

## Wisdom and the Fool – Proverbs 17:7-28

### I. Introduction:

- A. If I called you a “fool” would you be angry with me?
1. Even if you were, I might be more angry with myself than you would be.
  2. I would have to have lost my temper to call you a “fool.”
  3. It is not something I would ever do lightly or when I was in control of my emotions.
- B. With that point in the background, remember that **Proverbs** is one of the 5 Biblical “books of wisdom.”
1. The others are **Job, Song of Solomon, Ecclesiastes** and then some of the **Psalms**.
  2. There are no “books of foolishness” in the Bible, and yet the Bible is full of fools and foolishness.
  3. In contrast to wisdom is foolishness; in contradistinction to the sage, or wise man, is the fool.
- C. **Proverbs** gives us the word “fool” over 60 times, and it is found 7 times here in **chapter 17**.
1. And curiously, there are **3 different Hebrew words** translated “fool” in this chapter.
  2. *“Excellent speech becometh not a fool: much less do lying lips a prince” – v. 7.*
    - a. *“A reproof entereth more into a wise man than an hundred stripes into a fool” – v. 10.*
    - b. *“Let a bear robbed of her whelps meet a man, rather than a fool in his folly” – v. 12.*
    - c. *“Wherefore is there a price in the hand of a fool to get wisdom, seeing he hath no heart to it?” – v. 16.*
    - d. *“He that begetteth a fool doeth it to his sorrow: and the father of a fool hath no joy” – v. 21.*
    - e. *“Wisdom is before him that hath understanding; but the eyes of a fool are in the ends of the earth” – 24.*
    - f. *“Even a fool, when he holdeth his peace, is counted wise: and he that shutteth his lips is esteemed a man of understanding” – v. 28.*
- D. This morning, I’d like to share with you some of the Biblical principles involving our two words – “wisdom” and “foolishness.”

### II. Let’s start with “WISDOM.”

- A. **Moses** is usually pictured as the **patron of God’s law**, and **David** is the **epitome of a worshiper** of God – with his music and poetry.
1. And **Solomon**, David’s son, is recognized as the great **exponent** and **writer** of the **wisdom literature**, and not without reason.
  2. You’ll remember from **I Kings 3** that God visited Solomon early in his reign, asking the man what he wanted more than anything else in the world.
  3. Solomon replied: *“O LORD my God, thou hast made thy servant king instead of David my father: and I am but a little child: I know not how to go out or come in.*
    - a. *And thy servant is in the midst of thy people which thou hast chosen, a great people, that cannot be numbered nor counted for multitude.*
    - b. *Give therefore thy servant an understanding heart to judge thy people, that I may discern between good and bad: for who is able to judge this thy so great a people?”*
  4. And the Lord declared, *“Behold, I have done according to thy words: lo, I have given thee a wise and an understanding heart; so that there was none like thee before thee, neither after thee shall any arise like unto thee.”*
  5. In next chapter we read – *“And God gave Solomon wisdom and understanding exceeding much, and largeness of heart, even as the sand that is on the sea shore.*
    - a. *And Solomon’s wisdom excelled the wisdom of all the children of the east country, and all the wisdom of Egypt. For he was wiser than all men ... and his fame was in all nations round about.*
    - b. *And he spake three thousand proverbs: and his songs were a thousand and five.*
    - c. *And he spake of trees, from the cedar tree that is in Lebanon even unto the hyssop that springeth out of the wall: he spake also of beasts, and of fowl, and of creeping things, and of fishes.*
    - d. *And there came of all people to hear the wisdom of Solomon, from all kings of the earth, which had*

*heard of his wisdom.”*

- B. While this is **true about Solomon**, we must remember the words of **the Lord Jesus** in **Luke 11:31** –
1. *“The queen of the south (the queen of Sheba) shall rise up in the judgment with the men of this generation, and condemn them: for she came from the utmost parts of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and, behold, a greater than Solomon is here.”*
  2. Christ Jesus obviously is, and must be, more wise than the wisest Old Testament character – Solomon.
  3. And Paul added, “You, whom God has chosen to salvation, are *in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption*” – **I Corinthians 1:30**.
  4. And in Christ Jesus *“are hid ALL the treasures of wisdom and knowledge”* – **Colossians 2:3**.
  5. I will return to the Lord Jesus in a few minutes.
- C. **Job**, in his wisdom, reflected on the perplexing issues of life in the light of the nature of God.
1. His wisdom was **speculative** as he tried to figure out God’s sovereignty and justice.
  2. **The Book of Ecclesiastes** is much like that – **speculative** or **theological** in nature.
- D. But more often, the ministry of the wise man was to share **PRACTICAL** counsel or wisdom for **GENERAL life**.
1. Thinking back over our study of **Proverbs**, weren’t Solomon’s axioms **more practical** than **theological**?
  2. The Hebrew wise man was often able to condense practical wisdom into pithy statements.
  3. He wasn’t like the Greek philosopher, but more like a father sharing wise counsel.
- E. **Biblical wisdom begins with God** – the **fear** of God, the **reverence** of God, the **worship** of Jehovah.
1. And then it distills down into looking at life from God’s perspective.
  2. What sort of **vocation** or **vacation** should I have?
    - a. Well, what does God say about such things? Las Vegas or the Rocky Mountains?
  3. The wise man chooses the right kind of **friends** – the right kind of **wife** – one who is Godly and worshipful.
  4. How should I **worship** the Lord? The wise man know how, while the fool does not.
  5. And the wise man knows **what is sin** and takes steps to avoid it.
- F. In the Old Testament the wise man was not making his pronouncements from an ivy covered tower.
1. The Biblical wise man was as practical and important as sunshine and water.
  2. For example, why was **Joshua** chosen to **replace Moses** as the leader of the nation?
    - a. Because *“Joshua the son of Nun was full of the **spirit of WISDOM**”* – **Deuteronomy 34:9**.
  3. When the Lord instructed Moses about the **uniform of the priests**, He added,
    - a. *“And thou shalt make holy garments for Aaron thy brother for glory and for beauty.*
    - b. *And thou shalt speak unto all that are **WISE hearted**, whom I have filled with the **spirit of WISDOM**, that they may make Aaron’s garments to consecrate him, that he may minister unto me in the priest’s office.”*
  4. Later when Moses was ordered to **build the Tabernacle**, God said to Him in **Exodus 31** –
    - a. *“See, I have called by name Bezaleel the son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah:*
    - b. *And I have filled him with the **spirit of God, in WISDOM**, and in understanding, and in knowledge, and in all manner of workmanship, To devise cunning works, to work in gold, & in silver, & in brass,*
    - c. *And in cutting of stones, to set them, and in carving of timber, to work in all manner of workmanship.*
    - d. *And I, behold, I have given with him Aholiab, the son of Ahisamach, of the tribe of Dan: & in the hearts of all that are **wise hearted** I have put **WISDOM**, that they may make all that I have commanded thee.”*
  5. In short, **wisdom** involved the **practical ability to function successfully** in one’s chosen area of service.
  6. That wisdom properly meant to have *“good sense,”* **aptitude** and even **technical abilities**.
  7. And that wisdom was **recognized** also be a **gift of God**, and the truly wise man acknowledged it as such.

### III. In contrast to **“WISDOM”** is **“FOOLISHNESS,”** and in contradistinction to the **WISE MAN** is the **FOOL**.

- A. **In order** to really **understand** this foolishness we need to realize that there are **various types** of fools.
1. And none of those Biblical fools are mentally retarded or necessarily handicapped by demon possession.

2. Perhaps as much as anything else the term **"fool"** is descriptive of an **attitude**, a **propensity of mind**, a **direction in life** which needs to be corrected.
  3. **"The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God."** **But** that is something which can be corrected.
  4. There is certainly sinful wickedness involved in this foolishness, but there is another element.
  5. The **"fool"** was the raw material with which the wise man had to work.
  6. Isn't this the way that Solomon begins his **Book of Proverbs**?
    - a. *"Wisdom crieth without; she uttereth her voice in the streets: She crieth in the chief place of concourse, in the openings of the gates: in the city she uttereth her words, saying,*
    - b. *How long, ye simple ones, will ye love simplicity? and the scorers delight in their scorning, and fools hate knowledge? Turn you at my reproof: behold, I will pour out my spirit unto you, I will make known my words unto you."*
- B. **One variety of Biblical fool** might be described as **"open."**
1. The Hebrew term **"peti"** is often translated **"simple."**
  2. **Proverbs 1** begins by saying, *"The proverbs of Solomon the son of David, king of Israel;*
    - a. *To know wisdom and instruction; to perceive the words of understanding;*
    - b. *To receive the instruction of wisdom, justice, and judgment, and equity;*
    - c. *To give subtilty (wisdom or prudence) to the SIMPLE, to the young man knowledge and discretion."*
  3. This is the fool with the **greatest potential**, because he is accessible; he has left the door open to wisdom.
  4. He is called **"simple"** because he is usually **immature** or **inexperience**.
  5. He is **easily lead astray**; he is **gullible**, **naive** and **easily fooled**.
  6. In **Proverbs 7** Solomon says, *"at the window of my house I looked through my casement, and beheld among the simple ones, I discerned among the youths, a young man void of understanding,"* and he was headed toward immoral disaster.
  7. The heart of an open or simple fool is not barred against the entry of wisdom, but as yet he does not have it. He is **as open** to **virtue** as he is to **vice**.
- C. So I go back to **where I began** this message: If I called you a **"fool"** would you be angry with me?
1. Here is one place where **to be a fool** would be a **good thing**.
  2. Are willing to be instructed? Are you willing to listen to God and His Word?
  3. In several ways, it is a good thing to be a **"fool for Christ?"**
  4. Are you an **"open fool"** as opposed to some of the other varieties?
- D. There are two other Hebrew words translated **"fool"** which carry the idea of **HARDNESS** or **OBSTINACY**.
1. The idea behind these words is **"thickness"** or **"fatness"** – **"thickheaded"** or **"dull-witted."**
    - a. This fool is **sluggish**, **slow to change his ways**, **calcified** and **impenetrable**.
    - b. Not only is his heart unresponsive, his ears and mind won't listen to reason.
  2. **Proverbs 26:11** uses one of those words when it says, *"As a dog returneth to his vomit, so a fool returneth to his folly."*
    - a. No matter how much we love our pets, it's disgusting to see our dog do that sort of thing.
    - b. But it is even more disgusting to see it in human beings.
  3. This fool **despises instruction**; he is **braggadocios** and **contentious** – **Proverbs 12:23; 18:2** and **18:6**.
  4. He is **complacent (1:32)** and like the human beings of **Romans 1**, he **"finds pleasure in doing evil."**
    - a. *"It is as SPORT to a fool to do mischief: but a man of understanding hath wisdom."*
  5. He **rejects instruction (12:15)**; **babbles** thoughtlessly (**10:14**) and is **quick tempered (14:29)**.
  6. He is like a **colt** who refuses to be broken – refuses to be useful to the Lord or to society.
  7. In other words, **his only thought** is about **himself**.
    - a. It is said that the man who refuses a lawyer in court has a fool for a client.
    - b. But the man who chooses himself as his God is an even greater fool – a fool for eternity.

- E. Does this in any way sound like you? Don't snicker if it does. Rather you should fear.
- F. Another Hebrew word for "fool" is "letz," referring to **the MOCKING fool – the SCOFFER**.
1. Obviously, it is possible to be a variety of fools at the same time.
  2. **Psalm 1:1** speaks of "the seat of the scornful" – this fool is the man sitting on that throne.
  3. I am told that in **modern Hebrew** the word for "clown" is "letzan," coming from the same root.
  4. This fool is **proud, sneering, disruptive** and **deriding** – a master of heckling.
  5. He **ridicules** the man who believes the **Bible**, who believes in **creation**, the **rule of God**, the **return of Christ**.
  6. He knows all the answers, or at least he thinks he does, but rather than compare them with the wise man, he belittles him.
  7. God will not be outdone by this fool – the Lord "*scorneth the scorers: but he giveth grace unto the lowly*" – **Proverbs 3:34**.
- G. Probably the **best-known word translated "fool"** in the Bible is "**nabal**."
1. Ironically it is found **only 3 times** in **Proverbs**, and these verses sound very much like the others from that book.
  2. But it is the word used in **Psalm 14:1** – "*The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God. They are corrupt, they have done abominable works, there is none that doeth good.*"
  3. It is in the similar first verse from **Psalm 53** – "*The 'nabal' hath said in his heart, There is no God. Corrupt are they, and have done abominable iniquity: there is none that doeth good.*"
  4. Even more than the others, this variety of fool has no room for God in his life or in his heart.
  5. And as such his view on life is so distorted that he might do just about anything.
- H. Please turn to **I Samuel 25:2** –
1. "*There was a man in Maon, whose possessions were in Carmel; and the man was very great, and he had three thousand sheep, and a thousand goats: and he was shearing his sheep in Carmel.*
    - a. *Now the name of the man was Nabal; and the name of his wife Abigail: and she was a woman of good understanding, and of a beautiful countenance: but the man was churlish and evil in his doings; and he was of the house of Caleb.*
    - b. *And David heard in the wilderness that Nabal did shear his sheep.*
  2. *And David sent out ten young men, and David said unto the young men, Get you up to Carmel, and go to Nabal, and greet him in my name:*
    - a. *And thus shall ye say to him that liveth in prosperity, Peace be both to thee, and peace be to thine house, and peace be unto all that thou hast.*
    - b. *And now I have heard that thou hast shearers: now thy shepherds which were with us, we hurt them not, neither was there ought missing unto them, all the while they were in Carmel.*
    - c. *Ask thy young men, and they will shew thee. Wherefore let the young men find favour in thine eyes: for we come in a good day: give, I pray thee, whatsoever cometh to thine hand unto thy servants, and to thy son David.*
  3. *And when David's young men came, they spake to Nabal according to all those words in the name of David, and ceased.*
  4. *And Nabal answered David's servants, and said, Who is David? and who is the son of Jesse? there be many servants now a days that break away every man from his master. Shall I then take my bread, and my water, and my flesh that I have killed for my shearers, and give it unto men, whom I know not whence they be?"*
- I. I know I have no right to do it, but let's allegorize this passage.
1. Clearly in many scriptures **David** is a **type** or picture of **our Saviour**, the Lord Jesus Christ.
    - a. Christ Jesus, the Son of God, is the **creator and sustainer** of all things.
    - b. There is not a whippoorwill, daffodil, pencil or morsel of food which is not rightfully His.
  2. But Nabal the God-denying fool arrogantly says in his heart that he owes nothing to the Lord.

- J. Now skip down to **verse 36** – after visiting David, Abigail, Nabal’s wife, returned to her husband,
1. *“And, behold, he held a feast in his house, like the feast of a king; and Nabal’s (**the fool’s**) heart was merry within him, for he was very drunken: wherefore she told him nothing, less or more, until the morning light.*
    - a. *But it came to pass in the morning, when the wine was gone out of Nabal, and his wife had told him these things, that his heart died within him, and he became as a stone.*
    - b. *And it came to pass about ten days after, that the LORD smote Nabal (**the fool**), that he died.”*
  2. This, in a brief illustration, describes the end of every God-denying fool – every practical and ideological atheist.
  3. When a person’s theology is faulty, his behavior will be faulty – but his punishment will be just.

#### IV. Now I would like to point you to the answer to our foolishness, the Lord Jesus Christ.

- A. Please return to the scripture which Bro. Fulton read during our song service – **I Corinthians 1:17** –
1. *“Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel: not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect. For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God.”*
  2. **Does the preaching of the cross** seem to you to be **foolishness**? Then that **makes you a fool**.
    - a. **But which kind of fool?** Are you a God-denying fool, or a hard-hearted and obstinate minded fool?
    - b. Do you mock the preaching of the gospel, like the arrogant Greek philosophers – like the Christ-deny Pharisees?
    - c. Or are you an open-minded fool, searching for the truth and the way of eternal life?
  3. **Verse 19** – *“For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent.*
    - a. *Where is the wise? where is the scribe? where is the disputer of this world? hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?*
    - b. *For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe.*
    - c. *For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom:*
  4. *But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness;*
  5. *But unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God.*
  6. *Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men.*
  7. *For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called:*
    - a. *But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty;*
    - b. *And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: That no flesh should glory in his presence.”*
- B. For all intents and purposes, **God doesn’t care that you are a fool**.
1. He doesn’t care whether you laugh at the gospel or at those whose faith is in Christ.
  2. In reality, foolishness is the original condition of us all.
  3. **Saul of Tarsus** in all his education, high IQ and arrogant pride was a fool, thinking he was doing God a service in persecuting the believers in Christ Jesus.
  4. But then the mercy and grace of God struck him down and sucked out all the rebellion out of his heart.
  5. Saul is a picture of all those who have come to God through Christ.



- C. So Paul, converted Saul, goes on to say in **verse 30** –
1. *“But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption: That, according as it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord.”*
  2. We are all born fools.
  3. **Ephesians 2** –
    - a. *“Wherein in time past (we) walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience:*
    - b. *Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others.”*
  4. *“But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us,*
    - a. *Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;)*
    - b. *And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus:*
    - c. *That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus.”*
- D. **Solomon**, the **practical wise man**, said in **Proverbs 4:7** – *“Wisdom is the principle thing; therefore get wisdom.”*
1. Whether he fully understood it or not, he was speaking of salvation which brings the fool into a proper relationship with Jehovah, the judge of Heaven and Earth.
  2. Then **Job**, the **theological wise man** said, *“Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom.”*
  3. Listen to these sages of the Word of God.
  4. Have you humbly knelt before the Saviour seeking His grace – his wisdom?
  5. Do you worship Him, and in joyful awe do you fear the Lord?
  6. If not, your soul is in as much jeopardy as Nabal’s.
- E. Christ Jesus said, *“Whosoever heareth these sayings of mine and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock.”*
1. Have you built your hope for eternity upon the rock, the Lord Jesus Christ?
  2. Or are you, as a rudderless fool, floating through a tempestuous ocean certain to be destroyed on that very same rock?
  3. *“Happy is that man that findeth wisdom”* in the person of the Saviour – **eternally** happy and joyful.