

“Fools” in Proverbs

by Wayne Goff

Solomon lists several different kinds of “fools” in the book of Proverbs. One might ask the question, “How can Solomon call someone a ‘fool,’ when we are told not to call anyone a fool (Matt. 5:22)?”

One answer which we might give is that Solomon is speaking by **inspiration** (2 Peter 1:19-21) and therefore is uttering *God’s judgment*, not his own! If God calls a man a fool, then he most certainly is one.

The book of Proverbs is a comparison between the wise and the foolish. Fools in Proverbs are generally arrogant, scheming, and self-centered. Lest we become like one of those, we remind our readers of their tendencies.

Simple Fool

The simple fool is one who could learn better. He is simply ignorant. Proverbs 1:4 says that this book is written “*to give prudence to the simple,...*” So this is a person who can learn and is given the opportunity to learn. However, he can also be easily misled, possibly due to his youth and inexperience, but not because of his lack of mental ability.

This man is warned not to remain simple (1:22; 8:5) because it could lead to his death (1:32). Society will tolerate the young person who is foolish in his youth, but when he reaches middle age, then everyone considers him a fool who acts like a teenager! Read also Proverbs 9:4, 13, 15-16; 14:15, 18; 19:25; 21:11; 22:3; and 27:12.

Stubborn Fool

The stubborn fool is one who persists in his own way. Proverbs 5:23 says, “*He shall die for lack of instruction, and in the greatness of his folly he shall go astray.*” He is described as a “*prating fool*” (10:8, 10), whose “*mouth ... is near destruction*” (10:14). The wise are admonished not to “*answer a fool according to his folly, lest you also be like him*” (26:4).

Silly Fool

The silly fool is rather mindless, and is enjoying life day by day so that he doesn’t have time to consider anything seriously. Such a fool is a “*grief of his mother*” (10:1). He enjoys spreading slander (10:18), and doing evil (10:23). The wise are admonished to leave the presence of such a one (14:7-8).

Scorning Fool

This fool is a scorner, and is considered far worse than the other fools because he rejects the truth and enjoys violating God’s commands. God “*scorns the scornful*” (3:34). The wise are not to rebuke him because he can harm you (9:7-8), and he won’t listen to your rebuke anyway (13:1b)! Proverbs 14:6 says that he seeks wisdom and does not find it. I wonder why that is? Could it be because he is looking only for that which agrees with his opinions? He certainly is one who mocks at sin (14:9), and eventually he will come to judgment (19:29).

Committed Fool

This is the one who when his “*foolishness ... twists his way, ... his heart frets against the Lord*” (19:3). He does not learn from his mistakes, and thus repeats them over and over. “*As a dog returns to his own vomit, so a fool repeats his folly*” (26:11). “*Though you grind a fool in a mortar with a pestle along with crushed grain, yet his foolishness will not depart from him*” (27:22). No amount of pain or suffering will cause him to change. His sin becomes second nature to him, and it is nearly impossible for him to repent and turn around his life. Only as he turns his heart to God can there be hope because God can do what man cannot.

Application

You and I should study the book of Proverbs and learn the many wonderful, divine truths contained in it. Everyone reading this article will probably think to himself, “Well, I’m no fool!” but the truth is that all of us need instruction from God, and all of us can make the mistakes of a fool as described in Proverbs. So let him who thinks he stands, take heed lest he fall (1 Cor. 10:12)!