others you are jeopardizing your friendship if all of us keep this proverb in mind we can greatly strengthen our community because offense is not unusual if you live in close relationship with anyone whether it's your housemates other church members or your family members you're going to cause offense and you're going to be offended but what will you do when you are offended will you let that offense die by covering it up will you forgive or will you revive that offense again and again each time each time you repeat it an offense is like a cut on your skin once a scab covers it there is a chance for healing just as when you cover up an offense you seek love but if you keep picking that scab open it will never heal in fact it can get worse with an infection and it will leave a permanent scar if you repeat a matter if you gossip if you slander and say something ill of another even close friendships even intimate relationships will not survive perhaps some people respond to this point by saying well I don't want friends who offend me so good riddance but that's not what friendship is meant to be verse 17 says a friend loves at all times and a brother is born for adversity just as a person who cheers for the Boston Celtics only when they're winning championships is no true fan of the team a fair weather friend a bandwagon friend a friend that's only there for you when you when that person is pleasing you a friend that's only there for you when you are well liked by everybody else a fair weather friend is no friend at all love in hard times is what friends are made for enduring support and persevering love in times of adversity is what a brother is born for and that's what we are meant to be as brothers and sisters in

Christ in times of adversity like this when many people are suffering this is no time to isolate ourselves from one another no time to forget about one another distract ourselves with other things it's the time to be reaching out it's the time that we were born for to be a brother to each other a sister to one another verse 18 that serves to qualify verse 7 the fact that you should be a friend at all times even in the face of adversity does not mean that you should be a fool and become a surety for your friend it says one who lacks sense gives a pledge and puts up security in the presence of his neighbor the word friend in verse 17 and the word neighbor in verse 18 are the same words in Hebrew and so this is not a prohibition of helping our neighbors and being generous to our neighbors and friends the

[27 : 56] Bible in many places commands God's people to give generously and lend liberally to our neighbors and friends but this is not the same thing as putting up security in the presence of your

neighbor in that case you are neither lending to a needy neighbor nor giving to a poor neighbor you are in essence assuming their debt wholesale and taking full responsibility for their financial situation and biblical wisdom literature consistently warns against that practice so this is placed here to qualify verse 17 love your friend at all times yes don't be a fool don't be naive don't become a surety and then verse 19 says whoever loves transgression loves strife he who makes his door high seeks destruction now here the person who loves transgression on the one hand is contrasted with the friend who loves at all times in verse 17 and this person who loves transgression does not love his friend that's the connection that this contrast is making the reason why is because he loves transgression he loves crime a friend then and this

I think I dealt with temptation much more when I was younger maybe in my teens or perhaps even in college when peer pressure mounts there are friends who try to drag you into transgressions into crimes but friends who do that are no true friends they are unloving toward you because they love strife people who love transgressions love strife they are leading you to strife and it says he who makes his door high seeks destruction the door is the entrance to a house and to make one's door high is to make it inaccessible protected and hidden away from view the criminal who seeks to shield himself from scrutiny out then while bringing destruction on society will end up bringing destruction on himself and then verses 21 to 25 shifts to talking about having a foolish child verses 21 and 25 both speak of the father who has a foolish son so it encloses this unit together and it says in verse 21 and 22 he who sires a fool gets himself sorrow and the father of a fool has no joy a joyful heart is good medicine but a crushed spirit dries up the bones a joyful heart is good medicine but the father of a fool has no joy which means he has no medicine a crushed spirit dries up the bones and this father of a fool gets himself sorrow and so his crushed spirit dries up his bones in other words a foolish child kills his or her parents a foolish child saps the very life and vitality out of his or her parents verse 25 affirms the same a foolish son is a grief to his father and bitterness to her who bore him and then verses 23 and 24 tell us more specifically about this behavior of a foolish child says in verse 24 the discerning sets his face toward wisdom but the eyes of a fool are on the ends of the earth this is really insightful

God is not far away wisdom is not far away he has revealed it to us the phrase the discerning sets his face toward wisdom is literally at the face of the discerning is wisdom wisdom is right in front of him it's literally in his face and that's what the discerning preoccupies himself with in contrast the fool sets his eyes on the ends of the earth on distant unattainable goals on exotic fancies on pipe dreams things i must travel the world and live my own life in order to discover myself and find fulfillment says the fool i need to delve into every religion experiment with every philosophy to find the truth says the fool when the truth is right in front of him when god's unchanging time tested word is taught to him when wisdom is presented to him in his own house by his own parents he sets his eyes on the ends of the earth it's easy to wag our fingers at such fools but that's essentially what we have all done to

God in Luke chapter 15 Jesus uses a parable to compare sinners who have rebelled against God to a son who rebels against his father and it says that he gathered all he had and took a journey into where far country this is the fool that Proverbs 17 is talking about and there he squandered his inheritance and reckless living he had everything he needed at his father's house but instead of setting his face toward wisdom he set his eyes on the ends of the earth in the far country he prematurely demanded his inheritance of his father which was tantamount to wishing that his father were dead and then he squandered his wealth with prostitutes so that he was not to his father and his who once lived for ourselves and not for

God that's what we have done by disbelieving in God wishing that God were dead that's what we have all done in enjoying God's good gifts in creation without acknowledging him and giving thanks to him as the giver of all good gifts we have repaid God evil for good we brought God the father nothing but grief and bitterness but in this parable when after hitting rock bottom this foolish son returns home the lavish father instead of disowning him and rejecting him like he should have this father runs to him embraces him kisses him welcomes him and most outrageously reinstates him as his son and there's a problem however with this story the father had two sons and the older son has stayed at his father's house working diligently to build the family estate if the younger rebellious son is reinstated as a son that means he the older son must now share his rightful inheritance with him and so this older son begrudges his brother's return this creates a rift between him and his own father but

[35 : 48] Jesus tells a story to tell to point to the ultimate good brother the older brother that will actually come to the rescue of his rebellious brother and that's him Jesus Christ Hebrews chapter 2 11 says Jesus is not ashamed to call us brothers and sisters Proverbs chapter 17 verse 17 says a friend loves at all times and a brother is born for adversity Jesus in John 15 15 said I now call you friends Jesus is the friend who loves at all times Jesus is the brother who was born for adversity and in our greatest adversity when we face the greatest enemy of our own sins that alienated us from God our father Jesus our friend and Jesus our brother came to our rescue how

God Proverbs chapter 17 15 earlier said he who justifies the wicked and who condemns the righteous are both alike an abomination to the Lord God is holy and just and he cannot condone the wicked he cannot rightly justify us who are wicked and yet Romans chapter 4 verse 5 says that God justifies the ungodly how does he do what is abominable to himself that's because Jesus has paid our price because our brother our friend has died in our place on the cross and bore our sins and was raised from the dead there's no greater love than this that someone lays down his life for his friends because Jesus laid down his life for us his friends we by trusting in him now can be rescued and we can receive the wisdom of

God be adopted reinstated as his children and it's only as his children that we can live with trust in his sovereign judgment and face the worst of the human father please take a moment to reflect on that and ask yourself how is God calling you to respond to this message are you seeing God rightly are you submitted to him are you trusting in him after you've done that we're going to respond by praying out loud together as a church