

DON'T ACT LIKE A FOOL!

Introduction

There is the story about a man who rode his bicycle into an inner city park, climbed up onto a soapbox, and began to “preach” that people should ignore the law against stealing because no one should be poor while others are rich. After he finished his discourse he stepped down from his soapbox and headed for his bike, only to discover that it had been stolen! The man was furious. He shouted, “Where’s the bum who stole my bike!?!” (*Our Daily Bread*, 1/10/93)

How would you classify such a man? The term “fool” would be a very apt description: the man did display some of the traits characteristic of a fool. By exhorting people to disregard the law against stealing, he advocated a course of behavior that is contrary to the biblical standard; this is a mark of a fool. The man personally reaped the consequences of the sinful course he advocated, this is what happens to a fool. Having suffered the consequences of the sinful course he himself advocated, the man proceeded to rant and rave about what had happened to him; this, too, is characteristic of a fool.

Our next topical study from the Book of Proverbs turns our attention to the subject of the fool.

There are many things Proverbs says about the fool, but we shall confine ourselves to three of the major themes: 1) a fool refuses to accept biblical counsel or abide by the biblical standard; 2) a fool fails to exercise self-control; and 3) a fool suffers the consequences of his choices.

I. Don't Act Like a Fool! on the contrary, Accept Godly Counsel (Proverbs 10:8; Proverbs 15:5; Proverbs 28:26)

The wise in heart will accept commandments, but a chattering fool comes to ruin. (Prov. 10:8)

In contrast to the wise man, a fool will not receive instruction; he will not accept the counsel of God. Remember the exasperating question divine wisdom posed concerning the fool in the first chapter of Proverbs: *“How long will ... fools hate knowledge? ...²⁹... they hated knowledge and did not choose to fear Jehovah—³⁰they would not accept any of my advice, they despised my rebuke”* (Prov. 1:22c, 29-30.)

By contrasting *“the wise in heart”* with *“a chattering fool,”* this proverb is emphasizing the fact that a fool is more interested in expressing himself than in receiving sound biblical instruction. Note, also, Proverbs 18:2, *“A fool has no delight in understanding; his only concern is to express his heart.”* The fool has *“no delight in understanding,”* no joy in gaining godly knowledge and wisdom; his only desire is to *“express his heart;”* (in other words, to express his opinion and the

emotions of his heart.) Note the resistance of the fool to having his mind trained to think in godly terms and the determination for his heart (the seat of the emotions and the will) to express itself.

A fool despises his father's discipline, but whoever heeds rebuke acquires prudence. (Prov. 15:5)

The Hebrew term (נִוְסָר from נָסַר) sometimes translated “instruction,” also includes correction and discipline; it is the parental training that is intended to shape a child’s character in the way of righteousness. A fool “*despises*” such training: he resists it, rejects it, and disregards it as something that is of no value to him. Why? A fool does so because he has no interest in being instructed and trained, his chief interest is in expressing his heart: “*A fool has no delight in understanding; his only concern is to express his heart*” (Prov. 18:2.) Let us take to heart the description of the fool and heed the counsel of Proverbs 3:11-12, “*My son, do not reject Jehovah’s discipline and do not become tired of his rebuke, ¹²for Jehovah rebukes those whom he loves, just as a father rebukes the son in whom he delights*” (Prov. 3:11-12.)

He who trusts in his own heart is a fool, but whoever walks wisely will be kept safe. (Prov. 28:26)

A fool puts his confidence in the impulses, feelings, and desires of his own heart: if it “feels right” he will just do it. The fool chooses to make his heart his standard and authority instead of the Word of God. In so doing he follows a subjective, personalized standard as opposed to the objective, divinely authoritative standard of God’s Word. Contrast Proverbs 12:15a (“*The way of a fool seems right to him*”) with Joshua 24:15 (“*as for me and my house, we will serve Jehovah.*”)

What are you doing when you make your own heart your standard and authority instead of the Word of God? You are usurping God’s position as the One who defines good and evil, right and wrong, truth and error. You are usurping God’s position as the One who demands our trust and commitment. One may seek to justify the decisions derived from his own heart (and that are in opposition to the Scriptures) by insisting that “I feel at peace about my decision,” or, “I believe God spoke to my heart;” but note what the LORD Himself says about those who maintain such a position:

Then Jehovah said to me, “The prophets are prophesying lies in my name. I have not sent them or appointed them or spoken to them. They are prophesying to you false visions, divinations, idolatries and delusions of their own minds. ¹⁵Therefore, this is what Jehovah says about the prophets who are prophesying in my name: ‘I did not send them ... Those... prophets will perish’” (Jer. 14:14-15)

Don't Act Like a Fool, by refusing to allow your mind and life to be trained in the ways of righteousness by the Word of God, and by choosing to allow you life to be governed by the feelings, impulses and desires of your own sinful heart. On the contrary, accept godly counsel and live by it.

II. Don't Act Like a Fool! on the contrary, Exercise Self-Control (Prov. 10:14; Prov. 18:6; Prov. 29:11; Prov. 14:16; Prov. 17:24)

A FOOL FAILS TO EXERCISE SELF-CONTROL OVER HIS MOUTH.

Wise men store up knowledge; but the mouth of the fool invites ruin. (Prov. 10:14)

A wise man "*stores up knowledge.*" He receives knowledge (information that is true, valuable, constructive, useful,) he stores it up for future use, and he uses that knowledge with discretion. But the mouth of the fool "*invites ruin.*" The mouth of the fool is an ever present source of potential destruction; because of his rash, thoughtless, often times worthless utterances, the mouth of the fool always has the potential to stir up trouble and bring about disaster. May we make the prayer of the Psalmist to be our prayer: "*Set a guard over my mouth, O Jehovah; keep watch over the door of my lips*" (Psl. 141:3.)

A fool's lips enter into contention, and his mouth invites a beating. (Prov. 18:6)

A fool cannot keep silent, he cannot let a matter (such as an insult or injury) pass by, he feels compelled to pursue it and enter into contention. Note the testimony of the following Proverbs:

A stone is heavy and sand has great weight, but a fool's vexation is heavier than both of them! (Prov. 27:3)

A fool immediately makes known what irritates him; but a prudent man overlooks an insult. (Prov. 12:16)

A fool (who places such great emphasis on the emotions, feelings, impulses of his heart) allows himself to become easily aggravated and feels compelled to express that aggravation. As Proverbs 27:3 expresses it, the fool's vexation or aggravation is heavier than both a stone and the sand—he cannot bear the weight of it, he feels that he must relieve himself by expressing his heart. We should also take note of Proverbs 20:3, "*It is to a man's honor to avoid strife, but every fool is quick to quarrel.*"

A FOOL FAILS TO EXERCISE SELF-CONTROL OVER HIS ANGER.

A fool expresses all his anger, but a wise man holds it back and calms himself. (Prov. 29:11)

A wise man holds back his anger; he restrains it and stills it (literally, “*in the back he stills it.*”) A wise man senses when his anger is rising and he takes appropriate measures to calm it down; he takes those measures while his anger is still “*in the back*” and has not yet come to the forefront of his emotions and his behavior.

A fool disregards the fact that his anger is reaching the point of explosion; he lets it boil up until it erupts and gets totally out of control. Consequently, the fool then “*expresses all his anger,*” or, “*utters all his spirit*” (he expresses all that is in his heart and on his mind.)

What are some of the consequences of the fool’s action in not controlling his anger?

He who is slow to anger has great understanding, but he who has a hasty spirit exalts folly. (Prov. 14:29)

A man of great wrath shall bear the penalty, for if you deliver him, you must do so again. (Prov. 19:19)

An angry man stirs up strife, and a wrathful man commits an abundance of transgressions. (Prov. 29:22)

A FOOL FAILS TO EXERCISE SELF-CONTROL OVER HIS CONDUCT.

A wise man fears and turns away from evil; but the fool behaves arrogantly and is confident. (Prov. 14:16)

In contrast to the wise man whose life and conduct are governed by godly fear, the fool is characterized by reckless neglect and a confidence that defies all godly warning against sin and its deadly consequences. Literally, the fool allows himself “*to go beyond*” (עָבַר) the proper limits, “*being confident*” that no harm will befall him—being - confident that God will protect him and spare him from the consequences of his presumptuous behavior. The message of this proverb is well summarized by the adage: Fools rush in where angels fear to tread. Indeed, there is a holy boldness that trusts God and does what is right despite the threats of evil, as exemplified, for instance, in the behavior of the apostles,

Having brought the apostles, they made them appear before the Sanhedrin to be questioned by the high priest. ²⁸“We gave you strict orders not to teach in

this name,” he said. “Yet you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and are determined to make us guilty of this man’s blood.” ²⁹Peter and the other apostles replied, “We must obey God rather than men.” (Acts 5:27-29)

But there is an unholy boldness that tests God by exposing ourselves to evil despite the warning of God against such a practice—note the admonition of Romans 13:13-14,

Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy; ¹⁴rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not make any provision for the sinful nature so as to fulfill its lusts. (Rom. 13:13-14)

A FOOL FAILS TO EXERCISE SELF-CONTROL OVER HIS LIFE.

Wisdom is in front of the face of him who has understanding, but the eyes of a fool are at the ends of the earth. (Prov. 17:24)

A man who has understanding keeps his eyes focused on godly wisdom. He seeks to ascertain how Christ would conduct Himself in a given situation, and he seeks to do the same. He strives to observe the Word of God, consulting it for his decisions and allowing it to govern his conduct.

“But the eyes of a fool are at the ends of the earth;” his eyes, and thoughts and heart, drift anywhere and everywhere: he has no spiritual focus or godly discipline.

Let us consider and heed the counsel of Scripture as presented in Hebrews 12:1-2a,

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. ²Let us focus our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith. (Heb. 12:1-2)

Don’t Act Like a Fool, by failing to exercise control over your mouth, your anger, your conduct, and the direction of your life. On the contrary, by the grace of Christ, exercise self-control.

III. Don’t Act Like a Fool, Or You will Suffer the Consequences for It (Proverbs 26:3; Proverbs 19:3; Proverbs 13:20)

A whip is for the horse, a bridle is for the donkey, and a rod is for the back of fools. (Prov. 26:3)

The horse is headstrong and free-spirited, the donkey is stubborn and defiant, and the fool is classified with both of them! Just as the horse and the donkey encounter harsh measures to counteract their resistance to human authority and control, so shall the fool encounter similar harsh measures in consequence of resisting divine authority, note Proverbs 19:29, "*Penalties are prepared for scoffers, and beatings for the backs of fools.*" The proverb asserts, "*beatings* [the strokes of the whip in punishment for offenses committed] *are prepared for the back of fools.*" Such punishments have been established by God, made ready by Him, and shall be employed by Him, because God will not tolerate indefinitely the abuse and denial of His truth and righteousness.

A man's own foolishness ruin's his life; nevertheless, his heart rages against Jehovah. (Prov. 19:3)

A man's own foolishness and folly ruin his life—his own sinful choices or sinful reactions to trials and circumstances may bring his life to ruin. But rather than acknowledge his own responsibility or yield to the LORD's will, the fool's heart "*rages against Jehovah*"—Jehovah, the faithful, covenant-keeping God.

The fool seeks to put the blame on God: fretting and even raging against the LORD when He withholds His blessing, ... or when He exercises His prerogative to bring trials into a man's life, ... or when He in His justice causes the man to reap the consequences of his own foolish choices.

Walk with wise men and you will become wise, but whoever is a companion with fools shall suffer for it. (Prov. 13:20)

If you walk with wise men you shall become wise; but conversely, if you walk with fools you will suffer for it. Consider the tragic example of king Joash as recorded in 2 Chronicles 24,

Joash did what was right in the eyes of Jehovah all the years of Jehoiada the priest ...¹⁷After the death of Jehoiada, the officials of Judah came and paid homage to the king, and he listened to them. ¹⁸They abandoned the temple of Jehovah, the God of their fathers, and worshiped Asherah poles and idols. Because of their guilt, God's anger came upon Judah and Jerusalem ...²⁴Although the Syrian army had come with only a few men, Jehovah delivered into their hands a much larger army. Because Judah had forsaken Jehovah, the God of their fathers, judgment was executed on Joash. (2 Chron. 24:2,17-18, 24)

Don't Act Like a Fool, by being headstrong and set in your own ways, subverting your own life and then blaming God, and don't associate with such people who behave like fools. If you do these things, you will suffer for it.

Conclusion

In our topical study from the Book of Proverbs on the subject of fools, we have concentrated on three main themes: 1) a fool refuses to accept biblical counsel; 2) a fool fails to exercise self-control and self-discipline; and 3) a fool suffers the consequences of his choices.

By the grace of God, you have been called to be a Christian, not a fool; therefore, let us rely on God's grace and act like Christ our Savior, and not like a fool.