

Courts and Conflict

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[0 : 00] This section begins, this chapter begins another new section in Proverbs, often called the second Solomonic collection or Hezekiah's collection because it tells us that the court officials of Hezekiah, king of Judah, copied or redacted this section.

So you can see that in verse 1. And the collection begins in earnest with verses 2 to 3. It says, It is the glory of God to conceal things, but the glory of kings is to search things out.

As the heavens for height and the earth for depth, so the heart of kings is unreachable. This word glory appears again at the end of chapter 25 in verse 27 to bookend this first section.

It begins and ends with the mention of glory. And it says in verse 27, It is not good to eat much honey, nor is it glorious to seek one's own glory. There is a glory that is reserved for God.

There is a glory that is reserved for kings. And a glory that is reserved for people in general. First, the glory of God is seen in His inscrutability.

[1 : 17] That there are aspects of the nature of God and the works of God that are beyond our fathom, beyond our finding out. And this brings Him glory because it sets Him apart from the rest of creation.

God's mind, apart from what He has chosen to reveal to us, are hidden from us. God's not accountable to any man, and He owes no man anything. And this is unique to Him.

This is His glory. The glory of kings, however, is to search things out. On the one hand, this is a fitting verse after verse 1, which spoke of how Hezekiah and his men organized and transcribed what God had revealed to Solomon.

In other words, Hezekiah was a king who searched things out. But theological and academic inquiry does not seem to be what's primarily in view in this verse.

Because the following verses, verses 4 to 8, speak of how the king is responsible for expelling evildoers and establishing his rule with righteousness, how he's responsible for promoting qualified officials, individuals, and judging impartially.

[2 : 23] So the main thing that's in view here with the king's searching out things, it seems to pertain to him governing over his nation, over his kingdom.

He has to search out the matters of state in order to govern wisely. And there is an aspect of the king's purposes and governing priorities that are also hidden from the general population.

So verse 3 says, The heart of kings is unsearchable to the citizens, but the heart of God, however, is unsearchable both to the king and to everyone in the world.

And at the end of this chapter, verse 27 tells us that it is not glorious to seek one's own glory. The footnote in the ESV translation, frankly, tells us that the meaning of the Hebrew line is uncertain. Translated very literally, the verse says, To eat much honey is not good, nor to search their glory of glory. What does it mean?

[3 : 29] It's quite difficult to make sense of this verse, apart from recognizing that verses 2 to 3 and verse 27 intentionally bracket this unit and add context to each other.

So the word seek in verse 27 is the same word that is translated search, which occurs twice in verses 2 to 3. And the word glory, which occurs twice in verse 27, also occurs twice in verse 2.

So what does it mean then that searching out their glory of glory is not good? The immediate context of verse 27 suggests that it's possible to have too much of a good thing, like honey.

It is not good even to have too much of something that is as delicious and healthful as honey.

Likewise, searching their glory of glory, perhaps occupying oneself too much with searching out the concealed things that are the glory of God, or with searching out the heart of kings, which is unsearchable, is not good.

This reminds me of Psalm 131, 1-2, where David says, Oh Lord, my heart is not lifted up. My eyes are not raised too high. I do not occupy myself with things too great and too marvelous for me, but I have calmed and quietened my soul like a weaned child with its mother, like a weaned child is my soul within me.

[4 : 54] A wise person, according to these verses, these proverbs, in humility accepts his place within God's created order. That's the main point of this entire passage.

Rather than seeking one's own glory by presuming upon the glory reserved for God and kings, glory is something that God freely bestows on whomever He pleases.

And so accordingly, it's unbecoming of us. As Christians to seek glory for ourselves. Sometimes I stress out more than I should about the state of things in our country and in our world.

And that's because I'm too prideful. Because I'm too preoccupied with searching out things, searching out glory that is not my own. It is not my responsibility to chart, let alone direct, the course of this world.

Instead, we are to humble ourselves and know our place within God's created order. Verses 4 to 7 then tell us that it is the king's prerogative to expel the wicked and reward the virtuous.

[6 : 06] Read with me. Take away the dross from the silver and the smith has material for a vessel. Take away the wicked from the presence of the king and his throne will be established in righteousness. Do not put yourself forward in the king's presence or stand in the place of the great.

For it is better to be told, come up here, than to be put lower in the presence of a noble. The wicked have no place in a righteous kingdom, so they are to be expelled and we are to know our place rather than engaging in shameless self-promotion.

It is the king's prerogative to promote deserving officials and reward deserving citizens. If we put ourselves forward, we risk being spurned and humiliated.

This is very similar to the parable that Jesus tells in Luke 11. So how does this apply to us? If you're an intern who is supposed to be a wallflower taking copious notes in a room full of managers and executives, don't offer your ideas like you have a place at the table.

Know your place. If you're a student who has thought about this particular topic for a whole two hours during the lecture, perhaps ask your professor who has devoted years studying the subject some questions and seek to learn from him before you challenge him or dismiss him.

[7 : 30] When you get face-to-face time with your boss's boss, don't use it as an opportunity for a shameless one-upmanship, promoting yourself at the expense of others, your colleagues and your boss.

Don't talk to him like he's just warming up a seat that you're going to be occupying in a few years. This is counter-cultural because we live in a culture of self-promotion.

But as Christians, we ought instead to humble ourselves, know our place, because we know that God who rules over all sees everything. Similarly, verses 7-10 enjoin us to know our place and be slow to accuse our neighbors in court.

It says in verses 7-10, What your eyes have seen do not hastily bring into court, for what will you do in the end when your neighbor puts you to shame? Argue your case with your neighbor himself and do not reveal another secret, lest he who hears you bring shame upon you and your ill repute have no end.

How many times have you seen something that another person is doing and suspected something bad, only to discover later that it was nothing at all?

[8 : 41] This is often the case, especially in our culture of instant outrage. A few years ago, there was a 15-second video clip of a Cubs baseball game that went viral on social media.

When the Cubs first base coach tossed a foul ball in the direction of a smiling boy in the stands, he bobbled the ball, and the man sitting above him promptly scooped it up and gave the ball to the woman sitting next to him.

And this video was seen on live TV, and so obviously it caused a social media firestorm. And the man was clearly a thief who soullessly crushed this little boy's hopes and dreams.

And so came the curses, the threats, and there was video evidence. People saw it with their own eyes. The Cubs public relations team quickly resolved the issue by getting another ball signed by one of their star players and giving it to the boy.

But as they did that, they learned from the people sitting around the man that that wasn't the whole story. They learned that actually this same man had caught already three different balls before this

ball, and that with each ball, he had given it to the children around him, including the boy that was sitting in front of him.

[10:02] And this last ball that he caught, he caught for himself so that he could give it to his wife, and it was their anniversary. But of course, people will outrage about it and don't care, because they've seen it for themselves.

We need to question what we see, because what we see isn't always the whole story. Even when we see with our own eyes, we often see through a keyhole. It lacks proper context, and that context is too frequently supplied by our own prejudices and suspicions.

According to the Innocence Project, an organization dedicated to exonerating wrongfully convicted individuals, 342 people have been exonerated as a result of DNA testing since such testing became available in the 90s.

And over 70% of those wrongful convictions were based on eyewitness testimony. Our eyes are not infallible. We rarely know all the facts and seldom interpret them rightly.

So we should be slow to charge our neighbors of wrongdoing solely based on what we have seen. Instead, it says, you should argue your case with your neighbor himself and do not reveal another secret.

[11:19] This is akin to Jesus' admonition in Matthew 18 that before we involve anyone else, that if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone.

When we divulge another person's secret based on what we have observed, based on our partial knowledge, our motives are often not as selfless or righteous as we think they are.

When we become a tattletale, an informant, or a litigant, we are often arrogating for ourselves duties that are not ours and shirking our duty to love our neighbor as ourselves.

Of course, there are situations when we should report to appropriate authorities or to take someone to court, but this proverb warns us against doing so hastily on incomplete evidence.

Because then in the end, we might be put to shame and our ill repute have no end. But the fact that we should argue our case with our neighbors ourselves does not mean that we should do so in a harsh or rude way.

[12:27] So verses 11 to 15 teach us that the wise who fit snugly into God's created order are also characterized by timely fitting words. He says, A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in a setting of silver.

Like a gold ring or an ornament of gold is a wise reprover to a listening ear. Like the cold of snow in the time of harvest is a faithful messenger to those who send him.

He refreshes the soul of his masters. Like clouds and wind without rain is a man who boasts of a gift he does not give. With patience, a ruler may be persuaded and a soft tongue will break a bone.

A brilliant gemstone requires a complimentary setting in order to accentuate its beauty. Likewise, even if the content of your words are right and wise, the manner in which you share them as well as the timing of your words matter.

And a person who knows how to bring correction wisely adorns the hearer like a gold ring on a listening ear. Similarly, a faithful messenger by reliably relaying the words of his sender brings refreshment to his masters like the cold of snow in the time of harvest.

[13:45] This is probably not referring to actual snow at the time of harvest, but the way the people in the Inchinereus at times would climb high mountains to collect snow and ice and store them in caves so that they can use it to refresh themselves on hot days.

And unlike this faithful messenger who without fail delivers his message, a man who boasts of a gift he does not give is like clouds and wind without rain, all bluster, no substance.

So all of these deal with timely speech. And when it comes to the persuading a ruler, the wise person also knows that patience is called for and that a soft tongue will break a bone.

This is such an important lesson for us because we speak a lot of words. We speak over 16,000 words per day an average person.

If you count all the stuff we write and publish online, it's probably a lot more words than that.

Imagine if all of our words were well fitted, if they were wise, if they were true, how transformative that would be to our own lives and to our society.

[14:53] And the wise also demonstrate their well fittedness with self-control. This is in verses 16 to 27. Begin and end with the illustration of honey to tell us about the importance of self-control.

First it says, if you have found honey, eat only enough for you, lest you have your fill of it and vomit it. This tells us that there's a critical difference between a healthy appetite and greed.

And we must never cross that line. And this limit applies even to something as delicious and healthful as honey, which had medicinal properties that people in the ancient world used.

This limit also varies from person to person. So it says, eat only enough for you. This once again is about knowing our place, knowing our own limits.

Some people can process a lot of sugar, but a diabetic can only consume small portions as an occasional treat. Some people's bodies can process a fair amount of alcohol.

[15:57] Some people can't. Some people of East Asian descent, like me, have deficiency in one of the enzymes that breaks down alcohol. If you have too much of honey, you will have your fill of it and vomit it.

Bible scholar Derek Kidner puts it very memorably. Quote, Since Eden, man has wanted the last ounce out of life as though beyond God's enough lay ecstasy, not nausea.

Beyond God's enough lies nausea, not ecstasy. Remember this every time your appetite tries to get the better of you. This proverb applies literally to all kinds of food and drinks, but it also applies figuratively to all situations that call for self-control and restraint.

We can see its figurative application in verse 17. Let your foot be seldom in your neighbor's house, lest he have his fill of you. Same expression as verse 16, and hate you.

Even something as good as friendliness and neighborliness can be overdone. This too means that we need to know the limits of our neighbors.

[17:14] Some people have a much higher capacity for extended, repeated social interactions than others. If you look around, you know exactly who those people are. But other people need more space.

So be considerate of your neighbor and don't presume upon your neighbor's hospitality. Respect their privacy and allow for some space. This is what the English proverb, good fences make good neighbors, means.

It doesn't mean you should be a bad neighbor. You should be a friendly neighbor, but it means that you should respect your neighbor's boundaries. Verse 17 tells us, let your foot be seldom in your neighbor's house.

Be seldom literally means make rare or make precious. Make it so that your neighbor cherishes your visits and delights when you come through the door rather than groans when you come through the door.

Know your place. Don't let your neighbor have his fill of you and hate you. In contrast to the wise person who is considerate of his neighbor, verse 18 says, a man who bears false witness against his neighbor is like a war club or a sword or a sharp arrow.

[18:20] He's like a soldier who uses the full range of the weapons at his disposal to beat his enemy to a pulp. In short, perjury, lying in court in order to convict someone else is an act of violence.

And such a treacherous neighbor should never be trusted. It says, trusting in a treacherous man in time of trouble is like a bad tooth or a foot that slips.

It's such a fun and helpful description. I have a bad tooth right now because the filling didn't work out too well and I can't bite on it. And an unreliable person, a treacherous person is just like that.

Just in that time of need. When you need that person the most, he lets you down. is undependable. And this untimely betrayal of a treacherous man prompts the following discussion about the importance of timeliness, of doing what fits the occasion.

Verse 20 says, whoever sings songs to a heavy heart is like one who takes off a garment on a cold day and like vinegar on soda. There is a time and place for singing merry songs, but to do so to a heavy heart or to a sullen heart is like one who takes off a garment going shirtless on a cold day like now.

[19:45] And like vinegar on soda, right? Soda here refers to sodium carbonate base. So when you mix it with acidic vinegar, it bubbles up, it reacts. Like they don't fit together.

There's a time to weep and a time to laugh. And as Romans 12, 15, Jesus says, we are to rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. We are to know our place and time in our dealings with others.

And verses 21 to 22 continue this theme. If your enemy is hungry, give him bread to eat. And if he is thirsty, give him water to drink. For you will heap burning coals on his head and the Lord will reward you.

The time when our enemy is hungry might appear at first to be the prime time for revenge. But it says, instead of taking revenge, we are to feed our enemy in his time of need.

By refusing to stoop to the same tit for tat that our enemy engages in, by taking the high road, we will heap burning coals on his head. Because by doing so, we show our enemy that we are not like them, that we occupy the higher moral ground.

[20 : 53] And because of this, they will sizzle with shame like they have burning coals poured onto their heads. One might object that such an opportunity to put one's enemy back into his place is too good to be squandered.

But we need not worry about that. That's not our place to worry about. Because it says, the Lord will reward us. The Lord repays. The vengeance is the Lord's.

As Paul quotes this proverb in Romans 12, 17 to 21, Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.

Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God. For it is written, vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord. To the contrary, if your enemy is hungry, feed him.

If he is thirsty, give him something to drink. For by so doing, you will keep burning coals on his head. Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. Remember this when you feel tempted to exact personal vengeance on anyone in your life.

[21 : 58] The vengeance is the Lord's repay evil with good. And entrusting oneself to God's vengeance means that the wise person avoids taking shots at others in secret.

So verse 23 says, The north wind brings forth rain and a backbiting tongue angry looks. This is an odd simile because in Israel, the west wind usually brought rain, not the north wind.

In fact, the cold north wind usually cleared the sky and brought good visibility that seafarers relied on. So then, a north wind that brings forth rain would have been unexpected and disastrous at times.

And that's precisely the point of this comparison. The Hebrew word for north comes from the root that means to hide, referring to the northern region as the hidden region of the world.

And the phrase backbiting tongue in Hebrew is literally a tongue of hiding, referring to hidden slander. Like wind from the hidden north that brings unexpected rain, the cold wind of hidden slander brings forth angry looks, literally cursing faces.

[23 : 09] The victim of the backbiting tongue is blindsided because he turns and sees only angry looks where he expected to see friendly faces. And similarly, verse 24 says, It is better to live in the corner of the housetop than a house shared with the quarrelsome wife.

One's home is supposed to be a place of safety and peace. But when one's house is shared with the quarrelsome spouse, even the inhospitable corner of the housetop is preferable to that home. This is similar to the unexpected assaults of the backbiting friend. Now, in contrast to this malicious slanderer, verse 25 says, Like cold water to a thirsty soul, so is good news from a far country.

And continuing this imagery of a fountain and source of water tells us that the wise person should aspire to be such a refreshing life giving water to those around them. But in order for us to be a wellspring of life that the proverb describes the people who are wise as, it says in verse 26, It's like a muddied spring or a polluted fountain is a righteous man who gives way before the wicked.

If we are to be a wellspring of life to those around us, we must stand firmly on our righteous convictions and avoid compromise, avoid being polluted.

[24 : 35] A muddy spring or a polluted fountain is particularly dangerous because people have already learned to rely on that source of truth and wisdom. And they might come again to drink from that fountain that has now been poisoned.

This is why preachers who teach false doctrine are so insidious. This is why Paul exhorts Timothy this way in 1 Timothy 4.16. Keep a close watch on yourselves and on the teaching.

Persist in this for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers. Brothers and sisters, if we want to be a wellspring of life to those around us, we must not compromise with the wicked.

We must guard our doctrine and watch our lives lest we become a muddy spring and a polluted fountain. Verse 27, which I already talked about earlier, then brackets this section leaving us verse

28, which is a Janus verse, a transitional verse that connects the preceding passage from the one following it.

And this verse also speaks of the importance of self-control, about knowing our boundaries, knowing our place. And it begins the next section which talks about a catalog of fools.

[25 : 48] It's such a vivid and insightful problem so I'm going to dwell on it for a little bit. It says, a man without self-control is like a city broken into and left without walls.

Think about this. People who lack self-control are always pushing against the limits. They see boundaries as constrictive, oppressive.

They flee discipline. They seek freedom from restraint. But ironically, he is like a city broken into and left without walls, completely exposed and vulnerable to wild animals, to marauders, to enemy soldiers.

A wall is too restrictive, he says. I want to roam freely, he says. But little does he know that the so-called freedom he cherishes is going to be his perishing.

His lack of self-control, because of it, he gets taken advantage of by others. He falls easily to temptations. He fails to see that his freedom to sin is actually a slavery to sin.

[26 : 59] His unruly desires dominate him. He has no true freedom because true freedom is only found in servitude to God and his word. This is why in Exodus, in freeing his people from slavery in Egypt, God says in Exodus 9, 1, let my people go that they may serve me.

Let them stop being slaves of Pharaoh so that they might be my slaves, my servants. That's what it means to be free as human beings. To submit to the lordship of God is the only way that man can be free.

Brothers and sisters, I've seen too many people go astray from God because they think his standards are too restrictive because they think God's word to be too constricting.

That seems so strict, they say. That's so legalistic. That's so traditional. But brothers and sisters, I plead with you when you run into walls in God's word, don't think, I wonder what this wall is keeping me from.

I wonder what I'm being deprived of. Instead, ask yourself, I wonder what this wall is protecting me from. I wonder what good thing God is preserving me for.

[28 : 16] As soon as you break down the boundaries that God has placed around you for your flourishing, you will find that you are like a city broken into and left without walls.

Enslaved to the passions of the flesh. Enslaved to the patterns of this world. And enslaved to the prince of the power of the air. And this introduces chapter 26, which gives us a catalog of fools who do not know their place, unlike the wise who are humble and know their place in God's created order.

The fools do not fit into God's created order. And this chapter is organized in ascending order so that the type of fools described in this chapter get progressively worse, going from the simple fool to the sluggard, and then to the quarreler and ultimately to the hater, a murderous hater.

So first up is a simple fool in verses 1 to 12. It says in verse 1, like snow in summer or rain in harvest, so honor is not fitting for a fool. This word honor is the same Hebrew word that was translated glory earlier in the previous chapter.

And so here, the glory, there's a glory that's reserved for God and a glory that's reserved for kings and we should know our place and not search out the glory that is not ours.

[29 : 38] And chapter 26 also begins with this notion of glory by telling us that there is no place in God's created order where the fool should receive glory. It doesn't fit like snow in summer or rain in harvest, which would be disastrous in an agricultural society.

And that's the case with the fool that has honor. Unfortunately, this inappropriate elevation of fools happens all too often in our culture because we have a celebrity culture.

Nowadays, the heroes of our culture are not known for their great virtues. The heroes of our culture are known merely for their popularity. And too often, vain and foolish people are idolizing our culture of self-promotion.

But such elevation, such honor given to fools harms society. Verse 2 continues, Like a sparrow in its fleeting, like a swallow in its flying, a curse that is causeless does not alight.

God is the one who enforces blessings and curses, so if an undeserving, innocent person is cursed by the wicked, God will not fulfill it. A causeless curse is like a mail without postage.

[30 : 51] It will not be delivered. And such a curse is like a bird that flutters and flits about never landing in a spot. The root of the Hebrew word curse means to esteem or treat someone lightly.

It's the exact opposite of the word honor used in verse 1, which means to esteem or treat someone heavily, meaning to give weight to someone. And so there's an intentional contrast here.

In the same way that honor, counting heavy, is unfitting for a fool, this honor occurs counting lightly is unfitting for a wise, righteous person. What is fitting for a fool, it says, discipline and punishment, it says in verse 3, a whip for the horse, a bridle for the donkey, and a rod for the back of fools. A whip can tame and teach a horse, and a bridle can control a donkey. Likewise, a rod has the potential to restrain and teach a fool. And the fool is here compared to animals that respond more to physical stimuli than to reasoning.

And this is why it is foolish to try to reason with fools. It says in verse 4, answer not a fool according to his folly, lest you be like him yourself. This is a really fascinating couplet because verse 4 appears to advise against answering a fool.

[32 : 14] It means don't engage with fools in their folly, don't waste your time on them, lest you make a fool of yourself. However, if you look at verse 5, immediately after this, this seems to advise the exact opposite.

Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own eyes. Now, this verse appears to say that we should answer the fool, lest he continue under the delusion that his folly is wise.

These two verses are not only structurally parallel, they also are connected by similar sounds, creating a rhyming effect. And they're meant to be interpreted together. The key to resolving this apparent contradiction is to interpret the same phrase, the ambiguous phrase, according to his folly in light of its immediate context.

Verse 4 says, answer not a fool according to his folly, lest you be like him yourself. That's the interpretive key. When does answering a fool according to his folly make you a fool yourself?

Verse 4 is warning us against answering a fool in the manner of a fool. It's saying, don't stoop to his level. Don't answer in kind.

[33 : 23] When he says, well, you're just stupid, don't respond by saying, well, I have more degrees than you. To do so is to be reduced to a fool yourself. Answering a fool according to his folly.

Verse 5, on the other hand, says, answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own eyes. So that's the interpretive key. This problem is not telling us to adopt the fool's way of thinking because the goal of answering the fool is to prevent him from being wise in his own eyes.

If we merely confirm his worldview or adopt his perspective, then we are leaving him in his disastrous delusions, which is the exact opposite of what this verse is telling us to do.

Instead, verse 5 is telling us to address the fool's folly and expose it, poke holes in it, to enlighten the fool with true wisdom so that he will no longer be wise in his own eyes.

Verses 4 and 5 are not contradictory, advising that you apply these things in different situations. They nuance each other and are to be understood together and both of them are true simultaneously.

[34 : 39] Paul actually gives us a wonderful example of this in 2 Corinthians chapter 11. 11 and 12. The Corinthian believers are being led astray in that context by the false teaching of these fake apostles who were styling themselves as super apostles.

And the Corinthians believed that these super apostles were more qualified, more eloquent, and more knowledgeable than Paul and believed that that's why they demanded a premium honorarium compared to Paul who labored among them for free.

But Paul dispels the Corinthians' folly by answering them according to their folly. He lists all of his fleshly, worldly qualifications in order to demonstrate that he is in no wise inferior to these so-called super apostles.

He argues according to the Corinthians' terms because his refusal to do so would have only confirmed the foolish Corinthians' misjudgments. But now, if that's all that Paul did, he would be violating verse 4 and making a fool of himself.

But that's not what Paul does. Even as he boasts of his worldly accomplishments and qualifications, Paul says repeatedly that he is speaking as if he were a fool. And he does this, he says, in order to expose the Corinthians' folly not to leave them in their delusions of being wise in their own eyes.

[36 : 03] He tells them that boasting about such fleshly, worldly strengths is useless and says this in 2 Corinthians 12, 9, I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses so that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

Paul contrasts the sign and credentials that the so-called super apostles were offering with the signs of a true apostle in chapter 12, verse 12. By doing this, Paul follows the admonitions of both verse 4 and verse 5 and we ought to do the same and teach fools to know their place.

But we must be cautious not to form unwise associations with fools because according to verses 6 to 10, they are unreliable and volatile. Though we teach them God's wisdom, they only grasp the form of wisdom and not its substance.

That's what verses 6 to 10 are about. They're structured chiastically with parallel elements with the central element being verse 8.

Like one who binds a stone in a sling is one who gives honor to a fool. These verses speak of how unreliable the fool is and how the proverb is wasted on their mouths because they don't know actually how to apply it or to use it.

[37 : 22] And it says in verse 11, like a dog that returns to his vomit is a fool who repeats his folly. This proverb is harder for us to understand because one of the kinds of dogs that we see in our area is our cute dogs and pet dogs that are well trained.

But don't imagine that dog. Dogs back in the day and still in many parts of the world are wild, disgusting scavengers. According to details in scripture, they eat garbage, they eat carcasses and lick the blood of the dead.

And for this reason, they are sometimes used figuratively to describe evildoers. A dog would return to its vomit, smell it, lick it, and eventually eat it.

And that revolting behavior is used to turn us against being a fool, a fool who repeats his folly. This proverb is cited in 2 Peter 2, 20-22 to describe those who have escaped the defilements of the world through the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, but are again entangled in them and overcome so that the last state has become worse for them than the first.

Whenever you feel the allure of the sinful world, I pray that this revolting picture will come to your mind, to returning to your vomit, returning to your former way of life, your way of sin, is like returning to a vomit.

[38 : 48] It cannot satisfy you or nourish you. And then verse 12 issues a final warning about the simple fool. Do you see a man who is wise in his own eyes? There is more hope for a fool than for him.

The fool who repeats his own folly is on the verge of becoming a man who is wise in his own eyes, which is even worse. That's worse than being a fool.

The fool at least has a chance of being corrected with discipline, but the man who is wise in his own eyes has no hope. And then verse 13 to 16 speak of the sluggard, which I won't go into detail because I've spoken on this in multiple passages before in Proverbs.

There's these passages, some of these Proverbs are repeated in earlier. But the sluggard is described as someone who is wiser in his own eyes than seven men who can answer sensibly. The sluggard does not know himself, does not know his place. He does not occupy his rightful place in society. Instead, he stays in his bed turning, tossing and turning like a door that turns on its hinges and never leaves its place.

[39 : 59] And the type of fool's catalog continually gets worse. And after the fool and the sluggard, we encounter the quarrelor or the instigator in verses 17 to 22. Please follow along with me as I read it.

Whoever meddles in a quarrel not his own is like one who takes a passing dog by the ears. Like a madman who throws firebrands, arrows, and death is the man who deceives his neighbor and says, I am only joking.

For lack of wood the fire goes out and where there is no whisperer, quarreling ceases. As charcoal to hot embers and wood to fire, so is a quarrelsome man for kindling strife.

The words of a whisperer are like delicious morsels. They go down into the inner parts of the body. The instigator has an unhealthy curiosity for quarrels.

So he meddles in quarrels that are not his own and he is like a person who grabs a wild dog by the ear that's just passing by. The dog is sure to turn on you and to bark at you.

[41 : 01] The instigator does not know to keep to his place. And likewise, his words are ill-fitted. They do not fit the occasion. He hurls words like firebrands, arrows, and death. And then afterward feigns ignorance saying, I'm only joking.

And without wood the fire will certainly be extinguished. And likewise, when there is no whisperer, a quarreling ceases. But the instigators fan the flames of conflict with another gossip, with another slander.

And these whispers get consumed by people like delicious morsels poisoning them against others. And then finally, we see the portrait of the hater in verses 23 to 28.

Like the glaze covering an earthen vessel, our fervent lips with an evil heart. Whoever hates disguises himself with his lips and harbors deceit in his heart. When he speaks graciously, believe him not, for there are seven abominations in his heart.

Though his hatred be covered with deception, his wickedness will be exposed in the assembly. Whoever digs a pit will fall into it and a stone will come back on him who starts it rolling.

[42 : 12] A lying tongue hates its victims and a flattering mouth works ruin. The key word hate occurs in every other verse in these 23 to 28.

And the word heart is repeated three times which indicates where the hatred resides. And then the words like lips, speak, tongue, mouth are repeated to reveal the primary way in which hatred in the heart is expressed outwardly.

It is through deceit with evil intention. It's through flattery, speaking graciously in order to hide the evil intentions that, the murderous intentions that they have toward us.

These evildoers have toward the righteous. Though in reality they are just trying to crush you with this stone that they are trying to roll over you. In implementing his murderous plan this hater, this fool presumes for himself the place of God as the ultimate arbiter of justice.

And because he does this he will also be punished in kind and God will make that stone come back on him who starts it rolling. The way these two chapters of Proverbs describe humanity's sin is very insightful because at the heart of it is a failure to know our place.

[43 : 35] We have all rebelled against God. We have all sought to usurp God's throne and we have sought to be the masters of our own fate, lords over our own lives.

But true wisdom it teaches us lies in humbling ourselves and taking our rightful place under God's rule. And it's precisely because we have failed to do this that God the Father sends his son Jesus Christ.

This is why Jesus has to leave his place to occupy our place taking on human flesh, taking, occupying our place on the cross dying a sinner's death in our place as our substitute so that we might take his place because we didn't know our place.

that's why theologian John Stott puts it this way in his book The Cross of Christ. Man asserts himself against God and puts himself where only God deserves to be.

God sacrifices himself for man and puts himself where only man deserves to be. Man claims prerogatives that belong to God alone.

[44 : 47] God accepts penalties that belong to man alone. That's the good news of Jesus Christ. That's the saving message that we all must heed that the whole world needs to hear because the world has turned against them and does not know its place before God.

But God, the Son of God has taken their place so that they might be saved, so that they might take the place that God intended for them to have at the beginning of creation in his kingdom.

In his presence. In eternity. That's what we are called to be ambassadors of. That good news in our world. Please take a moment to reflect on that truth.

How is God calling you to deeper humility in your life? Who are the people in your life that God is calling to share this good news of Jesus' substitution taking your place with?

Please think for a few moments and then we're going to respond together as a body by praying.