The Fool

The book of Proverbs has been defined by some as “Wisdom applied.” This practical book turns theory and principle into reality. It shows specifically how the righteous man lives in everyday applications. Found throughout this straightforward book are several contrasts, such as laziness to diligence, or, wickedness to righteousness. But one of the most striking contrasts is that of wise compared to the fool.

The word “fool” carries the distinction of being one of the harshest things God ever said. We may think of a fool as someone who is silly, joking or being goofy. God uses this word as a form of condemnation. When the rich farmer dreamed of tearing down his barns and building larger ones, God required his soul saying “You fool! Now who will own what you have prepared?” (Luke12:20). The Psalmist acknowledged that the fool states, “There is no God” (Ps. 14:1). The Hebrew word ‘ewil is where we get our English word fool. It means to “be thick,” and therefore “thick brained” or “stupid” as the Theological Word Book of the Old Testament defines this word. But we must look beyond the simplistic idea of a person who is “dense,” or “dumb.” The word “fool” involves a person who is spiritually “thick.” They lack a moral compass. They are empty of God in their life. They live for themselves and think only of the present. They are spiritually bankrupt, yet they don’t realize it.

In the book of Proverbs, forms of the word “fool” are found 78 times. The writer of Proverbs shows through the negative choices of the fool and the consequences he reaps, that wisdom will lead a person to make the opposite choices. The contrasts between the fool and wise are obvious and stunning. Proverbs shows the fool to be short sighted, thoughtless, careless and lacking sense. The wise shines in comparison.

The word “fool” is used in the opening sections of the first chapter of Proverbs. As the writer outlines the value of wisdom and instruction, he states that “Fools despise wisdom and instruction” (1:7). This is more than a declarative statement. Throughout Proverbs examples will be given that prove this point. Fools don’t want to know. That’s why they are fools! The fool is convinced he is right (12:15). There is no telling him otherwise. The fool brings shame and heartache to the home (10:1). Doing wrong is sport to the fool (10:23). The mouth of the fool gets him in trouble. He speaks arrogantly of things he doesn’t know. His mouth spews folly. Lacking godliness in his life, the fool is an angry person (29:11). The fool quarrels (20:3). He laughs at sin (14:9). He is cocky and careless (14:16). It does little good to confront him (26:4; 29:9). And in a most sober statement, the Proverb writer declares, “He will die for lack of instruction and in the greatness of his folly he will go astray” (5:23).

The direction of Proverbs is not toward the fool. It is to the wise. Nothing is said about trying to turn the fool around. No hope is given for the fool. The powerful point that this contrast makes is that if you reject wisdom you will walk in the steps of the fool. The picture that follows is bleak. The fool ruins every relationship. He destroys himself. He is not one to be imitated, admired, or sought after. There is nothing good about the fool in the book of Proverbs. His attitude, his tongue, and his heart show what it is like to be completely void of God. He does what he wants. His only conscience is himself. He is a ruined man and doesn't even know it. A person gets this way because they have rejected the wisdom of God. It begins with his upbringing. Fools will begat more fools. They have learned to live without God. They don't think about consequences of actions. They don't consider how their words may affect others. They close their eyes to insight and reflection from God's word. By ignoring God, they assume God will go away. Pretending God doesn't exist allows them to live without guilt or shame. They have closed their eyes, their hearts and God's word.

By contrast, the wise are just the opposite. They delight in the Law of God. They receive instruction and discipline knowing that it will make them into a better person. The wise acknowledges God and His ways. They respect God and invite the Lord into their life. Just as the fool's heart is evidenced by all that he does, so is the wise. The relationships with the wise are wholesome, honorable and joyful. The mouth of the wise speaks encouragement. The wise is humble, considerate, and careful. The wise are a delight to be around. And in the end, the wise will be saved.

Remember the context that these words are used. Wise in Proverbs is not intellectualism. A person may be wise to the world but a fool to God. A man may have many college degrees but be "dense" in his ways with God. We are told in this book that "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom" (1:7). The wise person is one who has a moral compass. His steps are directed by the Lord. He knows the will of God and studies diligently that he may please God in all that he does.

It would be wonderful if we could say that this contrast was a study of ancient history, but we know better. The fool is alive and well today. He lives among us. He is found in local colleges. He works at the same place you work at. He lives in our neighborhood. He is not an axe murderer but rather a person who fills a life without God. His words, actions and attitudes express one who does not know God. How easy it is for us to judge such a person. Yet, the driving principle behind Proverbs is are we the wise person? Do our neighbors see us as a person whose life is filled with God? Do our actions, attitudes and words reflect a person who fears the Lord? This is what Proverbs is driving at. The wise man and the fool. Two people. Two destinations. Jesus used this contrast when he

talked about building a house upon the rock or the sand. *"The wise man and the foolish man"* our children sing in Bible class. This contrast was used by the Lord when he said the way to destruction is wide and many are on that path but the way to life is narrow and few be found who are on that. The wise man and the fool.