

Fools: from the book of Proverbs in the Bible

In our lives and in our relationships it is important to recognize fools and those who proclaim themselves to be wise but are not. If we know how to deal with them we will have greater peace and sympathy.

Let's take a few moments to think about whether there are people in our family, among our kinfolk, co-workers, acquaintances or friends who behave like fools. Here are some ways to identify them.

"Whoever spreads slander is a fool." (Pr 10:18, NAB)

"Fools take no delight in understanding, but only in displaying what they think." (Pr 18:2, NAB)

"The lips of fools walk into a fight." (Pr 18:6, NAB)

"It is to one's honor to avoid strife, but every fool is quick to quarrel." (Pr 20:3, NIV)

"As dogs return to their vomit, so fools repeat their folly." (Pr 26:11, NAB)

How to distinguish fools from the wise or prudent

"The way of fools is right in their own eyes, but those who listen to advice are the wise." (Pr 12:15, NAB)

"Fools show their annoyance at once, but the prudent overlook an insult." (Pr 12:16, NIV)

"All who are prudent act with knowledge, but fools expose their folly." (Pr 13:16, NIV)

"A fool's mouth lashes out with pride, but the lips of the wise protect them." (Pr 14:3, NIV)

"The wisdom of the prudent is to give thought to their ways, but the folly of fools is deception." (Pr 14:8, NIV)

"The wise person is cautious and turns from evil; the fool is reckless and gets embroiled. The quick-tempered make fools of themselves." (Pr 14:16-17, NAB)

"The crown of the wise is their wisdom, but folly is the garland of fools." (Pr 14:24, RSV)

"The heart of the wise seeks knowledge, a fool's mouth feeds on folly." (Pr 15:14, NJB)

"Those who trust in themselves are fools, but those who walk in wisdom are kept safe." (Pr 28:26, NIV)

"Fools give vent to all their anger; but the wise, biding their time, control it." (Pr 29:11, NAB)

How not to handle a fool

"Fools despise wisdom and instruction." (Pr 1:7, NIV)

"A single reprimand does more for a discerning person than a hundred lashes for a fool." (Pr 17:10, NAB)

"Better to meet a bear robbed of her cubs than a fool bent on folly." (Pr 17:12, NIV)

"Do not speak in the hearing of fools; they will despise the wisdom of your words." (Pr 23:9, NAB)

"Wisdom is too high for a fool." (Pr 24:7, RSV)

"Snow no more befits the summer, nor rain the harvest-time, than honours befit a fool." (Pr 26:1, NJB)

"A thorn branch in a drunkard's hand, such is a proverb in the mouth of fools." (Pr 26:9, NJB)

"Though you grind a fool in a mortar, grinding them like grain with a pestle, you will not remove their folly from them." (Pr 27:22, NIV)

"If a wise person disputes with a fool, there is railing and ridicule but no resolution." (Pr 29:9, NAB)

How to deal with fools

Before all else, heed Jesus' warning: "You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'You shall not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.' But I tell you that anyone who is angry with a brother or sister will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to a brother or sister, 'Raca,' is answerable to the court. And anyone who says, 'You fool!' will be in danger of the fire of hell." (Mt 5:21-22, NIV)

The book of Proverbs puts it this way: "Whoever mocks the poor reviles their Maker; whoever rejoices in their misfortune will not go unpunished." (Pr 17:5, NAB)

In the above quotation, "the poor" are not just those who have few monetary and material possessions, but also those who are poorly gifted in psychological maturity, pleasant personalities, or wisdom.

In the following Gospel reading, the "little ones" can also be applied to the same group of individuals. "See that you do not despise one of these little ones; for I tell you that in heaven their angels always behold the face of my Father who is in heaven." (Mt 18:10, RSV)

Here is what we can do. First, love them. Jesus commands: "Love one another, as I have loved you." (Jn 15:12, NJB)

Second, pray for them. We cannot change the hearts of fools by arguments and exhortations, or by shaming and rebuking. It is only by the grace of God that fools can be transformed to abandon their sin of pride and the desire for self-aggrandizement.

Third, rather than fuming with anger while a fool around us rages on and on with endless complaints and jealous boasting, let us do as these proverbs advise:

"Do not answer fools according to their folly, lest you too become like them." (Pr 26:4, NAB)

"Leave the presence of a fool, for there you do not meet words of knowledge." (Pr 14:7, RSV)