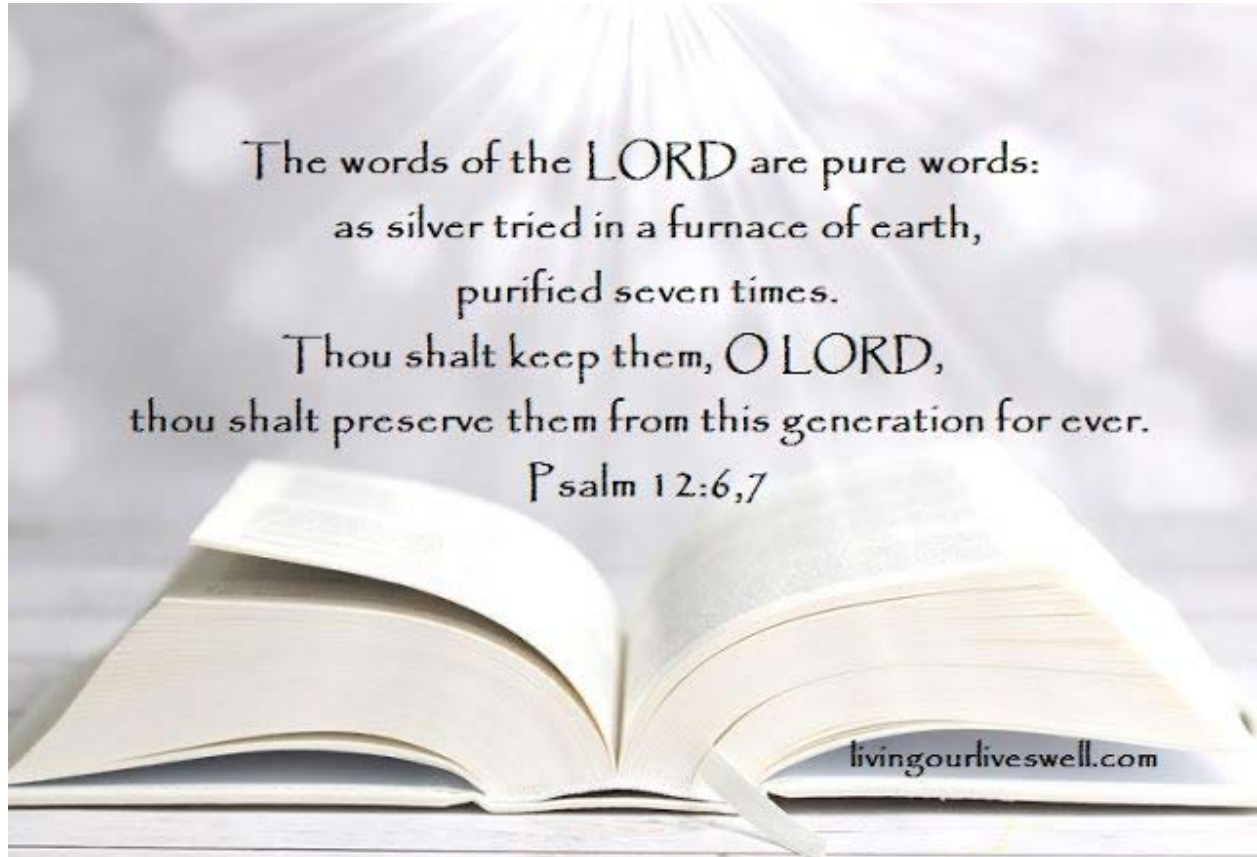


THE FOLLY OF THE FOOL

LET GOD BE TRUE (7)



We can help them understand their wrong reasoning.

T. M. MOORE

A ReVision Study from

The Fellowship of Ailbe

The Folly of the Fool

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Let God Be True (7)
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The Folly of the Fool

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Welcome to *The Folly of the Fool*

“Fool” seems like pretty harsh language to use in reference to someone who doesn’t agree with your faith. But God uses the term because it fits so well those who have turned away from Him to seek meaning, purpose, and happiness in paths of their own devising. The end of all such rebelliousness is eternal death, and if we care about our neighbors, we’re going to try to help them avoid that plight.

Which means we’ll need to use reason to help our foolish friends see the folly of their thinking compared to the beauty of Christ and the Gospel. We’re not going to call our lost friends fools, but we will know that their wrong beliefs have set them on a course of disappointment and destruction. We’ll want to do whatever we can to create a rational path for grace to reach and save their souls.

And that’s what we’ll be considering in this part of our study, “Let God Be True.”

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Thank you.

T. M. Moore
Principal

1 Who Is the Fool?

*Do not answer a fool according to his folly,
Lest you also be like him.
Answer a fool according to his folly,
Lest he be wise in his own eyes.* Proverbs 26.4, 5

Two lines of instruction

Asserting the truth of God into a culture of lies requires some finesse at times. A world of finesse is embedded in these two seemingly contradictory verses from the book of Proverbs, surely two of the most enigmatic verses in all of Scripture.

At first glance, as I mentioned, they seem to contradict one another. How can you both answer and not answer a fool according to his folly?

But a closer examination of Proverbs 26.4, 5 reveals two clear lines of instruction which are complementary, rather than contradictory.

First, we must be prepared to “answer” the fool. The word, “answer,” implies a conversation in which we are responding to the claims, questions, and challenges of someone familiar to us, giving testimony from our own perspective and convictions and offering explanations for why we believe our Christian worldview is true and more reliable than any other.

We can’t answer the fools of this world unless we engage them in conversation, pointing out the errors in their reasoning and giving sound reasons for what we believe.

Second, we must be careful how we “answer” people, how we conduct such conversations. Our goal must be to help them see the error of their thinking, their false premises, misguided reasoning, and faulty conclusions – what our text refers to as their “folly”. At the same time, we must be careful that we do not stumble into that folly by reasoning in such a way as to *reinforce* rather than *refute* their wrong reasoning and false ideas.

Thus, two commands – one implied, the other explicit – are in view here. We must engage the fools of this age in conversation about their beliefs, and we must do so in ways that enable them by reason to, if not see their folly, at least glimpse it, whether or not they choose to admit and abandon it.

Two further implications

But this instruction carries two further implications – first, that we know who the “fools” are, and second, that we take up the challenge of engaging them in conversation.

Who do we think we are calling someone a fool?

Let’s be clear about this much: The wording is that of Scripture, not our own selection. If we have a problem thinking this way, our problem is with God. When God teaches us to think of others as liars and fools, do we presume to tell Him that such language is not appropriate? We must accept His wording and make the best use of it, rather than take offense and avoid His wording because we think we know better.

So, to whom do the Scriptures refer when they use this term?

In Biblical parlance anyone is a fool who denies the existence or relevance of God and who thus becomes a law unto himself in trying to make his way in life (cf. Ps. 14.1; Eph. 5.15-17). The fool, as opposed to the wise, is the one who has no use for God (cf. Prov. 3.5, 6). The Hebrew word for “fool” appears to mean

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something like living within one's own little world – naïve, silly, or idiotic – or those who make decisions and choices from the gut rather than from careful consideration of all the facts and consequences.

The fool thus does not use sound reason, because his thinking is anchored in himself rather than in God and His Word; and he inhabits a world of his own creation, one that has no place for God or His Word. He lives “under the sun” rather than “under the heavens,” and thus his reasoning is trapped beneath the closed ceiling of his false worldview.

Part of the believer's calling is so to love such people that we seek them out – as Jesus did the lost of His day (Lk. 19.11) – and to engage them in ongoing conversations about their views. Our purpose in this must be, as Paul explains (2 Tim. 2.24-26), to correct those who are living self-contradictory, unworkable worldviews, with patience and gentleness, so that they might come to their senses and escape the clutches of the father of lies, who is fueling their self-deception.

This sounds like a tall order, a task best left to the specialists. But the Scriptures address this work to us, each of us whom God has called to His Kingdom and glory and appointed as witnesses for Jesus Christ and ambassadors of His Kingdom. So we do well to understand the requirements of this aspect of our calling and to prepare ourselves to make good use of it.

What this requires

This will require that we become more active in reaching out to lost people, getting to know our neighbors, and living in such a way as to demonstrate the hope we have in Jesus Christ. At the same time, it means engaging in ongoing conversations in which we will have abundant opportunities to answer from the perspective of our Christian worldview.

But if this is going to be the case, if we're going to rise to this challenge, we shall have to sanctify Jesus Christ as Lord in our lives (1 Pet. 3.15), so that we love and obey Him in all things, fear and serve Him at all times, and take up His calling to be witnesses and make disciples for His Kingdom (Acts 1.8; Matt. 28.18-20).

Sanctifying Jesus Christ as Lord in your heart will engender in you the kind of hope that others see, will provoke them to ask a reason for what you believe, and will give you the opportunity to answer a lost, loved fool according to his folly.

We don't go around calling people fools; however, they're easy enough to spot.

For reflection

1. Why do we say that answering a fool according to his folly and not according to his folly is a task appointed to every believer?
2. “Fool” seems like a harsh term, and we must be careful in how we use it. But why is it an appropriate term for those who have embraced a life of wrong-belief – the life of the lie?
3. How confident are you in your ability to start and maintain conversations that revolve around matters of faith? What could you do to increase in confidence?

Next steps – Preparation: Any fools in your sphere of influence? Of course, you won't address them as such, but it's important you understand how God sees them. What would you look for as evidence that someone was a fool rather than a wise person?

2 The Folly of the Fool

The way of a fool is right in his own eyes... Proverbs 12.15

But the folly of fools is deceit. Proverbs 14.8

*There is a way that seems right to a man,
But its end is the way of death.* Proverbs 14.12

Pity the fools – and love them

In the Scripture he is a fool who lives “under the sun” rather than “under the heavens,” a person who refuses to acknowledge the existence and relevance of God and, rejecting the authority of God and His Word, sets off on his own course in life, following his own counsel, living more by his affections than by sound reason.

The Bible makes it clear that such people are to be pitied, because they are in the grasp of the father of lies and have no power of their own to break free from his clutches and the false worldviews they have embraced.

If the fools of this age are to find their way to the light of truth, it will take loving, patient, gentle, and persistent reasoning on the part of those who serve the Lord Jesus Christ in living hope and fullness of joy.

The believer’s calling involves us with a variety of fools, like we once were. We want to get close to them with sincere and loving service, and engage them in ongoing conversations concerning what they believe and why. Think of Jesus and Nicodemus (Jn. 3.1-21), or Paul, wandering around the market place in Athens (Acts 17). Our goal in this is to get to know people and show them we care. This will create opportunities for conversations in which we can help them examine their worldviews. Our hope in so doing is that they will be able to see the folly of unbelief as clearly as we do.

Reason can engage the fools of this world and create an avenue along which, as God is pleased, grace can travel unto their salvation.

This is long-haul, patient, and loving work. It requires that we prepare well, pray earnestly, and practice to develop our conversational skills. We must not avoid this work, for the love of Christ constrains us to do everything in our power to make God’s Good News known.

Makes sense?

One thing we will discover very early on in talking with such people is that they are fairly convinced of the correctness of their views. Their way of life makes good enough sense to them, and they consider that all their views, convictions, choices, and practices are completely in line with what any reasonable person would accept.

We can begin to make progress in helping such people see the folly of unbelief if we focus on two crucial components of the worldview of every fool.

The first is suggested in the phrase, “in his own eyes.” The fool’s worldview makes perfectly good sense *to him*, frankly, because he wants it to. Yet most people are largely unaware of what they believe, at two levels.

First, they have never taken the time to think through all that they believe, especially those foundational, bare essential convictions that must be true for anything to make sense. Their lives are largely unexamined and have been cobbled together from various wafting breezes of intellectual and spiritual wrong-belief and cultural fashion. The approach of most people to changing times is just to go with the flow, without stopping to examine the reliability or implications of what they choose to believe.

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Second, most people are completely unaware of how they have come to believe what they do. They have no idea about who their authorities are or whether those authorities are reliable. All they know is that, as much as they understand things, their views make sense to them. Or they *seem* to.

Every worldview its savior

A second thing we need to understand about the folly of the fool is that every worldview has its savior, someone, or more likely, something, that is looked to for ultimate happiness, deliverance, and wellbeing.

The savior of the fool is not, of course, our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 1.18). However, everyone is trusting in someone or something to make their lives make sense and to bring them the happiness they believe they deserve. Part of our task will be to discover who or what the savior is in any fool's worldview, and to expose the folly of thinking that such a person, idea, or things could ever truly deliver the goods.

Thus, from the beginning of our conversations with our foolish neighbors – keep that term for your own use, not as a label to pin on them – we will want to discover two things: First, what is the full scope of what my neighbor believes, that which is so right in his own eyes that he has staked his life on it; and, second, what stands at the core of his worldview as savior and, thus, god?

It will be necessary for us, besides remaining loving and sincere, to ask good questions, listen for insightful comments, understand clearly, and remember what our neighbor says, because, in the process of answering him, we will want to use his own words as much as possible.

In other words, we will use *sound* reason – reason employed “under the heavens” – to help our unbelieving friend discover the *faulty* reason that has him trapped in the folly of an “under the sun” way of life.

Remember: The folly of the fool seems right to him. But life in the fast lane of wrong-belief is deceitful and can be disastrous. Surely we care enough about our neighbors to help them discover the better way.

For reflection

1. Why does the way of life chosen by the fool only *seem* right? To what does it ultimately lead?
2. Do you pray for lost people? For your lost neighbors? Have you mapped out your own Personal Mission Field ([watch this video](#))?
3. Reason doesn't save anyone. Only grace saves. But what role can reason play in making a way for grace?

Next steps – Preparation: How about you? What do you believe? If you were asked to outline the main points of your own worldview, what would you say? Are you ready to “give an answer” for the hope that is within you?

3 Clear about Our Worldview

... but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect... 1 Peter 3:15 (ESV)

The witness of our lives

As Jesus understood, we must earn the friendship of the fools of this age. At least, we must earn the right to reason with them about the truth of God and the Christian worldview.

We can't just go around spouting the Gospel, handing out tracts, knocking on doors, shouting on street corners, demanding that people listen to us, and stop whatever they're doing until we've finished. Gentleness and respect require that we take an interest in people – in *their* lives and *their* worldviews – and that we ask sincere questions and listen attentively.

At the same time, we will not disguise the hope we have in Jesus, but will strive to be like Him in how He approached the work of bringing near the Kingdom of God to the people of His day.

Jesus did many good works at every stage of His ministry, wherever He went. At the same time, He kept Himself pure and free of the hypocrisy and corruption so characteristic of the religious leaders of His day. And He showed that He genuinely cared about the needs and sorrows of the last, the lost, and the least.

It was not incidental to Peter's preaching that, when he began to proclaim Jesus to the Gentile Cornelius, he led off by saying that Jesus went about doing many good works, for which He was justly renowned (Acts 10:38).

Our ability to bear credible, persuasive, effective witness to the fools of this age will in large part depend on the extent to which our lives refract the reality of the living Christ and the hope we have in Him. Thus, we must daily sanctify Christ as Lord in our heart, growing in love for Him daily, working out His salvation in us with fear and trembling (Phil. 2:12, 13), and refusing to grow weary of the good works for which we have been saved (Gal. 6:9; Eph. 2:10).

Spam filter

Spiritual depth, moral purity, genuine friendliness, and sincere service must be the frame of reference for our witness if we hope to engage the fools of our age to consider the folly of their reasoning. We must *be* witnesses to the resurrection of Christ if we hope to be credible in *talking* about it (Acts 1:8).

People in the wrong-believing world have witnessed a good bit of hypocrisy, shallowness, disingenuousness, dishonesty, and corruption among the members of the Church. Many of them have installed a spam filter on their brains which automatically blocks anyone calling himself a Christian as having nothing meaningful or significant to say.

The only way to remove that filter is through a sanctified life of goodness, sincerity, patience, and love.

But there must be more; we must also prepare to proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom in all its fullness. For if we keep on living our hope, sooner or later, someone is going to ask us about it.

The Gospel – the whole Gospel

Our hope-filled lives, by themselves, won't lead anyone to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. For this, we must be bold to make God's Good News known, and to *make it make sense*. And that means making sense to fools, entering their frame of reference and way of seeing the world in the hope we might lead them to consider the Good News of Jesus in a new light.

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The Gospel of Jesus Christ is not just about being forgiven and going to heaven when we die. The Gospel is the Good News of the Kingdom of God (Matt. 4.17).

The Gospel announces a new reality, a new era, under the Lordship of King Jesus, Who, by His holy life, sacrificial death, and powerful resurrection, has opened the way for all people to enter fellowship with the one true God. We inhabit a world in the grip of sin. All its miseries, disappointments, cruelties, and corruptions can be traced to hearts blackened by wrong-belief and sin. Jesus came to set the world free from this tyranny. His life, death, resurrection, and reign guarantee that the offer He makes of forgiveness and eternal life is sure. By trusting in Jesus, people can know deliverance from the death-grip of sin through God's forgiveness, love, pleasure, and joy; and they can discover His purpose for their lives. This is the promise of the Kingdom. This is the offer of the Gospel. This glorious offer goes out to all who will renounce their folly and their preferred ways of finding salvation – however they define it – to embrace Jesus as Lord, King, God, and Savior.

Likewise, we must warn the reluctant and the skeptical that continuing in wrong belief is a downward spiral into deeper levels of degradation and disappointment, the end of which is everlasting death (Rom. 1.18-32).

This is the Good News of the Kingdom that Jesus proclaimed; however, we must make certain that we announce this glorious Gospel out of the same kind of loving, serving, holy lifestyle that He did.

Moreover, we will most likely give this announcement, not in one huge “data dump” at what we may regard as an opportune moment; rather, we will allow this Good News to percolate through our conversation, so that we glow with the Gospel and warm up with the welcome news of redemption, rather than blare it in our neighbor's face, insisting on some response.

We must be ready to make our own convictions clear as we engage the fools in our world, for we never know when one whom we have loved and listened to might ask, “Why do you have such hope? Where does this hope come from?” Only the Word of God has power to give life to lost people (Jn. 6.63). In our conversations with the fools of this age, as patient reasoning leads to open doors of opportunity, we will give the Gospel clearly, gradually, and completely, so that we set before our unbelieving friends the full picture of what we believe and why.

Then we will be ready to continue shining the light of truth on their worldview and answering their queries and challenges.

For reflection

1. Evangelism is a process, not an event. Explain. What does that process include?
2. Sharing the Good News about Jesus also entails reporting the bad news for those who refuse to believe. What is that bad news? Why must we share it?
3. How would you assess your own readiness to share the hope that is within you, should someone ask?

Next steps – Preparation: What is the Gospel of the Kingdom? How would you explain it to a lost person? Why must we be clear about what we believe before we seek to help others see the folly of their reasoning? Answer these questions in prayer with the Lord, and listen for His confirmation or correction.

4 Reasoning with the Fool

*“Come now, and let us reason together,”
Says the LORD...*” Isaiah 1.18

Ready to reason

Is it possible to reason with hardened sinners? Self-confessed atheists or agnostics? Deniers of God? Wrong-believers? Those who scorn the Gospel?

Fools?

Evidently the Lord thinks it is. In seeking to answer the fools in our lives with the glorious Good News of the Kingdom of God, we must *reason* with them, just as the Lord intended to reason with His rebellious people through the prophet Isaiah.

That is, it won't do simply to say to those who are blinded by a false worldview, “Because this is what the Bible says.” To be sure, we need to tell them what the Bible says, but we need to do so in an atmosphere of loving service, gentle patience, respect for their views, and clear and careful reasoning.

Wrong-believers may be lost and foolish, but they are not completely beyond the reach of reason. Their main problem is that all the reasons they embrace and the convictions they hold dear are based on false premises – that there is no God and that someone or something other than Jesus is their best hope in life.

We know this “under the sun” worldview is false; we know our wrong-believing friend is captive to the father of lies. So, to “answer the fool according to his folly” we will need to come over onto the platform of his own worldview, take a little guided tour, and, using careful reasoning, point out the flaws in the foundation and superstructure of what our friend believes.

A word of caution

At the same time we'll need to be careful, as we reason with fools, that we do not lend credibility to their false premises and skewed opinions; otherwise, we may end up becoming like them, having affirmed them in their faulty reasoning and foolish notions about life.

How do we do this? How do we expose the folly of wrong belief and, at the same time, keep from granting our deceived neighbors any solid ground on which to stand?

The answer is that we reason with them, like the apostle Paul reasoned, as the spokesman of God, with unbelieving Jews and Greeks everywhere he went. What, then, are the elements of such reasoning?

Elements of sound reasoning

To begin with, like Paul in Athens, we need to be willing to come onto the platform of our wrong-believing friends, to mingle with them and get to know them, to ask questions about their beliefs, and to learn as much as we can about the worldview animating their day-to-day existence. This is what Paul was doing as he wandered about in Athens and chatted with the people there (Acts 17.16ff).

At the same time, we'll want to take every opportunity to inject our own beliefs in a winsome, glowing, matter-of-fact manner. From Paul's example in Athens and Rome, we may glean a few key practices that will enable us to reason effectively on the platform of the fool.

First, we must engage in conversations with wrong-believers, either personally or virtually, according to their own views and opinions (Acts 17.18). We must take the initiative here by starting or resuming conversations,

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based on what we already know about the folly of the fool, and being ready with sincere questions to learn as much as we can. We're listening to understand, but we're also listening to discover inconsistencies, contradictions, and areas where our friend's views affirm what the Scriptures teach (cf. Acts 17.24-29).

We must pay careful attention to the views, beliefs, and practices our wrong-believing friends hold dear, so that we can understand them as fully as possible (Acts 17.22, 23). It is in these views, beliefs, and practices that the folly of unbelief will become evident.

Further, we must demonstrate to our wrong-believing friends that their worldview contains inconsistencies and contradictions. Their view is unreasonable; it doesn't make sense, will not work, and so can't be relied upon (Acts 17.24-27).

Also, we must try to discover evidence from within their own worldview that supports the truth about life and the world as presented in the Bible (Acts 17.28, 29).

Finally, we must be patient and willing to stay at such conversations for as long as it takes to set forth the claims of Christ clearly against what we will show to be the rubble of our foolish friend's failed worldview (Acts 17.32-34; cf. Acts 28.30, 31).

We're going to reason with our foolish friends, but not from a position *affirming* the platform of their faulty reasoning and false worldview, merely of *surfacing* it for more careful examination. We'll assume a starting point for our reasoning that is firmly based on our own Christian worldview. From that vantage point, then, we will, with patience, gentleness, and love, try to help the fools in our lives see the folly of their false worldview.

As Jesus demonstrated to the Pharisees (Matt. 12.22-29) and Paul showed the Athenian philosophers, a careful consideration of the tenets of wrong-believing worldviews will demonstrate at least two things: First, such worldviews are self-contradictory and therefore unreasonable and unworkable; and second, to the extent their false views work at all, it's only because they have borrowed premises from the Biblical account.

If we can do this, if we care enough about our lost friends to talk seriously with them, we may at least plant a sense of disquiet in their souls which may, in time, lead to a thoughtful reconsideration of the Gospel.

For reflection

1. Why must we try to reason with our wrong-believing friends about their worldview?
2. What do we expect to discover as we do?
3. Will reason alone save a fool and rescue him from his folly? What must we be careful to do in addition to practicing sound reason?

Next steps – Conversation: What do you know about your lost friends or co-workers that might make a good starting point for a conversation? See what you can find out this week. Pray about how you might use what you learn to begin a conversation about a lost friend's worldview.

5 Is that *Reasonable*?

But Jesus knew their thoughts, and said to them: "Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation, and every city or house divided against itself will not stand. If Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then will his kingdom stand?" Matthew 12.25

Questions, questions, questions

We begin to answer the fool according to his folly by taking our stand with our wrong-believing friend, on the platform of his own views and beliefs, following along and leading with questions to help him explain the foundations and structures of his worldview. We will do so with genuine interest, sincere respect, and careful listening.

By doing this we hope to use *sound reason* to demonstrate the *faulty reasoning* – the folly – of our friend’s beliefs.

We’ll ask important questions, foundational questions, such as: What kind of beings are we, and why are we here? What is the greatest good anyone could do, and should we do it? Is beauty real? Truth? Where did everything come from, what holds it together, and where is everything headed? What’s wrong with the world? Can we do anything about it? How have you come to these opinions, and how do you know they’re true? What do you most earnestly and sincerely hope for? Why?

We will want to pay careful attention to our friend’s answers, listening for evidence of faulty reasoning, for things that simply don’t make sense, precepts and views that don’t go together, beliefs and opinions that cannot be reconciled. We’ll also want to listen for views or convictions that sound like they may have come from the Bible, rather than our friend’s worldview.

This is what Paul was doing in Athens, and it’s what Jesus did in Matthew 12.

Jesus and His detractors

As Jesus was casting out demons, His detractors offered an explanation, from their perspective, for how He could do this. They said He was in league with the devil. Simple as that. Thus they hoped to undermine His credibility and deter His followers. Jesus began His answer to their foolish explanation with a simple analogy that must have left them feeling chagrined.

He simply pointed out that what they claimed doesn’t make any sense. How could He be in league with the devil while He was busy razing the devil’s house, taking him captive (v. 29), and taking all his plunder? Not only that, but their explanation didn’t account for an inconvenient reality: their own exorcists were also casting out demons – Biblical thing to do. Were their colleagues also in league with the devil?

This is easy enough to do with wrong-believers who are trapped in a web of deception and lies which is their worldview, but which to them *seems* altogether reasonable and right.

For example, our unbelieving friend may insist, when it comes to ethics, that there are no absolute values and everyone needs to be free to do whatever he thinks is right, as long as no one gets hurt.

But wait a second: if there are no absolute values, how can he make such a sweeping and absolute statement, as if his “no absolutes” worldview were absolutely so? If there are no absolutes, then not even *that* absolute is true. And how can the belief that one shouldn’t hurt others be fitted into a system where absolutes such as this are not allowed? Is that *reasonable*?

Or our friend may want to insist, without any evidence, that there is no God and we all simply have to make up our own minds about what’s true and best for us. But how can he know that? Does he know all things? If

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not, might he be willing to agree that, in the realm of things about which he knows nothing at all, there might be a God? And does he not, when he insists that each person must have the final say on his purpose and course in life, suggest, at least, that each individual human being is a kind of god unto himself? How do such authority-wielding “gods” resolve their differences apart from violence?

Or if your friend is more cosmic minded, he might wax eloquent about the splendid orderliness and knowability of a universe governed by chance. Think about that for a minute.

Or he might insist that there is no truth. Everything is relative. Truly? And relative to what? Or whom? Those same “gods” who will end up arguing with, screaming at, and doing violence to have their own way?

At the same time, like Paul in Athens, when we hear anything from him that sounds like Biblical truth, we’ll want to keep that in mind, and to point it out as such as our conversation continues.

Rife with folly

Wrong-believing worldviews are filled with such inconsistencies, contradictions, unexplainable anomalies, and notions borrowed from Scripture. Our task is to listen carefully for these and then to ask our friend to explain how he holds them all together, especially those which are clearly opposed to one another and impossible to reconcile.

At this point our questions must take the form, “How can this be?” or “How do you know that?” or “How do you explain this contradiction?” Having allowed the fool to scoot out onto the limb of credibility, we will now hand him the saw with which he will, as he tries to answer our questions, cut his own most cherished beliefs out from under him.

We don’t do this to be showy or snooty; and we don’t do this without gentleness, love, and respect. Our goal is to help our friend discover the folly of his convictions, convictions he has probably never taken the time to examine carefully. If we love our lost friends and neighbors, we will do what we can, as often as we can, to help them see the errors in their thinking, so that they might be better able to understand the truth that is in Jesus Christ.

And we will do this reasonably, winsomely, but firmly.

For reflection

1. Why do we need to challenge our wrong-believing friends to examine what they believe?
2. Look at Acts 17.32-34. What three responses might you expect to receive from a conversation such as we have been thinking about in this study?
3. If you listen patiently, respectfully, and with interest while your friends explain their views, do you think they will be more or less willing to listen as you explain yours? Explain.

Next steps – Conversation: This week, engage a wrong-believing friend in a conversation about his beliefs. You can do this. Keep your approach based on questions. See what you can find out. Do any inconsistencies or other evidences of faulty reasoning become evident?

6 This Is not How the World Works!

“And if I cast out demons by Beelzebub, by whom do your sons cast them out? Therefore they shall be your judges.” Matthew 12.27

“God, who made the world and everything in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands.” Acts 17.24

Jesus and the exorcists

Exorcists were recognized members of the community of religious leaders in Jesus’ day. Because of God’s love for the afflicted, He granted power, even to those with faulty and incomplete views of the truth, to relieve the suffering of the last, the lost, and the least. Where demons were being tossed out, the grace and power of God were at work.

Until, that is, Jesus came along casting out demons. Then, suddenly, the power of grace the religious leaders had always admired in their peers became a power of the devil.

The religious leaders of the day charged Jesus with being in league with the devil; that was their explanation for why He was able to cast out demons. We looked at Jesus’ first line of response in our previous installment: It’s not reasonable, Jesus explained, for Satan to destroy his own kingdom.

Jesus’ second line of response, which we examined briefly, was to point out the utter incongruence of their claims with the facts everyone knew to be true. The religious leaders accorded divine power to their colleagues who cast out demons; how could they then argue that Jesus’ power was not the same? And if they charged Him with serving the devil, what did that suggest about their own exorcists?

Paul did something similar in Athens. The philosophers in his audience acknowledged the greatness and power of the “unknown god”. How could they possibly imagine that a god so great and powerful would live cooped up in kiosks and temples made by men? That made no more sense than the bogus accusations the religious leaders made concerning Jesus.

Lack of explanatory power

Wrong-believing worldviews simply cannot explain the way things are in the world. They end up stumbling over their statements, contradicting their claims, and backtracking over their boasts.

Oh, they make a good stab at it, to be sure, an effort which, when not very carefully examined seems almost plausible. However, they simply overlook a good many facts and criteria, and they freely assert others – certain of which they have borrowed from the Christian worldview – that make their story hold together, but which do not derive from and aren’t supported by their own position.

For example, when a postmodernist insists that there is no truth, all values are relative, and every person needs to be free, within his own community, to decide what’s right for him, we might like to ask: “Would you apply that reasoning to driving your car, ordering a meal, crossing a road in traffic, or going to the doctor?” In such everyday situations the postmodernist cannot live out the tenets of his worldview; instead, he must defer to a worldview that insists this is an orderly universe, there are laws to obey, we are responsible for one another’s wellbeing, and there is such a thing as trust – precisely as the Christian worldview teaches.

The postmodernist’s faulty reasoning – his folly – demonstrates the sound reason of the Christian worldview.

Or when the evolutionist argues that chance is the ultimate determiner of who we are and how we got here: We might remind our friend that chance is unknowable, unpredictable, and uncontainable, and then point out

that the world, with all its physical laws and widely-agreed-on moral values (concerning stealing, lying, murder, etc. – what Lewis referred to as the *Tao*), doesn't support the claim that chance governs and determines everything. Again, the evolutionist must borrow from beyond his worldview to make his worldview make sense. In the process, once again, he validates the Christian view of how the world works.

Or when the materialist insists that money, fun, and things are all that matter in life, we might like to query him concerning whether this is how he would be happy for his wife and closest friends to regard him – as merely a means to their material happiness, a thing to be used and used up, then cast aside as they saw fit? And we might also point out, from observations we have made in his own life, that he seems to believe there are more valuable things than stuff, such as peace of mind, love, contentment, and security from fear.

Wrong-belief just doesn't work

The fact is, wrong-belief just doesn't work; it doesn't explain the world or the way people live. Because it turns from God, Who alone is true, its only option is to land on the lie in one form or another, pockets stuffed with smuggled cash from the Biblical worldview as they go.

We will want to help our friends see that they can only make their worldview make sense when they *deny* their own unexamined assumptions and *borrow* from truths explained only within the framework of a Christian worldview, as Jesus did with His detractors and Paul with his philosopher audience. Our God regards the lies and half-truths of wrong-believing worldviews as deadly arrows, which they shoot into the world to create fear and promote wickedness (Ps. 64.2-6). But God has “arrows” of His own – His Word, wielded by His faithful people. And that Word, faithfully proclaimed and reasonably explained, can leave those who prefer lies to God's truth with nothing more to say:

But God shall shoot at them with an arrow;
Suddenly they shall be wounded.
So He will make them stumble over their own tongue;
All who see them shall flee away.
All men shall fear,
And shall declare the work of God;
For they shall wisely consider His doing (Ps. 64.7-9)

It's reasonable and loving to help people face up to the inconsistencies and incongruencies of what they claim to believe about life. And, at the same time, it's reasonable to point them *away* from their folly to truth as we know it in Jesus Christ. Because the world only works as it should when it works according to the one true God.

For reflection

1. Why are wrong-believing worldviews unable to explain the way the world works?
2. If we as believers in Jesus remain silent before wrong-believing worldviews, what's likely to happen?
3. How can you prepare to help wrong-believing friends see the shortcomings of their views?

Next steps – Demonstration: Suppose someone says, “Well, science is the answer to everything. Science shows us the way to the good life.” How might you answer such a statement? Can you cite any evidence suggesting science might be as much a problem as a boon? What does science need to keep its more destructive tendencies in check? Where can that come from?

7 The Fact of Jesus

“But if it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you. Or how can someone enter a strong man’s house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man?” Matthew 12.28, 29

The ultimate Fact

From the examples of Jesus and Paul, we see that it is possible to answer the fool according to his folly – his false premises and shaky reasoning – without falling into the trap of accommodating the Gospel to the reasoning frameworks of wrong-believing worldviews. We can answer the fool according to his folly, without becoming snared in reason, so that some of our wrong-believing friend’s confidence in his own views may be called into question, if not undermined.

Only the grace of God, operating by His Word and Spirit, can bring new life to dead souls. Reason rightly employed can create an avenue for grace, but grace comes only at God’s pleasure, according to His timing.

Jesus used three lines of defense in answering the fools of His day. At each step of His response, He reasoned with them to help them see, first, that their explanation of Him and His work was riddled with contradictions and inconsistencies. Their worldview was constructed on false reasoning and betrayed a foundation of folly. He invited them to consider whether their explanations were reasonable, whether they made sense; and by His own use of reason, He exposed the folly of their conclusions.

Next, He demonstrated, in a most reasonable manner, that their claims about Him – that He was in league with the devil – were incongruent with reality. They did not fit with their experience in the world. Would they say the same about their own exorcists? No. Their explanation of Jesus’ power was not congruent with the facts of how the world works. Their folly was again exposed by Jesus’ careful use of reason.

We saw that the apostle Paul, in his sermon on Mars Hill, followed a similar approach, challenging his hearers by reason to consider their practices and beliefs in a brighter light and from a different perspective.

Jesus’ final line of defense in answering the fools who were opposing Him was to point out that their worldview could not account for *Him*, given its own inconsistency and incongruity. He was right there in front of them, and He was not what they claimed Him to be. He had to be what He said He was, not what they claimed. They could not account for Him, and they must not ignore Him.

So likewise did Paul in Athens, pointing to Jesus as the only true way to know God.

Jesus is a fact for which wrong-believing worldviews can offer no credible account within the faulty framework of their foolish thinking. The fact of Jesus stands before every lie-based, flimsy, wrong-believing worldview as both a rebuke and a resource for hope. And we, having sanctified Jesus as Lord in our own hearts, must be ready to give an answer for the hope He gives us, with all gentleness and respect.

Not a true worldview

The worldview which Jesus’ detractors held up against Him was not comprehensive, and thus not a true *worldview*. On its own terms and from within its own framework of thought, it could neither reasonably nor effectively explain the phenomenon of Jesus Christ in terms that made sense. Jesus exposed the folly of their thinking, leaving them to stumble over their words with nothing left to say.

Jesus said that, to understand Him and His works, they would have to accept His claims, turning away from their folly to believe that what they were seeing in Him was a manifestation of a larger, more comprehensive, consistent, and congruent worldview – the Kingdom of God. Here was a worldview which, like their own, must be accepted by faith, *not* faith in men’s best ideas, but in the revelation of God in His Word.

The Folly of the Fool

To really understand Jesus and begin to account for Him, they would first have to put their faith in Jesus. They would have to *repent* of their wrong beliefs and receive Him on His terms, not theirs.

This left His detractors with two choices. Either they could accept what Jesus declared – the coming of the Kingdom, centered in Him and His redeeming and liberating work – as the real deal; or they could continue to stand stubbornly on what everyone present would have seen to be an unworkable, unreliable worldview.

For us and our conversations with wrong-believing friends, this means that we must come back to the beginning and explain once again what the Bible teaches about Jesus. We have been appointed as witnesses to Jesus. We must proclaim Jesus and we must live Him. This is not likely to persuade all those who are perhaps beginning to see the bankruptcy of their cherished but unexamined worldview; nevertheless, even getting this far has merit. It may open a crack in the ceiling of their “under the sun” worldview which can allow the light of truth to enter their souls, perhaps for the first time.

Leave ‘em questioning

We recall the instructive words of Michael Polanyi, about sowing doubts and unsettledness into the false worldviews of our wrong-believing friends: “Yet where the metaphysical believer cannot hope to convince, he may still strive to convert. Though powerless to argue with the nihilist, he may yet succeed in conveying to him the *intimation of a mental satisfaction which is lacking*, and this intimation may start in him a process of conversion” (emphasis added).

In the book of Acts, great numbers of those who opposed Jesus, even those who put Him to death, later came to be among His most devoted followers (cf. Acts 6.1-7). How did this happen?

Their conversion to Christ may have been incubated in just such situations as we have been exploring in this study, where the folly of their beliefs, lifestyle, and explanation of the world began to unravel as Jesus’ followers faithfully demonstrated and proclaimed the reality of His resurrection, bearing powerful witness through consistent lives of love and the bold witness to the Gospel. Over time, those first believers were able, by answering the fools of their day according to the folly of their unbelieving worldviews, to serve as agents of grace resulting in salvation in those who were being liberated to full and abundant life in Christ.

We must answer the fools, the wrong-believers, of our day, not on their own terms, but certainly according to their folly, and we must persevere in love and conversation. The Lord of the harvest will do what He will with the seeds we sow. Our responsibility is to speak and live the truth in love, and leave the work of conversion to the Lord.

For reflection

1. We must not vaunt or rely on our own cleverness as we use reason to help people see Jesus as He truly is. Explain.
2. We’re not seeking to “triumph” over someone else or their views. What is our objective in answering the fool?
3. What should we expect as responses to our answering the fool according to his folly?

Next steps – Preparation: How should you prepare each day for the opportunities God will give you for showing and telling Jesus in your Personal Mission Field?

The Folly of the Fool

For reflection or discussion

1. At its most essential, what is “the folly of the fool”?
2. Why is it important that we be willing to reason with those who are trapped in wrong beliefs?
3. What do we hope our lost friends will come to see as we reason with them?
4. Reason won’t save anybody. Only grace saves. How can reason prepare a way for grace? What is our role in bring grace to those who are trapped in wrong beliefs?
5. What’s the most important lesson you’ve learned from this series?

For prayer:

The Fellowship of Ailbe

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