



Sermon Transcription • Abbotsford

Wise Up - June 24/25, 2017 - Jeff Bucknam
Contradicting Fools - (Proverbs 26:4-5)

[Please Note: This transcript has been lightly edited for ease of reading. Also, some headings have been added in square brackets to aid the reader in locating portions of the sermon.]

I ride my bike a bit around town. I've seen some of you and some of you have seen me. I've prayed for some of you as you've driven by, probably because of your driving [laughter]. You might not know this (you should know this because you all passed a driver's training program or you had the test, so you should know this) that cyclists are actually to be treated just like automobiles. I know cyclists don't always act like that. They are supposed to obey the rules of the road, so if they come to a stop light, they aren't supposed to run through it, they are supposed to stop and be there. A lot of drivers don't understand that cyclists are supposed to be like other cars and so, if you are passing another car, you don't usually squeeze them off the road. You usually give them a lot of space. That's the way it works. You don't cut them off or these sorts of things. Often times when I'm riding down the road, cars won't treat you that way, so as a result, you have to compensate. If you ride too close to the right side of the road and the cars are coming by, they will squeeze you. They won't get over at all. They'll just think that you're riding off to the side even if there's no shoulder. They'll squeeze you and it's kind of a freaky moment when you can feel their mirror kind of go right by your ear and you're like, "Oh dear." So, I've gone off the road a few times because of cars squeezing me off the road. As a result, you ride in the first groove. You know the two grooves as you go down the road? The first tire groove, you ride down that section of the road. I ride out in the Matsqui Flats a lot (which is the farm roads), and the farmers are always really great because they're used to having slow machinery and things like that, so as a result, they are used to moving over and that sort of thing. Not everybody is like that. Usually the "N" drivers aren't aware of how to treat cyclists and sometimes you get into these really weird situations as I was, just about a year ago. It was a delivery truck driver who was driving out on the roads out here. I don't know why it was so busy on this particular day, but it was. There were a lot of cars out on these farm roads, but I was riding down one of these farms roads and I was in my first groove and the delivery driver came up behind me and he was not very happy with me. It was in the afternoon, so maybe he just wanted to finish his deliveries or something, but he was not very happy with me and he let me know it by making sure that I could hear him on his horn as he was honking. I was just riding down the road and he was frustrated because cars were coming the other way and he couldn't pass me. So, he kept honking at me, wanting me (apparently) to go off into the ditch and try that road bike down in the weeds. I kept shaking my head like, "I'm fine, you can go around and just wait about 20 seconds." But he was getting very upset. Well, as we kept riding, I was about to move over a little bit because I was getting sick of it, but as I got closer to this dumptruck on the side of the road (the dump truck was actually parked on the other side of the road - I don't know why, but he was stopped on the other side of the road) and behind the dump truck was a father and two children going



for a little bike ride out on this sunny afternoon. They were about to pull around the dump truck, but this driver couldn't see them because of course he's driving on the left side of his car and I'm over on the other side of the road, so I can see around the dump truck, but he is focused very much on me and yelling at me. So, I started to move over to let him by and he started to accelerate and when I saw the kids and the dad and realized that if he kept going and passed me, he might hit them. I swerved back in front of him [laughter] to the other side to stop him from going, thinking, "I'm going to save the lives of these children and you're going to be guilty of manslaughter, okay?" Well, he wasn't very happy about that for some reason. So this guy decides he is going to roll down his window and he starts throwing things at me [laughter] from his car. There was a bottle and other things coming at me and I was like, "This is crazy!" I can actually almost feel the back of his truck touching the back of my bike and I was like, "I'm going to die!" He is so focused on me (but he's still in the lane) that the father and the kids, they ride by on the other side, the dump truck goes by and this guy finally whips out on the inside. At this point I pull way over. He whips out on the other side, he rolls down the window on the other side, and he's just screaming at me as much as he possibly can. Then, he exhausted himself with his gestures and his words and he kept going forward and I was just stunned. Of course this gets me going a little bit, right? I'm not a fast rider, except for that day, right? Cause I'm..."Oh..oh... [frustrated grunting and pedaling motions] because I'm going to keep up with you!" Well, he has to come to a stop sign and he is going to have to turn left at this stop sign and I see him at the stop sign. There are cars going by and I'm like, "Oh, it is on [pedaling gestures and exaggerated gurgling grunt]!" I am catching up to him and he can see me in his rear-view mirror and so, as soon as there is an opportunity, he actually cuts off a car to get out of the way from the mad cyclist who is going to just dominate him, terminator style [laughter]. He turns left and he goes down by the Clayburn Store and across the street from the Clayburn Store there is a parking lot. Well, he goes down by this Clayburn Store and I had to go that way to go home anyway, and he backed in by some trees and hid..."hid" [scare quote gesture] his truck [laughter]. So I started driving by --It's an international company that he works for. I'm riding down the street and I'm just mad and I'm thinking to myself, "I should go say something to him. That's just ridiculous. I should go over and tell him." Then I thought, "You know, it's not a big deal. Lord, if you want me to talk to him you should do something." And in that moment, I'm not kidding, a police officer pulls out right in front of me and stops and I went, "Oooo." I pull my bike up to him and say, "Excuse me, that guy right there..." He sees me talking to the police officer and he jumps out of his delivery truck (his hiding job didn't work) and he runs over and says, "He's lying! He's lying!" He didn't even know what I said [laughter]. So this police officer doesn't look very happy. He's like, "Oh, whatever." He can just see paperwork, so he pulls over to the other side of the road. This guy and I are yelling at each other while the police officer is there and stuff like that, and finally the police officer turned to me and said, "Do you want to go to jail?" to me, and I said, "No. I'll let you handle this." Right? So, I walked over to this guy's truck and I'm taking pictures of it while he sees me. "You see that?" It's got a big sign on the back that says, "How's my driving [gestures taking a photo and makes satisfied grunting noise]?" [laughter]. Right? I am thinking, "He is a national carrier. I am going to call these guys and I'm going to tell them about this guy. I'm going to get his name and the license plate and everything like that and, 'Oh, he is done'." So, I'm doing this, and the police officer gets my statement, his statement, and comes over to me and the police officer said, "Actually, this guy feels really bad. He's a little bit embarrassed by what happened here, but he is clearly in the wrong. Right, I mean he is. He is supposed to treat you like a car and he did not do that sort of thing. He says



you swerved in front of him,” and I said, “Yeah, to save the lives of children, hmm?” He said, “Yeah, okay. I got that. So, what do you want to do?” says the police officer. “<uppity tone> What do I want to do? Well, I’ll tell you what I want to do. 30 years is what I want </uppity tone>” [laughter]. I said, “Look, I don’t want anybody to get in trouble. Everybody makes mistakes. Clearly he’s made a mistake and he’s sorry about it and stuff, but he needs to know that if he is going to drive all the time, he needs to start treating cyclists with a little more regard. There are more and more of us on the roads and yes, some of us don’t do very well, but we really are trying to be safe and want you to be safe, and 20 seconds is not going to end your day. Could have ended my day, but it’s not going to end your day.” Anyways, so I’m riding off on my way home and, like every other time that I have situations like this in my life, I’m thinking to myself, “Did I handle that the right way?” So, here you have a man who’s acting foolishly. Did I answer the fool in a foolish way? Did the way that I responded to his foolhardy ways, did that make me a fool by how I acted that way? But what if I didn’t answer him? If I didn’t respond and engage, weren’t there risks in that too? So what? Do I answer the fool or do I not answer the fool? I often wonder how to respond to people acting foolishly. Have you ever felt that way in a situation where you’re like, “Do I answer? Do I not answer? I mean clearly you’re acting in a way that is --Do I get engaged?”

In Proverbs you have two kinds of people who are juxtaposed, who are set next to each other for the sake of comparison. You have the wise person and the fool, and in some proverbs, in that very proverb, you’ll get them put next to each other. So, Proverbs 12:15:

“The way of fools seems right to them, but the wise listen to advice.”

That’s probably what marks the wise people, is their willing to hear the advice of those who have gone before them. But fools are like, “I don’t need to hear anything because I know.” Proverbs 13:20:

“Walk with the wise and become wise, for a companion of fools suffers harm.”

And every parent of 14 and 15 year-old boys wants to grab their kids by the shoulders and tell them that. “Look, some of your friends are fools. Some of your friends are wise. If you hang out with the wise ones you’ll become wise. If you hang out with the fools you’re going to suffer harm.” Proverbs 14:3:

“A fool’s mouth lashes out with pride, but the lips of the wise protect them.”

In fact, the fools just spout whatever they’re thinking at the moment and they think that everyone needs to know. But the wise people know when to speak and when to remain silent. One of my favourite proverbs refers to the fool. It’s not the one about the dog returning to his vomit, but that’s a good one too. Here’s my favourite: Proverbs 17:12,

“Better to meet a bear robbed of her cubs than a fool bent on folly.”

Right. They’re dangerous. I’d rather be near a bear whose cubs were recently stolen. That will be better for me than meeting a fool who is leading me into folly. There are fools all around us.



<whispering> Sometimes we are them </whispering>. We all act foolishly at points and people around us act foolishly. How do you answer somebody who is acting foolishly? That's what this proverb is about. In fact, it gives you two answers. Ready? Proverbs 26:4-5. Answer number one:

“Do not answer a fool according to his folly, or you yourself will be just like him.”

Answer number two:

“Answer a fool according to his folly, or he will be wise in his own eyes.”

Do not answer the fool (one) and second, answer the fool. We are going to study it under those two headings, okay? Before we do that, I don't know if you've noticed, but that's a contradiction. I know people who I've gotten into the odd conversation with who will end up bring up Proverbs 26:4-5 as the case that the Bible contradicts itself. “Look, it's even in two verses. You stupid Christians. You don't see this? Don't answer the fool. Answer the fool. Clear contradiction, right? Christianity is bunk.” Okay, there is a different way of understanding and I think a better way of understanding this, okay? Here's how: what we have here is what's called a rhetorical paradox. What that means is that rhetorically, meaning when I say something out loud, if I put two ideas that seem to be contradictory next to each other but on closer inspection are not contradictory, if I put them next to each other it's got a kind of pop to it. It draws you in and makes you want to think more about it. “Wait a minute. That sounds like they contradict, but they don't. Tell me more.” So Gandhi uses rhetorical paradoxes. Here's one of his quotes. Ready?

“Whatever you do will be insignificant, but it is very important that you do it.”

“Okay, wait a minute. It's either insignificant or it's important, but it's not both of those. What do you mean Gandhi?” and Gandhi is like, “<deep, wizened voice> Yes, come sit at my feet and I will teach you the ways of the wise </deep, wizened voice>.” He draws you in. It's got rhetorical pop. Albert Einstein said,

“Life is a preparation for the future; and the best preparation for the future is to live as if there were none.”

“So is there a future or is there not a future? I'm supposed to live like there is no future in preparation for the future? Come on Al!” [laughter]. It draws you in, doesn't it? We have seemingly contradictory proverbs. “Absence makes the heart grow fonder, but familiarity breeds contempt.” “Wait a minute, should I be absent or familiar? Which one?” Both. It's the placement next to each other that makes it engaging. That's what they are doing here. Proverbs 26:4,

“Don't answer a fool according to his folly, [lest you] be just like him. Answer a fool...or he'll be wise in his own eyes.”



The wise man who is giving the proverb is saying, “Look, there’s a river that you should live in when it comes to answering fools. On one bank there’s a possibility that you’re going to get in trouble by answering them in a way that makes you a fool too. On the other bank, there’s a danger if you don’t say anything because they’ll think that they’re wise and they will spread their foolishness everywhere and everyone will be affected by it. So don’t go on either bank. There is a way to answer a fool that doesn’t make you a fool and that preserves everyone else (and even the fool) from their foolishness. So that’s what we’re going to look at here, okay?”

1. Don’t Answer the Fool
2. Answer A Fool

[Don’t Answer the Fool]

Verse 4 says,

“Don’t answer a fool according to his folly, or you yourself will be just like him.”

Okay, so I like basketball. My son plays basketball and both my boys have played for a while. I grew up playing basketball, coached it for a while, officiated it for a while. When I go to basketball games around the area to watch my son play, I usually put headphones in because I am worried of two things. Number one: that I will yell at the referees. I put the headphones in and it’s not because I’m not trying to be friends with everyone around me, I just know myself well enough to know that if I’m not listening to something else, there’s a danger that I will actually say something about that horrible call. Number two: it’s because I really struggle, more than anything else, I really struggle with the culture around basketball these days that is really (what I call) chesty. If I score a basket on you it’s not enough that I scored the basket and I run back on defence (which is all you should teach kids when I was coaching), it’s, “I have to score the basket and then I gotta stand over you like this [lifts arms out the side], ‘<boasting> Boom, I scored! in a game where we’re going to score 90 points. I scored two of those </boasting>.’” And then chirpy, about everything. The kids chirp at each other constantly. So, I have to keep my headphones in because if I hear it (especially from kids who aren’t very good at basketball) I just freak out. Anyway, I’m at this one game, and I’ve got my headphones in, and this one kid (who is not a very good player) is chirping at our team a lot. He’s chirping at the referees a lot. And specifically, what he’s doing, is every time there is a call that goes against our team (so if one of our kids fouls one of the other kids) he goes up to the kid who committed the foul and does this, [clapping] “Nah nah nah,” in his face. [clapping with noisy, exasperated exhale] He kept doing it over and over and over again, just clapping in everybody’s face. Well, I had my headphones in and finally I realized that I’m too close to the court (even with my headphones in) that I’m going to end up saying something, so I end up moving back to sit next to my friend who is videotaping the game on a camera. I take my headphones out, we’re talking for a little bit, but every time there is a call that goes against our team, this kid is walking down the floor and goes right up to the face of one of our kids and goes, [clapping] “Nah nah nah.” So finally, this kid commits a foul. Shouldn’t say that. He was called for a foul. He committed lots, but he was called for a foul on one end of the floor, and I don’t know what happened to me [laughter]. No kidding, I stood up in this not very big gym and I started going, [clapping] “Nah nah nah” and then, awkwardly, I just kept doing it and everyone in the entire gym is silent except for Pastor Jeff [laughing]. [clapping and obnoxious gloating sounds] The kids on our team



are looking at me going, “Oh my goodness, he’s lost his mind.” The referees stop and they’re looking at me going, “What are you doing?” and the kid sees me and he starts walking over to me and he goes, [gesturing for a fight] “You want to go outside? You want to go outside?” [laughter] and I’m doing this, [clapping] “<obnoxious gloating> Nah nah nah </obnoxious gloating>.” I kept doing it. It’s all on video, right? Because it’s right next to me. After the game, my son, when we were in the car, goes, “Dad, that was interesting” [laughter]. I said, “Yeah, of course it was interesting because that kid is a fool!” and then there is this long silence [laughter] and we (my son Ethan and I) both felt it in the car - the question that was not going to be asked, which was, “If he’s a fool dad, what are you?” [laughter].

You see, sometimes when you respond to someone acting foolishly in the same way that they are acting foolishly, that by definition makes you a fool. So little kids sit at the table and they’re beginning their life in school and they’re not used to sharing with other kids and they’ve been at home with mom and dad most of the time and mom and dad don’t fight over the crayons with them, but this other kid is fighting over the crayon. You grab the crayon and then they grab the crayon from you and then you grab the crayon back and then they grab the crayon and you smack them and then the other kid smacks them and then it becomes a full blooded fist fight. You pull the kids apart and you step back, as the teacher, and you say, “Which one is the fool?” Which one is acting foolishly? We’re supposed to get over that when we move out of kindergarten, but then, you know, we get cars and we start driving our cars around, minding your own business, and some person comes up behind you and starts tailing you. And you’re like, “Ugh. Tap my brakes” and then they freak out and they get in front of you and you tail them and they tap their brakes in front of you. You say, “Oh, I don’t like this” so you get in front of them and you cut them off and then they cut you off and then they give you a wave with certain fingers and then you wave back. Those of us who are watching are thinking, “Okay, which one is the fool?” Or you’re married and your spouse starts bringing up the past, things that you’ve done in the past. They’re mad at you because you didn’t answer your phone or they’re mad at you because you did this thing or said that thing and they say, “You always do this. Remember these four other times?” and you respond by going, “Oh, we’re going into the history books are we? Because I’ve got a book in my dresser of all the stuff...let me get it for you.” Then you list off, “Okay, point one in 1978...” and then you keep going down all this stuff. “Well, I wouldn’t have done those things,” she says to you, “If it wasn’t for your family, who is just a mess.” “Oh, we’re going to compare families now are we? Honestly, your family is a bunch of redneck...” and you go into the family thing and then she slams the door. “Oh, we’re going to slam doors now?” and you slam the door. Which one is the fool? In your attempts to answer someone acting foolishly, you become foolish. “Do not answer a fool according to his folly, or you yourself will be just like him.”

Do you know what a rage fantasy is? Listen, everyone in the room has rage fantasies. Somebody said something to you on some occasion and you wanted to have a comeback in that moment but you didn't have it. So what happens now is when you go and you mow the lawn or you're going for a run or there is silence around, you remember this event and you have a list of comebacks, right? Jerkstore comments that are just amazing (that's a Seinfeld reference for those of you who know). Like, you have a list of comments that you are going to give if just the moment --you wish you could go back in time, right? Not to cure cancer, not to go back in time to solve the world's problems, but so that you



could deliver this line. You think that by delivering the line that you are going to outsmart them, but are you? Is acting like the fool outsmarting someone or is it just out-fooling them? “Do not answer a fool according to his folly or you yourself will be just like him.”

When I said this section to my wife this week (because this has massive implications regarding how I respond to people), I said, “Isn’t this a brilliant proverb?” and she said, “Okay, but what are you supposed to do? Say nothing? Like, when someone is acting foolish, we’re not supposed to say anything? That’s the wise thing to do?” I said, “Yeah, verse 5.” So, don’t answer a fool, but then verse 5, he puts it right next to it.

[Answer the Fool]

“Answer the fool according to his folly, or he will be wise in his own eyes.”

My friend Mark and I grew up together and his dad invited me to be a part of a camp where we were overseeing some junior high boys. Mark’s father was put in charge, at this camp, of teaching the kids how to shoot basketballs at the basketball station. At this point, I had been playing competitive basketball for a lot of years. There is a certain way that you are supposed to shoot a basketball. You’re supposed to create a “T” with your hands, you’re supposed to have your elbow directly underneath your wrist when you shoot it, and you’re supposed to use four fingers when you shoot and follow through to the basket, okay? Square your shoulders, follow through. Shoot from your eye-socket if you can. There are people who do it differently, right? There are some guys who shoot from over here or whatever. That’s not the proper way. The ball is going to go all over the place. Maybe they make it work, but you’d never teach anybody --it’s foolish to teach somebody to shoot a basketball other than that. Okay, well, my friend’s dad would go out to the court with them and he’d say, “Okay, we’re going to teach all you kids how to shoot basketballs.” He picks up the basketball. “Here’s what you want to do. You take the ball and you put it in your palm like this.” Right? “And you put your other hand and you put it right behind the ball like this. When you shoot the basketball, you’ve got to get a little bit of ‘umph,’ so you bring the basketball down to your hip, like this, and you shoot it and kick your leg out, like this [laughter]. Everybody practice.” All these grade six kids are like, “Am I doing it right?” Balls going off the backboard and over the backboard and I’m like, “Oh no. This is a foolish way to teach people how to shoot baskets.” One of these kids, three years later, I was at a basketball camp (where I was also helping) and one of the kids was there and he was still shooting like this. All the kids were like, “Come and see Joe shoot the ball.” You know? And he’s kicking it off like it’s 1952 and it’s in black and white, you know? So, here’s the thing. What should I have done? I chose not to say anything because it was my friend’s dad. But there are affects of saying nothing. Somebody is at risk of being led down the wrong path. All the people that he teaches this to will be affected by it and he, himself, will think this is a wise way to shoot a basket. So yes, perhaps I shouldn’t answer a foolish way to shoot a basket, but there are massive ramifications to that (not just on him, but everyone else). So,

“Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own eyes.”



You know, the Apostle Paul, in the New Testament, has this really interesting experience. Paul had planted the Corinthian church and then he had left to go plant other churches. The people in the Corinthian Church (after Paul had left) had gathered around themselves some really exciting teachers. These exciting teachers were called “super-apostles”. Not just apostles, <exaggerated> “super-apostles” </exaggerated>. The “super-apostles” were known and were called super because they were clearly better speakers than the Apostle Paul was. When they stood up in front of an audience, they could command their attention. Paul was kind of dry. The “super-apostles” were also called “super-apostles” because they charged for their services, right? People value what they pay for. “So listen, I know Paul doesn’t charge anything for his services, but when we come, we’re charging you because what we have to give you is more valuable than him. And if you want to know how apostly we are, like, how super-apostly we are that surpasses Paul, let us give you our resume regarding all the things that we’ve suffered for God and all the ways that he’s working through us. We can do magnificent acts of power through our hands. Paul doesn’t do that. I mean, he does a little bit of that, but not like us. Super-apostles.” And little Paul the apostle comes and he has to engage this church. These guys are fools and he doesn’t want to engage the fools the way fools are speaking. He doesn’t want to give his CV, his resume, but he also feels like he has to keep them in check lest those people are thought to be wise in their own eyes and they affect everyone else. So, this is this passage. I want to read it to you. It’s really interesting, with that background in mind, how he works through this tension that’s written down in these two proverbs. Here’s how it goes. 2 Corinthians 11:5. He says,

“I do not think I am in the least inferior to these “super-apostles.” I may indeed be untrained as a speaker [I don’t talk like them], but I do have knowledge [the content of what I am saying is better than theirs. The delivery, not so much, but the content]. We have made this perfectly clear to you in every way. [verse 7] Was it a sin to lower myself in order to elevate you by preaching the gospel of God to you free of charge? I robbed other churches by receiving support from them so as to serve you [I didn’t put any burden on you guys, but I was supported by others, thereby robbing them to help you]. And when I was with you [verse 9] and needed something, I was not a burden to anyone, for the brothers who came from Macedonia supplied what I needed. I have kept myself from being a burden to you in any way, and will continue to do so. As surely as the truth of Christ is in me, nobody in the regions of Achaia will stop this boasting of mine. Why? Because I do not love you? God knows I do! [you guys should be thankful that I didn’t charge you. Verse 12] And I will keep on doing what I’m doing in order to cut the ground from under those who want an opportunity to be considered equal with us in the things they boast about [these “super-apostles”]. For such people are false apostles, deceitful workers, masquerading as apostles of Christ. And no wonder, for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light. It’s not surprising, then, that his servants also masquerade as servants of righteousness. Their end will be what their action deserve [they are not the real thing, I’m the real thing]. I repeat: [verse 16] Let no one take me for a fool [we start to feel his tension now]. But if you do, then tolerate me just as you would a fool, so that I may do a little boasting [look, I know I’m not supposed to boast because that is foolish, but you guys don’t listen to anything else, so I’m going to boast now, even though I shouldn’t do it because it’s foolish and I don’t want to be thought a fool]. In this self-confident boasting I am not talking as the Lord would, but as a fool. Since many are boasting in the way the world does, I too will



boast... [verse 21] Whatever anyone else dares to boast about - I am speaking as a fool [he keeps having to add these little phrases in there, right? "Oh, I know this is wrong and I shouldn't be talking this way] - I also dare to boast about. Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they Abraham's descendants? So am I. Are they servants of Christ? (I am out of my mind to talk like this) [but if they're giving their CV, if they're giving their resume and that's the thing that is going to work for you guys, okay, I'll go there even though I think it's foolish to go there. No one should give their resume, but are they servants of Christ?] I am more [and here is his proof. Here comes the resume]. I have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again. Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was pelted with stones, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my fellow Jews, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false believers. I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked. Beside everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches."

"Listen, I know I'm not supposed to talk like a fool because it makes me a fool in doing so, but it's all that you guys are listening to." Do you guys feel the tension that he has in this? The tension that he has is born out of this understanding of this proverb.

"Don't answer a fool according to his folly, or you yourself will be just like them. [But] answer a fool according to his folly, or he will be wise in his own eyes."

If he doesn't answer, they are going to spread their foolishness everywhere.

I'll give you an example as we finish here, a little closer to home. It will help you understand what is being taught here. I want you to imagine that you're at dinner with a friend and he is verbally disparaging his children to their face. Meaning that he looks at you and shakes his head and says, "These kids are so dumb and so whatever," and he makes sarcastic comments about them and to their face. You can just see the kids shrinking in themselves as they walk out of the room. They come in with a little fear and trepidation for their dad because they don't know what they are going to get and they walk out deflated. You've been there several times and this has happened over and over again. So finally (when the kids walk out of the room), you say, "Look, brother, you do see what is happening to your children when you talk to them that way, right? Why do you talk to them this way?" He says, "Listen, I think it's wise for us to build up our kids and to steady them and give them ability to withstand the criticisms of society as a whole, so I'm just giving them practice. It's wise what I'm doing." Okay, so hear what you've got: Is you've got a fool saying that what he is doing is wise. Okay, now you've got some options here. Here are your options. This is how you can respond. Number one: you can remain silent. You can nod and go, "Hmm, interesting point," and then you can go home and talk to your spouse about it. I call this the Canadian approach [laughter]. You go home and then you share with her, "...[stammering] you should have heard the stuff he said to her..." And it's a half an



hour discussion with your spouse about how horrible this guy is being to his kids. The danger, of course, in doing this, is that you give tacit approval to him when he makes a statement about how wise he is by berating his children. He said, “No, I’m wise for doing this,” and you said nothing. So, as a result, he goes on thinking, “Yeah, that’s a really good point,” and of course the kids are the ones who are going to bear the brunt of it. You’re not going to bear the brunt because that’s why you went home and didn’t say anything, because you’re scared. You don’t want to ruin the relationship or something like that. There’s another option. You could confront him using the same language he does towards his kids. “You redneck, bald freak. You want sarcasm? I’m going to ratchet it up to ten on the sarcasm machine so that you can feel what it’s like for these kids to hear you. Hmm, hmm?” [clapping, obnoxious gloating] You could do this to him. Now here’s the problem: He probably won’t listen. The kid (when I was clapping), for some reason didn’t listen to me. I don’t know. He didn’t change his behaviour. Of course you become the same kind of fool he is. Or option three: You can carefully challenge him. You say, “Listen, Brother, I know it’s hard raising kids and I know we want to build them up in a way that they’re going to be able to withstand all the pressures of accusations and things like this, but this is not the right way to do it. Here’s some things that I’ve learned in parenting that have led me down a better path. Consider it.” Now, listen, he might not listen to you at all. He might really be a fool and spurn your wisdom, but at the very least, what you’ve done is put a seed of doubt in his mind, so that the next time he does that with his kids, he might pause. And you’ve taken a step to protect his children from the foolishness of their dad. There is a way to respond to foolish actions in a way that doesn’t make you a fool and running aground on that side of the river, and also protects them from their own foolishness and all those who are the objects of it.

“Do not answer a fool according to his folly, or you yourself will be just like him. Answer a fool according to his folly, or he will be wise in his own eyes.”

Let me pray. Father, this is a great little text. I love the wisdom that you bring to us about practical things, about the way that we speak to those who are acting in foolish ways like we do, so often. I pray, Father, that you would help us to strike this balance. Would your spirit come and enable us to do that? That we might be wise as well. In Jesus’ name we pray, Amen.