

Wisdom for Folly

Topical

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This picture says it all...



The book of Proverbs contains many verses on fools and their behavior.

Discerning a Fool

The Character of a Fool

According to Proverbs, a fool is someone who despises wisdom and instruction, speaks rashly and recklessly, causes strife and contention, mocks at sin and hates correction.

A fool does not fear the Lord, which is the beginning of knowledge (Proverbs 1:7). A fool also does not listen to advice or accept rebuke, but follows his own way and his own heart.

A fool's mouth is a source of trouble and violence, and his words are like firebrands, arrows and death (Proverbs 26:18-19).

A fool's folly is evident to everyone, and he repeats it like a dog that returns to his vomit (Proverbs 26:11).

A fool cannot be trusted with a message or a proverb, for he will ruin it or misuse it (Proverbs 26:6-9).

A fool is worse than a sluggard, for he is wise in his own eyes and there is more hope for a fool than for him (Proverbs 26:12-16).

The Contrast with the Wise

The book of Proverbs also contrasts the fool with the wise person, who fears the Lord.

A fool does not seek knowledge and understanding.

A fool does not receive commandments and instruction.

A fool does not speak with prudence and discretion.

A fool does not avoid strife and quarrels.

A fool does not love righteousness and hate evil.

A fool does not listen to counsel nor accepts discipline.

A fool does not guard his mouth nor his heart

A fool does not use proverbs wisely and appropriately, and therefore cannot benefit himself and others by his words and actions.

The wise person will inherit honor, but the fool will suffer shame (Proverbs 3:35).

Categorizing a Fool

Let's consider the topic, or theme of fools and their folly.

The Character of a Fool

A fool despises wisdom and instruction (1:7), hates knowledge (1:22), trusts in his own heart (28:26), speaks rashly (29:20), and mocks at sin (14:9).

A fool is arrogant (21:24), quarrelsome (20:3), lazy (26:13-16), and deceitful (14:8).

A fool also lacks self-control (29:11), discernment (17:24), and understanding (10:21).

The Consequences of being a fool

A fool will suffer harm (10:8, 14), shame (3:35), ruin (10:14), and death (10:21).

A fool will also inherit folly (14:18), be exposed (10:23), be despised (12:15), and be punished (19:29).

A fool's way is right in his own eyes, but it leads to destruction (12:15, 14:12).

The Contrast between a Fool and a Wise Person

A wise person fears the Lord (1:7, 9:10), listens to instruction (1:5, 8, 12:15), loves knowledge (12:1), and seeks understanding (18:15).

A wise person also speaks with prudence (10:19), acts with humility (11:2), and walks with integrity (28:6).

A wise person's words bring healing (12:18), life (10:11, 21), and honor (3:16).

A wise person's way is pleasant, peaceful, and prosperous (3:17-18, 13:14).

The Counsel for Dealing with a Fool

Do not answer a fool according to his folly, lest you be like him yourself. Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own eyes. (26:4-5)

Do not speak in the hearing of a fool, for he will despise the good sense of your words. (23:9) Do not associate with a fool, for you will not find knowledge on his lips. (14:7) Drive out a scoffer, and strife will go out, and quarreling and abuse will cease. (22:10)

Responding to Types of Fools

Let's think of these texts and gain insight in how to respond to a fool or a person who is foolish. It depends on what kind of fool we are dealing with. There are different types of fools, and different ways to handle them.

The Ignorant Fool

One type of fool is the one who hates knowledge and wisdom, and only cares about expressing his own opinion. This kind of fool is not interested in learning or listening, but only in arguing and boasting. The best way to deal with this fool is to avoid him, or to answer him according to his folly, so that he does not think he is smarter than he really is. For example, if he says something like "The earth is flat", the reply, "Yes, in the same way the moon is made of cheese". This way, you expose his ignorance and make him look ridiculous.

The Wicked Fool

Another type of fool is the one who does wrong as a joke, and mocks at sin. This kind of fool thinks that evil is fun, and that there is no consequence for his actions. He laughs at those who try to do good and makes fun of their faith. The best way to deal with this fool is to rebuke him, or to ignore him, so that he does not influence you or others with his wickedness. For example, if he says something like "Let's go rob a bank, it will be hilarious", your response can be something like "No thanks, I prefer not to go to jail", or just walk away. This way, you show him that you do not approve of his behavior and that you have better things to do.

The Deceitful Fool

A third type of fool is the one who is deceitful and slanderous. This kind of fool lies and spreads rumors about others and tries to cause trouble and division. He hides his hatred with lying lips, and pretends to be friendly while plotting harm. The best way to deal with this fool is to expose him, or to confront him, so that he does not get away with his lies and schemes. For example, if he says something like "Did you hear what John said about you?", you can say something like "Actually, I did. He said you are a liar and a troublemaker", or just go directly to John and ask him what he really said. This way, you reveal his dishonesty and stop his gossip.

There are many other types of fools in the book of Proverbs, but they all have one thing in common: they lack the fear of the Lord. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge and wisdom, but fools despise it and reject it. The only way for a fool to become wise is to repent of his folly and turn to God for forgiveness and guidance. Otherwise, he will face the consequences of his foolishness in this life and in the next.

Conclusion

Remember these principles so that you can grow in your own wisdom.

Folly is the natural, inborn state of people. Children are naturally foolish. It is not an acquired state. It is either slowly replaced with growing submission and wisdom or it is intensified by growing rebellion and foolishness.

Folly can only be reversed through discipline. It can be taught. But it will only be replaced by experiencing the natural or imposed consequences for choices.

Folly may be out of ignorance, out of scorn, or blatant open disregard or rebellion against God, against His Word, His ways, His design.

The Christian is to be growing in wisdom. You are to be making more and more wise decisions as God teaches, corrects and chastens you in the flow of life.

There is a kind of foolishness that is defined by the world. This is how the world looks at things. But the world then sees the cross as foolishness. The reverse of the world's idea of foolishness is the very wisdom of God.

So, how do we respond to a person who is a fool or who is foolish?

We respond with wisdom, which comes from God.

We respond with love, which covers a multitude of sins.

We respond with prayer, which can change hearts and minds.

We also remember that we are not perfect ourselves, and that we need God's grace every day.

We hope that by our words and actions, we can help some fools become wise, and some wise become wiser.