

Romans
Message 23
What is a Fool?
Rom 1:18-32

- 18 For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness;
- 19 Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them.
- 20 For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse:
- 21 Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened.
- 22 Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools,
- 23 And changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things.
- 24 Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonour their own bodies between themselves:
- 25 Who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever. Amen.
- 26 For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections: for even their women did change the natural use into that which is against nature:
- 27 And likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another; men with men working that which is unseemly, and receiving in themselves that recompence of their error which was meet.
- 28 And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient;
- 29 Being filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, debate, deceit, malignity; whisperers,
- 30 Backbiters, haters of God, despiteful, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents,
- 31 Without understanding, covenantbreakers, without natural affection, implacable, unmerciful:
- 32 Who knowing the judgment of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them. KJV

Introduction:

There is a phrase in this text that we dare not pass by without seeking to understand it as well as we possibly can. It is found in v.22, “they became fools,” and it is said about people who thought themselves to be wise, really smart, above average in their ability to perceive and know truth. The phrase is interesting on several levels. It is a translation of only one word but such is the complexity of the Greek language that is sometimes takes a sentence to translate one word.

All of the translations agree on this particular rendering of the word but if one digs a little deeper he finds the scholars handling it this way, “they were convicted of folly” and “the incurred the character of folly.” (The Analytical Greek Lexicon) The Amplified Bible reads, “they made simpletons of themselves.”

This is truly a remarkable thing but we must resist the temptation of assuming we know what this word means in all its depth simply because we have familiarity with the English word, “fool.” The scriptures speak much of both wisdom and foolishness and give us important examples of each.

Now, it is obvious from the text that some of the meaning can be gleaned from the context in which we find the word.

- It is related to ones behavior and attitude in light of knowledge and information.
- Specifically, in our text, it has to do with decisions made in light of knowledge concerning God. And those decisions are obviously unwise.
- We would expect such words and descriptions from a man who is diving deeply into ideas and notions concerning the gospel.

Let us back up and remember some things.

When God created man/woman He formed creatures with a limited physical body and a spirit that would never cease existing.

Try to think about that seriously and rationally for a moment, a being with a measured time on this planet and an eternity somewhere.

Add to that the issue that there were issues concerning this physical life which would be determining factors in the way eternity goes.

Gen 2:16-17

16 And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat:

17 But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die. KJV

I am certain that this ‘death’ about which God spoke had nothing to do primarily with spiritual death and not physical death. They did not die physically when they ate of the fruit but they did die spiritually. I am also convinced that Adam, at least, understood this.

That which they did in this life affected their eternity and it is the same for every one of their children. Everyone of them which inherit eternal life will be people of repentance and faith and every one who ends up with everlasting existence in torment will be those who made other choices. I am speaking as an observer, not suggesting that salvation is by works, but that which happens in this life does affect what happens in eternity.

This, therefore, is the opportunity/problem for men. On the one hand there is the possibility of an eternity that is wonderful beyond imagination and the other possibility is horrible to the infinite degree.

Now, ask yourself the question, “what kind of being/person would choose to consistently live in such a way that guarantees the worst possible outcome to this scenario?”

I am assuming that your answer is “only a fool!”

So, let us ask the scriptures, “what is a fool?”

On the face of it this may sound like a silly question but the scriptures invested a goodly amount of ink and time to record information concerning fools.

I am going to give you a preliminary definition and then look at some passages from the Bible for you to judge if you think the definition fits.

- A Fool is a person who consistently makes decisions contrary to his own best interest spiritually and morally.

1 Sam 26:21

21 Then said Saul, I have sinned: return, my son David: for I will no more do thee harm, because my soul was precious in thine eyes this day: behold, I have played the fool, and have erred exceedingly. KJV

This was one of those moments of mental clarity for Saul after he had been given the information that the kingdom was going to be taken from him under the discipline of God.

You may remember that back in chapter 15 of 1 Samuel Saul had violated a specific set of orders from God through the prophet Samuel. He had been told to go to war against the Amalekites and destroy them all, including their cattle. Saul had allowed the people to keep the best of the cattle and he had kept Agag the king alive as a trophy to bring back for his own publicity. Samuel had confronted him over his disobedience and had communicated to him that the kingdom was to be taken from him.

Samuel had gone to Bethlehem and anointed David to be king and an evil spirit had descended upon Saul which cause him to become terribly depressed and at time murderous. David had been brought to the palace because of his talent at playing music which would relieve Saul’s depression at times.

But ultimately the evil spirit was able to motivate Saul to attempt to murder David and he had to flee from the palace and live as an outlaw for several years during which Saul had carried on two different campaigns to fin him and kill him. This story was taken from the end of the second campaign where David proved to him again that he intended Saul no harm.

In this small window of clarity that Saul enjoyed he confessed himself to be a fool. And what was the nature of his foolishness? He continually made decisions against his own welfare and especially his own spiritual welfare.

Let us look at some other scriptures that reference the fool.

Ps 14

1 The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God. They are corrupt, they have done abominable works, there is none that doeth good. KJV

He denies God even though, as Paul has said plainly, He has clearly revealed Himself. How can the denier of God prepare himself for eternity?

And, yet, his eternity is just as certain as that of the believer.

Ps 92:1-8

1 It is a good thing to give thanks unto the LORD, and to sing praises unto thy name, O most High:
2 To shew forth thy lovingkindness in the morning, and thy faithfulness every night,
3 Upon an instrument of ten strings, and upon the psaltery; upon the harp with a solemn sound.
4 For thou, LORD, hast made me glad through thy work: I will triumph in the works of thy hands.
5 O LORD, how great are thy works! and thy thoughts are very deep.
6 **A brutish man knoweth not; neither doth a fool understand this.**
7 When the wicked spring as the grass, and when all the workers of iniquity do flourish; it is that they shall be destroyed for ever:
8 But thou, LORD, art most high for evermore. KJV

Ps 94:1-11

1 O LORD God, to whom vengeance belongeth; O God, to whom vengeance belongeth, shew thyself.
2 Lift up thyself, thou judge of the earth: render a reward to the proud.
3 LORD, how long shall the wicked, how long shall the wicked triumph?
4 How long shall they utter and speak hard things? and all the workers of iniquity boast themselves?
5 They break in pieces thy people, O LORD, and afflict thine heritage.
6 They slay the widow and the stranger, and murder the fatherless.
7 Yet they say, The LORD shall not see, neither shall the God of Jacob regard it.
8 **Understand, ye brutish among the people: and ye fools, when will ye be wise?**
9 He that planted the ear, shall he not hear? he that formed the eye, shall he not see?
10 He that chastiseth the heathen, shall not he correct? he that teacheth man knowledge, shall not he know?
11 The LORD knoweth the thoughts of man, that they are vanity. KJV

We could line up scriptures for the next hour to make the point here. God sees everything. There is nothing hidden from Him, not even the thoughts of man.

To behave as if nothing makes any difference, as if one could escape giving account of himself in eternity, to continually make decisions against one's own eternal spiritual interest, is the word of a fool.

Prov 1:5-7

- 5 A wise man will hear, and will increase learning; and a man of understanding shall attain unto wise counsels:
6 To understand a proverb, and the interpretation; the words of the wise, and their dark sayings.
7 The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge: but fools despise wisdom and instruction. KJV

Prov 12:15

- 15 The way of a fool is right in his own eyes: but he that hearkeneth unto counsel is wise. KJV

It is a consistent quality of fools that they refuse to listen to wise counsel. Those who do are spared the consequences of foolish decisions, determinations against the interest of their souls.

Paul made the point that God, in order to aid man in his preparation for eternity and the Day of Death (which is the First Day of Forever), has given man tools to use in his preparations for that day. He has given man,

Mind

Information

Conscience with which to use them both

But Paul in our text in Rom 1 has made a serious point about fools.

Rom 1:28

28 And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, KJV

One of the translations reads, "they did not approve of God so as to hold Him in their knowledge."

It is almost inconceivable but we are watching people every day who disapprove of God and what He has revealed.

God gave man the ability to evaluate moral issues and He gave this as help in the choosing of Good over Evil.

-But they have twisted that gift, using it to criticize and reject God, to judge Him as wrong in His Judgments and in His Commands. It is insanity for sure but that is why they are called 'fools.'

Now, is that or is that not a choice against one's eternal spiritual welfare?

Have you ever considered the importance of a person's ability to properly evaluate himself/herself?

What we wear

What we look like

What we smell like

How our words seem to others.

Then, there is the importance of being able to evaluate one's own thoughts and feelings properly, objectively, and make proper judgment calls concerning them.

There is a need, an absolute need, in every person to excel at self-criticism, to consider every thought, every emotion, every intention in light of both God's Word and Reason.

At the end of the day we depend in important ways on our ability to notice ourselves and make good decisions based on what we see.

22 Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools,

Here is the real issue, they lost the capacity for objective self-criticism which is only truly known in proximity to God. It is Integrity in its Pure Form and we will speak more about that later.

At the end of the day we depend upon our ability to notice ourselves and make proper evaluations even harsh criticisms our ourselves and our behaviors. Those who are blessed and fortunate enough to have had godly fathers can often hear his voice speaking in their minds concerning foolish actions and decisions.

The scriptures show us that the nearer a person is to God in his thoughts, perceptions and emotions the better he is at making correct moral and spiritual observations and decisions.

Moses had to be taught this, if you remember, at the Burning Bush but he had not yet been brought to the spiritual place that he would ultimately come. God had to tell him that the place was Holy and command his to remove his shoes in humility but once he got the principle he had it.

Isaiah, on the other hand, was better taught and trained at that moment when God revealed Himself to him.

Isa 6:1-5

- 1 In the year that king Uzziah died I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple.
- 2 Above it stood the seraphims: each one had six wings; with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly.
- 3 And one cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy, is the LORD of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory.
- 4 And the posts of the door moved at the voice of him that cried, and the house was

- filled with smoke.
- 5 Then said I, Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts. KJV

He not only *saw* truth but he *embraced and confessed it*. He could see who and what he was and he could make the decision to operate in light of that revelation to him.

You must recognize from this text that he apparently did not see these things which this clarity before this moment. He may have believed and owned them but here he saw them in absolute clarity.

In chapter 10 of the book of Daniel, that prophet saw and was confronted by a being whose description fits very closely that of the Lord Jesus Whom John saw on Patmos.

Dan 10:5-6

- 5 Then I lifted up mine eyes, and looked, and behold a certain man clothed in linen, whose loins were girded with fine gold of Uphaz:
6 His body also was like the beryl, and his face as the appearance of lightning, and his eyes as lamps of fire, and his arms and his feet like in colour to polished brass, and the voice of his words like the voice of a multitude. KJV

Rev 1:13-15

- 13 And in the midst of the seven candlesticks one like unto the Son of man, clothed with a garment down to the foot, and girt about the paps with a golden girdle.
14 His head and his hairs were white like wool, as white as snow; and his eyes were as a flame of fire;
15 And his feet like unto fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace; and his voice as the sound of many waters. KJV

Daniel's reaction was very much like that of John.

Dan 10:7-9

- 7 And I Daniel alone saw the vision: for the men that were with me saw not the vision; but a great quaking fell upon them, so that they fled to hide themselves.
8 Therefore I was left alone, and saw this great vision, and there remained no strength in me: for my comeliness was turned in me into corruption, and I retained no strength.
9 Yet heard I the voice of his words: and when I heard the voice of his words, then was I in a deep sleep on my face, and my face toward the ground. KJV

But there was a spiritual/moral/psychological reaction as well.

Dan 10:15-17

- 15 And when he had spoken such words unto me, I set my face toward the ground, and I became dumb.
16 And, behold, one like the similitude of the sons of men touched my lips: then I

opened my mouth, and spake, and said unto him that stood before me, O my lord, by the vision my sorrows are turned upon me, and I have retained no strength.
17 For how can the servant of this my lord talk with this my lord? for as for me, straightway there remained no strength in me, neither is there breath left in me.
KJV

He was totally humbled in the Presence of the Lord, a perception that is always made of one's self when in such a situation.

Even for those who never have had such a vision the testimony of all of the true saints of God has always been that the nearer they come to Him the more aware they are of their own inabilities and failures. They elect to confess themselves to be sinners and fall upon the Mercy of God which is always a wise decision.

Real encounters with God greatly improve the perception of men concerning Him and concerning themselves. They become wise.

In drawing near to God we see ourselves clearly and are freed from pride, brought low in humility.

We see and understand how to pray for ourselves and how to ask others to pray for us.

We are delivered from being a fool.

Many of God's wise people have done foolish things and David was no exception. But he wrote so much and was so honest that he left for us real insight concerning wisdom, the balance between the purposes of holiness and honest self awareness.

In order to fully develop his thoughts we would need to completely exegete the 119th Psalm, which we have done before, but we will take just a couple of sections to demonstrate the wisdom that exuded from the man.

Ps 119:1-8

- 1 Blessed are the undefiled in the way, who walk in the law of the LORD.
- 2 Blessed are they that keep his testimonies, and that seek him with the whole heart.
- 3 They also do no iniquity: they walk in his ways.
- 4 Thou hast commanded us to keep thy precepts diligently.
- 5 O that my ways were directed to keep thy statutes!
- 6 Then shall I not be ashamed, when I have respect unto all thy commandments.
- 7 I will praise thee with uprightness of heart, when I shall have learned thy righteous judgments.
- 8 I will keep thy statutes: O forsake me not utterly. KJV

Here he identified what blessedness is, the choices and behaviors of the wise, vs. 1-3

He affirmed the Prerogative of Deity, to command and to demand obedience, v. 4.

Then, he confessed his own weakness and failure as well as his profound humiliation that he did not measure up to the standard, vs 5,6.

He expressed his goals, intentions and ambitions, vs. 7-8a

Even as he considered the alternative, v.8b.

This is the way the wise mind works.

Ps 119:9-16

- 9 Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? by taking heed thereto according to thy word.
10 With my whole heart have I sought thee: O let me not wander from thy commandments.
11 Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee.
12 Blessed art thou, O LORD: teach me thy statutes.
13 With my lips have I declared all the judgments of thy mouth.
14 I have rejoiced in the way of thy testimonies, as much as in all riches.
15 I will meditate in thy precepts, and have respect unto thy ways.
16 I will delight myself in thy statutes: I will not forget thy word. KJV

Here again is honest self-assessment. He is in need of being cleansed because he has not fully kept nor obeyed the commands of God, v.1. He was worried about his sins, v. 11b, and he had a real concern about his ignorance of God's Word and God's will, v. 12b.

Nevertheless, he was committed to the worship of God and obedience to Him, v.13-16.

Here again is the evidence of wisdom at work in a soul.

To what purpose is this contrast between "fool" and "wise"?

The scriptures constantly contrast the terms and consistently point out that each is the opposite of the other.

Prov 3:35

35 The wise shall inherit glory: but shame shall be the promotion of fools. KJV

Prov 12:15

15 The way of a fool is right in his own eyes: but he that hearkeneth unto counsel is wise. KJV

Prov 13:20

20 He that walketh with wise men shall be wise: but a companion of fools shall be destroyed. KJV

Prov 14:16

16 A wise man feareth, and departeth from evil: but the fool rageth, and is confident. KJV

Prov 15:2

- 2 The tongue of the wise useth knowledge aright: but the mouth of fools poureth out foolishness. KJV

The wise person is the anti-fool and he is wise for the very reason the fool is not.

The wise person constantly makes decision on the basis of what is best for his eternal welfare.

Now, he must have the help of God for sure, but the fool sees that just as much as the wise man does. But the wise man cries out to God for that help and persists in crying out until God grants his request.

This is what Jesus taught in the stories of the importunate neighbor and the unjust judge. You remember those stories don't you.

Luke 11:5-8

- 5 And he said unto them, Which of you shall have a friend, and shall go unto him at midnight, and say unto him, Friend, lend me three loaves;
6 For a friend of mine in his journey is come to me, and I have nothing to set before him?
7 And he from within shall answer and say, Trouble me not: the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot rise and give thee.
8 I say unto you, Though he will not rise and give him, because he is his friend, yet because of his importunity he will rise and give him as many as he needeth. KJV

Luke 18:1-6

- 1 And he spake a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint;
2 Saying, There was in a city a judge, which feared not God, neither regarded man:
3 And there was a widow in that city; and she came unto him, saying, Avenge me of mine adversary.
4 And he would not for a while: but afterward he said within himself, Though I fear not God, nor regard man;
5 Yet because this widow troubleth me, I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me.
6 And the Lord said, Hear what the unjust judge saith. KJV

The wise person knows that he will perish unless God helps him.... so whatever level of persistence is needed he summons and he does not stop. The fool decides to accept a hideous fate rather than persist in seeking after God.

We are shown in Matt 25 a picture of the Great Judgment and of mankind divided into two great groups, the 'goats' and the 'sheep'.

For our purposes let us think about them as 'the fools' and 'the wise.'

The verses we have read today point to the reality that the 'wise' will inherit everlasting life

while the ‘fools’ will be forever rejected by God.

Today is the day for every one of us to resolve to weigh every issue in terms of the spiritual welfare of our souls, the souls of others and the Glory of God. I think you will find that the three issues are actually the same.

But one thing you will find, *if you should decide to make such a commitment*, is how far we all really are from true wisdom.