

Foolishness
June 6, 2010

1. What is foolishness?

W. T. Dayton: “Folly is the opposite of wisdom. It is not imbecility, insanity, or error. It is wrongheadedness. It has to do with practical insights into the nature of things that lead to success or failure in life. Wisdom and folly in the Bible rest on the principle of adjustment to a higher law for a practical purpose. Folly involves rejection or disregard of the revealed moral and spiritual values on which life is based. The fool sins against his own best interests and rejects God.”

Ultimately, foolishness is an arrogant, self-centered hardheadedness that refuses to accept reality.

Frank Sinatra’s popular song, *I Did It My Way*, is the theme-song of fools.

Sinatra himself, doing life his own way, suffered 3 failed marriages and was notorious for mood swings and bouts of depression.

In a 1950’s interview, he said, “Being an 18-karat manic-depressive, and having lived a life of violent emotional contradictions, I have an over-acute capacity for sadness as well as emotion.”

Sinatra’s final words were, “I’m losing.”

One of the best examples of foolishness in the OT is Jacob.

In an interview with Pharaoh, Jacob summed up the results of his own life of foolishness, saying (Gen 47:9), “*The years of my sojourning are one hundred and thirty; few and unpleasant have been the years of my life, nor have they attained the years that my fathers lived during the days of their sojourning.*”

God created this world to work in certain ways, according to certain laws and principles.

Living according to those laws/principles is called wisdom; not doing so is foolishness.

In Proverb 8 wisdom itself speaks to teach us about its own importance.

Prov 8:5-6—“*O fools, discern wisdom. / Listen, for I shall speak noble things; And the opening of my lips will produce right things.*”

Prov 8:10-11—“*Take my instruction, and not silver, And knowledge rather than choicest gold. / For wisdom is better than jewels; And all desirable things can not compare with her.*”

Prov 8:35-36—“*For he who finds me finds life, And obtains favor from the LORD. / But he who sins against me injures himself; All those who hate me love death.*”

The fool hears this and answers, “No thanks, I’ll do it my way.”

The fool’s whole world is centered on himself, and he cannot see beyond it because of his pride.

He disregards any notion of truth that contradicts his own opinions.

The objective realities of this world mean nothing to him unless they happen to correspond with his own points of view.

In his proud mind, his opinion is the essence of truth.

Prov 21:20—“*There is precious treasure and oil in the dwelling of the wise, But a foolish man swallows it up.*”

The wise man recognizes true value when he sees it, and he embraces it to enrich his own life and to meet own needs.

The fool is a consumer who seeks instant gratification, lives on credit, and mortgages his future assuming that nothing will ever go wrong.

He is like the foolish man who built his house on sand (Mt 7:26).

Or like the 5 foolish virgins, whose solution when their lamps started to go out, was to ask the wise virgins for oil, only to be turned down.

At one time a Christian school used our church's facilities for their classrooms.

We charged them nothing, and even paid for their utilities and insurance.

Eventually we discovered that the school was doing things we couldn't condone; e.g. teaching preschoolers to speak in tongues.

We told the school's governing board that we would only allow this arrangement to continue if their school came under the authority of our church.

The board became incensed, allowed personal anger to determine their decision, and foolishly moved the school off our campus.

Having deprived themselves of the advantages they were enjoying here, they fell on hard times and the school ultimately closed down.

All because foolish leaders refused to deal with the reality of their situation.

Prov 12:15—*"The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, But a wise man is he who listens to counsel."*

You cannot teach a fool anything, because in his mind, he is right and everyone who disagrees with him is wrong.

His pride won't allow him to admit he is wrong or ignorant in any way.

Because ego so dominates his thinking, he truly believes that everything he agrees with is right/true (by definition), and everything he disagrees with is wrong/false.

He considers himself self-sufficient.

The fool's ego is threatened by anyone who attempts to teach him.

Prov 15:5--*"A fool rejects his father's discipline, But he who regards reproof is prudent."*

The fool has no regard for reproof or correction because that would imply his own views and values are somehow incorrect/imperfect.

So if you tell a fool the slot machines in Las Vegas are designed to cause their users to lose money (which is true!), he will respond that somebody has to win, and it might as well be him; or that lady luck is on his side.

If you show him from Scripture that his views contradict God's revealed truth, he may stop arguing and change the subject, he may present arguments which make no sense, he may say, "That's your truth, not mine," or "I believe what I believe."

But he will not change his mind, because his own opinion matters more to him than objective truth which corresponds to objective reality.

In other words, he has found a comfortable mental niche which makes him unteachable.

In spite of the hardships fools suffer as they disregard reality, they remain unteachable.

Prov 26:11—*"Like a dog that returns to its vomit Is a fool who repeats his folly."*

2. How should one deal with a fool?

Prov 17:12—*"Let a man meet a bear robbed of her cubs, Rather than a fool in his folly."*

A wise person will avoid fools, just as they would a bear robbed of her cubs.

Because the opinions of fools often contradict reality, and because reality often imposes its own negative consequences on their foolishness, fools often get hurt by the realities they refuse to acknowledge.

This makes them very frustrated, angry, self-destructive people who spend much of their lives getting beat up by reality.

Prov 11:29—*“He who troubles his own house will inherit wind, And the foolish will be servant to the wisehearted.”*

Prov 14:1—*“The wise woman builds her house, But the foolish tears it down with her own hands.”*

Prov 14:3—*“In the mouth of the foolish is a rod for his back, But the lips of the wise will preserve them.”*

Because fools are constantly losing in their conflicts with reality, they can be very unpleasant people to be around.

Prov 14:17—*“A quick-tempered man acts foolishly, And a man of evil devices is hated.”*

Prov 18:6—*“A fool's lips bring strife, And his mouth calls for blows.”*

Prov 29:9—*“When a wise man has a controversy with a foolish man, The foolish man either rages or laughs, and there is no rest.”*

I Sam 25:25 describes such an ill-natured man, whose very name meant fool—Nabal.

This is what his own wife said about him to David—*“Please do not let my lord pay attention to this worthless man, Nabal, for as his name is, so is he. Nabal is his name and folly is with him.”*

If you want to avoid a life of misery, don't marry a fool; stay away from him.

3. What are the moral/spiritual implications of foolishness?

Foolishness is a refusal to acknowledge the authority of God.

It is the opposite of wisdom.

Psa 111:10—*“The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom; A good understanding have all those who do His commandments.”*

Prov 9:10—*“The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, And the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.”*

Viewing himself as his own authority, the fool rejects God, whose authority threatens his own delusions of autonomy and the “freedom” to do as he likes (no matter how evil it is).

Jer 4:22—*“My people are foolish, They know Me not; They are stupid children, And they have no understanding. They are shrewd to do evil, but to do good they do not know.”*

Fools are infuriated by the fact that God is God, and they are not.

Prov 19:3—*“The foolishness of man subverts his way, And his heart rages against the LORD.”*

This is why Samuel told Saul (1 Sam 13:13)—*“You have acted foolishly; you have not kept the commandment of the LORD your God, which He commanded you.”*

This is also why, when Job's wife advised him to *“Curse God and die!”* he answered, *“You speak as one of the foolish women speaks”* (Job 2:9-10).

If fools would humbly submit to God and do things His way, their lives would conform to His design for this world, and they would enjoy both peace and personal prosperity.

Instead, they choose to sin, rejecting God and His ways, and living lives of misery.

But their foolish pride won't allow them to repent, so they condemn themselves to fighting against God and His principles—a fight they can never win.

The fool refuses to acknowledge his accountability to God or the fact that he will someday stand before God to be judged on the basis of his deeds.

Jer 29:23—*“They have acted foolishly in Israel, and have committed adultery with their*

neighbors' wives, and have spoken words in My name falsely, which I did not command them; and I am He who knows, and am a witness,' declares the LORD.'
Psa 14:1—*"The fool has said in his heart, 'There is no God.' They are corrupt, they have committed abominable deeds."*

As a result, Prov 10:23 says, *"Doing wickedness is like sport to a fool."*

God's Word says that He blesses righteousness, and punishes sin.

The fool says, "Lighten up. Life's a game. Wickedness is just part of the game."

Foolish people can become shamelessly immoral.

Isa 32:6—*"For a fool speaks nonsense, And his heart inclines toward wickedness, To practice ungodliness and to speak error against the LORD, To keep the hungry person unsatisfied And to withhold drink from the thirsty."*

4. What can we do about foolishness?

Correct foolishness in children with loving confrontation and training.

Prov 22:15—*"Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child; The rod of discipline will remove it far from him."*

Children come into this world foolishly self-centered, insisting on doing life their own way.

Parents are responsible to teach their children to cope with the world's realities by learning to deal with authority—originally, the parent's authority, but ultimately, God's authority.

The parent can do this by being as consistent as possible in correcting the child when he disobeys (the *"rod of discipline"*) and in showing the child love and approval when he obeys.

Prov 22:6—*"Train up a child in the way he should go."*

Parents must help children overcome their foolishness with constant training.

Deut 6:6-7—*"And these words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart; / and you shall teach them diligently to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up."*

Most importantly, parents are to teach their children the ways of the Lord (Prov 1:7-8).

Deal with foolishness in oneself through biblical awareness and strong corrective measures.

1st, come to a realization of what foolishness is costing you (I Tim 6:9)=>

"Foolish and harmful desires... plunge men into ruin and destruction."

2nd, realize that overcoming foolishness will require a total reorientation, recognizing the world's wisdom as foolishness and biblical truth as wisdom (I Cor 9:19).

Mk 7:21-22 says that foolishness proceeds *"from within"* man's heart.

It's part of our fallen nature, and if our parents didn't discipline and train it out of us, it's still there and will require serious measures to deal with it.

3rd, realize that foolishness comes from willfully refusing to believe & obey God's Word.

Lk 24:25—*"O foolish men and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken!"*

4th, make a life-choice to become wise by learning God's Word, embracing it as ultimate truth, and obeying it.

Eph 5:17—*"Do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is."*

5th, pray for the Spirit's power to do what human strength alone cannot accomplish.