

Pillar Passage – Proverbs 26:4-5
Jed Brown
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Welcome to another Pillar Passage. Today we're looking at a couplet, a pairing of two verses, from Proverbs 26—a famous one because of the way that it structured.

Verse 4 *Answer not a fool according to his folly, lest you be like him yourself.* Verse 5, *Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own eyes.*

Okay, so obviously here there is a way to answer a fool and there is a way not to answer a fool.

First, do not answer a fool in such a way that makes you like him—where you drop down into his foolishness; his idiocy—and become an idiot, a fool yourself. You want to avoid driving into his ditch. But ... But we are called to love of neighbor and so Proverbs says to the king—to a man who would reign wisely in his life—*Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own eyes.*

So, you don't want to become like him, but we do want to act in such a way that a person's self-conceit; a fool's self-delusion is torn down. You do not want to answer a fool that you become like him yourself and he walks away smugly thinking his is wise though his is a fool.

That's the command. So, how does this work? Well, this is—I'm convinced—a pairing within a pairing. This brings us to a rule we should always think about when trying to understand a passage, is what is that passage's native habitat? Look at the context. What is around it? What is around it immediately in that sentence? What is around it immediately in that paragraph? What is around it in that section of scriptures? Some people call that the pericope—which may not be the same as a chapter or could be. A pericope is a section of meaning. What is the context of that chapter, of that book, of that section of books, of that testament? We want to always consider the context.

Here, the immediate context gives us a literal frame to it. Let's look at the two verses before 1-4 and one after.

Verse 3, *A whip for the horse, a bridle for the donkey, and a rod for the back of fools. {chuckle}*
How do you answer a fool such a way you do not become like him yourself and you disabuse him (that's a good word there) disabuse him of his delusion that is he wise in his own eyes?
How do you that?

You don't speak to him the way he is speaking with you. You don't use his methods. You use a different method. You use a rod to the back. You use a paddle to the rear end. {chuckle}
Because, here's the opposite, *Whoever sends a message by the hand of a fool—*whoever honors a fool with an errand—*cuts off his own feet and drinks violence.* In other words, you

become like the fool. You enter into the experience and consequences of life of the fool by becoming like him, and by honoring him with something that is on your level.

The reason why this is so important these days is two-fold. On the one hand, social media is full of arguments, and the Bible does tell us Timothy 2 don't to get lost in (this is at the end of 2 Timothy 2) not to get bogged and lost into useless arguing. But sometimes we find ourselves in an argument. Sometimes we find ourselves in an intellectual street fight. And what will we do then?

The other side of this is there is a notion out there—especially among evangelical church—that Christians should only be nice. That holiness equals nice. We are wrong if we engage in contending for the faith that finds us in the middle of arguments online.

But this verse says something very different. That when we answer a fool according to his folly, we should not answer like him. But sometimes we should answer a fool, and we should do so with a rod, or with—as we will see in a second—with the intellectual version of a rod to the back.

Let's look at an example here. This is a recent interaction that Ben Shapiro had. You may have seen him online. There's been many videos online of him "owning the liberals". I'm not saying the Ben Shapiro's a Christian. As far as I know, he's an observant Jew, not a Christian. But this does give us some recent indication of what the writer of the proverb meant by answering the fool with a rod to the backside.

This is an interaction in a public forum where a student stands up and says, braggingly, "I'm a mathematician and physicist, here, a double major, and I also just won a prestigious award in the country to pursue research at any institution I want —"
And Shapiro responds, "Ah, congratulations," which, I believe, he said that unsarcastically. He meant that. By the way, this speech here was on gender identity, and on Shapiro's argument that's there's no such thing as a trans person or a bi- person. That people are created male or female. Imagine that.

So the student says, "So, I'm pretty qualified to say that most of what you're saying is based on old data."

Shapiro says, "I literally cited a study from last month, but sure."

The student says, " Like, for example, gender identity disorder, that's a DSM4 *{short for}* (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual for Mental Disorders)... Which is a manual used by the American Psychological Association, which is changed over, and over, over again over the years. The student says, "... bro. We use the DSM5, now."

Shapiro: "I literally cited the DSM 5 in the speech, and it's called gender dysphoria."—in the manual.

In other words, Shapiro's point here even today in our most recent psychological manual—which is my not means Christian, the term for these things is called gender *dysphoria*. In other words, a misunderstanding; a mis-ordering of one's gender.

The student replies by mimicking Shapiro in a mocking voice and said Shapiro "sounds like a bozo, bro." The student then made disparaging remarks about Shapiro's sexual capabilities.

This is call bulverism. When you see someone engaging in bulverism or ad hominem attacks, that's usually a good sign that the person has lost the debate. I have no more arguments to make. No more arguments based on information logic or anything else, so I'm just going to attack the speaker.

But Shapiro replies, "So, the nice thing about having several small children is I don't feel the necessity to have my masculinity challenged by someone like you."

The student then replies and now he's using language that's just catch words. "Shapiro has a 'Western colonial idea of gender.'"

To which Shapiro replies, "You're right, men and women don't exist in any other culture. You're right. Nailed it." (sarcasm there).

The student replies, "I'm a mathematician and a physicist!"

They debate further about gender identity. Then Shapiro ends it with this, "As a mathematician and physicist, what in the \$&!# do you know about human biology that allows you to deny it?" referencing the recent supreme court candidate's inability to answer the question 'what is a woman,' because she said "I am not a biologist." Again, this person keeps claiming that his place as mathematician and physicist allow him to take the high ground here. So, the student replied, "You go your law degree from Harvard! What do you know about biology?" Which he has not just fallen into the pit; the hole that Shapiro just laid for him. He has just used the same argument that Shapiro has just laid against him, and basically proved Shapiro's point, 'What are you talking about?'

To which Shapiro replies, "One other thing if your logic is so flawed as a mathematician and physicist, I would suggest that whichever institution gave you an award, revoke it immediately."

That is taking a rod to the backside of a fool. The scriptures says, that if you must reply to a fool—but there are plenty of times when you don't need to, and there are plenty of other passages in Proverbs which teach us how to walk away with self-control—but, when you must answer a fool, answer him so that he walks away not (perhaps) wise in his own eyes like that foolish young man. But the only way to do that—the only way to break through that that façade; that self-insanity; that delusion—that foolish delusion is a rod to the backside.