

Proverbs of Solomon – Proverbs 26:18-19

Verses 18 and 19 highlight something which has been, and probably still is, a problem in my life. It might be a problem with some of you to a lesser degree, and for some it is no problem at all. But let me say right off the bat, my problem may not be what you think it is.

Briefly consulting with my short list of commentaries, it appeared they were all agreed to the meaning of these two verses, but I will reach beyond them a little later.

Those commentaries condemn the person who lies or deceives.

I hope that no one has any problem understanding or agreeing with this principle. *“As a MAD man ... So is the man that deceiveth his neighbour...”* In this case the *“mad man”* is not angry – he is insane. I am told that the Hebrew word *“mad man”* is rooted in the idea of *“burning”* or even *“rabid.”* The man who deceives his neighbor, whether intentionally or unintentionally, is like a rabid dog. And that rabid animal, or the man he has infected, will die. *“All liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death”* – **Revelation 21:8**. *“A false witness shall not be unpunished, and he that speaketh lies shall not escape”* – **Proverb 19:5**. The rabid man or dog spreads a virus which is fatal unless treated. Not only will the mad man die, but so will those he infects, unless they come to see the truth in the matter.

More often than a reference to *“rabies,”* the word *“mad”* – when not speaking about anger – refers to *“insanity.”* The deceitful man is like a **pathological arsonist**. The arsonist is a man who likes to burn things down because he loves the heat or the flame, the sound of the fire, or the destruction of something ugly or even the destruction of something which is beautiful. He is insane, so he doesn't care whose family history is destroyed in the fire, who dies or whose finances are reduced to smoldering rubble.

Or the deceitful man is a lunatic with an bow, shooting arrows at random. Or he has a handgun or rifle, just firing into the air or randomly across a field. *“As a mad man who casteth firebrands, arrows, and death, so is the man that deceiveth his neighbour...”* Whether casting firebrands, flaming arrows or firing random bullets he is causing potential death. *“As a mad man who casteth... death... so is the man that deceiveth his neighbour...”* This puts that man into very bad company, just as did that partially quoted verse from **Revelation 21**. *“... the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, (as well as) all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death.”*

Now, let's say this particular arsonist has been caught. He was standing in front of the house he set on fire with a torch in his hand when the police arrived. Two people died in the fire, but the man doesn't care, because he is an arsonist. What will his lawyer plead when the man is brought before the judge? In American jurisprudence the lawyer will say, *“He is not responsible for his crime; he is a mad man.”* Or to put it into Solomon's terminology; *“He just did it in sport.”*

The general consensus among my commentaries was that the deceiver plies his trade and then later defends himself by saying, *“Oh, I was just joking.”* Most of them suggest that the man deliberately deceived others, but then tried to cover his sin by saying that it was all just a joke.

What does God think of that defense? *“A false witness shall NOT be unpunished, and he that speaketh lies shall NOT escape.”* *“All liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death”* no matter what excuse or legal defense is attempted.

Some of you might remember a news event from about 20 years ago. It took place over the in Wenatchee area. A pastor, and I believe he was head of a small Christian school, was accused by a teenage girl of sexual assault. It became nightly news here in Spokane, and the network I was accustomed to watching, came out in vociferous condemnation of the man. To their minds there was no doubt about the man's guilt, and they crucified him. His school was destroyed; his church was destroyed; his ministry was destroyed; his life was destroyed. He spent time in jail while the police investigated the charges; the case dragged on for months. I think that his wife left him, but I may be mistake there. Every few days the news continued their assault, fanning the flames of the conflagration. But eventually the girl admitted that she was mad – angry – and lied about the whole thing. *“Am not I in sport?”* I wonder what happened to that young woman? I hope that she has been born again, because I can't see how without the Lord's grace, she could ever have peace. She destroyed another person by her lies. I also wonder what happened to that former preacher?

I think Solomon's intended lesson here is pretty unmistakable.

But getting back to my problem, let's single out the last five words of this scripture.

"Am not I in sport?" What does the Bible teach about teasing? Jestings? Isn't it true that some of our teasing involves misdirection, dissimulation, and playful deceit? When two people understand that the conversation is in jest, there may be nothing wrong with playing. But when the recipient of the jest, doesn't understand, or when there are bystanders, and they are in the dark, then the jesting can take on a dark and sinful nature. *"Hey, brother,"* you say with a big grin on your face, *"didn't I see you going into a tavern last Monday?"* You saw him going into just about any restaurant in town, because they all sell wine and beer. You are saying you saw him go into Applebees, but in jest you have put the question another way. And then you add, *"Who was that beautiful woman you were with?"* Well it happened to be the man's wife and you know it, but the stranger hearing the conversation doesn't.

There used to be a member here with whom I sometimes traded playful barbs. That person would say something awful about my tie. Knowing it was in jest, I'd reply with something equally caustic. It was in fun and we both enjoyed it, but over time things escalated – it wasn't just about ties and hair styles. We both found things more and more outrageous to say, and then others started joining in. Finally, I came to my senses, and I told the person that I quit. I'd not play that game any more for the sake of our testimonies, and I haven't.

Proverbs 15:21 says, *"Folly is joy to him that is destitute of wisdom..."* **Proverbs 10:23** adds – *"It is as sport to a fool to do mischief: but a man of understanding hath wisdom."* I'm not declaring myself to be particularly wise to quit our little game. But I came to see that there was some degree of folly in it, and I chose to quit.

Like lying in **Revelation 21**, simple jesting is put into a really bad light in **Ephesians**. Turn to **Ephesians 5:1** – *"Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children; And walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweetsmelling savour. But fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not be once named among you, as becometh saints; Neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor jesting, which are not convenient: but rather giving of thanks."*

I don't believe that the Lord necessarily condemns laughter and joy – even on an earthly level. But when our **earthly** humor and joy become **worldly** and **sinful**, it is time to repent and find another path. As Paul says, we are much better off spending our time in thanksgiving than in giving people the business. *"Neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor jesting, which are not convenient: but rather giving of thanks."*