

A Study of Fools

The Bible has a lot to say about both wisdom and foolishness. A great deal of time has been spent studying wisdom, but I haven't seen a lot written on what the Bible has to say about fools. While it is a good thing to know what activities are wise, it is also a good thing to know what activities are foolish and should be avoided. If we don't know the characteristics of fools then we may find ourselves becoming one without even realizing it. The Bible strongly warns against foolishness, and we should take its warnings seriously.

It turns out that the word “fool” appears a *lot* in the Bible. There is no shortage of material! The picture that the Bible gives of fools is fascinating. One of the key themes of Proverbs is that fools should forsake their foolishness and get wisdom:

Proverbs 1:20: “Wisdom crieth without; she uttereth her voice in the streets:
21 She crieth in the chief place of concourse, in the openings of the gates: in the city
she uttereth her words, saying,
22 How long, ye simple ones, will ye love simplicity? and the scorers delight in
their scorning, and fools hate knowledge?”

There are many people in the world – and even in churches – who do not value wisdom. In our day the truth is not prized. Many prefer fantasy over reality and would rather believe things that make them happy instead of things that are true. This is a grave error that has deadly consequences:

Proverbs 1:24: “Because I have called, and ye refused; I have stretched out my
hand, and no man regarded;
25 But ye have set at nought all my counsel, and would none of my reproof:
26 I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh;
27 When your fear cometh as desolation, and your destruction cometh as a
whirlwind; when distress and anguish cometh upon you.
28 Then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer; they shall seek me early, but
they shall not find me:
29 For that they hated knowledge, and did not choose the fear of the Lord:
30 They would none of my counsel: they despised all my reproof.
31 Therefore shall they eat of the fruit of their own way, and be filled with their own
devices.
32 For the turning away of the simple shall slay them, and the prosperity of fools
shall destroy them.”

Do not choose foolishness; instead, choose wisdom. Do not hate knowledge and do not despise the fear of the Lord. Run to Him, while there is still time. Reject foolishness with great passion and fervency. Do not demonstrate these characteristics:

Fools Deny God

Anyone who denies the existence of God is a fool:

Psalm 14:1: "The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God. They are corrupt, they have done abominable works, there is none that doeth good."

Psalm 53:1: "The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God. Corrupt are they, and have done abominable iniquity: there is none that doeth good."

As the old saying goes, God doesn't believe in atheists. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of both wisdom and understanding:

Proverbs 9:10: "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom: and the knowledge of the holy is understanding."

Those who do not fear the Lord lack wisdom. They are blind, walking in darkness.

Fools Hate Wisdom

Anyone who despises wisdom and instruction is a fool:

Proverbs 1:7: "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge: but fools despise wisdom and instruction."

Proverbs 1:22: "How long, ye simple ones, will ye love simplicity? and the scorers delight in their scorning, and fools hate knowledge?"

Proverbs 15:5: "A fool despiseth his father's instruction: but he that regardeth reproof is prudent."

Proverbs 17:24: "Wisdom is before him that hath understanding; but the eyes of a fool are in the ends of the earth."

This next one is especially biting. All those who are seeking to "discover themselves" and "follow their heart" are fools:

Proverbs 18:2: "A fool hath no delight in understanding, but that his heart may discover itself."

The Bible is brutally honest about this. Those who trust their hearts are fools:

Proverbs 28:26: "He that trusteth in his own heart is a fool: but whoso walketh wisely, he shall be delivered."

Why is it such an error to trust your heart? Jeremiah explains:

Jeremiah 17:9: "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked:

who can know it?"

Don't trust your heart; instead trust God and His Word. Why would you trust something that is deceitful and desperately wicked?

Another key characteristics of a fool is his utter hatred of wisdom:

Proverbs 23:9: "Speak not in the ears of a fool: for he will despise the wisdom of thy words."

Proverbs 29:9: "If a wise man contendeth with a foolish man, whether he rage or laugh, there is no rest."

A wise man can be corrected by a simple reproof; if you point out the error of his ways then he will repent and change. There are some, though, who hate reproof and who refuse to be corrected. These people are so committed to their error that even beatings will not deter them. These people are fools:

Proverbs 17:10: "A reproof entereth more into a wise man than an hundred stripes into a fool."

Proverbs 27:22: "Though thou shouldest bray a fool in a mortar among wheat with a pestle, yet will not his foolishness depart from him."

People who hate wisdom and love error should be avoided:

Proverbs 14:7: "Go from the presence of a foolish man, when thou perceivest not in him the lips of knowledge."

Why? Because fools are dangerous:

Proverbs 17:12: "Let a bear robbed of her whelps meet a man, rather than a fool in his folly."

It is actually better to meet *an angry bear* than it is to meet a fool in his folly!

Then there are these two enigmatic verses:

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

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

These verses seem contradictory, but you have to keep in mind that they are talking about two different situations. In the first case, answering a fool would make you like him so you should not answer him. In the second case, you *should* answer him lest he be wise in his own conceit. (How can you tell the difference between the two situations? With wisdom, of course. There is a time for everything: a time to rebuke fools and a time to *not* rebuke fools. The difficult part is to not confuse the two situations.)

Fools Are Characterized By Anger

Those who are quick to wrath, and easily angered, are fools:

Proverbs 12:16: "A fool's wrath is presently known: but a prudent man covereth shame."

Proverbs 14:17: "He that is soon angry dealeth foolishly: and a man of wicked devices is hated."

Proverbs 27:3: "A stone is heavy, and the sand weighty; but a fool's wrath is heavier than them both."

Ecclesiastes 7:9: "Be not hasty in thy spirit to be angry: for anger resteth in the bosom of fools."

Those who are characterized by a spirit of anger are fools. The wise take a very different approach:

James 1:19: "Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath:

20 For the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God."

Fools Are Destroyed By Their Anger

It is a foolish thing to be quick to wrath. That road leads to destruction and even death:

Job 5:2: "For wrath killeth the foolish man, and envy slayeth the silly one."

Fools Are Destroyed By Prosperity

It is a terrible thing for a foolish person to suddenly become prosperous. Prosperity will utterly ruin those who are not wise:

Proverbs 1:32: "For the turning away of the simple shall slay them, and the prosperity of fools shall destroy them."

This has been proven true time and time again by lottery winners. You would think that winning the lottery would make the rest of your life a dream, but that is not the case. Instead, those who win the lottery find that the sudden influx of millions of dollars has utterly ruined their lives:

Adams, who won the New Jersey lottery in 1985 and 1986 for a total of \$5.4 million, gambled and gave away all her winnings and by 2001 was poor and living in a trailer...Michael Carroll, who won about \$17 million in a lottery in England in 2003, said he only had \$3 million left in early 2006. He told the press, "I regret ever winning the lottery. I've spent \$2 million on drugs and given \$7 million to friends and family." Karen Cohen, who won \$1 million in the Illinois state lottery in 1984, filed for bankruptcy in 2000 and in 2006 was sentenced to 22 months in jail for lying to federal bankruptcy court. Jeffrey Dampier, who won \$20 million, was kidnapped and murdered by his own sister-in-law and he boyfriend who targeted him for money. Ed Gildein, who won \$8.8 million in the Texas lottery in 1993, gambled away most of the money and left his wife with a slew of debts when he died in 2003.

(David Cloud, *Lottery Fever*)

Fools Love Evil

Those who love evil, or love doing evil things, or mock the idea of "sin", are fools:

Proverbs 10:23: "It is as sport to a fool to do mischief: but a man of understanding hath wisdom."

Proverbs 13:19: "The desire accomplished is sweet to the soul: but it is abomination to fools to depart from evil."

Proverbs 14:9: "Fools make a mock at sin: but among the righteous there is favour."

Proverbs 14:16: "A wise man feareth, and departeth from evil: but the fool rageth, and is confident."

Proverbs 19:3: "The foolishness of man perverteth his way: and his heart fretteth against the Lord."

Proverbs 24:9: "The thought of foolishness is sin: and the scorner is an abomination to men."

The wise man fears God and departs from evil, but to a fool it is an *abomination* to depart from evil.

Fools Face Judgment

The foolishness of fools does not go unpunished. There are very serious consequences for despising wisdom and clinging to folly:

Psalm 5:5: "The foolish shall not stand in thy sight: thou hatest all workers of iniquity."

Psalm 107:17: "Fools because of their transgression, and because of their iniquities, are afflicted."

Proverbs 3:35: "The wise shall inherit glory: but shame shall be the promotion of fools."

Proverbs 10:8: "The wise in heart will receive commandments: but a prating fool shall fall."

Proverbs 10:14: "Wise men lay up knowledge: but the mouth of the foolish is near destruction."

Proverbs 10:21: "The lips of the righteous feed many: but fools die for want of wisdom."

Proverbs 13:20: "He that walketh with wise men shall be wise: but a companion of fools shall be destroyed."

Proverbs 18:6: "A fool's lips enter into contention, and his mouth calleth for strokes."

Proverbs 19:29: "Judgments are prepared for scorers, and stripes for the back of fools."

Proverbs 26:3: "A whip for the horse, a bridle for the ass, and a rod for the fool's back."

Proverbs 26:10: "The great God that formed all things both rewardeth the fool, and rewardeth transgressors."

The wise will inherit glory, but the fool will inherit shame, suffering, and death.

Fools Lie About Their Hatred

This one is a bit odd. Those who hide their hatred with lies are fools:

Proverbs 10:18: "He that hideth hatred with lying lips, and he that uttereth a slander, is a fool."

Does this mean that it's better to be open about your hatred? Not exactly: as the verse goes on to explain, those who are open about their hatred and slander others are also fools. It's best to not hate your brother in the first place; God has called us to love one another.

We should keep this in mind, though:

Proverbs 27:5: “Open rebuke is better than secret love.”

This verse seems odd, but it makes perfect sense. If a fellow Christian is caught in sin and you openly rebuke him so that he might turn from his sin and be saved, then you have done your brother a service. However, if you just love him secretly and do nothing about it, then he is actually worse off than if you had rebuked him. A secret love that results in no actions is pretty much worthless.

Fools Will Serve The Wise

It should come as no surprise that those who are foolish and despise knowledge will find themselves serving those who are wise:

Proverbs 11:29: “He that troubleth his own house shall inherit the wind: and the fool shall be servant to the wise of heart.”

Fools Think Their Ways Are Right

One of the key characteristics of fools is that they do what *they* think is right:

Proverbs 12:15: “The way of a fool is right in his own eyes: but he that hearkeneth unto counsel is wise.”

The wise man takes a very different course: he does what *God* thinks is right. A fool says “I think this action is right, so I will do it.” A wise man reads the counsel of God and obeys it. The Bible repeatedly warns us against doing that which is right in our own eyes. That road leads only to destruction.

Fools Proclaim Foolishness

Those who are constantly saying foolish things are, of course, fools themselves:

Proverbs 12:23: “A prudent man concealeth knowledge: but the heart of fools proclaimeth foolishness.”

Proverbs 13:16: “Every prudent man dealeth with knowledge: but a fool layeth open his folly.”

Proverbs 14:3: “In the mouth of the foolish is a rod of pride: but the lips of the wise shall preserve them.”

Proverbs 14:33: "Wisdom resteth in the heart of him that hath understanding: but that which is in the midst of fools is made known."

Proverbs 15:2: "The tongue of the wise useth knowledge aright: but the mouth of fools poureth out foolishness."

Proverbs 15:7: "The lips of the wise disperse knowledge: but the heart of the foolish doeth not so."

Proverbs 15:14: "The heart of him that hath understanding seeketh knowledge: but the mouth of fools feedeth on foolishness."

Proverbs 16:22: "Understanding is a wellspring of life unto him that hath it: but the instruction of fools is folly."

Proverbs 18:7: "A fool's mouth is his destruction, and his lips are the snare of his soul."

Proverbs 19:1: "Better is the poor that walketh in his integrity, than he that is perverse in his lips, and is a fool."

Wise men are easy to spot: they are the people saying wise things. All you have to do to spot a fool is listen to what he has to say.

Fools Cause Sorrow

A foolish child brings a great deal of misery and pain to his parents:

Proverbs 17:21: "He that begetteth a fool doeth it to his sorrow: and the father of a fool hath no joy."

Proverbs 17:25: "A foolish son is a grief to his father, and bitterness to her that bare him."

Proverbs 19:13: "A foolish son is the calamity of his father: and the contentions of a wife are a continual dropping."

Proverbs 15:20: "A wise son maketh a glad father: but a foolish man despiseth his mother."

A wise son makes his father glad; a foolish son brings his father a great deal of pain and suffering.

Fools Stir Up Trouble

The wise man seeks to put an end to strife. Those who seek to meddle and continue the argument are fools:

Proverbs 20:3: "It is an honour for a man to cease from strife: but every fool will be meddling."

Fools Cannot Handle Wisdom

When a foolish person somehow gets their hands on a bit of wisdom, the results are not pretty:

Proverbs 17:16: "Wherefore is there a price in the hand of a fool to get wisdom, seeing he hath no heart to it?"

Proverbs 24:7: "Wisdom is too high for a fool: he openeth not his mouth in the gate."

Proverbs 26:7: "The legs of the lame are not equal: so is a parable in the mouth of fools."

Proverbs 26:9: "As a thorn goeth up into the hand of a drunkard, so is a parable in the mouths of fools."

You would think that if you gave a foolish person a bit of wisdom he would become wise, but that is not the case. A foolish person cannot handle wisdom anymore than a raving drunkard can drive a car. If you try it, someone will get hurt. Wisdom can only help the fool after he has stopped being foolish; he has to change first.

What is the beginning of wisdom? The fear of the Lord. That is where the journey begins; it is the first step. That first step *must* be taken before anything else can be done.

Fools Cannot Handle Money

Those who know how to save money and store up wealth are wise. Those who waste it, however, are fools:

Proverbs 21:20: "There is treasure to be desired and oil in the dwelling of the wise; but a foolish man spendeth it up."

Fools Do Not Deserve Honor

Those who lead foolish lives do not deserve delight or honor:

Proverbs 19:10: "Delight is not seemly for a fool; much less for a servant to have rule over princes."

Proverbs 26:1: "As snow in summer, and as rain in harvest, so honour is not seemly for a fool."

Proverbs 26:8: "As he that bindeth a stone in a sling, so is he that giveth honour to a fool."

Fools Cannot Be Trusted

If you put your trust in a fool then you will find yourself in a lot of trouble:

Proverbs 26:6: "He that sendeth a message by the hand of a fool cutteth off the feet, and drinketh damage."

Fools Return To Their Folly

Those who return to their foolish ways are fools:

Proverbs 14:24: "The crown of the wise is their riches: but the foolishness of fools is folly."

Proverbs 26:11: "As a dog returneth to his vomit, so a fool returneth to his folly."

Fools Speak Hastily

Those who speak hastily are fools:

Proverbs 17:7: "Excellent speech becometh not a fool: much less do lying lips a prince."

Proverbs 17:28: "Even a fool, when he holdeth his peace, is counted wise: and he that shutteth his lips is esteemed a man of understanding."

Proverbs 29:11: "A fool uttereth all his mind: but a wise man keepeth it in till

afterwards.”

Proverbs 29:20: “Seest thou a man that is hasty in his words? there is more hope of a fool than of him.”

Ecclesiastes 5:3: “For a dream cometh through the multitude of business; and a fool's voice is known by multitude of words.”

Ecclesiastes 10:12: “The words of a wise man's mouth are gracious; but the lips of a fool will swallow up himself.”

A person will seem wise if he keeps silent, but once a fool starts talking he is easy to spot. His words give him away.

In Conclusion

Seek wisdom, not foolishness. Whereas the consequences of foolishness are devastating, the rewards of wisdom are enormous:

Proverbs 3:13: “Happy is the man that findeth wisdom, and the man that getteth understanding.

14 For the merchandise of it is better than the merchandise of silver, and the gain thereof than fine gold.

15 She is more precious than rubies: and all the things thou canst desire are not to be compared unto her.

16 Length of days is in her right hand; and in her left hand riches and honour.

17 Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace.

18 She is a tree of life to them that lay hold upon her: and happy is every one that retaineth her.

19 The Lord by wisdom hath founded the earth; by understanding hath he established the heavens.

20 By his knowledge the depths are broken up, and the clouds drop down the dew.

21 My son, let not them depart from thine eyes: keep sound wisdom and discretion:

22 So shall they be life unto thy soul, and grace to thy neck.

23 Then shalt thou walk in thy way safely, and thy foot shall not stumble.

24 When thou liest down, thou shalt not be afraid: yea, thou shalt lie down, and thy sleep shall be sweet.”