

## Answering Fools according to Their Folly

### Small Group Follow-up Study for 2 Corinthians 11:16-21

#### **RE-READ**

[16] I repeat, let no one think me foolish. But even if you do, accept me as a fool, so that I too may boast a little. [17] What I am saying with this boastful confidence, I say not as the Lord would but as a fool. [18] Since many boast according to the flesh, I too will boast. [19] For you gladly bear with fools, being wise yourselves! [20] For you bear it if someone makes slaves of you, or devours you, or takes advantage of you, or puts on airs, or strikes you in the face. [21] To my shame, I must say, we were too weak for that! But whatever anyone else dares to boast of—I am speaking as a fool—I also dare to boast of that.

#### **RECAP**

Here we see Paul trying to walk the tightrope of the wisdom provided in Proverbs 26:4-5 which reads, “Answer not a fool according to his folly, lest you be like him yourself. Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own eyes.” Paul is writing to a church that had grown suspicious of him. They had grown suspicious of him because of their foolish tolerance of false teachers. False teachers had come to them proclaiming another Jesus, a different spirit, and a different gospel, and Paul says that the Corinthians “put up with it readily enough” (2 Corinthians 11:4). In order, though, for this false teaching to gain traction, those preaching it had to undermine Paul’s authority; so they took small things, things like a change in travel plans, and used them like a wedge to drive Paul and the Corinthians apart. Had Paul’s authority still been intact in their minds, Paul could’ve spoken to the Corinthians the way he did the Galatians when he said, “O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? ... I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel—which is really no gospel at all” (Galatians 3:1; 1:6). But the relationship just wasn’t there. Paul, instead, had to reassert his apostolic credentials in order to be heard. And, to do so, he felt the need, given the Corinthians’ suspicion of him and their foolish tolerance of boastful teachers, to boast a little bit himself. In effect, he was going to answer the Corinthians according to their folly, lest they be wise in their own eyes (v 19). But he wanted to be careful, at the same time, not to be branded a fool himself (hence the numerous disclaimers).

According to the Jewish Talmud, Proverbs 26:4 informs our approach to worldly things while Proverbs 26:5 informs our approach to religious things. In other words, in negligible issues one should just ignore what the fool has to say; but in issues that matter, he must be dealt with lest credence be given to what he says.

Therefore, when the gospel is on the line, when eternal souls are in the balance, our reputations need to take a back seat; and we need to prepare to be branded a fool for Jesus’ sake (cf. v. 19).

#### **RESPOND**

1. What caught your attention from Sunday’s sermon? What are you still thinking about/mulling over?
2. Can you think of a time when you faced the Proverbs 26:4-5 dilemma? How did you decide whether or not you were going to respond?
3. Have you ever been branded a fool for believing and/or sharing the gospel?
4. Considering our text, how did Paul reflect the cross of Christ in his leadership? How did the false teachers reflect the opposite of the cross? What does the Corinthians’ response to Paul’s leadership say about their savouring of the cross?
5. Can you think of contemporary examples of false teaching? If so, how far do its characteristics match those of the false teaching Paul describes (v. 20)?
6. When are we most tempted to boast? What practical actions can we take to avoid the danger?
7. Given our discussion, what sort of things should we be praying for ourselves and for our church?