

# The Proverbial Fool: The Book of Proverbs and “Biblical” Counseling<sup>1</sup>

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## ABSTRACT

### The Proverbial Fool: The Book of Proverbs and “Biblical” Counseling

*How can the book of Proverbs be utilized in the context of Christian counseling? This topic is the focal point of my dissertation, in which I seek to integrate the areas of Biblical Studies and Pastoral Theology in order to provide an informed and responsible answer to this question. In the following article select aspects of that study are highlighted, touching upon such concerns as (1) How biblical are so-called “biblical” counselors? - with J Adams and L Crabb examined as representative writers; (2) What hermeneutical considerations should such Christian counselors have in mind when interpreting Proverbs? - where current advances in the study of proverbs are used to sharpen the understanding and use of Proverbs; (3) How could the above considerations, coupled with an exegetical study on “the foolish” (אוייל) in Proverbs (10-29), be utilized to make Adams’ and Crabb’s “biblical” proposals more representative and reflective of Scripture?; and lastly, (4) How could an understanding of the “world of Proverbs” be incorporated into the “language-world” of the counseling context?*

### 1 J ADAMS AND L CRABB: A BIBLICAL BASIS FOR BIBLICAL COUNSELING

Both Adams and Crabb purport to be “biblical” counselors and have written about making use of Scripture in counseling as well as several books on counseling itself. S Pattison<sup>2</sup> described both Adams and Crabb together under the rubric of the “biblicist/fundamentalist” approach to using Scripture in counseling. In studying these two authors, I analysed their earlier writings in detail and then checked my findings against the rest of their works. Adams’ regard for Scripture, his theories concerning interpretation, and the way in which he used Scripture, were all highly consistent throughout his writings. Crabb, on the other hand, evidenced clear signs of development, particularly in his understanding of how one should approach interpretation and also in the profundity of his thought.

Both Adams and Crabb were found to be lacking an informed and comprehensive use of Scripture in their proposals regarding “biblical” counseling.

### 1.1 J Adams: Uninformed, misleading and incomplete

J Adams is a well-known author in the area of christian counseling. He is the director of Advanced Studies and professor of Practical Theology at Westminster Theological Seminary, California. Adams has written over fifty books on various aspects of pastoral ministry. For my study, I focused mostly on Adams’ counseling books, although some recourse was also made to his writings on preaching and Bible study.

The title of this section states in concise terms my evaluation of Adams’ exegesis and interpretation of Scripture at the practical level. Adams is uninformed about current thought in the arena of exegesis, particularly in the area of the understanding and interpretation of words. He is misleading in some of the foundational studies he has done, upon which much of his understanding and approach to counseling has been based. He is also incomplete in failing to reflect not just the whole of Scripture, but even the whole of a passage in his exegetical work.

With respect to Adams’ use of Scripture, the following areas were examined: Adams’ approach to interpretation; his views on the use of secondary literature; his theory and practice of interpreting according to the purpose of a passage; and his view of his own role as pastoral counselor. My findings on these areas are briefly summarized below, with select examples being given. The discussion of these areas formed the basis from which the above assessment of Adams’ use of Scripture was made.

Adams obviously believes he can make good and proper use of Scripture without any exegetical helps or aids. A short perusal of virtually any of Adams’ numerous writings will reveal that he makes an extensive and detailed use of Scripture. For example, in his foundational book, *Competent to counsel*, Adams has 112 Old Testament and some 209 New Testament references throughout this 270 page book<sup>3</sup>. Yet for all of these references, some of which are discussed extensively, there are only 11 references to what may be considered to be secondary literature related to biblical studies. These are only made to six different works. Moreover, Adams frequently transliterates Greek terms with explanations as to their meanings, but virtually never reveals his source materials for such statements.

On the other hand, three-quarters of the 107 authors listed in the *Index of Names* are associated with psychological or (less frequently) pastoral writings, and are utilized in the three more psychologically oriented chapters of this book<sup>4</sup>. Here is evidence of Adams' training and area of interest - that of counseling and psychology. With respect to Scripture though, it is apparent that Adams feels little need to do any more than to study Scripture for himself, without any outside aids. He quite evidently believes that the meaning of the numerous passages he uses is quite transparent. This is apparent not only in the meager use of exegetical helps in his works, but also in the way he explains various passages. Consider the following:

*The thesis of this chapter is set forth succinctly in Proverbs 28:13.*

*He who conceals his transgressions will not prosper: but he who confesses and forsakes them will obtain mercy. [RSV]*

*Those words are straightforward and simple. There is nothing obtuse about them; they say exactly what they mean and mean precisely what they say. God's remedy for man's problems is confession. The concealing of transgressions brings misery, defeat and ruin, but the confession and forsaking of sin will bring merciful pardon and relief<sup>5</sup>.*

Even without recourse to the Hebrew text, a procedure which one would not necessarily impose on a pastoral counselor, a quick check with other versions, such as *NASB*, *KJV* and *NIV*, will reveal that translators rendered the words 'will obtain mercy' in a variety of ways. This would suggest that these translators have not found this verse as transparent in meaning or expression as Adams declares it to be.

This extensive use of Scripture and the relative non-use of exegetical aids, along with the apparent belief in the transparency of Scripture passages, is characteristic of Adam's writings. A further example of this can be found in *A theology of christian counseling*, which has 716 Scripture references scattered throughout the 326 pages of the book, yet with only 8 references made to works done in the area of Biblical Studies<sup>6</sup>. Contrary to the above practice of evidencing little recourse to secondary literature, Adams has at various points highlighted the importance of using such work for the exegesis of Scripture. In addressing Christian counselors he stated,

*How can a counselor who doesn't even possess the word 'exegesis' as a part of his everyday speaking vocabulary, who has never read Berkhof's text on theology, who knows nothing of Kittel's Theological Dictionary, and who doesn't even understand the*

*problems of theological reflection upon the truths of the Scriptures, begin to develop a biblical system? The very idea is absurd?*<sup>7</sup>.

Adams furthermore underlined the importance of historical-grammatical exegesis, biblical-theological and systematic-theological studies as well as rhetorical and literary analysis<sup>8</sup>. It is apparent that, according to Adams, both counselors and preachers alike should be making use of secondary aids for exegesis, if they are to understand Scripture correctly. Yet even if Adams himself has done so, this is not in evidence throughout his writings, and in this respect Adams must be judged not on what he says, but on what he does (or fails to do).

Adams is quite concerned that counselors (and preachers) determine the overriding purpose of each passage they use. He asserts that all the above aids for exegesis are “useless unless you go on to discern, from all those efforts, the *telos* of the passage”<sup>9</sup>. By this Adams means the explicitly stated or derivable purpose of a passage (or book). In his explanation of this concept, Adams evidently has the literary context of a passage in mind. But does Adams consistently interpret Scripture with the immediate context in mind? In an analysis of his use of Scripture in his explanation of “nouthetic counseling” (Adams’ own approach to counseling), Adams evidenced a tendency to (a) read specific verses out of their general context, and also to (b) read words out of their immediate context.

Adams asserts that the ministry of Paul was taken up largely with *nouthetic confrontation*, based on Acts 20:31, which he translates as follows:

*Be on the alert... remembering that night and day for a period of three years I did not cease to confront each one nouthetically with tears*<sup>10</sup>.

Concerning the general context of this passage (Acts 20:18-35, Paul’s farewell address to the elders at Ephesus), Adams overlooks a vast array of terms used in reference to Paul’s ministry. Such words include the following: “serve” (v 19), “declare” (vv 20,27), “teach” (v 20), “testify” (vv 21,24), and “preach” (v 25). Since all of these terms are used in the same speech to characterize the general ministry of Paul, it is evident that Adams had not taken the general context into account when he selected the one term *noutheteo*, found only in verse 31, as that which exemplified the ministry of Paul.

Adams also reads the terms *noutheteo* (“to admonish”) and *nouthesia* (“admonition”) out of their immediate contexts in his foundational explanation of his *nouthetic* approach. In his discussion of both Col 3:16

and 1:28, where verbal forms of “teach” (*didasko*) and “admonish” (*noutheteo*) are clearly paralleled in the Greek text (to say nothing of “wooden” translations as the *NASB*), Adams completely obscures this balance in his explanations of these texts, which he renders as follows:

*Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and [for the moment we shall simply transliterate the next word] confronting one another nouthetically.*

*We proclaim him confronting every man nouthetically, and teaching every man with all wisdom in order that we may present every man complete in Christ<sup>11</sup>.*

Why has Adams emphasized the one activity - admonishing, to the detriment of the other - teaching? A balanced representation of even these two initial verses may have helped Adams avoid his one-sided emphasis on admonition which characterizes so much of his counseling approach.

One might ask a prior question concerning “nouthetic counseling” even before examining Adams’ use of Scripture: Why did Adams coin this term “nouthetic” at all? Adams invented and made use of this term *nouthetic* as a transliteration, of sorts, of the Greek terms *noutheteo* (verb) and *nouthesia* (noun), used a mere eight and three times respectively within the New Testament. He did this because, “the term [*nouthesia*] contains more than one fundamental element... (so) it is difficult to translate”<sup>12</sup>. It is true that Bauer lists a variety of terms for both the verb and noun as potential English equivalents<sup>13</sup>. But the modern study of linguistics leaves no doubt that few terms in a language map exactly onto the same area of usage and meaning as a similar term in another language<sup>14</sup>.

Adams’ invention of a transliterated term - “nouthetic”, combined with another term - “confrontation”, actually has the effect of limiting the range of meaning which the Greek terms have using English equivalents. In giving *noutheteo* and *nouthesia* a singular English meaning, Adams has actually obscured the meaning of these terms. Moreover, Adams did this despite the fact that 5 of the 11 references to “outside helps” found in *Competent to Counsel* can be found in the chapter devoted to this topic. The manner in which these helps have been used (i e, as a basis for severely delimiting the range of English equivalents for mapping the use of the Greek terms) shows a distinct need for Adams to broaden his exposure to current thinking and approaches in Linguistics and in Biblical Studies in order to make his exegesis more informed and responsible (note that Silva lamented the same need amongst biblical scholars)<sup>15</sup>.

The last area to mention regarding Adams is his view of himself as a pastoral counselor and a teacher of pastoral counseling. Adams defined

himself in these terms as over against psychologists and psychiatrists<sup>16</sup>. By implication of this self-definition, Adams may also be set apart from “biblical scholars”. If this is the case, then Adams as a pastoral counselor should lean far more heavily than he does upon the work of those whose full time area of study is that of biblical studies. Furthermore, this dependency should be reflected in his writings, particularly since the Scriptures and their interpretation are so integral to all of Adams’ work.

In the above review of Adams’ use of Scripture as a basis and guide for counseling, regardless of his high regard for and extensive use of Scripture, Adams’ exegesis and interpretation can be seen to be uninformed, misleading, and incomplete. This is true consistently throughout his works. That is, Adams has failed to set forth his understanding of Scripture in the context of biblical scholarship, despite his admonitions that counselors and preachers should do so. At the very least, Adams should have shown that he has checked his own conclusions with those of others in the area of biblical studies. By this he would show that he has dealt with the text in an informed and responsible manner.

## **1.2 L Crabb: Uninformed and incomplete**

A trained clinical psychologist, L Crabb practiced psychology for ten years and directed the master’s program in biblical counseling at Grace Theological Seminary in Indiana for seven years. He is the founder and director of the Institute of Biblical Counseling, and currently professor of biblical counseling at Colorado Christian University. Crabb has written several books, three of which are foundational in depicting his understanding and approach to biblical counseling. These particular writings are discussed below.

To anticipate the following critique of Crabb’s work I will begin with a summary of my evaluation of the biblical aspect of Crabb’s approach. For all of his use of Scripture and his sound model of the need for a solid exegetical basis for biblical counseling, Crabb fails to show that his thoughts and ideas are derived from an informed and thorough study of Scripture. This evaluation is not to downgrade the profundity of Crabb’s thought, the suggestiveness of his interpretations of Scripture or the usefulness of his models for counseling and pastoral care. Nor is it to suggest that Crabb never made use of any outside helps. It is to say, though, that such helps are not in evidence in Crabb’s writings. This deficiency is contrary to Crabb’s own recognition of the need of biblical scholarship for a solidly based model of biblical counseling.

In his first foundational book, *Basic principles for biblical counseling*, Crabb expressed a desire to use Scripture as the basis and framework of a biblical counseling model<sup>17</sup>. It is somewhat surprising that no Scripture reference can be found until halfway through the book, and even then it is not used as a basis for Crabb's understanding of people's "deepest needs" - being security and significance. Crabb rather uses Scripture, after he asserted the nature of these needs, to show how these are met in Christ (and in the use of spiritual gifts). He likewise agreed with a number of psychologists on the importance of "thinking" and backed this up with the claim that "Scripture abounds with reference to the importance of right thinking"<sup>18</sup>, briefly discussing three verses.

In his first book then, Crabb's actual approach was not so much to derive a model from Scripture (as the basis of thought) as it was to ensure that his thinking was consistent with Scripture. This observation is in agreement with Crabb's own comments introducing his second book, *Effective biblical counseling*:

*In my first book... I developed in rather broad outline an approach to counseling which I believe to be psychologically sound and consistent with Scripture*<sup>19</sup>.

This same approach is in evidence throughout *Effective biblical counseling*. For example, in introducing his discussion on human motivation, Crabb states that his goal is "to describe what I believe to be a theory of human motivation which is consistent with a scriptural view of man"<sup>20</sup>. Crabb then discusses Maslow's hierarchy of needs and proceeds to show how God meets all of these needs. This procedure characterizes the rest of this book.

In his third foundational book which deals with Scripture and counseling, *Understanding people* - written ten years after the first two, Crabb moved from using Scripture as a means of testing a psychological view for its consistency with (at least portions of) Scripture, to using Scripture as a basis of reflecting upon man in relation to himself and to God, man's problem, and what Scripture sets forth as the solution. In this book Crabb sets out a sound theory of interpretation which incorporates the following steps: exegesis, developing (systematic) doctrine, thinking through implications and working on communication<sup>21</sup>. Concerning exegesis, Crabb acknowledges the expertise of scholars trained in the biblical languages, customs and cultures, with the comment:

*It is wise, therefore, for people like me who have not had formal theological training to draw freely from the insights of the biblical scholars*<sup>22</sup>.

Is Crabb consistent with his model as he proceeds to discuss anthropology and hamartiology in part two of *Understanding people*? As with his first

two books, Crabb begins with a survey of options in the field of psychology. But unlike those initial studies, he sets these aside for a biblically grounded perspective. Crabb begins with the proposition that “people are fallen image-bearers”, with the comment, “I accept this premise because the Bible accepts it”<sup>23</sup>. He then examines a number of theological options (showing but not explicitly displaying a range of reading), and accepts the explanation of “image” as “similarity in personhood”. The four chapters following are devoted to exploring the “similar” capacities of longing deeply, thinking, choosing and feeling.

In answering the question of how Crabb has used scripture throughout his discussion, it must be said that (1) little exegesis for “fallen” or “image-bearer” was done, (2) there was discussion on various theological meanings of “image”, but (3) the ideas about the four “similar” capacities were derived from a variety of passages, with no detailed exegesis in sight. That is, Crabb has not shown that he drew “freely from the insights of the biblical scholars” as he mentioned (above).

In setting forth biblical models for counseling, Crabb has consistently failed to demonstrate that his use and understanding of scripture is informed and comprehensively reflects the whole of scripture. Crabb would like to have a model for christian counseling which has been derived from scripture, but there is no evidence to suggest that Crabb knows how to interpret in a literary context, the importance of a passage’s purpose (as at least Adams spoke about doing), or the potential effects of genre and historical setting on one’s understanding of the passage at hand. As Crabb has not shown an awareness of these things, his models and approaches, as suggestive and often profoundly impactful as they may be, cannot be accepted as having been derived from and therefore representative of a comprehensive and informed study of scripture.

## **2 AN INFORMED APPROACH: THE INTERPRETATION OF PROVERBS**

The following two sections briefly summarize the main highlights of two chapters of my dissertation; the first was concerned with gathering together from various sources current thought on the (literary) understanding and (linguistic) interpretation of proverbs *per se*, the second applied these general considerations to a particular study within the book of Proverbs itself.

## 2.1 General Principles: Relative truths about the roads we travel by

Recent studies on proverbs have shed light on various characteristics of these literary forms of expression. According to these findings, proverbs are characterized by intensivity, narrativity, and metaphoric play<sup>24</sup>. They are open-ended texts<sup>25</sup>, and often teasingly ambiguous<sup>26</sup>. Proverbs sound (or read) like absolute statements, but in truth they are relative statements, which are used according to the goals of the user in a particular situation<sup>27</sup>.

Knowledge of the above characteristics of proverbs can affect one's translation and interpretation of individual proverbs, as well as understanding the book of Proverbs as a whole. Schneider warned against translating proverbs in such a way to eliminate their ambiguity and thereby turning open texts into closed texts<sup>28</sup>. The excellent article by Kirshenblatt-Gimlett, which had as its goal, "demonstrating that [a proverb] expresses relative rather than absolute truths"<sup>29</sup>, can stand as a warning against interpreting any one proverb as making an absolutist kind of statement (such as on the "incurable" nature of the foolish, as many understand Prov. 27:22)<sup>30</sup>.

It is virtually commonplace to state that the overriding value and goal of wisdom and of the book of Proverbs, is that of life<sup>31</sup>. Crenshaw explains what this meant for the wise:

*The word "life" is used here in its pregnant sense - a long existence characterized by good health, an abundance of friends, a house full of children, and sufficient possessions to carry one sagely through any difficulty<sup>32</sup>.*

Crenshaw goes on from here to explain something which is pertinent to both the study of "the foolish" which I undertook, and to the way in which one can relate the book of Proverbs to pastoral counseling:

*Another image that plays an important part in the vocabulary of Israel's sages who composed the book of Proverbs is the path or way to life... in the thinking of Israel's wise men and women..., at birth everyone had embarked on a journey which led to a full life or to premature departure. On this path of life two distinct groups of pilgrims walked toward different goals. They are known as the wise and the foolish; all people fell into one or the other category<sup>33</sup>.*

The concern with obtaining "the good life" is shown throughout the book of Proverbs with the continual call away from folly and towards wisdom. This story-like portrayal of the basic theme of Proverbs is a useful way of putting its many parts into a coherent whole, which can also then be utilized in the counseling context in terms of counselor and counselee telling their life-stories with the "language-world" of Proverbs.

## 2.2 A Specific Study: “The Foolish” in Proverbs 10 - 29

In line with the above theme of “the wise” and “the foolish” which is central to the book of Proverbs, I embarked upon a partial study of “the foolish”. The goal in this was to provide an example of how one might draw together a composite portrait of this character-type in Proverbs, and then to relate this as well as the general understanding of the book of Proverbs and proverbs to the counseling context. Space necessitated a partial study, which was limited to the occurrences of the term *'ewil* (“the foolish”) as found in seventeen proverbs from chapters 10 - 29. A full study would properly include the whole semantic range of “folly”<sup>34</sup>.

In summarizing the results of the exegesis on these seventeen proverbs, I arrived at three broad groupings for this character-type, which are as follows (all passages are from Proverbs):

(1) Speech and self-expression - in which “the foolish” are depicted as being quick to talk (10:8), ready to burst out (20:3) and to express anger (12:16), indiscreet (10:14) and proud (14:3) in their talk. They are, however, silent when the time comes to speak out for justice (24:7), and a silent fool may be mistaken as being wise (17:28).

(2) Attitude to input - the foolish are generally closed to accepting input and advice, preferring their own talk (10:8), and they even spurn parental instruction (15:5), all perhaps because they implicitly assume that their way is right (12:15).

(3) Resultant effects - through their talk, the foolish leave themselves unprotected (14:3), and they bring about destruction (10:14) and severe ruin (10:8, 10); they become separated from positive relationships in the community (14:9), and even their rightful family inheritance (11:29); they are furthermore plagued by the very folly they embrace (16:22).

This brief description of “the foolish” is simply intended to provide a basis for the following sections, where the general and specific study of the book of Proverbs are placed in the context of christian counseling.

## 3 PROVERBS AND “BIBLICAL” COUNSELING

The following discussion focuses on how the above considerations with respect to the book of Proverbs could be utilized to make Adams’ and

Crabb's "biblical" counseling more biblical, that is, more representative of the whole of Scripture, including the book of Proverbs.

### 3.1 Adams: Proverbs and counseling

In a brief, three-page section in *Competent to counsel*, Adams discusses the usefulness of Proverbs for "nouthetic" counselors. He entitled this section "Proverbs: A book of directive counseling". Two of his main points in discussing Proverbs are that (1) Proverbs is "anything but non-directive", and (2) "it is clear that an outside source imposed upon the counselee from above in an authoritative fashion... is what a young man (or any client seeking counseling) needs"<sup>35</sup>.

With respect to his assertion that the book of Proverbs is directive, Adams appears to read proverbs as though they are all admonitions. That is, he fails to distinguish between the proverbial admonition, and the proverbial saying. All of the ten passages Adams discusses in this section come from Proverbs 1 - 9, many of which are clearly directive (3:5, 11-12) while others speak of commands and teachings (2:1-6; 3:1; 4:2; 6:23). Adams also appears to regard Proverbs as a catalogue of "do's and don'ts"<sup>36</sup>, a view consistent with his "admonition"-oriented regard of Proverbs.

This understanding of directives in Proverbs needs to be counter-balanced with (1) the indirectness of proverbial sayings and (2) the potential ambiguity of proverbial admonitions. Not one of the seventeen proverbs I exegeted concerning "the foolish" could be described as being an admonition; they are all sayings. Proverbial sayings by their very nature are indirect and can be utilized in a number of different ways. Sayings can be used to illuminate one's understanding of oneself, others (an individual or a group), or even how "the world of people" operates. They may cast light on behavior - actual or intended. They may affirm or warn against certain courses of action, values, or attitudes. All of this potential variability in usage argues against viewing proverbial sayings as being necessarily and straightforwardly directive.

Further to this, even admonitions can be ambiguous. Proverbs 26:4,5 is a famous pair of juxtaposed and apparently contradictory proverbs, yet they are both admonitions:

*Don't answer a fool according to his folly, lest you yourself become like him. Do answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his eyes*<sup>37</sup>.

In his article on these proverbs, Hoglund argues that the first verse highlights the danger to the wise, and the second the responsibility of the

wise, with respect to their being in dialogue with the foolish. Regardless of how one finally understands how these make sense together, the fact remains that these two admonitions, and potentially others, are not necessarily as clear and directive as Adams would seem to suggest. Whybray's comment on these verses furthers this point, for he proposed that these proverbs were deliberately placed together "to demonstrate that no human wisdom can encompass the whole truth; in particular, that a short proverb can express only one part of it"<sup>38</sup>.

This brings us to Adams' second assertion concerning the need for an authoritative directive counselor.

*the Book of Proverbs exhorts the young man to listen to others rather than upon his own ideas: "Do not rely on your own insight [bina]" (3:5). Words could hardly be more anti-Rogerian [Rogers being non-directive]<sup>39</sup>.*

Unfortunately this single statement in Proverbs does not mean to despise or to completely ignore one's own insight or understanding (*bina*), and to therefore defer to "the authoritative directives imposed from an outside source" (as Adams put it). The contrast struck in Proverbs 3:5 is between relying on one's own understanding as opposed to relying on God. The inherent ambiguities of proverbial sayings, as well as some admonitions, argue against a denigrating of making use of one's own understanding, as Adams does regarding the "understanding" of the counselee.

Moreover, one of the clear directive admonitions in Proverbs 4:5a,7 is this:

*Acquire wisdom: Acquire understanding (בִּינָה)!*

*The beginning of wisdom (is) acquire wisdom;*

*and with all your acquiring, acquire understanding (בִּינָה)!*

Proverbs is so composed that not only is one forced to use one's understanding to understand proverbial sayings (as mentioned in 1:6a), one is admonished to acquire understanding. Hence, both the nature of proverbs and the instruction within the book of Proverbs argue against Adams' assertion that Proverbs is necessarily directive, and should be used that way to override the "understanding" of the counselee. Rather, proverbial sayings and admonitions are potentially non-directive, ambiguous, and open-ended. Moreover, the development of one's own understanding (a "young man's", "clients", or any user of Proverbs) is one of Proverbs' central concerns.

### 3.2 Crabb: Understanding people and “the foolish”

In part two of *Understanding people*, Crabb seeks to address two questions: “Who is man?” and “What is man’s problem?”. The first question is concerned with the nature of man, the second with the nature of what underlies the “problems” which surface in the counseling context.

Crabb’s study on the nature of man incorporates a prolonged discussion on man as a personal, rational, volitional, and emotional being<sup>40</sup>. In the summary of my study on “the foolish”, the first grouping of ten proverbs was entitled “Speech and Self-expression”. From these proverbs one may postulate that a person is known in and through his or her speech. This may add another aspect of “image” to Crabb’s list; man as a communicating being.

In my readings of Crabb, Adams and others in the pastoral counseling field, I have not seen much stress on this possible means of assessing the character of a person, by reflecting upon his speech. “The tongue” and “words” are not new suggestions for topical studies in Proverbs<sup>41</sup>. However, to postulate that a person’s character is revealed through his speech is to perhaps place the typical counseling “skill” of listening into a broader framework - the framework of character assessment. This aspect of communicating character through speech may add another dimension to discussions on the communicative aspect of Practical Theology<sup>42</sup>. If character is revealed through speech and the primary goal of pastoral counseling (as many agree in pastoral writings) is the development of godliness (or christian maturity), then listening may be one of the primary means of assessing a counselee’s character and hence one of the counselor’s primary activities.

Crabb’s discussion of “What is man’s problem?” focused on man as a “fallen image-bearer”. Although Crabb placed this topic under the systematic terminology of hamartiology (the study of sin), it may be more helpful to discuss “the problem” without direct reference to “sin” *per se*. Scott argued, in line with McKane, that one should not confuse the proverbial terminology of “wise/foolish” and “righteous/wicked”:

*a line of demarcation marking a real difference is to be drawn between the sayings marked by the presence or absence of religious terms and ideas*<sup>43</sup>.

Scott notes that even though these two antithetical pairs are analogous, “that does not mean that they are equivalent and interchangeable”<sup>44</sup>. Although, as he puts it, these groupings might “broadly coincide”, Scott argues that righteousness is more narrowly focused on one’s relationship

with Yahweh, whereas wisdom was more broadly related to everyday experience<sup>45</sup>.

With the above distinction between “sin” and “folly” in mind, one may then reconsider the “Resultant Effects” of “the foolish” (my third summary grouping) with respect to the discussion on the problem of man. The “problem” which has prompted the counselee to seek help may be as a result of foolishness, his or her own, or that of others. The disaster and ruin which the foolish effect, potentially upon themselves or others, may in turn prompt them, or others, to seek counsel. The suffering which folly brings about is not necessarily confined to the foolish (which conclusion is reflective of an “open-ended” interpretation of various proverbs). The reason behind such folly or the solution to the harmful outcome, was not addressed as such in the proverbs examined concerning “the foolish”. A step in this direction, though, may be in the direction towards which the next section points.

#### **4 THE “WORLD” OF PROVERBS AND THE “WORLD” OF COUNSELING**

How can one move from a study of the book of Proverbs, complete with an informed understanding of proverbs and a well-grounded exegetical base, to the counseling room? The questions about “What constitutes the good life?” (with the implicit value on life), and “How can one obtain it?” are the central concern of the first nine chapters of Proverbs. However these questions may be relevant in today’s world and I assume they are as alive now as they ever have been, the “language” of these ancient texts has been largely displaced in the modern world. Few, if any, use the proverbial terms like “the fool”, yet in the loss of this terminology there may also be the loss of the use of the related concepts of “wisdom” and “folly” for pastoral purposes.

##### **4.1 The language-world of the book of Proverbs**

C Gerkin has addressed the need of a new language in the context of therapy in his book *The living human document*. In reviewing the development of this problem, he stated that

*the therapeutic paradigm was becoming triumphant over other language paradigms as the primary mode for consideration of human individual and relationship problems<sup>46</sup>.*

Gerkin's proposed solution is to alter the language which therapists use, from the purely psychological to include the theological. This could be done by viewing theological and psychological "language systems" as *efforts to penetrate the mystery of what is beyond human understanding and make sense of it... Building on very different paradigmatic images of the core truths of human reality, each language world develops a vocabulary of words and imagerial forms by which these mysteries are to be interpreted, understood, and where possible, explained*<sup>47</sup>.

Gerkin advances the idea of the pastor as something of a "go-between", moving between the language-world of theology, human experience, and psychotherapy. The language-world of theology includes the "images, concepts, theories, and methodologies of the disciplines that undergird pastoral counseling - theology, communications or systems theory, and the like"<sup>48</sup>.

I wish to extend what Gerkin includes in the theological language world to include the "world" of biblical theology, the Old Testament and more particularly the "world" and language of Proverbs. By the language of Proverbs I am not advocating that pastors suddenly use the terms "fool", "sluggard" and the like. But pastors and christian counselors do have much to gain if they acquaint themselves with the symbols, images, values and concepts utilized in the book of Proverbs. In this way one could be equipped with an informed comprehension of the "world" of Proverbs, and ready to move into the "world" of counseling.

#### 4.2 The language of counseling: Life-stories

In a fairly recent book, *Finding God*, Crabb advocates spiritual growth, a moving towards finding God, in the midst of life's problems, rather than to run from such suffering wondering where God has gotten to. The means of achieving this is by courageously telling our life stories in the context of community. Crabb expands upon this desire to know God in community by explaining three kinds of stories<sup>49</sup>. These can be described as follows:

*Our present story is about how we relate to a world full of disappointing people, either in a self-serving or a self-giving manner. Our inside story is about how we deal with relational pain, either through self-protection or courageous growing. Our deepest story is about our attitude of self-service or worship of God when His goodness seems to be utterly lacking in our personal experience.*

Of course the "either-or" explanation is probably closer to "both-and" in real life. However, the point is that spiritual growth involves admitting one

is worse off than a godly person should be, and desiring and moving towards a more God-honouring response to others, inner suffering and God himself.

Crabb's suggestions about storytelling can be applied to the telling of one's story as informed by the language-world of Proverbs. Whether it is in relationship to others, to oneself, or to God, one's general character can potentially be revealed by an understanding and identifying with the character-types found throughout Proverbs - such as "the wise" or "the foolish". This revelation of oneself through the "story" of Proverbs places one in a position of choice and change, for such a revelation of self must almost necessarily carry with it the imperative to affirm that character or to work towards changing that which is unworthy.

This self-understanding can help the pastor or counselor to interpret both his or her own story, as well as that of others, and in doing so to place these life-stories in a scriptural framework of wisdom. With regard to the character-type of "the foolish", one may come to see that he or she is displaying evidence of foolish tendencies; in relating to people, in dealing with relational pain, or in one's relationship with God (our present, inside or deep stories). In this recognition of foolishness in oneself, the hope is then that one can move beyond such by choosing the way of wisdom, and thus to move into more of the breadth of life's fullness.

#### NOTES:

- 1 This paper is a summary of a doctoral thesis that was submitted in the department of Old Testament, Faculty of Theology, University of Pretoria (section B) with Professor W S Prinsloo as promoter and Professor J C Müller as co-promoter.
- 2 S Pattison, *A critique of pastoral care*, London 1988, 115-8.
- 3 J E Adams, *Competent to counsel*, Grand Rapids 1970, 283-5.
- 4 Adams, *op cit*, 286-7.
- 5 Adams, *op cit*, 105.
- 6 J E Adams, *A theology of christian counseling*, Grand Rapids 1986, 327-34.
- 7 Adams, *op cit*, 14.
- 8 J E Adams, *Preaching with purpose*, Phillipsburg 1982, 29-30.

- 9 Adams, *op cit*, 27.
- 10 Adams, *Competent to counsel*, 42.
- 11 Adams, *op cit*, 41-42.
- 12 Adams, *op cit*, 44.
- 13 W Bauer, *A Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament and other early Christian literature*, Chicago 1958, 544.
- 14 For an extended discussion of this topic, see M Silva, *Biblical words and their meaning: An introduction to lexical semantics*, Grand Rapids 1983, 136-169.
- 15 Silva, *op cit*, 10.
- 16 J E Adams, *What about nouthetic counseling?*, Phillipsburg 1976, 45.
- 17 L J Crabb, *Basic principles of biblical counseling*, Grand Rapids 1975, 21,110.
- 18 Crabb, *op cit*, 80.
- 19 L J Crabb, *Effective biblical counseling*, Grand Rapids 1977, 13.
- 20 Crabb, *op cit*, 51.
- 21 L J Crabb, *Understanding people: Deep longings for relationship*, Grand Rapids 1987, 63-73.
- 22 Crabb, *op cit*, 65.
- 23 Crabb, *op cit*, 87.
- 24 J G Williams, "Proverbs and Ecclesiastics", in: R Alter and F Kermode (ed), *The literary guide to the Bible*, London 1987, 273-75.
- 25 T R Schneider, *The sharpening of wisdom: Old Testament proverbs in translation*, (Old Testament Essays, Supplement 1), Pretoria 1992, 84.
- 26 A Berlin, *The dynamics of Biblical parallelism*, Bloomington 1985, 91-99.
- 27 B Kirshenblatt-Gimlett, "Toward a Theory of Proverb Meaning", *Proverbium* 22 (1973), 821,826.
- 28 Schneider, *op cit*, 51.
- 29 Kirshenblatt-Gimlett, *op cit*, 821.

- 30 An example could be found in R N Whybray, *Proverbs*, (The New Century Bible Commentary), Grand Rapids 1994, 386.
- 31 R E Murphy, "Kerygma of the book of Proverbs", *Interpretation* 20 (1966), 4; A E Zanneni, "Five disconcerting theological reflections from Old Testament wisdom literature", *Saint Luke Journal* 19 (1976), 287; J L Crenshaw, *Old Testament wisdom: an introduction*, Atlanta 1981, 79.
- 32 Crenshaw, *op cit*, 79.
- 33 Crenshaw, *op cit*, 79-80.
- 34 See T Donald, "The semantic field of 'folly' in Proverbs, Job, Psalms, and Ecclesiastes", *Vetus Testamentum* 13 (1963), 285-92.
- 35 Adams, *Competent to counsel*, 98-99.
- 36 Adams, *A theology of christian counseling*, 24.
- 37 K G Hoglund, "The Fool and the Wise in Dialogue", in: K G Hoglund et al (eds), *The listening heart*, Sheffield 1987, 161.
- 38 Whybray, *op cit*, 372.
- 39 Adams, *Competent to counsel*, 99.
- 40 Crabb, *Understand people*, 97-141, 153-189.
- 41 See for example D Kidner, *Proverbs: An introduction and commentary*, (Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries), Chicago 1964, 46-49.
- 42 As in L M Heyns and H J C Pieterse, *A primer in practical theology*, Pretoria 1990, 46-56.
- 43 R B Y Scott, "Wise and foolish, righteous and wicked", in: *Studies in the religion of Ancient Israel*, (Supplement to Vetus Testamentum 23), Leiden 1972, 154.
- 44 Scott, *op cit*, 160.
- 45 Scott, *op cit*, 160-61.
- 46 C V Gerkin, *The living human document*, Nashville 1984, 12.
- 47 Gerkin, *op cit*, 19.

48 Gerkin, *op cit*, 27-28.

49 L J Crabb, *Finding God*, Grand Rapids 1993, 196-97.