

#263 "Don't Be a Fool"

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The contrast between the wise person and the fool is a major theme in the book of Proverbs. Solomon picked up on it some in Ecclesiastes as well. He, the wisest man ever to live, also made a lot of foolish choices in his life. Thus, he wanted those who were naïve and who lacked knowledge to hear godly instruction and receive it from an early age on. He knew from his errors that he did wrong, and there is much that we can learn from the truth that God shares through him in the Scripture. In this context, the term "fool" is not a personally insulting or derogatory term as people might use if they hate somebody, but it is a factual descriptor of the spiritual reality of a person who lacks wisdom. We would be wise to learn from Scripture so that we can put aside folly and grow in wisdom. The following gives 15 characteristics of foolishness.

1. Fools despise wisdom. There is a clear dichotomy in the Bible between right and wrong and between fools and those who love wisdom. Those who fear God learn wisdom, but fools hate understanding. Proverbs 1:7 says, "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; Fools despise wisdom and instruction."

2. The fool hates God. He has rejected God and His Son Jesus Christ, and he has great anger in his heart toward God. Proverbs 19:3 says, "The foolishness of man ruins his way, And his heart rages against the LORD." He will go so far as to even convince himself that God doesn't exist because, in his foolish mind, this gives him freedom to live as he wants. Psalm 14:1 says, "The fool has said in his heart, 'There is no God.' They are corrupt, they have committed abominable deeds; There is no one who does good."

3. Fools create needless strife and adversity for themselves and others. Ecclesiastes 7:17 says, "Do not be excessively wicked and do not be a fool. Why should you die before your time?" Sin is inherently destructive, leading people to do dumb things and to put themselves in dangerous situations. Proverbs 13:21 says, "Adversity pursues sinners, But the righteous will be rewarded with prosperity." The righteous will suffer trouble and hardship in this life (Matthew 5:45), but they will avoid the needless trouble that fools create for themselves and others. The righteous will manifest the fruit of the Spirit, and their lives will bless others by pointing them to Christ.

4. Foolishness cannot satisfy, and ultimately the futile pursuit of sinful pleasure is wearying. Ecclesiastes 10:15 says, "The toil of a fool *so* wearies him that he does not *even* know how to go to a city." The love of stupidity and despising the knowledge of God and His Word will leave a man's soul unsatisfied because God has set eternity in the hearts of all men (Ecclesiastes 3:11). They must respond to His revelation in the creation, cross, Bible, and conscience if they want to be forgiven and find true satisfaction. Otherwise, fools will be left multiplying their folly, for sin and error has a way of compounding its misery. The fool can actually increase his foolishness until he can't even make the most basic of life decisions.

5. Fools have a spiritual complacency about them. Proverbs 1:32 says, "For the waywardness of the naive will kill them, And the complacency of fools will destroy them." Having rejected the fear of God, which is the beginning of wisdom, they think not of the coming judgment or of matters of eternal significance. They have been spiritually lulled to sleep (Ephesians 5:14). Ecclesiastes 4:5 says, "The fool folds his hands and consumes his own flesh." His complacency and lack of zeal for God, for truth, and for good works is his own undoing. Proverbs 17:24 says, "Wisdom is in the presence of the one who has understanding, But the eyes of a fool are on the ends of the earth." The fool does not fix his hope on heaven (1 Peter 1:13), but upon futility, vanity, useless tasks, nothing, or on every worldly thing Satan has to offer.

6. Fools do a lot of worthless talking. Proverbs 10:8 says, "The wise of heart will receive commands, But a babbling fool will be ruined." This does not imply that those who do a lot of talking are automatically doing wrong compared to those who are more quiet by nature. What it is saying is that the words that fools speak are nonsensical, irrational, unedifying, of trivial matters, formulated without thinking, and based not in absolute truth but in opinion, feeling, and emotion. Proverbs 18:2 says, "A fool does not delight in understanding, But only in revealing his own mind." Rejecting the opportunity to learn, the fool is more interested in running his mouth according to his own views even if they are not in accordance to reality or truth. Ecclesiastes 10:12-14 says, "Words from the mouth of a wise man are gracious, while the lips of a fool consume him; the beginning of his talking is folly and the end of it is wicked madness. Yet the fool multiplies words." The fool's speech begins with idiocy in that he rejects the Scripture and doesn't think rationally. The result is increased wickedness, stupid choices, and madness, that is, the inability to properly evaluate decisions and life directions based upon truth. Yet the fool likes to hear himself talk and keeps the babbling and jabbering going on and on. Proverbs 15:2 says, "The tongue of the wise makes knowledge acceptable, But the mouth of fools spouts folly."

7. Fools enjoy being argumentative and stirring up strife. Proverbs 20:3 says, "Keeping away from strife is an honor for a man, But any fool will quarrel." Fools like to fight, and they will do what they can to stir up trouble and provoke others to anger. Proverbs 18:6 says, "A fool's lips bring strife, And his mouth calls for blows." Fools enjoy stirring up controversy rather than resolving it. They prefer to be argumentative because they like fighting rather than being peacemakers who like to get along. They take pride not in learning, problem-solving, conflict-resolution, or growing in truth but in banter, yelling, and useless debating (1 Corinthians 1:20). Proverbs 29:29 says, "When a wise man has a controversy with a foolish man, The foolish man either rages or laughs, and there is no rest."

8. Fools tend to have anger issues. Proverbs 29:11 says, "A fool always loses his temper, But a wise man holds it back." Fools are quick to lash out in anger, and they thrive on violence and personal attacks. Ecclesiastes 7:9 says, "Do not be eager in your heart to be angry, For anger resides in the bosom of fools."

9. For fools, doing evil is fun like a sport or hobby. Proverbs 10:23 says, "Doing wickedness is like sport to a fool, And so is wisdom to a man of understanding." Because a wise man loves God and His Word, doing righteousness and justice is a source of joy and pleasure for him. But the fool hates what is good and loves evil, and it is what consumes him, drives him, and motivates him. Even his form of religion

becomes a sinful, playful sport just as it did for Israel while Moses was away when they made the golden calf and committed immorality. Exodus 32:6 says, "So the next day they rose early and offered burnt offerings, and brought peace offerings; and the people sat down to eat and to drink, and rose up to play." Life is a game to the fool, but it is a stewardship to the wise.

10. A fool follows the deceptive leading of his wicked heart in the wrong spiritual direction. Proverbs 12:15 says, "The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, But a wise man is he who listens to counsel." If a fool would only respond to the instruction of Scripture, he could see that his directional bias is misguided and dangerously pointed in the wrong direction. Yet he is convinced that his way is right and justified, even if it is irrational. Proverbs 28:26 says, "He who trusts in his own heart is a fool, But he who walks wisely will be delivered." Wisdom seeks out a new heart in Christ, for only in Christ can a heart be reborn and given the desires of His heart (Psalm 37:4). Ecclesiastes 10:2 says, "A wise man's heart directs him toward the right, but the foolish man's heart directs him toward the left." There are two ways to choose in life, God's way or the devil's, and fools choose the wrong one and believe that they are right in doing so.

11. Foolishness is contagious. Bad company does indeed corrupt good morals (1 Corinthians 15:33), and those who spend too much time with fools will begin to assimilate to their foolishness. Proverbs 13:20 says, "He who walks with wise men will be wise, But the companion of fools will suffer harm." Spending time with those who have the wisdom of Christ and being teachable will lead to one growing in wisdom, but the companion of fools will come to harm.

12. A fool doesn't listen to sound teaching or respond to correction. Proverbs 23:9 says, "Do not speak in the hearing of a fool, For he will despise the wisdom of your words." A fool is not even thankful for pearls of wisdom, but catching a fool in his folly is more dangerous than confronting a mother bear who has just had her cubs stolen (Proverbs 17:12). It is why Jesus says not to cast pearls before swine because the swine will turn and tear you to pieces (Matthew 7:6). The fool is not appreciative of helpful Scriptural advice and wise counsel, but he will despise the person for attempting to share it and even seek to do him harm. Proverbs 15:5 says, "A fool rejects his father's discipline, But he who regards reproof is sensible." A fool does not respond to wisdom, but he goes right back to doing the same despicable acts all over again. Proverbs 26:11 says, "Like a dog that returns to its vomit Is a fool who repeats his folly."

13. Fools are wasteful and frivolous. Proverbs 21:20 says, "There is precious treasure and oil in the dwelling of the wise, But a foolish man swallows it up." A wise person saves up resources in case of emergency, but a fool spends everything without thinking ahead and living only for the moment. His vain appetites are a drain on what could otherwise be used for the benefit of others.

14. Fools don't take sin seriously. Proverbs 14:9 says, "Fools mock at sin, But among the upright there is good will." They have no concern for the well-being of their fellow man, and they certainly don't love their neighbor as themselves or consider their interests as more important than their own. They underestimate sin's devastating effects, and they have no fear of its consequences, now or in eternity. Proverbs 13:19 says, "Desire realized is sweet to the soul, But it is an abomination to fools to turn away

from evil." To not do evil is unthinkable for a fool, and the notion of sin to him is a pleasurable sport. Proverbs 14:16 says, "A wise man is cautious and turns away from evil, But a fool is arrogant and careless." Not taking life seriously is arrogant and careless, and it leads a person to turn to evil rather than to run from it.

15. The ultimate form of foolishness is a person who thinks that he is smarter and wiser than God.

Proverbs 26:12 says, "Do you see a man wise in his own eyes? There is more hope for a fool than for him." A person who is naïve, untaught, young, or inexperienced has more of a likelihood of coming around to the truth than a person who thinks that he knows it all and has it all figured out. Those who want God to bow down at the idol of their intellect as they spout the wisdom of the world which is foolishness before God are the most foolish of fools. 1 Corinthians 1:21 says, "For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not come to know God, God was well-pleased through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe." Hasty boasts of false wisdom and hurried and premature victory claims are symptoms of great pride and evidence of a need for God to bring a person low (Proverbs 29:20).

In conclusion, we live in a world where evil is called good, and good is called evil (Isaiah 5:20). Wisdom is called foolishness, and foolishness is lauded as wisdom. Isaiah 32:5 says, speaking of the coming kingdom under Jesus' rule, "No longer will the fool be called noble, Or the rogue be spoken of as generous." Eventually true wisdom will win out, and those who love the folly of sin need to repent before it is too late. Isaiah 35:8 says, "There will be no fools in heaven. A highway will be there, a roadway, And it will be called the Highway of Holiness. The unclean will not travel on it, But it will be for him who walks that way, And fools will not wander on it." May God reveal any remnant foolishness in our hearts, and may we be teachable so that we can grow in wisdom. God will multiply it to those who ask (James 1:5-7). Fools don't ask, but we who love Jesus must. He is, after all, the source of all wisdom and knowledge (Colossians 2:3), and He delights in pouring out wisdom on His own who love Him and who feast upon His Word.