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"The great God that formed all things both rewardeth the fool. and rewardeth transgressors" (Proverbs 26: 10).

Marks of a Fool

Lesson Subject: God's judgment rests upon those who live without wisdom.

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Topic: Foolishness.

The great burden of the book of Proverbs is to contrast the wise man and the fool. The book contains 130 references to *wisdom, wise, wisely*, etc.. and 70 references to *fools, foolishness*, etc. The central idea of the book is that righteousness is wisdom and sin is foolishness.

The fool is the simpleton, the scorner, the sluggard, the slothful, the drunkard, the glutton, or the immoral person. God's judgment rests upon the fool.

However, the Old Testament "*fool*" is more than a person who is a thoughtless simpleton. The word denotes a wicked person of an evil character. A fool is equivalent to one being "a son of Belial." Here is the Old Testament picture of the fool: "*The vile person will speak villany, and his heart will work iniquity, to practise hypocrisy, and to utter error against the LORD, to make empty the soul of the hungry, and he will cause the drink of the thirsty to fail*" (Isaiah 32:6). The fool is a person whose heart has rejected the counsel of God, and he walks in his own ways.

Wisdom is the outcome of careful observation and long pondering on life in the light of religion and divine revelation. Wisdom has its seat in God. It is the essence of life. The wise person stands in contrast with the fool who is indifferent to God or His will, and who might even oppose religion and wise instruction.

I. DECEIT IS FOOLISH (Proverbs 10:18)

A. Deceit is common in our world. Many hide hatred "*with lying lips*" (Proverbs 10:18). People will be deceived by such iniquity (Jeremiah 9:5). We must be constantly on guard in a world of evil people.

B. Deceit arises from an evil heart. The heart of every unredeemed person is deceitful and desperately wicked (Jeremiah 17:9). Deceit may be expressed by words (Psalm 36:3; Romans 3:13), by wrong counsel (Proverbs 12:5), by kisses of seeming affection (Proverbs 27:6); however, it always expresses a wicked heart (Mark 7:22). There is no other explanation of the presence of deceit in human society than the wickedness of sinners.

C. Deceit is hated by God. "*Lying lips are abomination to the LORD: but they that deal truly are his delight*" (Proverbs 12:22). God will destroy those who speak falsely; He abhors deceitful people (Psalm 5:6). He warns, "*He that worketh deceit shall not dwell within my house: he that telleth lies shall not tarry in my sight. I will early destroy all the wicked of the land; that I may cut off all wicked doers from the city of the LORD*" (Psalm 101:7, 8).

D. Deceit is overcome by grace. All of that is put off in Jesus Christ, and righteousness and true holiness are put on. A spirit of loving honesty marks one who is in Christ (Ephesians 4:20-32).

II. SLANDER IS FOOLISH (Proverbs 10:18)

A. Slander arises from the devil. He is "*the accuser of our brethren. . . which accused them before our God day and night*" (Revelation 12:10). Job 1:6-12 reports how Satan accused Job before God when he was "*a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God, and escheweth evil*" (1:8). A person who slanders another person is walking in the way of the devil.

B. Slander has power to do great harm. It is spreading falsehoods by word of mouth, falsehoods which harm another's character or reputation. The Bible warns, "*An hypocrite with his mouth destroyeth his neighbour*" (Proverbs 11 :9).

Take care against receiving or spreading a rumor. Many of God's faithful saints have been hurt by false reports, incorrect reports, and even by true reports which should not have been spread abroad. I do not want to be the devil's mouthpiece. Do you? How much better it is to refrain the tongue from speaking evil, rejecting evil and doing good, seeking peace and pursuing it (I Peter 3:10, 11).

C. Slander is condemned by God. He warns that He will "*cut off*" the

person who slanders his neighbor (Psalm 101:5). He warns that His face is against those who do evil (I Peter 3: 12). The wise person will observe those solemn warnings.

III. SELF-SUFFICIENCY IS FOOLISH (Proverbs 12:15)

A. Self-sufficiency is deceptive. *"The way of a fool is right in his own eyes"* (Proverbs 12:15). *"He that trusteth in his own heart is a fool"* (Proverbs 28:26). God warned by the apostle Paul, *"If any man think that he knoweth any thing, he knoweth nothing yet as he ought to know"* (I Corinthians 8:2). Dependence on one's own wisdom, apart from divine help, is a mark of the fool.

B. Self-sufficiency arises from sin. Walking in darkness and knowing not where one goes is related to hating one's brother (I John 2:16). The spirit of self-sufficiency is a form of idolatry. One thinks he has no need of God; therefore, he depends on himself in the place of God.

C. Self-sufficiency is shameful. *"When pride cometh, then cometh shame"* (Proverbs 11:2). *"He that is of a proud heart stirreth up strife"* (Proverbs 28:25). It is foolish to live a life-style which stirs up shame and strife. It was when King Hezekiah's heart was lifted up that the wrath of God came upon him (II Chronicles 32:25). It has always been so.

D. Self-sufficiency will end in judgment. It leads to a fall (Proverbs 11:14) and to disappointed purposes (Proverbs 15:22). God will not let such a spirit of rejection of deity go without its proper reward.

IV. QUICK TEMPER IS FOOLISH (Proverbs 12:16)

A. Quick temper is forbidden of God. *"Cease from anger, and forsake wrath: fret not thyself in any wise to do evil"* (Psalm 37:8). *"He that is soon angry dealeth foolishly"* (Proverbs 14:17). *"Be not hasty in thy spirit to be angry: for anger resteth in the bosom of fools"* (Ecclesiastes 7:9). And the New Testament scriptures join in a like witness. *"Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath: for the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God"* (James 1:19, 20). God's Word is very clear that the child of God has no place for quick temper.

B. Quick temper arises from a spirit of selfishness and self-importance. It indicates that one is so important personally that other (and less important) people should not contradict one's preferences. It might be

expressed with one answering in anger , "You cannot talk that way to ME!" "With lesser people, perhaps, but not with one as important as I," is the meaning of such a statement. Quick temper borders on an idolatrous exaltation of self.

C. Quick temper can be controlled by divine grace. It may be impossible for a person to control his temper, but it is not impossible for God to do so. Remember the difference Jesus made when we were saved. *"The love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us"* (Romans 5:5). The love of God in one's heart solves all problems of quick temper.

V. REFUSING COUNSEL IS FOOLISH (Proverbs 15:5)

A. God commands us to reprove sin. *"Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them"* (Ephesians 5:11). We are to point out wrong at appropriate times.

B. Wise people accept the counsel of reproof (Proverbs 15:5). The counsel of the wise is a kindness which heals (Psalm 141:5). Chastisement is to be received willingly, for it is given as a sign of love (Hebrews 12:5, 6). *"The heart of the prudent getteth knowledge; and the ear of the wise seeketh knowledge"* (Proverbs 18:15). To accept counsel is a sign of wisdom; to refuse it is the height of foolishness.

C. One who refuses to receive right counsel rejects God. *"He that refuseth reproof erreth"* (Proverbs 10: 17). It is like turning one's back on God to reject the counsel God sends by human messengers (Jeremiah 32:33, 34). Consider the sin of this kind of reaction to God: *"They refused to hearken, and pulled away the shoulder, and stopped their ears, that they should not hear. Yea, they made their hearts as an adamant stone"* (Zechariah 7:11, 12).

D. Those who reject the counsel of God deserve the judgment they will certainly receive. Zechariah warned of *"a great wrath from the LORD of hosts"* upon those who reject Him (Zechariah 7:12). Earlier in the book of Proverbs are the words, *"Ye have set at nought all my counsel, and would none of my reproof: I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh"* (Proverbs 1:25, 26). This is a solemn matter. God warns, *"He, that being often reprov'd hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy"* (Proverbs 29:1).

Listen to the message of the preacher, Bible teacher, and mature Christian friend. Listen to the inner voice of the Holy Spirit. It is foolish not to receive and abide by Christian counsel.

VI. ARGUMENTS ARE FOOLISH (Proverbs 18:6, 7)

Be careful about arguments. God said, "*A fool's lips enter into contention. . . . A fool's mouth is his destruction, and his lips are the snare of his soul*" (Proverbs 18:6, 7).

A. Arguments are forbidden. The "*clamour*" which is forbidden in Ephesians 4:31 refers to arguments. God's people are "*to speak evil of no man, to be no brawlers*" (Titus 3:2). God's minister must not be a brawler (I Timothy 3:3) because "*the servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men*" (II Timothy 2:24).

B. Arguments are harmful. They promote no good and increase evil. To "keep the mouth" is to "keep the life," and to "open wide the lips" is to have "*destruction*" (Proverbs 13:3). Sin comes where there are many words spoken; so it is wise to refrain the lips (Proverbs 10:19). Arguments increase arguments. "*As coals are to burning coals, and wood to fire; so is a contentious man to kindle strife*" (Proverbs 26:21).

C. Arguments are unspiritual. A sign of one's true religion is that he bridles his tongue (James 1:26). He who does not bridle his tongue, therefore, is not a spiritual person. "*Debate*" is placed in a list of sins between "*murder*" and "*deceit*" (Romans 1:29), indicating what wicked company it keeps. The church congregation which has argumentative discussions going on in her meetings is not what God would have her to be (II Corinthians 12:20). Arguments are a sign of backsliding.

D. Arguments are worthless. Pleasant words are health-giving (Proverbs 16:24). The words of a wise person give grace, but the lips of a fool destroy him (Ecclesiastes 10: 12). Refrain from words which are of no profit. Cultivate "*the tongue of the learned*" that you "*should know how to speak a word in season to him that is weary*" (Isaiah 50:4).

E. Arguments lead to judgment. "*Judgments are prepared for scorers*" (Proverbs 19:29). Be warned! No good comes from contentions. They lead only to the judgment of God. What are the marks of a fool? A fool deceives, slanders, trusts in himself, is quick tempered, mocks at sin, refuses spiritual counsel, and enters into arguments. God's judgment rests upon such a person.

Look at your life. Are you living wisely in the reverent fear of God and humble obedience to His will? *"If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God. . . and it shall be given him"* (James 1:5).

QUESTIONS

1. What does the Bible mean by *"fool"*?
2. How does Isaiah 32:6 describe a fool?
3. How does Proverbs 1:7 describe wisdom?
4. Why does God condemn slander?
5. Why is self-sufficiency a sin?
6. What does James 1:19, 20 say about quick temper?
7. How does Proverbs 1:25, 26 warn against refusing counsel?
8. Why are arguments foolish?
9. What are the qualities of the person described in Isaiah 50:4?
10. How has this study profited you personally?