

Proverbs 26:5

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own conceit.

Analysis

This verse seems to contradict verse 4: 'Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own conceit.' But both are true in different contexts. Sometimes answering exposes folly and prevents self-deception. The Hebrew 'pen yihyeh chakam be'eynay' (lest he be wise in his own eyes) emphasizes the danger of fools thinking themselves wise when unchallenged. Wisdom requires discerning when silence enables pride and when rebuke is necessary. Reformed theology values balanced application of truth to specific situations, not rigid legalism.

Historical Context

Jewish wisdom tradition embraced paradox and situation-dependent wisdom. Life's complexity requires multiple, sometimes seemingly contradictory, principles applied with discernment.

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 to answer a fool (verse 5) versus when to remain silent (verse 4)?
2. What situations require exposing folly lest it grow unchecked?
3. How does this pair of proverbs teach the need for wisdom in application, not just knowledge of rules?

Interlinear Text

אֶת	הַ	פָּנָיִם	כִּי	סִילָּוּ	כִּי	אַלְתָּה	וְ
Answer	a fool	according to his folly		H6435	H1961	lest he be wise	
H6030	H3684	H200				H2450	
בְּעִינָיו:							
in his own conceit							
H5869							

Additional Cross-References

Romans 12:16 (Parallel theme): Be of the same mind one toward another. Mind not high things, but condescend to men of low estate. Be not wise in your own conceits.

Proverbs 28:11 (Parallel theme): The rich man is wise in his own conceit; but the poor that hath understanding searcheth him out.

Proverbs 3:7 (Parallel theme): Be not wise in thine own eyes: fear the LORD, and depart from evil.

Proverbs 26:12 (Parallel theme): Seest thou a man wise in his own conceit? there is more hope of a fool than of him.

Proverbs 26:4 (Parallel theme): Answer not a fool according to his folly, lest thou also be like unto him.

Romans 11:25 (Parallel theme): For I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits; that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in.

John 8:7 (Parallel theme): So when they continued asking him, he lifted up himself, and said unto them, He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her.

Titus 1:13 (Parallel theme): This witness is true. Wherefore rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith;

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