



Dealing with Foolish People



Lesson One

April 5, 2022

Introduction

The Bible has lots to say about fools and foolish behavior. Besides Adam and Eve foolishly listening to Satan. Who is the first foolish person you can think of in the Bible?

The word *fool* or *fools* is mentioned 99 times in Proverbs alone. And it appears approximately 360 times throughout the Old and New Testament.

As we look into what the Bible tells us about fools and foolish behavior, we should always remember that there is a Redeemer, Jesus Christ our Lord! And no situation is beyond his ability to salvage.

Isaiah 59:1:

Surely the arm of the LORD is not too short to save, nor his ear too dull to hear.

Jesus' Teaching about Fools

First, let's consider the passage from the Sermon on the Mount where Jesus talks about fools:

Matthew 5:21 – 22:

"You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'You shall not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.' But I tell you that anyone who is angry with a brother or sister will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to a brother or sister, 'Raca,' is answerable to the court. And anyone who says, 'You fool!' will be in danger of the fire of hell.

Are we really never to say or think, "That person is a fool"?

The idea behind **Raca** is "nitwit, blockhead, numbskull, bonehead, brainless idiot." Its whole idea is that of *contempt*...It is the word of one who despises another with an arrogant contempt. Jesus says when we unleash our anger on someone who is a fool or behaving foolishly—when we call them names, lash out with contempt and condemnation, we are harboring murderous anger. And that, of course, is totally wrong.

James describes two kinds of anger:

James 1:19 - 20:

My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, because human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires.

What is the difference in righteous anger and human anger?

There are fools in the world and most likely there are some fools in your life. In this study we will identify what the Bible tells us about fools and then see what our response should be.



Jesus' Parable about the Foolish Rich Man

Luke 12:16 – 20:

And he told them this parable: "The ground of a certain rich man yielded an abundant harvest. He thought to himself, 'What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.'"

"Then he said, 'This is what I'll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store my surplus grain. And I'll say to myself, "You have plenty of grain laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry."'

"But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?'

Let's describe this man—what do we know about him?

He was rich, he must have been a good farmer and very successful businessman. Yet, as Jesus tells this parable, God calls him a fool. Why?

- His actions begin with wrong thought patterns:
--"It's all about me—where shall I store MY surplus?"
- He is very proud of himself.
- He is very selfish.
- He didn't do anything good for others with all his wealth. He kept everything for himself.
- He was thinking about the years ahead, but he was not thinking about eternity.

Luke 12:15:

Then he said to them, "Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; life does not consist in an abundance of possessions."

- He thought he had control of his eternal destination—his life. But God called for his life that very night.

Matthew 16:26:

What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul?

Jim Elliott said it so well: "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain that which he cannot lose."

New Testament References to Fools

- **2 Timothy 2:23:** *Don't have anything to do with **foolish** and stupid arguments, because you know they produce quarrels.*

How would you describe a "foolish and stupid argument"?

- **Titus 3:3:** *At one time we too were **foolish**, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another.*

We've been foolish, too, and still at times we do foolish things. We recognize that without Jesus, without the power of the Holy Spirit, we can be just as foolish as anyone else.

- **Romans 1:14:** *I am obligated both to Greeks and non-Greeks, both to the wise and the **foolish**.*

The Apostle Paul reminds us that the fools in our lives are not there by accident—and we are obligated to them to love them like Jesus loves, to help them if at all possible, and to pray for them regularly.

What the World Thinks about Fools

- **If silence be good for the wise, how much better for fools.** - Talmud
Proverbs 17:28: *Even fools are thought wise if they keep silent, and discerning if they hold their tongues.*
- **Never tell a fool that he is a fool. All you'll have is an angry fool.** - Talmud
Proverbs 23:9: *Do not speak to fools, for they will scorn your prudent words.*
- **A fool and his money are soon parted.** - Thomas Tusser
Proverbs 17:16: *Why should fools have money in hand to buy wisdom, when they are not able to understand it?*
- **Talk sense to a fool and he calls you foolish.** - Euripides
Proverbs 18:2: *Fools find no pleasure in understanding but delight in airing their own opinions.*
- **Any man is liable to err, only a fool persists in error.** - Marcus Tullius Cicero
Proverbs 26:11: *As a dog returns to its vomit, so fools repeat their folly.*
- **No one but a fool is always right.** - David Hare
Proverbs 12:15: *The way of fools seems right to them, but the wise listen to advice.*

Teaching about Fools from Proverbs

The book of Proverbs is part of what is called “Wisdom Literature” in the Bible. In the first chapter we are told what the purpose of Proverbs is:

Proverbs 1:1 – 7:

The proverbs of Solomon son of David, king of Israel: for gaining wisdom and instruction; for understanding words of insight; for receiving instruction in prudent behavior, doing what is right and just and fair; for giving prudence to those who are simple, knowledge and discretion to the young—let the wise listen and add to their learning, and let the discerning get guidance—for understanding proverbs and parables, the sayings and riddles of the wise. The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and instruction.

Proverbs contrasts fools or foolish behavior with wise people or wise behavior. In verse 7 we see this literary device that is most common in Proverbs. It contrasts wisdom and fools:

Wisdom: The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge

Foolish: fools despise wisdom and instruction.

Who Is a Fool?

What would be your definition of a fool?

A simple definition of a fool is a person who is thoughtless, self-centered, and obviously indifferent to God. Keep in mind that there is a big difference between a person seeking wisdom who acts foolishly at times and a fool who does not really seek wisdom at all.

Dr. Henry Cloud says this is how you recognize a fool: “What does a person do when truth comes to them?” He offers the insight that a fool often responds to truth with anger. He suggests we limit our exposure to such people.

How Should We Respond to Fools?

We receive this advice from **Proverbs 14:7 - 9**:

Stay away from a fool, for you will not find knowledge on their lips. The wisdom of the prudent is to give thought to their ways, but the folly of fools is deception. Fools mock at making amends for sin, but goodwill is found among the upright.

What are we told here about dealing with the fools in our lives—or with people behaving foolishly?

- **Stay away.** Remember there are all kinds of distance: geographical distance, emotional distance, mental distance.
What are some ways you can separate yourself from a fool?
- **A fool will not impart any true knowledge to you**
- **Fools are often very deceptive.**
- **Fools rarely if ever admit they've made a mistake, or that they have sinned**
- **You won't find much "goodwill" among fools**

Proverbs 13:20:

Walk with the wise and become wise, for a companion of fools suffers harm.

Don't be a companion with a fool. When you do, they are more likely to bring you down than you are to influence them for good and make them change.

You should not be surprised when you've tried your best to help a foolish person change, only to discover that you are once again disappointed.

Proverbs 23:9:

Do not speak to fools, for they will scorn your prudent words.

Proverbs 17:10:

A rebuke impresses a discerning person more than a hundred lashes a fool.

Trying to teach a fool is useless. A fool does not even care about what a wise teacher has to say. The fool will go so far as to despise the wisdom shared with them.

Does this mean that we give up on people?

Trying to teach a fool is useless. You're wasting time on a person that you cannot influence.

Someone has said that every decision to do one thing is a decision not to do another. Every decision to pour into one person is a decision to not pour into another.

We are always to love people, and that includes fools. We need to love them, but not join them.