

Difficult Scriptures

I. Scripture: Proverbs 26:4-5

II. How This Verse Is Misused By Some

These verses contain a seeming contradiction. They might be pointed to by someone who wishes to show the Bible contradicts itself and therefore is not inspired. The questions here are whether there is a contradiction and whether we should "answer a fool" or not.

III. True Explanation

- A. First of all, we need to realize that the Bible does not contradict itself. God's Word is truth (John 17:17), and the Scripture cannot be broken (John 10:35).
- B. These two verses are not contradictory. They complement each other. The last part of each proverb shows the set of circumstances under which each is to be used.
- C. Verse 4 tells us not to answer a fool according to his folly lest we be like him. In this situation, to answer the fool's specific statement or question, you would be descending to his level and end up in a *pointless argument.

An example of this is given in Luke 20:1-8, where the Pharisees asked Christ by whose authority He did certain things. The Pharisees were not there seeking to learn anything. To avoid being like the fools they were, Christ didn't answer their question. Rather, He asked them a question that they couldn't answer without condemning themselves. Since the Pharisees couldn't answer His question, the discussion was dropped.

- D. Verse 5 tells us that under another set of circumstances we must answer the fool according to his folly -- by a foolish answer, which exposes how ridiculous his statement, claim or question is -- or he will be wise in his own conceit.

This case is well illustrated by Paul's example in II Corinthians 11:23. Certain men at Corinth claimed to be true apostles of Christ, but they were false apostles (II Corinthians 11:13). For Paul to have remained silent at the time would have given tacit

approval of these men who were leading the Church astray. They would have appeared wise in their own conceit.

Therefore in verse 23 Paul said: "Are they ministers of Christ? (I speak as a fool) I am more; in labors more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft." These men had been boasting of their qualifications, and in this epistle Paul was exposing these men for what they were. Paul answered these false apostles' claims so they would not appear wise.

These scriptures do not contradict, but taken together they explain two different methods of handling the questions and statements of fools. You need wisdom to know just when and how to apply these principles, and wisdom comes from God.