

Proverbs 26:4

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Answer not a fool according to his folly, lest thou also be like unto him.

Analysis

Don't answer a fool 'according to his folly' lest you become like him. Engaging fools on their terms drags you into foolishness. The Hebrew 'anah' (answer) and 'damah' (be like) warn against adopting foolish methods or arguments to counter folly. This requires discernment about when and how to respond. Reformed theology values measured responses to opposition. Sometimes silence is wise; sometimes rebuke is necessary (next verse). But we must not become what we oppose—returning insult for insult or adopting foolish argumentation.

Historical Context

Wisdom literature valued knowing when to speak and when to remain silent. Engaging every fool wastes time and often leads to being drawn into unprofitable disputes that accomplish nothing.

Related Passages

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Study Questions

1. When are you tempted to engage with fools in ways that make you foolish?

2. How do you discern when to respond and when to remain silent?
3. What does maintaining wisdom while addressing folly look like practically?

Interlinear Text

אֶל	תַּעֲנֵ	כִּסִּיל	כְּאַלְתּוֹ	פֶּן	תִּשְׁוֶה	לֹא
H408	Answer	not a fool	according to his folly	H6435	lest thou also be like	H0
	H6030	H3684	H200		H7737	

גַּם	אַתָּה:
H1571	H859

Additional Cross-References

Proverbs 26:5 (Parallel theme): Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own conceit.

1 Peter 3:9 (Parallel theme): Not rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing: but contrariwise blessing; knowing that ye are thereunto called, that ye should inherit a blessing.

1 Kings 12:14 (Parallel theme): And spake to them after the counsel of the young men, saying, My father made your yoke heavy, and I will add to your yoke: my father also chastised you with whips, but I will chastise you with scorpions.