
The Way of Folly

SCOTT HOEZEE

According to the Bible, there are two distinct paths in this world that a person can travel: The path of folly or the path of wisdom. The path of folly entices us with what is quick and easy and immediately pleasurable; and yet, that path leads to death. The path of wisdom, however, might seem harder; and yet, because wisdom begins with nothing less than the fear of the Lord, wisdom's road leads to flourishing—to life. Today on *Groundwork*, we will look at how the Bible portrays that deadly path, the way of folly, as pursued by those who are called fools. Stay tuned.

DAVE BAST

From Words of Hope and ReFrame Media, this is *Groundwork*, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Dave Bast.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And I am Scott Hoezee; and Dave, we are doing just a very short series—it doesn't get much shorter than this—just two programs on what constitutes, really, a pretty major theme in the Bible, the theme of wisdom and its counterpart, folly; and so, we are just going to do two programs. We are going to start with folly today so that we can end on the positive note. So, we will start with the negative side of the coin and then end in the next program by examining wisdom in a very positive context...

DAVE BAST

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And of course, when we think of this, as many of our listeners probably know, whenever you talk about wisdom and folly it is a short leap to the book of Proverbs.

DAVE BAST

It certainly is; in fact, there is a whole genre of the Old Testament in particular that is known as the wisdom literature...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

And it is really about how to live, and supremely that is crystallized in the book of Proverbs. If you are familiar with it, if you have ever read it, you know that it is mostly short sayings, many of them just a verse long, sometimes a little bit longer passage that uses really graphic language and imagery to illustrate, on the one hand, the right way to live—the way of wisdom—on the other hand, the wrong way to live, the way of folly.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; and one thing, I think, to point out at the beginning of this program and of this short, two-part series, is something that I learned in seminary, and that is one of the first things to distinguish here is that there is a difference biblically between knowledge and wisdom. Now, sometimes knowledge and wisdom are used interchangeably in the book of Proverbs, but basically, knowledge is what you learn in school...

DAVE BAST

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

It is classroom learning: The multiplication tables, history...

DAVE BAST

Book learning.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Book learning. Wisdom is sort of from the school of hard knocks. Wisdom is what you learn out on the streets by paying attention to how the world works and adjusting your life accordingly.

DAVE BAST

Yes; and so, one of the consequences of that distinction is that a person could have a whole lot of knowledge and still be a fool...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes.

DAVE BAST

Still lack wisdom. In fact, C. S. Lewis in one of his books says that a man may be a master of arts and still be a fool. You can have advanced degrees, you can have a PhD; and yet, you haven't really learned the basic rules of a happy and successful life; and that is another way of describing wisdom.

SCOTT HOEZEE

The problem...and here is the focus of part of this program...the problem with fools is that they cannot be taught. They don't pay any attention. They are just so sure of themselves that they don't pay attention, they just make it up as they go; and so, the old saying: Fools are often in error but never in doubt...

DAVE BAST

Yes, that is good.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And that is the essence of it.

DAVE BAST

Well, and so, they are vulnerable as a result of that, too, by not paying attention. You think of some of the common sayings...and now, we will get to Proverbs in just a moment and look at the biblical material...but just common, everyday adages that everyone has heard: A fool and his money are soon parted, for example. Why is that? They are vulnerable to being taken, to being cheated, because they don't pay attention, as you said, they just...

SCOTT HOEZEE

And they are spending without any...limits!

DAVE BAST

Right, exactly; blowing their money, throwing it away on stupid things...really dumb purchases. That is one of the reasons why so many lottery winners end up actually going bankrupt according to the statistics. Yes, these wonderful characterizations, and it is really about finding a way through life that won't hurt you, but will enable you to flourish; that is the distinction.

SCOTT HOEZEE

What is really, really interesting about the book of Proverbs is that it uses so many common, everyday illustrations for it. So, it is sort of like, you know, if you spit into the wind and your spit comes back and hits you in the face, the wise say: Well, spitting into the wind is a dumb idea...

DAVE BAST

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Whereas, the foolish just keep spitting into the wind, and every time their spit comes back, they are like: Well, I didn't think that would happen *again*! Again, they just prove themselves to be unteachable. They don't pay attention.

DAVE BAST

They saw off the branch they are sitting on.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly.

DAVE BAST

Which you have sometimes seen that in a cartoon maybe. That is the essence of folly; and in Proverbs, where we want to turn now, we want to look at a wonderful passage from the first chapter of Proverbs, in which we read about wisdom and folly both personified as women, interestingly enough. So, there is Lady Wisdom and there is Lady Folly. Here is how Proverbs describes it:

²⁰Out in the open, wisdom calls aloud. She raises her voice in the public square. ²¹On top of the wall she cries out. At the city gates she makes her speech. ²²"How long will you who are simple love your simple ways? How long will mockers delight in mockery and fools hate knowledge? ²³Repent at my rebuke, then I will pour out my thoughts to you; I will make known to you my teachings. ²⁴But since you refused to listen when I called (this is wisdom speaking now, to fools, they refuse to listen), and no one pays attention when I stretch out my hand. ²⁵Since you disregard all of my advice and do not accept my rebuke, ²⁶I in turn will laugh when disaster strikes you... ^{27a}I will mock when calamity overtakes you like a storm..."

SCOTT HOEZEE

^{27b}"When disaster sweeps over you like a whirlwind, when distress and trouble overwhelm you, ²⁸then they will call to me, but I will not answer. They will look for me, but will not find me. ²⁹Since they hated knowledge and did not choose to fear the Lord; ³⁰since they would not accept my advice and spurned my rebuke, ³¹they will eat the fruit of their ways and be filled with the fruit of their schemes."

That is from Proverbs 1; and again, Dave, it goes to exactly what we were just saying. A core problem of people who are trapped in folly, people who we would label as fools, is they are unteachable, they will not accept rebuke, they do not take instruction well; they are just sure that they do not need it. That is a core problem.

It is interesting here, too, and this is from Proverbs 1, but we could also sort of note that in the psalms, in Psalm 1, all of humanity gets divided up into just two simple groups: The righteous and the wicked. Proverbs makes the same move, but it is the wise and the foolish. Now, sometimes that might seem a little too black and white to us, just to divide up all humanity, because we all know that, yes, we are all mixtures of these things. Wise people make foolish decisions, although they often learn from them; but it is the general pattern that is interesting. So, even though it seems overly simplistic to divide all of humanity into just these two

groups, when you think about it, there is a lot of truth to that. There are people who are just singularly foolish day after day, and there are a lot of other people who are just wise all the time.

DAVE BAST

Right; and at bottom, I think the problem with the wicked, as with the foolish, is that they have chosen to reject God: The Word of God, the will of God, the way of God; and in doing so, as we see today, so many people think that they can make it all up for themselves; that they do not have to listen to anyone or anything else. They do not have to really decide on the basis of anything other than their own desire or their own opinion; and that classically is the characteristic of a fool—a fool who won't listen, who won't take instruction.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; but it does usually lead to some level of pain and discouragement, so why would people choose that? Well, we are going to take that up in just a moment with another really important passage from Proverbs 9, and that will come up next.

Segment 2

DAVE BAST

I am Dave Bast, along with Scott Hoezee, and you are listening to *Groundwork*, where today we are beginning a brief, two-part series on wisdom and folly. We are looking at folly first, and especially what Proverbs has to teach us about that. Now we want to listen to these verses from Proverbs Chapter 9.

SCOTT HOEZEE

¹³Folly is an unruly woman. She is simple and knows nothing. ¹⁴She sits at the door of her house on a seat at the highest point of the city, ¹⁵calling out to those who pass by, who go straight on their way: ¹⁶“Let all who are simple come to my house!” To those who have no sense she says, ¹⁷“Stolen water is sweet; food eaten in secret is delicious!” ¹⁸But little do they know that the dead are there; that her guests are deep in the realm of the dead.

DAVE BAST

Whoa!

SCOTT HOEZEE

That is pretty dramatic.

DAVE BAST

Yes, it is; so here folly is personified as a lady—a woman—and not to put too fine a point on it, a woman who lacks virtue...really, a prostitute who is enticing all those who pass by, described as “the simple,” to come to her house and enjoy what is sweet and take pleasure from what she has to offer; and in inviting people to do that, it is actually an invitation to them to *death...to destruction!*

SCOTT HOEZEE

Well, it turns out it is, right? So, the one thing that is interesting is that what this part of Proverbs 9 is saying is that Lady Folly finally has no substance. There is nothing to her. There is no there, there; which would make her the opposite of wisdom in the sense that wisdom, as we will see more in the next program, ties in with God's good designs for creation. Creation is substantive, right? It leads to a full, robust life; whereas, folly leads to an emptied out life because it is built on lies and it is built on crime...stolen bread is delicious...you know, come eat what has been stolen; and this passage very directly says it is sort of like the walking dead or something; the people who enter that house do not come out...

DAVE BAST

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

They are shriveled up; they are used up, because that is where folly leads you. Folly leads you away from God, who is our life; therefore, the alternative is death.

DAVE BAST

And it is a trap, really. I mean, there is a kind of tragic note to this; and the writer of Proverbs is almost pleading in all of these passages. I don't think these words are written out of a spirit of sort of vindictiveness or self-satisfaction or, oh, you are going to get what's coming to you. There is a pleading note here; there is a sense of the tragedy of people who were meant for life being seduced, literally sometimes seduced into the way of death; and they will not wake up until it is too late and they cannot escape, and the consequences cannot be undone. So, this is a life or death thing. I think that is one of the big things we need to say about the difference between wisdom and folly; the choices that each of us face in this regard are choices of life versus death.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; and so the question becomes when you read something as stark as Proverbs 9, you sort of say, well, who would ever fall for that? I mean, isn't pretty obvious that this leads to death? Why would...and yet, people do, of course. Every day they engage in high-risk behavior...

DAVE BAST

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

They make foolish investments and choices. They do this every day; and the question is why? Well, some verses from Proverbs 5 give us a clue.

DAVE BAST

Yes, here they are: ³For the lips of the adulterous woman drip honey, and her speech is smoother than oil; ⁴but in the end she is bitter as gall, sharp as a double-edged sword. ⁵Her feet go down to death. Her steps lead straight to the grave. ⁶She gives no thought to the way of life; her paths wander aimlessly, but she does not know it.

So, it turns out folly is very smooth talking.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

Her words are like honey and oil. They are sweet; they are appealing. It is almost like the allure of drugs, for example.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes.

DAVE BAST

Where people are promised a high, and they feel it at first; but suddenly they discover that the high goes away and they are trapped.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And they need more; and the next thing they know, all of their money is spent trying to buy more. So in addition to being kind of a smooth talking, you know, make it sound good, sort of seductress—folly—Lady Folly, as personified in Proverbs—also knows that she can appeal to the people who live by the slogan: If it feels right, do it. Right? Or sort of what I read a while back; somebody said: Do you want to know what the quintessential modern-day proverb is that dictates a lot of peoples' lives? Different strokes for different folks.

So, the idea is, there are no fixed patterns in life. How dare you puritanical, uptight, buttoned-down Christian people tell me how to live, as though there is a one-size-fits-all morality; no, no, no; I can make up the rules as I go along; maximize my pleasure quotient. There are no fixed patterns here, so don't tell me, you know, that there are lines inside of which I have to color. I can color anywhere on the page I want. That is sort of the essence of folly, and it leads to death.

DAVE BAST

It sure does, because the fool, in addition to not really taking instruction, not really thinking, not believing that *he* has to follow the rules...rules are for other people...they are for dummies...he can sort of make up his own way as he goes...but fools never look ahead either. They are incapable of reasoning out and seeing the consequences of the choices that they are making—seeing where that will lead.

There is a wonderful parable in the New Testament, one of Jesus' parables, the parable of the rich fool, who is this farmer who has a bumper crop and he says: Oh, now what will I do? Oh, I know. I'll tear down my barns; I will build bigger ones; and I will have all kinds of stuff and I will live easy and enjoy myself for the rest of my life (sounds like a fool), because that night God comes to him and says: You fool! Tonight you are going to die; then what is going to happen to all of these things? So, he never thought beyond the next day, or today even. He never understood that ultimately we are eternal creatures who are meant for God.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; and no disrespect to teenagers, but one of the things that people have noted for a long time about teenagers is they seem to have this idea that they are indestructible. They don't have to worry about consequences. They can binge drink and they can, you know, engage in high-risk driving behaviors on the highway and nothing is going to happen to [them]. Most mature people mature out of that. By the time you become an adult you realize you cannot live in the moment like that; it is dangerous. You are not indestructible; the world doesn't revolve around you; but some people never grow out of that. Some people continue to live that way when they get into business, and they don't have foresight, right? They never look ahead; they never say: You know, this particular investment scheme has never worked in the history of mankind...

DAVE BAST

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

But I think this time it will, so we will do it again; and they pay no attention.

DAVE BAST

One of the things they lack is imagination. They cannot project themselves into an alternative future if things don't go the way they are going, or they are expected. So, all of this is a little bit dark; you know, we have been painting quite a picture of folly and its ways; and we are going to brighten it up in the next program when we look at the opposite, which is wisdom; but before we do that, before we close this program, we would like to think a little bit even now about what are the ways that perhaps we can escape following the trajectory and enduring the fate of the fool? So, that is where we will turn next.

Segment 3

SCOTT HOEZEE

You are listening to *Groundwork*, where we are digging into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Scott Hoezee.

DAVE BAST

And I am Dave Bast.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And so, Dave, we said we want to close out this program... We have been talking kind of darkly about the way of the fool and how it leads to destruction and death and suffering. Let's assume that all of us would just as soon not be fools. Let's assume that we would just as soon avoid making those kinds of choices, much less having that pattern dictate our whole life. What are some things that we can do? Well, we have three ideas in this final part of this program, Dave; and the first one we can kick off by a well-known line from Psalm 14—not a proverb this time, but from Psalm 14, the opening verse:

¹The fool says in his heart, "There is no God."

DAVE BAST

Right; so, the first thing to do if you don't want to be a fool is—acknowledge God; and I think we should point out here that the psalmist is referring not to what we might think of in modern terms as an atheist.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

There were hardly any atheists in the ancient world. This is not something theoretical or philosophical. The fool who says there is no God is a practical atheist.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

It is a person who lives as though God does not exist, or at least does not matter. God is far away; he is not going to look at me.

SCOTT HOEZEE

There is no God *here*...

DAVE BAST

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

He is not worried about my business decisions or what I do morally or with my sexuality. There is no God paying any attention. He has no bearing on my here and now, so I am free to make up the rules as I go. And so, a major first step...and of course, we will be thinking about this a lot in the next program when we talk about the fear of the Lord...a major first step to avoid folly is saying there *is* a God; there is a God *here*...

DAVE BAST

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

There is a God who cares about me, who is paying attention to me, and who has given me the roadmap for a wise life; and so, my job is to say: Yes, there is a God and I am not it; and therefore I want to serve that God.

DAVE BAST

Well, here is a second practice that can help us avoid folly; and it is something we talked about right from the beginning in this program: The idea of teachableness. The great theologian John Calvin once described his conversion, really, in a simple phrase. He said: God subdued my heart to teachableness. So, that not only describes the way perhaps you can become a Christian, but it describes the way you learn to become wise, which is to open your ears—to be willing to listen—to be willing to be corrected or challenged; become a learner, become one who doesn't think they know it all. You know, again, there is a synonym for a fool,

right? A know-it-all.

SCOTT HOEZEE

A know-it-all, yes; and Dave, you just touched on something which is so important about this aspect of avoiding folly by being teachable, and that is being willing to accept a rebuke. Now, let's admit none of us like to be rebuked. We didn't like it when we were kids and our parents yelled at us; we don't like it when our spouse does it or a fellow member of the church. Nobody thrives on being told you are wrong; but a wise person will have to say now and then I was. You are right and I am wrong. We see this over and over in the book of Proverbs. It is like a refrain that you could multiply a hundred times over; and there are some verses in Proverbs 4, Dave, that speak to that theme of this book.

DAVE BAST

So, now the figure changes to a father—not a lady, but a man: ¹Listen my sons to a father's instruction; pay attention and gain understanding. ²I give you sound learning, so do not forsake my teaching. ³For I, too, was a son to my father; still tender and cherished by my mother. ⁴Then he taught me, and he said to me, "Take hold of my words with all of your heart. Keep my commands and you will live. ⁵Get wisdom! Get understanding! And do not forget my words or turn away from them.

So, listen; like a good son listens to a good father; and do not turn away, do not blow it off, do not scoff at it.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Do not be proud, do not be arrogant. Those are the things that will cut you off from that kind of teachability. Do not conclude: Ah, there is nothing my old man can teach me. There is nothing my teachers can teach me. I know what I need to know already. No, no, no; the Bible says that kind of arrogance leads to death because it makes you unwilling to accept rebuke; it makes you roll your eyes every time somebody talks to you, you know; I mean, it is the bored-looking kid in the back of the classroom staring out the window chewing gum, just will not listen to the teacher...

DAVE BAST

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

If that is your stance in all of life, good luck.

DAVE BAST

Or the person who gets angry whenever anyone tries to, even however gently...I am thinking of myself here...tries to point out: Hey, you know, maybe there is a better way. Maybe that is not the best decision that you are making. All of these things are the way of the fool; and the way of wisdom is to listen—just listen.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; and also...and here is the third thing to mention at the close of this program...listen also to those who are old, to those who are elderly, to those who have been around the block a few times, right? Proverbs 16:31:

Gray hair is a crown of splendor. It is attained in the way of righteousness.

You know, so often today, Dave, life moves along pretty quick. Young people are sure: Oh, yeah; Grandma doesn't even know about Facebook or Twitter; she is out of it. But the Bible says no, listen to your elders if they have been wise people. It is no guarantee, right? There is no fool like an old fool...

DAVE BAST

Yes, right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, just being old doesn't make you wise...

DAVE BAST

That is true.

SCOTT HOEZEE

But if they are; if they have themselves been teachable their whole lives, then it is well to sit at their feet and say: What can you tell me, Grandma? What can you teach me on how to live right?

DAVE BAST

Well, like all traditional societies, the world of the Bible respected age; looked up to those who had presumably...again, we said it is the school of hard knocks that teaches you wisdom. Well, those who have lived the most through it and have profited the most by it have something to teach the rest of us, so pay attention...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes...

DAVE BAST

Be sure you listen...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Do not chalk it up as just old-fashioned. It is not necessarily...

DAVE BAST

And you know what it comes down to in a word, Scott, I think, is humility.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes.

DAVE BAST

The person who is wise will be humble and will recognize they do not have all the answers.

SCOTT HOEZEE

The world does not revolve around you; creation did not spring into existence the moment you were born. In humility, which the theologian Robert Roberts...Robert C. Roberts...he says this is the core Christian virtue: All Christian virtue ultimately ties in with humility; and what humility says is there is a God, you are not it; accept your place in God's good order; accept your station in life; do not be uppity; do not think that you can never make a mistake and be rebuked for it, you can be; and so, be discerning; be humble; because that posture of humility will open all these other things we have been talking about.

DAVE BAST

Right; there are those who have something to teach me. There are people who know more than I do about most things, and if I am willing to acknowledge that and to set aside my opinion and be guided by the wisdom of my elders, and as we used to say, elders and betters, I will find that that is the way that leads to life.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And that is the whole purpose of the book of Proverbs, and of scripture generally, to do the things that make for delight and flourishing. That is what God desires for all his creatures.

DAVE BAST

Well, thanks for listening and digging deeply into scripture with *Groundwork*. We are your hosts, Dave Bast with Scott Hoezee, and we hope you will join us again next time as we turn our attention to Proverbs' personification of, and teaching on, wisdom.

Connect with us at groundworkonline.com to let us know what scripture passages or topics you would like to hear discussed on *Groundwork*.

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