

Gleanings from the Book of Proverbs: Fools and Foolishness

Scripture Reading: Psalm 14:1-7

As Solomon credited his father David for teaching him to seek God’s wisdom (Proverbs 4:1-9), so it is fitting that we take a psalm of David to introduce the teaching, in the book of Proverbs, concerning fools and foolishness. In Psalm 14, we see some basic observations about fools:

Psalm 14:1-3 – They are atheists and evil workers. They do not seek God or consider God.

Psalm 14:4-6 – They ignorantly trouble and persecute God’s people. They will suffer for it.

Psalm 14:7 – God’s people have a bright future. Fools do not.

There are 78 verses in the book of Proverbs that use the words “*fool, fools, or foolishness.*” This would be a topic that requires deep study and prayerful meditation – something that you could pursue the rest of your life. It is impossible to exhaustively teach this topic in one or two sermons. At this time, we can only arrange these Proverbs with brief descriptions and encourage people to start the long-term process of absorbing the Word; of growing in grace and in the knowledge of Christ (Isaiah 28:9-10; II Corinthians 3:18; I Timothy 4:13-16; II Timothy 2:15).

We will be looking at...

- Descriptions of Fools and Foolishness
- The Destiny of Fools and the Outcome of Foolishness
- Directives on How to Respond to Fools and Foolishness

Descriptions of Fools and Foolishness

Proverbs 1:7 has been described as the key verse of the book of Proverbs. This verse has introduced the idea of “*The Fear of the Lord.*” It also introduces the theme of the “*fool / fools.*” Not every fool fits every description in the Proverbs. Fools are described for the sake of identification, so that we can be warned about them. Fools are also described so that we can avoid being one, or at least acting like one (foolishness).

Fools are guilty of willful ignorance (Proverbs 1:7). They love to mock and ridicule (Proverbs 1:22; 14:9). Though shallow and ignorant, they can be loud and outspoken, (Proverbs 9:13). They use their tongues deceptively / hypocritically. Motivated by hatred, they engage in lying and slander (Proverbs 10:18). Fools do not benefit themselves or others (Proverbs 10:21). They do not take life and relationships seriously (Proverbs 10:23 cp. Proverbs 14:9). Fools give themselves the benefit of a doubt – easily justifying themselves (Proverbs 12:15).

A fool can become a public spectacle, having no dignity or discretion. Though others can see it, fools do not understand their own foolishness (Proverbs 12:16,23; 13:16; 14:8,33; 26:1). A fool lacks godly drive and ambition. They can be easily distracted and often have a false sense of prosperity and security (Proverbs 1:32). Pleasure and a desire for evil things motivate them (Proverbs 13:19). A foolish woman is described as having a heart that is not in the home. Negligence, selfishness, destructive attitudes and behavior destabilize her home (Proverbs 14:1).

A fool does not fear God. They harden themselves through anger and pride. Using arrogant, abrasive talking, they gain a terrible reputation among people (Proverbs 14:16-17 cp. Proverbs 14:3; 27:3). Fools are known by their inappropriate and excessive use of their tongues (Proverbs 15:2,7; 17:7; [Proverbs 17:28 – beware of quiet fools!]; Proverbs 18:6-7; 29:11 cp. Proverbs 10:19; Ecclesiastes 5:3). Fools are known to dishonor and disobey their parents (Proverbs 15:5,20; 10:1; 17:21,25; 19:13).

A fool does not feed on truth. They feed on foolishness (Proverbs 15:14; Colossians 2:8; I John 4:1-6 cp. Proverbs 16:22; 17:16; I Corinthians 1:18-24). Fools are seen as stubborn and unteachable (Proverbs 17:10; 18:2; 20:3; 29:9). They can be dangerous (Proverbs 17:12). They lack discernment and have wandering minds. A fool is vulnerable to all of the false teachings and influences of the world (Proverbs 17:24). To a fool, real wisdom is too much effort. Though they talk a lot, when some good could be done for others in the public arena (i.e. *“speaking in the gate”*), they are uninvolved and quiet (Proverbs 24:7 – NIV says *“they must not open their mouths”*).

Bad choices and bad actions lead to bad consequences. Fools are known to blame God for their problems (Proverbs 19:3). Their lives are marked by discontentment and lack of joy (Proverbs 19:10). A fool also lacks foresight and discipline. They do not save or plan ahead (Proverbs 21:20).

The Destiny of Fools and the Outcome of Foolishness

The world often tries to find excuses for some fools – seeking to justify them. But each and every fool will stand accountable to God (Proverbs 26:10 cp. Isaiah 5:20-24; Romans 1:32; 6:23; Revelation 20:11-15). What kind of outcome can we expect from the foolishness of fools? – Shame (Proverbs 3:35); confrontation and correction from both men and God (Proverbs 7:22; 14:17; 19:29; 24:9; 26:3 cp. Psalm 94:8-11); calamity, failure, destruction, becoming subservient to those who are wise (Proverbs 10:8,10,14,21; 11:29; 14:24). Some foolish people acquire wealth and position. But material prosperity doesn't compensate for the miserable end of a fool (Matthew 16:24-26). Honest poverty is a better end (Proverbs 19:1 cp. Proverbs 15:16).

A Word of Warning and of Hope – We all have the potential to be foolish and need correction (Proverbs 22:15; 30:32). Fools are not hopeless. They may respond to the gracious call of God to repent and turn to God, confessing their sins and confessing their faith in the Son of God. Hear the plea of Lady Wisdom and see the possibility for a change of heart; a change in destiny (Proverbs 1:20-23; 8:1-6 cp. Psalm 94:8; Isaiah 55:6-7; John 3:16-17; 5:24; Acts 3:19; II Corinthians 5:17).

Directives on How to Respond to Fools and Foolishness

A word of caution – In Matthew 5:21-22, Jesus warned about slinging insults at people (Titus 3:1-7 – note verse 2). This included the use of the word “*fool.*” He compared it to the same attitudes that are in murderers.

Don't follow fools / foolish people. Forsake, flee, avoid, separate from them. Companionship with fools / foolish people will drag you down. Make sure you are going in God's prescribed pathway (Proverbs 9:6; 13:20; 14:7; 1:10 cp. Psalm 1:1-3; I Corinthians 15:33; II Timothy 2:22-23; Romans 16:17-18).

When trying to teach someone who is a fool / foolish, use discretion. Don't waste time arguing with them. If they are not receiving your words, invest your time with someone who appreciates what you have to show them. Don't waste your time using flattery. Sometimes a fool / foolish person needs to be rebuked. It may later benefit them or someone else who may be noticing (Proverbs 23:9; 9:6-9; 26:4-5,7-9; 29:9 cp. 14:16; 17:10; 21:11; Matthew 7:6).

Don't depend on fools / foolish people. No matter how they boast or what they promise, their words and actions are undependable (Proverbs 26:6; 28:26; 14:7).

Compassionately give them the gospel as much as you can and pray for them. Work in harmony with Lady Wisdom / The Spirit of Christ (Proverbs 1:20-23; 8:1-6; Matthew 5:44-48; 28:18-20; Mark 16:15; Luke 24:46-48; Romans 1:14-16; 13:8; I Corinthians 1:18-31; 9:19-23; I Timothy 2:1-8; II Timothy 2:24-26; Revelation 22:17).