

Jason Upchurch - Q and A - Proverbs, Heaven and Hell, Sovereignty

Turn to Proverbs 26:1-12

This morning we are concluding our short Q and A series with a flourish of variety. We have seen a veritable smorgasbord of biblical questions.

And I'll be honest, this is one of my favorite parts of being a pastor: answering peoples' questions about the Bible. Whether I know the answer or have to research the answer I love knowing what's on peoples' minds and showing them what the Bible has to say.

And I've said this before but I think it's good that you ask questions about the Bible. If there's something that bothers you or concerns you or you don't understand you need to be able work through it. I'm reading a book this week about what the Bible has to say about dinosaurs and dragons from a exegetical view and a historical, archeological view. Since the Bible is the source of life and wisdom and truth then it can withstand any questions we bring to it.

Question 1: How to we reconcile Proverbs 26:4 with Proverbs 26:5? Read

Now, I read the larger context because I wanted you to notice that these first 12 verses of Proverbs 26 deals with the fool. Fools are addressed throughout the book.

And in Proverbs a fool is not someone who is just uninformed. They're not an ignorant person. They're also not the class clown. The fool in Proverbs is a wicked, malicious person. Or someone who refuses to be humble enough to do things God's way.

And the author - Solomon - over and over saying that wisdom and godliness is right there for the taking. You can have it if you want it. And a lot of people don't want it.

But with humility and the fear of the Lord a simple person can become wise, and a fool can turn from his error. But often times they don't.

So a lot times Proverbs simply makes fun of the fool. Takes jabs at them:

They eat their own vomit. That's gross but that's what they do.

And fools often quote wise sayings but then don't live it out. They're like the lame man in the wheel chair that has legs but they don't work. They are spiritually handicapped.

This might come across as odd because we live in a day and age where people think that Christians can't ever offend anyone with sharp language, but sometimes the way we call people to repentance is to insult them. In Jesus's name. Jesus himself used insults very often to call vile hard-hearted people to repentance. And if you read the book of proverbs in many ways its a collection of insults toward those who are wayward.

Well, Proverbs also helps us know how to deal with fools. You've heard the phrase "hater's gonna hate?" Well, fools are gonna fool. And so we have to know how to live wisely with fools. How do we live wisely with fools? Especially when they say things to us that are especially foolish. I think this proverb is especially important in the age of social media and texting where things are said online that would never be said in person or in public.

So here's what I think we have - and this is a pretty common interpretation of this passage - I think we have a general rule, and then I think we have an exception to that rule.

So here's the general rule. **Read 4**

In general, the best thing you can do when a fool says something foolish is to not respond in the same way. Or maybe not respond at all.

When we're insulted or mocked the natural instinct is to return fire. Solomon says to not do that. Don't escalate, don't do to them what they're doing to you. That's foolish.

Proverbs 9:7: Whoever corrects a scoffer gets abuse, and he who reproves a wicked man incurs injury.

In general, wicked people, fools, the ungodly don't like reproof. They don't like correction.

They don't like to be told they're wrong so when they are told they are wrong they retaliate even more.

So what Solomon is saying here is the last thing you want to do to a fool is answer a fool according to his folly because then you're the fool. You've been sucked into their foolish tractor beam and now you're spitting out the same nonsense as they are.

When I first ran for city council I was posting my positions of local politics on Facebook and interacting with people. And for the most part people were cordial and nice - even when they disagreed. But occasionally I'd get a troll and they would say something completely offensive or off the wall. And I had no idea what to do or say.

And so I developed a rule that I wouldn't respond for 24 hours. And even then maybe not respond at all. And during that time I was reading a chapter of proverbs every day because I needed wisdom. And the beauty of that was that after 24 hours usually it became a non-issue or other people would jump in and scold the person and I didn't need to do anything. Don't respond to a fool with foolishness.

But this is true in business meetings, at family get togethers where you have that weird cousin who always says crazy things. This is true when you're in an argument with your spouse or a neighbor. A lot of times the best thing to do is not respond. Or if you are cursed, then bless them like Peter says. So that's the general rule.

I think Verse 5 is the exception. **Read**

So the Bible never contradicts itself. There are no contradictions. And there's a reason these 2 verses are right next to each other. It wasn't an editing mistake like Solomon didn't know what he was doing.

I think this is here as the exception: there are actually times when a fool says something that needs to be addressed.

Jesus, when he's destroying the hypocritical religious leaders in **Matthew 23** calls them blind fools. Remember they would take oaths by the gold of the Temple by not by the Temple itself? The idea is that the Jewish leaders found ways to weasel out of their oaths by technicalities and he calls them fools. But he doesn't ignore them like Verse 4, he rebukes them like 5. Why? Because their hypocrisy is so dangerous he has to say something.

In the same way there are times when some fool says something so bad or dangerous or outlandish we have to say something. It could be the gospel at stake, the reputation of someone at stake or the consequences of not saying something far outweigh saying something.

So how do we know when to answer and when not to? I think our general posture should be to not answer the fool. If you don't know what to say then it's okay to not say it. Usually when we clap back it's a bad thing. A friend of mine once said "you can't unring a bell." Once the words are out, they're out. So err on the side of silence.

But there are exceptions and simply pray for wisdom. In the moment you'll figure it out. You might fail a little, but you'll grow in this area.

Question 2: When was hell and heaven made? When did demons fall? **Turn to Col. 1:15-20.** The short answer is God created heaven and hell somewhere between day 1 and 6. We don't know exactly where.

Genesis 1:1: God created the heavens and the earth - that was day 1.

Heaven can mean the sky, it can mean outer space, it can also mean the dwelling place of God. In Genesis 1 it probably refers to outer space in contrast to the earth.

So we're not told exactly when God created heaven - the dwelling place of God - or hell. We know that they were created though.

Matt 25:41 says the eternal fire - hell - was prepared or created for the devil and his angels.

So heaven is not eternal and hell is not eternal in the sense that they have not always existed. Only God himself is eternal, existing both before creation and to all time future.

We also know that God rested on the 7th day - there was no more creative activity after day 6 in the sense of creating new things.

So logically then, since only God existed before creation and all that exists now was made on days 1-6 we know everything had to be made in those first days. And we know specifically that Jesus - the second person of the Trinity - was the active agent of creation. What that means is that although all 3 persons of the Trinity were involved in creation, the Son of God specifically was the person by which they were made. **Read 15-20**

So this week I met with a man who wants to build something in Deer Park. We sat down with city officials and there's the owner, there's the architect and there's the general contractor who will actually do the work. When they all go home at night and their kids ask them, daddy what did you do today they can all say "I'm building something" - there's a sense in which they're all taking part. The owner is in charge, the architect planned, and the general contractor physically brought it together. But the contractor is the hands on agent that brings the plans to fruition.

It's an analogy but in that scenario Jesus is the agent, he's the general contractor directly creating all things. "For by him all things were created." So he made heaven and hell. He made them sometime between day 1 and 6 - we don't know exactly the day.

The second part is when did demons fall and the answer is that we also don't know. It seems like it was probably pretty soon after creation was finished because there's not much time between Genesis 2 and 3 where Satan tempts Adam and Eve. So he must have fallen into sin prior to that temptation. But Satan - the serpent - is in the Garden tempting Adam and Eve just after they were created. We have no other information about Adam and Eve in the Garden and nowhere else in the Bible are we given any idea that they were there for a long time before they were tempted.

Question 3: How are we to understand the sovereignty of God in practical terms?

So if you've been at Sunday School or had any theological discussions at all one of the more difficult concepts to wrap our brains around is the sovereignty of God. The sovereignty of God is his ability and right to do anything he wants in any way that he wants as a good God.

So it's a combination of 3 things: God's ability, his willingness and his goodness. And we know that God brings all things to pass. **Turn to Isa 45:5-7.** There's a sense in which all Christians claim to believe in the sovereignty of God. No Christian I know of denies that God is sovereign. What they will often say is that there are just some things that God isn't in control of.

He's in control of all the good things that happen, but not the bad things.

Or he's in control of good and bad things, but he's not in control of our decisions.

There's always some "but" or there's always some caveat. I'm here to simply say that there is no but and there is no caveat. As RC Sproul once said: "there are no maverick molecules in the universe." There are also no maverick agents in the universe. We believe that God has decreed all things that will come to pass and he will hold every creature accountable. So let's look at some passages. **Read 1-7**

So what do we see? There is no other god competing against Yahweh. He's the only one. This is God talking to Cyrus, by the way, the future king of Media Persia who will send the Jews back from captivity to Israel. This section is written before Cyrus is even born God calls him out by name and says "I'm God who does everything."

Everything? Everything. **Read 7**

By God's decree all things come to pass. You say how can that be? Evil things come to pass. Does God do evil? Not directly. You remember the architect, owner, general contractor analogy? Where the general contractor is directly responsible for things? Well God is never directly responsible for evil, though he uses evil agents to accomplish his purpose.

I'll give you 3 examples.

Jesus. Did God predestine and plan and decree that Jesus would be crucified? Yes. Was crucifying the Son of God a sin? Yes. They condemned an innocent man - that's an abomination.

Jospeh says to his brothers in **Gen 50:20**: As for you, what you meant for evil God meant for what? Good.

Is what the brothers did to Jospeh good or evil? It was evil. But in the same way, God sovereignly meant those exact same actions for good. Did God decree the actions? Yes. Did God do the actions. No.

So He decreed the bad thing, used evil people, and saved many people alive.

Turn to Isa. 10:5-19. This is God using Assyria - the king of Assyria - to judge the northern kingdom of Israel. God will use the king to judge Israel, then he's going to judge the king of Assyria for wickedly attacking Israel. I think this is one of the most compelling places in the whole Bible for God's absolute sovereignty in the heart and mind and affairs of people. **Read 5-11**

So what's happening? God is using Assyria as a rod to discipline nations. God is sending Assyria to destroy all these wicked nations. Now the king of Assyria doesn't understand this. He doesn't know that God is putting all of this in his heart. **Read 7**

So he's going to war, but it's God causing him to do it.

Proverbs 21:1: The king's heart - and all of our hearts - is a stream of water in the hand of the Lord, he turns it wherever he wills.

You ever been outside watering plants with a garden hose? And you're just standing there spraying the hose around watering all the plants? That's what God is doing to kings' hearts. He's just turning them wherever they will.

And it's not like they know this. It's not like they're sitting there on their throne or in the White House or in the Kremlin or London or you in your home or making decisions thinking "God is moving my heart and mind." That's the rub in this chapter. The King goes to destroy people God wants him to destroy but he doesn't even acknowledge God. And so God punishes him for it. **Read 12-14**

Do you get how wild this is? God is punishing him for the arrogance of doing the very thing God designed and used him to do. He says "I did all this, I conquered those nations." And God says "You arrogant king, I'm taking you down." And he did. Babylon obliterated Assyria.

And at this point you might be thinking “How is that fair?” How is it fair that God uses this king of Assyria, he doesn’t know it, thinks it’s his own heart’s desires, and then God punishes him for doing exactly what God wanted him to do?” Because God is good and can do whatever he wants. **Read 15-19**

God is going to destroy the people and the land all around Assyria because of the king’s boasting.

The imagery is that God can do whatever God wants to do with whoever he wants to do it and no one gets to boast. God was wielding Assyria around like an axe to judge nations. Like a saw to cut them down. But the saw thought it was the one doing all the work so God judged it.

Now, at this point will usually start asking about free will. Well he was judged because of his own free will actions.

Was his will free? Or did he do exactly what God intended him to do? He did exactly what God intended him to do. And in his own heart those wicked things were exactly what God intended him to do.

The idea of free will - and buckle up here - is a philosophical notion. It’s not a biblical teaching.

I joke with people that as soon as I find a verse that talks about free will I will preach the daylights out of it. It’s a joke because there is no passage in all the Bible that talks about free will.

That’s why Martin Luther wrote a book called “The Bondage of the Will” - to refute the notion that our wills are free. Seem the Bible talks about our wills are in bondage to sin.

Rom. 5:18: One trespass led to condemnation for all men. Why? Because now we are sinners by our very nature.

Rom 6:15-16: we were slaves to sin and we joyfully obeyed that slavery. That’s why the king of Assyria doesn’t think he’s being used by God: because his own slavery to sin loves to destroy other societies, all of which accomplished God’s purpose.

The Bible does talk about accountability and responsibility for our actions. And judgement. We’re not robots who have no desires and we’re not animals who are unaccountable to moral actions. God will hold every single person to account for actions they have done, even if he’s used them to bring about calamity and sin.

And you say: How does he still find fault? How can he do that? You know what Paul says in Romans 9? Who are you, O man, to answer back to God. God can do whatever he wants.

The sovereignty of God is his ability and right to do anything he wants in any way that he wants as a good God.

Turn to Ezekiel 37. Let’s talk about this in terms of salvation. Because this is where people really struggle with the sovereignty of God. The Bible is clear that because we’re dead in sin and enemies with God the moment we are conceived that there is no way we would ever come to faith in God apart from him raising us to spiritual life.

When you came to faith in Jesus - that first moment you believed and desired to follow Jesus as Lord. Why did you do that? Because Changed your heart, gave you faith and raised you from spiritual death.

John 6:44: Jesus says no one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. A person has to be drawn by God through the Spirit in the preaching of the gospel to believe.

And when a person is drawn, they will always come to God. **John 6:37:** All that the Father gives to me will come to me and whoever comes I will never cast out.

Did you come to faith in Jesus? You know why? Because the Father drew you through the ministry of the Spirit.

John 6:63: It is the Spirit who gives life, the flesh is only a little bit of help. No. Some help no? It is the Spirit who gives life, the flesh is no help at all.

It's all the Spirit who gives life through the Father's drawing.

Titus 3:5: It is not by works of righteousness that we have done but according to his mercy he has saved us. Our salvation is all God's mercy.

Eph. 2:8-9: For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God. Not a result of works so that no one can boast.

Even the faith we have in Jesus isn't something we conjured up - even that is a gift.

Phil 1:29: it has been granted to us to believe in Jesus.

John 1:12-13: But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to be the children of God. Do you believe in Jesus? Did you receive him as the Lord God of all the universe, accept him as the Jewish Messiah who died for your sins and rose for your salvation and your only hope of forgiveness from the Father is through him? Then you're a child of God. How did that happen?

John says: "But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God. Who were born not of blood (their family origin), nor of the will of the flesh (not their own will), nor of the will of man (the desire of other people) but of God."

If you're sitting here today as a believer who has had their sins forgiven because you believed in Jesus it wasn't because you figured it out when no one else did or because your family genetics somehow gave you an edge. It's because God gave you birth - that's why you believed.

That should humble us. God didn't have to choose you. He did have to pick you. He didn't have to draw you or raise you from spiritual deadness. And the Bible is clear he definitely didn't do it because we're so good.

You know who God usually predestines for salvation? The losers of the world.

1 Cor. 1:26: for consider your calling, brothers; not many were wise according to worldly standards (educated), not many were powerful (well connected), or of noble birth (politically influential). But God chose what is foolish to shame the wise, he chose what is weak to shame the strong, he chose what is low and despised in the world - the nobodies - so that no human would ever boast in his presence.

God chose the Bad News Bears of the world because he knew we wouldn't brag about our salvation, but we'd give him all the glory because he did all the work.

Now how does this happen? If it's all up to God, do we just do nothing? No. We preach, we tell people the gospel. But if God has to save them why do we preach anyway? Because he says so. And here's the illustration: the Valley of dry bones. This is a prophecy of the future preaching of the gospel. **Read 1-3**

Translation: I ain't answering that question! **Read 4-6**

This is all a metaphor. The dry dead bones are people. They are spiritually dead and Ezekiel is supposed to preach to them. And God says to him: You preach and I'll give them life.

We preach the Word of God - the gospel of Jesus - to people and when we're faithful to do that, God gives life to who he wants. We're not giving life. We're not coercing people into following Jesus. There's no magic formula. He gives life. Watch this. **Read 7-14**

What's going on? What's going on is that sometimes our job is to keep telling people about Jesus over and over until there's breath. Until there is spiritual life. And prophesying here isn't some weird charismatic thing, it's just telling people the gospel.

Rev 19:10: The testimony of Jesus is the Spirit of prophesy. So when you're telling people about Jesus there's a sense in which your prophesying.

So God says keep doing it until they have spiritual life in them. And just to apply this specifically right now: if you're here and you don't know if you're a Christian, you don't know if your sins are forgiven, then I encourage you to turn from your sins - repent - and follow hard after the Lord Jesus Christ in faith.

Give up your pride and doubt and rebellion and believe in him, obey him, follow him, and become a Christian. That's the message that you need to believe to be saved.

We preach, God brings the life. Who gets the glory? God does.

And see when you begin to understand that God is sovereign over all things - including who is saved and isn't saved - that's a lot of weight off of our our shoulders. All of a sudden we realize that all we have to do is be faithful in life and God will work it all out.

That's why Spurgeon said that the sovereignty of God is the pillow that he lays his head on every night to sleep.

It's easy to sleep when you know God is on the throne. It's easy to sleep when you know you've done everything you need to do to be faithful.

Rom. 8:28: For those who love God, all things work together for good, for those who love God and are called according to his purpose, for his glory.

Pray