

Introduction - Proverbs 14:12

This section of Proverbs is a part of the “*contrasts between the upright and the wicked*” section of Proverbs. Although this text doesn't explicitly mention the word fool, the man who assumes his way is right will only end in death, and that is foolish. A way may seem right to man. In other words, the way to heaven may seem to be one who is honest and genuine. A way to holiness may be a way of self-sacrifice.

The phrase “way” is more than just a designated path; “*it refers to a chosen course of action, a lifestyle, or a specific method of behavior.*” First, there is a *moral and ethical direction*. The way to marriage is living together before you decide to be married; it seems to be the right way. These types of ways seem to be right because they seem or hope to bring some kind of happiness and satisfaction. There's a *subjective perception* vs. *objective reality*. Subjective is based on human intuition, cultural norms, or personal desire. Objective reality is the actual destination of that path, which in this case is death (ruin or spiritual separation). The Hebrew word for way is often used to describe character, habits, and customs.

Application: many ways seem right to man. Concerning salvation, it seems right that a man can do as good as he can, and God will be kind. Concerning forgiveness, it seems right to forgive under most circumstances but not all. Concerning preaching, it seems right to make the Scriptures relevant to the culture. In fact, “*seems right*” is relying on a limited human perspective, ego, or deceptive emotions. This Proverb is repeated verbatim in Proverbs 16:25. There's always been a way that seems right to man, but every single way of man leads to death. We can assume that a man who thinks his own way is enough may be a fool or, better yet, foolish.

We must first define what a fool means from a biblical perspective. A fool is not necessarily defined by a lack of intelligence, but by a specific set of moral and spiritual behaviors. In the book of Proverbs, a fool centers around one's wisdom, discipline, and speech. Some characteristics of a fool include: *rejecting instruction, reckless speech, moral insensitivity* as they tend to mock sin rather than taking it seriously, and *complacency*. Just to make some comparisons, the wise listen and the fool despises, the wise hold their speech, the fool blabs, and the wise listen to counsel, but the fool does what is right in his own eyes.

Point 1 - A Fool Hates Instruction

As we looked at briefly last week, Proverbs 1:7 defines this foundational truth, “*The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction.*” The word despise here means “*to regard something as worthless, contemptible, or beneath consideration. It is an active feeling of looking down on something with a sneer.*”

1A - The proverb begins with the prerequisite of fear of the Lord. “*This term can describe dread, being terrified, standing in awe, or having reverence. With the Lord as the object, this word captures both aspects of shrinking back in fear and of drawing close in awe. It is not a trembling dread that paralyzes action, but neither is it a polite reverence. The fear of the LORD ultimately expresses reverential submission to the Lord's will and thus characterizes a true*

worshiper.¹ This always exists before knowledge and wisdom. On the other hand, fools despise this. As our definition of despise is true, they regard the knowledge and wisdom from God as worthless or beneath consideration.

1B - Knowledge (wisdom and instruction) aren't merely man's wisdom, but truth and obedience to the Scriptures. Proverbs 10:14 "Wise men store up knowledge, but with the mouth of the foolish, ruin is at hand." We should store up the word of God in our hearts, Psalm 119:11 "Your word I have treasured in my heart, that I may not sin against You." To the fool, this kind of knowledge is beneath him, because he knows best according to man's wisdom.

1C - A fool is prideful when it comes to knowledge. Proverbs 26:4-5 "Do not answer a fool according to his folly, or you will also be like him. Answer a fool as his folly deserves, that he not be wise in his own eyes." It appears the writer shares a contradiction. However, as we look at the text, we are commanded not to answer a fool according to his folly, because we may be drawn into useless words and arguments. However, there's a time to speak and keep silent, and the Proverb says there is a time to answer him, as his folly deserves, so that he may see his own pride and foolishness. We do that not with our own words, but with the Word of God.

Point 2 - A Fool Is Complacent In His Life

Proverbs 1:32 "For the waywardness of the naive will kill them, and the complacency of fools will destroy them." The word complacent refers to a "dangerous state of self-satisfaction or false security." The word describes a person who feels just fine without wisdom or biblical instruction.

2A - Lot was complacent and hesitated (his complacency led him to linger and wait), Genesis 19:15-16 "When morning dawned, the angels urged Lot, saying, up, take your wife and your two daughters who are here, or you will be swept away in the punishment of the city. But he hesitated. So the men seized his hand and the hand of his wife and the hands of his two daughters, for the compassion of the Lord was upon him; and they brought him out, and put him outside the city." Being complacent can lead to sin, regrets, and bad decisions. And complacency is a sign of a fool.

Point 3 - A Fool Lacks Moral Ability

A fool does not consider the spiritual dangers or even physical dangers of immorality, cf. Proverbs 5:1-6. Notice the key to not being foolish in this text. Give attention to wisdom and incline your ear. Pay attention to God's book. Incline your ear to those who offer godly advice. Observe discretion; this applies to not hesitate or linger but also to not be in a place of temptation. This satisfaction is temporary; her words drip honey, and words are sweet, but in the end, it's bitter. The end of Proverbs 5:23 is clear: "He will die for lack of instruction, and in the greatness of his folly, he will go astray." Furthermore, Proverbs 10:23 says, "Doing wickedness is like a sport to a fool." Proverbs 14:9 says, "Fools mock at sin."

3A - A fool never learns the missteps and consequences of his sin. Proverbs 26:11 says, "Like a dog that returns to its vomit, is a fool who repeats his folly." Fools repeat their disgusting mistakes. No matter how

¹ Expositor's Bible Commentary (Abridged Edition): Old Testament; Copyright 2004.

many times they are warned, they never learn, not even from experience. Even Peter mentions this proverb in 2 Peter 2:22.

Point 4 - A Fool Exhibits His Anger

Let's remind ourselves that a fool isn't one who lacks intelligence. Often, a man behaves like a fool when he is angry. Most often, if not always, a man's anger is because his own rules have been violated. An angry fool is described not by what they have but by what they lack: self-control. Proverbs 16:32 says, "**He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he who rules his spirit, than he who captures a city.**" Here is the anatomy of an angry fool.

4A - Weakness masquerading as strength. People often think their outbursts of anger are a show of power and strength. In fact, this verse shows restraint is better than anger outbursts.

4B - A lack of self-control. One of the most treasured gifts of sanctification is self-control. Proverbs 19:11 says, "**A man's discretion makes him slow to anger.**" A fool is someone who cannot rule his spirit. They are a slave to their own impulses, making them more vulnerable than a city with broken walls.

4C - The New Testament speaks of the ability to have self-control over one's anger. Ephesians 4:26 "**Be angry, and yet do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger**" has been a verse taken out of context by many Christians in order to justify angry responses and behaviors. The verse does not give way to anger. A man cannot be angry and not sin. James 1:20 "**For the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God.**" The Greek phrase for "be angry" is "in your anger" and means "*to be angry, to feel and express strong displeasure and hostility; this can range from petty human anger to the righteous anger of God toward sinful disobedience.*"²

The fool expresses anger in a way that is not conducive to the glory of God. This verse implies that we will be angered, or things will make us angry. Most often the case is some sort of violation of our personal beliefs or standards. Often my own anger arises from men who claim to be pastors that turn the biblical exposition of the Scriptures into some kind of self-motivated, health and wealth, motivational mockery of God. Or churches that turn worship services into Broadway performances or some kind of pregame festivities before the so-called preaching hour. When men try to perform hermeneutical pretzels of the text to fit political stances or affirm their sinful behavior. More often than not, my displeasure arises from a violation against me, not God. This is why a fool expresses his anger in sinful and not God-pleasing ways. Don't be a fool.

Point 5 - A Fool Is Proudful And Arrogant

This is one of the first verses I remember memorizing, Proverbs 16:18 "**Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before stumbling (a great fall).**" Pride carries the idea of "*surging waves, tall*" and it goes before destruction, which also has the idea spiritually of "*discouragement or faint-hearted.*" This haughty spirit of thinking way too much of one's knowledge and lack of discernment, goes before a fall or

² <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=eph%204&version=NIV&tab=interlinear>

one's stumbling. The Lord has a very profound way of humbling us at times. We think we know it all or have somehow achieved a spiritual level above others, and we find God stumbling us out of that.

1 Corinthians 10:12 **“Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed that he does not fall.”** For context, vs. 1-11 are about ways and warnings to avoid mistakes Israel has made. The text **“think he stands”** implies the idea of you think you stand firm, be careful, don't get prideful, because you may stumble and fall.

5A - Do not think for a moment that you can inch ever so close to the edge of disobedience and flounder around without slipping. You pray, study, and read the Bible, yet, you think you can defend and walk into a demons den of temptation and walk out like Sylvester Stallone untouched. Be careful the text warns. Don't let yourself get into a compromising position with someone not your spouse. Don't let yourself drift off into a land of lust on your phone or computer. Don't think you are so spiritually untouchable that you can walk near the lion's den. Take heed we are warned. Don't get prideful it precedes destruction and stumbling. Proverbs 6:27-29 **“Can a man take fire in his bosom, and his clothes not be burned? Or can a man walk on hot coals, and his feet not be scorched? So is the one who goes in to his neighbor's wife; whoever touches her will not go unpunished.”**

The fool thinks he can play with fire and not get burned. It may go on for years or decades, but we are warned in Scripture in Numbers 32:20-23 when land was being settled in Gilead, **“So Moses said to them, “If you will do this, if you will arm yourselves before the Lord for the war, and all of you armed men cross over the Jordan before the Lord until He has driven His enemies out from before Him, and the land is subdued before the Lord, then afterward you shall return and be free of obligation toward the Lord and toward Israel, and this land shall be yours for a possession before the Lord. But if you will not do so, behold, you have sinned against the Lord, and be sure your sin will find you out.”** Disobedience is sin, and many think they have enough knowledge and discipline to tread water without drowning.

5B - Pride assumes no danger or falling. Proverbs 7 gives us explicit warnings against this. Proverbs 7:1-21 describe the temptations of the harlot. The young man hangs nearby and stands for a while; however, in vs. 22-23 **“Suddenly he follows her, as an ox goes to the slaughter, or as one in fetters to the discipline of a fool, until an arrow pierces through his liver; as a bird hastens to the snare, so he does not know that it will cost him his life.”** Oh, the danger of pride and assumptions of our own spiritual strength.

Conclusion

A fool hates instruction, is complacent, lacks moral clarity, exhibits anger, and is prideful and arrogant. He may be intellectually wise, but he is a fool. Let's consider Psalm 14:1 as we close. **“The fool has said in his heart, there is no God.”** I first learned this text as one who is an atheist. However, careful exegesis would reveal to us that it means more than that. In fact, while it's true one would be foolish to say there is no God at all, what may be even more foolish is to say no to God. The words **“there is”** have been added by translators. *The word fool here is synonymous with the wicked, who aggressively and intentionally flouts his independence from God and his commandments. The fool in his heart denies the practical import of God's existence. He shuts off the affairs of this world from divine*

*intervention and denies any personal accountability to God for his actions.*³ I pray today that if you have ears to hear, the Lord will open them to hear and respond in repentance to God. And God is holy, man is sinful and sin demands a penalty. Without Christ, that payment is yours. God provided an atonement in Christ Jesus, who knew no sin to become sin for us. Confess and believe He is the one who gave His life for you and repent and believe!

³ <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Psalm%2014%3A1%2D3&version=NASB1995&tab=interlinear>