

Proverbs 23:9

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Speak not in the ears of a fool: for he will despise the wisdom of thy words.

Analysis

This proverb warns against wasting wisdom on those determined to reject it. 'Speak not in the ears of a fool' בְּאַזְנוֹנִי קְסִיל (al-tedabber be'ozney kesil) commands withholding pearls from swine (Matthew 7:6). The fool (kesil) is not merely ignorant but morally obstinate—he 'despises' יַבּוֹז (yavuz, scorns/disdains) wisdom. 'The wisdom of thy words' מִלְּשָׁכֶל מִילָּכָה (lesekhel mileykhah, the insight/understanding of your words) refers to genuine, valuable instruction. The principle is stewardship of truth: don't cast what's sacred to those who will trample it. Jesus instructed disciples to shake dust off their feet when towns rejected the gospel (Matthew 10:14). Paul turned from rejecting Jews to responsive Gentiles (Acts 13:46). This doesn't mean abandoning evangelism but recognizing when continued engagement proves fruitless. Some hearts are so hardened that further testimony only increases their condemnation (Matthew 13:10-15). Discernment determines when to persist and when to move on.

Historical Context

Wisdom teachers in ancient Israel invested significant time training students. The opening chapters of Proverbs depict extended parental instruction (1:8-9:18). However, not all students proved teachable. Some mocked wisdom (Proverbs 1:22-32), rejecting instruction to their destruction. Jesus encountered this regularly—religious leaders who witnessed miracles still rejected Him (John 12:37-40). His parables both revealed truth to receptive hearts and concealed it from mockers (Matthew 13:10-17). The early church faced similar dynamics. Paul

reasoned in synagogues, but when Jews blasphemed, he turned to Gentiles (Acts 18:5-7). Peter warned about those who twist Scripture 'unto their own destruction' (2 Peter 3:16). Church history records how theological truth, when given to unprepared or hostile audiences, became ammunition for heresy.

Related Passages

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

Study Questions

1. How do you discern when someone is genuinely seeking truth versus merely arguing to resist conviction?
2. Are there relationships where you're wasting spiritual resources trying to convince someone determined to remain foolish?
3. How can you maintain availability to share truth while not forcing it on those who despise it?

Interlinear Text

לִשְׁנָה כָּל בְּבָזָק בְּאַזְנֵי
not in the ears of a fool Speak for he will despise the wisdom
H241 H3684 H408 H1696 H3588 H936 H7922

מִלְּבָד:
of thy words
H4405

Additional Cross-References

Matthew 7:6 (Parallel theme): Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and rend you.

Isaiah 36:21 (Word): But they held their peace, and answered him not a word: for the king's commandment was, saying, Answer him not.

Proverbs 1:7 (Parallel theme): The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge: but fools despise wisdom and instruction.

John 10:20 (Parallel theme): And many of them said, He hath a devil, and is mad; why hear ye him?