

Don't Be a Fool

(by Pastor Trent Boedicker)

Text: Proverbs 12:15; 23:9; 26:11

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The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, But a wise man is he who listens to counsel.

A pastor entered the local tavern at lunchtime to get a bite to eat. One of the regulars noticed the preacher, and wishing to embarrass him, rose to his feet calling out quite loudly, "There is no God."

The pastor walked over to the man, and calmly laid his hand on his shoulder, and said, "Friend, what you have just said is nothing new. In fact, there is a verse in the Bible, written more than 2,000 years ago, that says the very same thing."

The man was quite surprised, and answered, "Well I never knew that the Bible made such a statement."

The pastor pulled out his pocket Bible, and quickly turned to the pages. "Here it is. Psalm 14, verse 1, tells us, 'The fool says in his heart, there is no God.' But there is a great difference between that fool and you. He was quite modest and said it only in his heart; he didn't go around yelling it out in taverns." (Tan, P. L. 1996 *Encyclopedia of 7700 Illustrations: Signs of the Times* p. 483. Garland, TX: Bible Communications, Inc.)

In the Bible, a fool is someone who lacks common sense. He is rash, and reckless, and irresponsible. If the path of the wisdom leads this way, he is headed full speed in the opposite direction. His decisions get him into all kinds of trouble. He is often his own worst enemy. His problem is not so much with his mind, but in his heart. It is not an intellectual deficiency, but a spiritual issue.

One Bible Dictionary puts it this way: "Not only is the fool immoral, he is also godless. His mind is closed to [the Lord]. He conducts his life without any recognition of God and thus is corrupt... He does not fear the Lord and hence knows nothing of wisdom." (Elwell, W. A., 1996 *Evangelical dictionary of biblical theology* Grand Rapids: Baker Book House)

As I look out across the congregation this morning, there is not a single person that I would characterize as a fool. But every one of us is capable of acting foolishly, and making ill-advised decisions. King Solomon was the wisest man in the world, but there were even moments in his life, when he took his eyes off of the Lord, and became a fool. Sin has a way of clouding our judgment, blinding us to the truth. That's why we need to ask the Lord for wisdom.

In the book of Proverbs, Solomon spends a great deal of time training us in the ways of wisdom. He also has a great deal to say about the fool. I think Solomon would have been a fan of Mr. T. Remember the old show (from the 90's) "The A-Team?" Mr. T's famous phrase was "I pity the fool!" Solomon felt the same way. He shows us a number of characteristics of the foolish person, and warns us: **don't be a fool, because those who travel that path are headed for trouble.**

1. First of all, Proverbs tells us that if we don't want to act like a fool, we ought to **listen to good advice!** (*Pr. 12:15*)

Look at ***Proverbs 12:15***. *"The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, But a wise man is he who listens to counsel."* One of the problems with the fool is that he thinks that he has it all figured out; his way is right; he knows what he's doing. You can't teach him anything, because he already knows everything. If someone has a different point of view, the fool doesn't want to hear about it.

It might be something simple. If you take turns with a friend, carpooling to work, you notice that whenever he drives you get there a couple of minutes late. It's because he likes to take the scenic route, which adds an extra five or ten minutes to the commute. So one morning, as you climb into his car, you glance at the clock, and notice that the two of you are already running behind schedule. Very politely, as pleasantly as you know how, you suggest that if he takes the shorter route you can probably make up for the lost time. He looks at you like you're crazy. "What do you mean? The road I take is shorter. When it's your turn to drive, you can take whatever route you want, but today is my turn and we're going to go whichever way I choose!" You keep looking at the clock all the way there, and sure enough, you pull into the parking lot fifteen minutes late. You so badly want to tell him, "I told you so," but you resist.

Or it could be something more serious. You find out a good friend is experimenting with drugs, and so you sit down and share your concern. You tell him how much you care about him, how you don't want to see him get hurt, and how dangerous it is to mess around with that stuff. You offer to be there to help him get clean. You pour out your heart, and when you finished he just brushes aside everything you have said. "I don't know what you're talking about, I'm fine. I don't try to interfere with your life, and I don't want you trying to interfere with mine." He gets up, and walks away.

You could make a perfect case. Your logic could be flawless. You could anticipate every possible objection, and have an answer ready. But it won't help. He has already made up his mind. He sees nothing wrong with what he is doing. No matter what anyone else might say, his way is right in his own eyes. "Who are you to tell me that I'm wrong?" he asks. "It works for me and that's all that matters."

He is a lot like a child. The toddler wakes up in the morning and asks his parents, "can I have candy for breakfast?" No honey, candy isn't a good breakfast food. "But it could be!" No, it really isn't what you need to fill you up and give you energy for the day. "But I like candy." I know, and it's okay to have a little every once and awhile, but not right now. "I want it." No. "I want it now!" No, not going to happen. And it goes downhill from there. It's difficult to reason with a child in that situation. Their mind is already made up, and they don't want hear it. That's how it is with a fool, his mind is already made up, and nothing you say will convince him he is wrong. He is so proud, and so stubborn, that he refuses consider that maybe he could benefit from the wisdom of others. He won't listen to a word of advice, he won't listen to a word of correction, he won't even listen to the Word of God.

Solomon makes the same point again, in Proverbs 23:9. If you turn forward, a few pages in your Bible to ***Proverbs 23:9*** he tells us, *"Do not speak in the hearing of a fool, For he will despise the wisdom of your words."* I don't think the verse is telling us that that we should just give up on friends and family who are heading the wrong way, or that we shouldn't try to reach them. But the passage does warn us that ultimately we're not going to be able to persuade some people that God's way is best. The Holy

Spirit will have to be the one to convince them, if they are really going to change course and change the direction of their life. There comes a point where we have to step away, realizing that to argue any further would be a waste of time. We may have to step back and pray, “Lord, I trust you to continue to work in that person’s heart. When the moment is right, if it is your will, show me when you want me to approach that issue with them again.”

There are a lot of examples in Scripture of people who wouldn’t listen. One of them is a king by the name of Zedekiah, who was a descendant of Solomon. Zedekiah was the last king to sit on the throne of David in Jerusalem. He ruled almost four hundred years after Solomon, during the time of the Babylonian exile. The prophet, Jeremiah, ministered during his reign, but the king wouldn’t listen to the words of God’s messenger. One day Zedekiah realized he was in trouble. He wanted to believe that he was somehow going to escape the army of Babylon, but it was difficult to see how. And so he called for the prophet. He asked Jeremiah what he should do. What is the Lord’s message for us? In **Jeremiah 38:15** the prophet answered the king, *“If I give you an answer, will you not kill me? Even if I did give you counsel, you would not listen to me.”* But the king was insistent. He even swore an oath, *“As surely as the Lord lives, who has given us breath, I will neither kill you nor hand you over to those who are seeking your life.”* (38:16) And so Jeremiah went on to deliver God’s message. *“This is what the Lord God Almighty, the God of Israel, says: ‘If you surrender to the officers of the king of Babylon, your life will be spared and this city will not be burned down; you and your family will live.’¹⁸ But if you will not surrender to the officers of the king of Babylon, this city will be handed over to the Babylonians and they will burn it down; you yourself will not escape from their hands.”* (38:17-18) Do you think that was the message Zedekiah wanted to hear? Surrender... give yourself up, and the city will be spared. No. At least Zedekiah did make good on part of his promise. He did not have Jeremiah killed. But he refused listen to God, and wound up in all kinds of trouble.

There is wisdom in listening to others, especially godly people the Lord places in our life. We have to be willing not just to give advice, but to receive it graciously as well. Most importantly it is essential that we listen and heed the counsel of the Lord. **Proverbs 8:33** says, *“Hear instruction and be wise, and do not neglect it.”*

2. The book of Proverbs also tells us that if we don’t want to act like a fool, we ought to learn from our mistakes! (Pr. 26:11)

Turn to **Proverbs 26:11**. Solomon was so good at illustrating spiritual principles. His examples are vivid, and create a picture that helps us to understand the message. And that’s the case with this proverb. Proverbs 26:11 tells us, *“Like a dog that returns to its vomit Is a fool who repeats his folly.”*

Dogs are great, man’s best friend, but they are not the wisest of animals. They eat garbage after all, and they can be pretty disgusting at times. No wonder dogs were considered unclean animals in Israel.

If you’ve had a dog, you know that their stomach can be a little finicky. Every now and then Bentley will eat something that disagrees with them, probably something the kids have fed him. He starts to make an unpleasant noise, and I know what’s coming next. So if he is sitting in the recliner with me, I will pick him up and rush him to the kitchen. If we can make it all the way outside that’s even better, but at least the floor of the kitchen is easier to clean than the fabric of my favorite chair. “Blah!” is the next sound I hear, as he ralphs up his lunch on the floor. I’m sure glad he is a little

dog, because the mess could be a whole lot worse. It's nasty, but what is even more disgusting is that if I do not rush in immediately with a paper towel to clean it up, he will start licking it back up. Then he wants to give you a kiss. Come on, Bentley! If it didn't sit well in your stomach the first time, it is probably not going to taste any better the second time around. Leave it alone! But he's a dog, and that's what they do.

That's what a foolish person does, as well. He returns to his folly. He goes back to his sin. Even though his bad decisions have made a mess in his life, even though deep down he realizes that this isn't good, even though it will bring more trouble – he goes back to what is familiar. He may want to change. He may make all kinds of promises, and tell himself that he will never do that again. But it doesn't take long before he ends up right back where he started.

All of us make mistakes, and sometimes we even make some real doozies. We have all done things that we later regret. The person who says, "I've never messed up," is lying. The important thing is how we respond. This is an opportunity for us to grow. There is something the Lord can teach us through that experience, if we let Him. Wise people learn from their mistakes.

There are a number of lessons that we can glean from our failures:

- We can learn to view sin in the same light as God sees it. If the passage makes a comparison between vomit and the folly of a sinner, it must be pretty offensive to the Lord. Not only is sin rebellion against God, it is destructive in our lives.
- We can also learn about God's grace. God doesn't treat us according to what our sins deserve, He is merciful and willing to forgive those who come to Him with a humble and contrite heart. Though our sins are as scarlet, through Christ, they been washed white as snow (Isaiah 1:18).
- And we can learn to depend on the Lord. We see how much we need His strength to live a holy life. In our own power the best we can do is make resolutions. But without God's empowering presence, we won't get very far.

These are just a few things that the Lord can teach us through our failures, if we let Him. God doesn't want us to repeat the same mistakes, over and over, like the fool. He wants to show us a better way to live.

The people of Israel, in the OT, were like us. They could be so foolish at times. They would have to learn the same lesson time and time again. No sooner did the Lord tell them not to worship idols, like the other nations, and what were they doing? They created idols. God would allow them to endure the consequences of their rebellion, and then when they returned to Him, He would set them free. But too often it didn't last. Psalm 85 was written during one of those times. The psalmist remembers God's faithfulness, and prayers for deliverance. And he goes on to say (Psalm 85:8) *"I listen carefully to what God the Lord is saying, for he speaks peace to his faithful people. But let them not return to their foolish ways."* The author of that psalm is confident that God will show lovingkindness to His people. His prayer is that the people will not go back to their sinful ways.

We will only be able to learn from a mistake after we have admitted that we've messed up, we've blown it, we have stumbled. That's not an easy thing for most people to do, but it's necessary. Wise people don't try to hide, blame others, or deny it. They look to God, allowing Him to offer instruction.

3. Finally, Scripture tells us that if we don't want to act like a fool, we ought to love God! (*Psalm 14:1*)

There is a lot more that we can learn from Proverbs about the ways of the fool, but we're going to turn to ***Psalm 14:1***. The passage tells us, "*The fool has said in his heart, 'There is no God.'*"

This is the fool's greatest error. All of his other problems trace back to this. He tries to live his life independently from God. He shakes his fist at heaven and says, "I don't need you God. I can do it on my own." He ridicules believers and says, "faith is just a crutch for weak people." He laughs at the Bible and says, "it is just a book of myths and stories." The fool doesn't like the idea of being held accountable for his actions, so he dismisses the idea of God altogether. Then he is able to justify doing as he pleases.

The Bible might say this is wrong, but if he doesn't believe in God, he doesn't have to listen. He is free to define morality on his own terms, as he sees fit. But his logic is faulty. Just because you don't believe in something doesn't mean it isn't real. You can look at a stack of bills on your desk and tell yourself that they don't exist. Closing your eyes you insist "There is no electric bill. There is no phone bill. There is no water bill." But that doesn't make them go away. When you open your eyes, they are still there. The fool might be able to convince himself that God is not real, he might even be able to convince others, but that doesn't change reality.

There was a debate between a Christian and an atheist. The atheist thought he had an airtight argument, he was really going to silence the believer once and for all, and so he asked him: "If there is a God, where is he?" The Christian replied, "Where is He not?" (*Tan, P. L. 1996 Encyclopedia of 7700 Illustrations: Signs of the Times p. 486. Garland, TX: Bible Communications, Inc.*)

There are very intelligent people in the world who have become fools, because they refuse to see what is right in front of them. "Convince me that there is a God," the demand. "Prove to me that God is real." All we have to do is look around, everywhere we turn in this universe the glory of God is on display. The very fact that you are alive, is a miracle. People don't become atheists because there is a lack of evidence for God's existence. They become atheists because they don't want to believe.

Job captures their rebellious attitude, in ***Job 21:14-15***. "*They say to God, 'Depart from us! We do not desire the knowledge of your ways. What is the Almighty, that we should serve him? And what profit do we get if we pray to him?'*"

The world thinks that it is foolish to believe in God, that faith in God holds us back somehow. But they have it backwards. Faith in the Lord is what sets us free and fills life with meaning. If there is no God, life would be pretty empty and meaningless. What's the point? We are just here for a blip of time and then we would vanish into dust. What a depressing life that would be. When

we come to know God, and experience His love, we discover what true life really is. Walking in a relationship with Him is what we were made for.

In the NT, the Apostle Paul tells us how foolish the human race has become. **Romans 1:18–23** says,

¹⁸ The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness, ¹⁹ since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. ²⁰ For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse.

²¹ For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. ²² Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools ²³ and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles.

This is the human story: claiming to be wise, mankind became fools. Paul wrote these words at an age in human history when there were great accomplishments being made in science, medicine, engineering, and education. It was much like our time, in that respect. But all of humanity's greatest intellectual achievements would mean nothing, if we miss the most important thing.

Paul goes on in the book of Romans to show us the greatness of God's love. Despite the foolishness of our human rebellion, God sent His Son to die on the cross for our sins, and Christ rose from the dead to give us life. It is a message that is foolish in the eyes of the world, but for those who believe, it is the power of God unto salvation. If God loved us so much, it would be foolish for us not to embrace that love.

Conclusion –

The verses we've looked at this morning urge us not to be a fool.

(1) **Listen to the wisdom of others.** No one expects you to come up with all the answers on your own. A wise person has a teachable spirit. His ears are open, always eager to learn. He doesn't have to be the one speaking all the time. Even a wise person can learn something new. The moment we stop learning, is the moment we stop acting wise.

(2) **Learn from your mistakes.** We all make them. It is pointless to pretend otherwise. How we handle our blunders says a lot about our character. We can try to make excuses. We can blame others for our failures. We can try to hide them. Or we can acknowledge the mistake, and pray that the Lord would teach us a valuable lesson through that experience. God doesn't waste anything, He can ever redeem the blunders that we make by teaching us something.

(3) **Love the Lord.** Realize how much you need Him, each and every day, how lost we would be without Him. Depend on Him for strength. Look to Him for guidance. Seek His wisdom.