

Characters
of the
Psalms & Proverbs

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There are all kinds of people in this world, and many ways that they can be classified. Aesthetically we have tall people or short people, thin people or fat people, beautiful people or ugly people. Mentally we have smart people or dumb people, quick-witted people or slow-minded people, bright people or dim people. Physically we have strong people or weak people, muscular people or frail people, brawny people or scrawny people, etc. The list could go on and on; the possibilities of classification could be endless. Interestingly, the Bible has a way of cataloging people as well. Fortunately for us, it is done by much better means. Throughout the many pages of the written Word of God you will find that people are not filed in such a superficial manner. A person is not judged upon his or her height, weight, or looks. The Spirit of God searches the innermost being of man in order to label him correctly. This process can be seen extensively within the books of the Psalms and Proverbs. From these examples one can only conclude that it appears as though God is much more concerned with the state of one's mind and soul than He is with the things the eyes of man seem to focus upon. As followers of Christ and those who possess the "mind of Christ" (1 Cor. 2:16) we must attempt to see people through the eyes of Christ. The best way to begin this task is found within the Word of God. As we embark upon this journey set before us we must stay upon the paths that the Lord has marked - these winding trails of the Psalms and footpaths of the Proverbs. In fact, perhaps it is not the destination that will bring the answers that we seek; perhaps it will be the characters we meet along the way.

The first two characters we meet live within the mind. The mind. Man's best friend or worst enemy? I suppose the answer to this question can be quite subjective. The human mind is intrinsically powerful but to whom do you submit that

power? Will it be an instrument of God or a tool of the Devil? Amongst this tapestry of many questions that are woven into the creation of our very existence there is one patch that the Lord placed with His very own hands. This fine piece of cloth is double sided and can be worn in either fashion. Expose the one side and you will be clothed in the robes of a wise man, expose the other and you will be draped in the rags of a fool. The fool or the wise man; with options come choices. All of us shall decide; whether it is by will or action. Throughout the many chapters of the Psalms and Proverbs we are introduced, and eventually become well acquainted with, both of these characters. For some of us, these verses will serve as a warning to beware of the choices we make and the things to come. To others, these same verses are a wake up call of what we have done and the things that already are. Either way, a further exploration of these passages will prove to be educational for all, and are indeed meant to help mold us into beings who truly are children of God.

A sucker, a chump, a dupe, a sap . . . a fool. Webster's defines a fool as a person lacking in judgment or prudence¹. Another possible definition provided is a harmlessly deranged person or one lacking in common powers of understanding¹. As we delve further into this subject we will find that in many ways Webster's definitions of a fool are similar to those found in the Bible. Yet, we will find that there are many ways in which they differ as well. It is inarguable that a fool is someone who lacks judgment or prudence, is deranged or lacks understanding. These are all different ways that one can describe, or define, a fool. But, are these attributes truly lacking or are they simply not

¹ Merriam-Webster - online dictionary: www.m-w.com

being employed? Is this state of being truly harmless or is it something we must avoid at all costs?

Exactly how does the authors of Psalms and Proverbs describe a fool.

Amongst the many passages the following are a few that seem to be of utmost importance in our attempt to define a fool through the eyes of Christ.

- A fool says in his heart “There is no God!” They are corrupt; their deeds are vile. (Ps 14:1)
- Fools do not understand. (Ps 92:6)
- Fools despise wisdom and discipline. (Prov. 1:7)
- Fools hate knowledge. (Prov. 1:22)
- A fool dies for lack of judgment. (Prov. 10:21)
- Fools find pleasure in evil conduct. (Prov. 10:23)
- A fool shows his annoyance at once. (Prov. 12:16)

Is a person labeled a fool because of what they do, or do they do what they do because they are a fool? What comes first, the foolish person or the foolish action?

The verses previously stated are but a few descriptions that can be found in regards to the fool and we can already see a pattern being formed. Fools are not only defined by what they do but also by how they think. It is the inward thoughts of a man, which are expressed through his actions that make him a fool. This can be seen most clearly in the first verse provided above. “A fool says in his heart ‘There is no God!’ They are corrupt; their deeds are vile.” There is a process expressed in this statement. It begins with a person who inwardly believes there is no God, this thought brings corruption to the whole person, and finally culminates in vile deeds. So truly, through these verses we can

see that there is a definite connection between one's action and one's thoughts, but it all begins in the mind. The foolish thought definitely comes before the foolish action. Another verse that substantiates this theory is Psalms 107:17a, "some become fools through their rebellious ways". In order for a person to *become* a fool they mustn't be born that way. This verse obviously states that a fool is made, not born. Now, what can the future hold for such a person? Well, Proverbs 8:5 exhorts, "you who are simple, gain prudence; you who are foolish, gain understanding". A fool was not born in his present state and he is not condemned to stay in that state. If the Word of God instructs the fool to gain understanding, then there must be a way for him to do so. Unfortunately, that process would contain sufficient information to constitute an essay of its own. Seeing that our goal through this paper is not to bring change to the fool we must not digress on to this topic. So, is there an alternative to this mindset - this lifestyle?

Enter the wise man. Again, as we look to Webster's the word wise is defined as one who is marked by deep understanding, keen discernment, and a capacity for sound judgment². A second definition, and my personal favorite, is a person evidencing or hinting at the possession of inside information². Here we have a person who seems to be the exact opposite of the fool. Yet, as much as this definition seems to agree with Scripture where does it not? Webster's discusses the possession of inside information but we will find that the Lord places the emphasis not so much on us knowing the Word but on us living it out. "Your commands make me wiser than my enemies, for they are ever with me." (Ps 119:98). It is not the knowledge of God's commands that makes the Psalmist wise. Wisdom is truly found in one who finds the

² Merriam-Webster - online dictionary: www.m-w.com

truth of God and then lives it out. If I knew that fire would burn me but then I still walked through the flames, I would still be burnt. This is where knowledge and wisdom differ. Knowledge is cognitive; wisdom is experiential. Some of the smartest men in this world have also been the biggest fools. In fact, the one who knows the truth yet does not follow it would be considered the biggest fool of all. So, the wise man does not just possess inside information but he puts it into practice. How one attains this information seems to be quite clear.

- Listen to my instruction and be wise. (Prov. 8:33a)
- Instruct a wise man and he will be wiser still. (Prov. 9:9a)
- But he who holds his tongue is wise. (Prov. 10:19b)
- But a wise man listens to advice. (Prov. 12:15b)

The text speaks for itself. Wisdom is attained by ones own silence and willingness to not only listen but obey the words being spoken. There also seems to be an element of humility found within the wise man³. He does not see himself to be above the person who is speaking into his life. He is able to quietly hear the words being delivered and apply them appropriately to his life.

With this basic introduction to these characters we are now able to decide whether or not the fool is truly harmless. Does it matter which lifestyle we adopt? What will the outcome be for each?

We could go through an almost limitless number of verses that will expound upon the benefits of the wise man; to himself and others. Yet, the positive side

³ Jamieson, Fausset, & Brown; Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible: online – www.crosswalk.com

of wisdom, practically and spiritually, is obvious. Instead, let us look at this situation from another angle. What are the detriments of being the fool?

- And the complacency of fools will destroy them. (Prov. 1:32b)
- But a chattering fool comes to ruin. (Prov. 10:8b)
- But fools die for lack of judgment. (Prov. 10:21b)

Destruction. . . ruin . . . death. This is the ultimate outcome of the fool. These are but a few reasons why they shall be destroyed. In just these three verses we see that the fool is brought to ruin through his complacency, inability to listen, and an utter lack of judgment. However, these are simply the symptoms behind the true disease. The fool comes to complete destruction simply because he is a fool. Now, one might think that if a person so desires to live in such a manner that it will be to their harm alone. Yet the Scriptures would differ in this opinion. Proverbs 13:20 states, “He who walks with the wise grows wise, but a companion of fools suffers harm.” The fool not only brings harm to himself but to all who associate with him. On the other hand, wisdom seems to be attained through osmosis. Being in the company of the wise will bring wisdom into your life.

We can conclusively see that the Lord defines men in a particular way. A line has been drawn in the sand. Yet, he has given us all the tools that we need in order to choose which side of that line we will be found. Shall we take the steps that lead to wisdom or shall we linger in the dark recess of a foolish world.

There is another way in which the Lord measures man and that is in the condition of his soul.

Men define the term wicked as one who is morally very bad, disposed to or marked by mischief, or disgustingly unpleasant⁴. Time and time again we see the vileness of the wicked played out through Scriptures. Throughout the Psalms the authors are constantly speaking of destroying the wicked, breaking their arms, burning their crops, and a plethora of other violent solutions. Obviously the ways of the wicked are not far from the way they have been defined by the “secular” world. Their actions are so vile that the men of God cry out for their destruction all throughout the pages of the Bible. Well, has the Lord heard the cry of His children? Will there be vengeance upon these horrible people?

- The LORD does not let the righteous go hungry but he thwarts the craving of the wicked. (Prov. 10:13)
- But the name of the wicked will rot. (Prov. 10:7b)
- But violence overwhelms the mouth of the wicked. (Prov. 10:11b)

The possible verses go on and on. There will be a day of reckoning for the wicked.

Their deeds will not go unpunished. In fact Scripture states this very thing, “Be sure of this: The wicked will not go unpunished, but those who are righteous will go free.”

(Prov. 11:21). With this last verse we are introduced to the final character of our journey – righteousness. Interestingly enough it is defined as acting in accord with divine or moral law: free from guilt or sin⁴. Interestingly, this definition is identical to the one the Bible proposes. The only difference between the two viewpoints is probably the acquisition of righteousness. Where a worldly man would attempt to act in accord with divine or moral law in his own strength a spiritual man would not only attempt but also

⁴ Merriam-Webster - online dictionary: www.m-w.com

succeed in his goal through faith. As Christians we believe that it was Christ who lived in accord to the Holy moral law of God and that through faith in the perfection of His sacrifice we will find freedom from guilt and sin. So what do the righteous benefit according to Scripture?

- For the LORD watches over the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish. (Ps. 1:6)
- For surely, O LORD, you bless the righteous; you surround them with your favor as with a shield. (Ps. 5:12)
- There they are, overwhelmed with dread, for God is present in the company of the righteous. (Ps. 14:5)

There are so many verses that cover the benefits of righteousness but we have covered the general extent of what it is they receive. To state it simply, it is the Lord. Just as the Lord stated to Aaron in Numbers 18:20; “I am your share and your inheritance” so does He call out through the rest of His Word to the righteous. They shall inherit the Lord and all the favor that such an inheritance entails while the wicked will inherit His wrath and vengeance.