

THE FOLLY OF FOOLS

"Like the legs of the lame that hang limp is a proverb in the mouth of fools." (26:7)

INTRODUCTION—The tendency in Proverbs is to overemphasize the simplicity in the character of human nature, by generalizing the categories and summarizing the wide variety of men as either wise or fools. There is no flattering category in between—the only other category being the “simple.” These “simple” people are those depicted as standing at the crossroads and having to choose a path of wisdom or folly. Each person will possess differing degrees of wisdom or folly, but the book of Proverbs classifies **all** men in one of these three categories (see Proverbs 9). Therefore, the most important question for each of us to consider is “Where am I?”

I. WHAT IS A FOOL?

- A. Definition: *“The word is used in Scriptures with respect to **moral** more than to intellectual deficiencies. The ‘fool’ is not so much one lacking in mental powers, as one who misuses them... In Scriptures the ‘fool’... is the person who casts off the fear of God, and thinks and acts as if he could safely disregard the eternal principles of God’s righteousness (Psa. 14:1; 92:5-6; Prov. 14:9).” (Unger’s Bible Dictionary, p.375).*
- B. Definition: *“One ‘who acts without counsel, and whose will is too hard for his understanding; he hath no reason for what he doth, but because he hath a mind to do it.’” (Wilson’s Old Testament Word Studies, p.172).*

II. CHARACTERISTICS OF A FOOL

- A. Trusts in Himself (12:15; 28:26). Why is that the mark of a fool? What are some of the dangers inherent in trusting in self? In whom should we trust (3:5-6)?
- B. Deaf to Instruction (1:7; 15:5; 23:9; 24:7). Not only is he deaf to it but he despises the instruction **anyone** tries to give him. He cannot stand to have anyone “preach to him.” But that is his downfall (10:21). Why does he despise wisdom?
 - 1. He is a Know-it-all (18:13).
 - 2. He is Opinionated (18:2; 14:33). He does not listen and learn even though his opinions may be obviously foolish (12:23; 13:16).
 - 3. He is a Talker Rather Than a Listener (10:8; cf. 15:7).
- C. Cannot be Disciplined (12:1; 17:10; 16:22). He is not moved by the consequences of his folly. Rods of instruction do not phase him (cf. 19:29; 26:3).
- D. Impulsive (14:29; 17:24). He does not act on principle, but on impulse. Therefore, he is uncontrollable, ruled only by his emotions (29:11).
- E. Commits Evil (10:23; 13:19; 14:9). He has rejected the fear of God and wisdom, and therefore exalts in his folly.
- F. Virtually Unchangeable (27:22; 26:11).

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS—

- 1) *What are the three categories of human nature as depicted in the book of Proverbs?*

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- 2) *What things does a fool lack according to the book of Proverbs?*
 - 3) *Though both the simple (naive) and foolish may share many similar characteristics, why is there hope for the simple and none for the fool?*
 - 4) *Combine the characteristics of a fool. Then describe this kind of person so we will know what to look for (in ourselves and others).*
 - 5) *Why doesn't a fool ever learn?*
 - 6) *Is it possible for the fool to recognize his own folly? Who does a fool blame for his condition (19:3)? What are your chances of convicting a fool of his condition?*
 - 7) *Is a man's foolishness usually a very well-kept secret (12:23; 13:16)?*
 - 8) *How morally dangerous are fools (17:12)?*
 - 9) *Can you ever win an argument with a fool (29:9)? Why?*
 - 10) *How should we respond to fools (26:4-5; 29:9)?*

Related Passages—3:35; 10:13-14; 13:20; 14:1,3,7-8,15-18,24; 15:14,20-21; 17:16,25; 18:6-7; 19:13; 26:1-12