

The “Fool” of Wisdom Literature

by Wayne Goff

“Even when a fool walks along the way, he lacks wisdom, and he shows everyone that he is a fool” (Ecclesiastes 10:3).

The Hebrew word translated “fool” in Ecclesiastes 10 is found 69 times in wisdom literature (Psalms—Ecclesiastes). The word *properly* means “fat” and is used *figuratively* to mean “stupid, silly, or insolent” [*Strong’s Hebrew Dictionary*]. There are many in our country today who fit this description and are thus “fools” in the eyes of God and His people!

A fool is known by his walk (Ecclesiastes 10:3), by his know-it-all attitude (Proverbs 15:2), by his multitude of words (Ecclesiastes 10:2), by his love of spreading slander (Proverbs 10:18), by his love of evil (Proverbs 13:19), by his unwillingness to be rebuked or taught (Proverbs 8:5; 14:33), by his love of deceiving others (Proverbs 14:8), and by scoffing at things he should honor (Proverbs 17:21).

The “fool” is not an ignorant soul with no intelligence, but one who has wasted his opportunities and enjoys being a worthless fellow. This is why he has no use for God because God would cause him to think, reflect, and become responsible!

We have a saying, “Better to keep one’s mouth shut and have people think you to be a fool than to open it and remove all doubt.” Solomon is undoubtedly the author of the thought because Proverbs 17:28 states, *“Even a fool is counted wise when he holds his peace; when he shuts his lips, he is considered perceptive.”*

Perhaps the saddest quality of the “fool” is that he is unteachable! *“A fool has no delight in understanding, but in expressing his own heart”* (Proverbs 18:2). Once again we have a saying, “God has given us two ears and one mouth so that we should listen twice as much as we speak.” I think of this when listening to talk radio or TV about sports or politics! Every pundit is an “expert” on the subject and his word is the final one. It really irritates me when a loud-mouthed, know-it-all is talking as fast as he can talk, saying things that amount to little or nothing, while trying to “sound” like a genius. Yes, I quickly turn off the channel or change the radio station. *“So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be **swift to hear, slow to speak**, ... (and) If anyone among you thinks he is religious, and does not **bridle his tongue** but deceives his own heart, this one’s religion is useless”* (James 1:19, 26). I am supremely conscious of this when preaching, teaching, or even writing! And I wonder how **foolish** a country we have become when we spend so much time on sports and politics, and so little time on the wisdom of God found in His eternal word. There was a time in America where things were the exact opposite — people went to church on Sunday, honored God with their time, lives and possessions, tried to live as the Bible dictates, and filled the stadiums and auditoriums around the country to listen to God’s Word instead of drivel.

For example, Ryman Auditorium in Nashville, Tennessee is better known as the home of The Grand Ole Opry (1943-1974) than the venue of “Hardeman’s Tabernacle Sermons” (March 28—April 16, 1922). Brother N.B. Hardeman preached to capacity crowds (2,362 seats) during the presentation of the simple gospel of Christ. There are churches of Christ all over the Nashville area as a result. Can you imagine that being done today?

Solomon was totally disgusted with the “fool” who has turned away from God, and so we are today. If only they could see themselves as God and others see them. Dear reader, are you a “fool,” biblically-speaking? Or do you revere and obey God?

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