

### **The Simple, The Scorned and The Fool**

If you wake up one day and you have the chills (when it's 80 degrees outside), fever, a headache, muscle aches and joint pain, what do you have? Most of us would say, "I've got the flu. I'll take some pain reliever, drink lots of fluids and in a few days, I'll be over it." But what if you do that and in a few weeks the symptoms are back, only they're magnified and now you also have a stiff neck and extreme fatigue? This exact scenario happened to our son Jesse when he was about 11-years-old. His neck hurt so bad the second time that he could barely lift his head off the pillow. We'd actually taken him to several doctors who said it was just the flu. But on Sunday here at church, Dr. Tom Turbiak asked about Jesse and when I told him how severe his neck pain was, Tom said, "I'm working in the emergency room at Bristol hospital this afternoon. Why don't you bring him in?"

We did and Tom prayed with us and then gave Jesse a thorough examination. He found nothing conclusive but asked that we wait in the exam room while he visited another patient. While we were waiting, Jesse said, "Hey Dad, look at my stomach." There was this large red circle across his stomach. When Tom came back in, we said, "We think we know what's wrong. Jess has the red circle disease!" Tom said, "Why do you say that?" We said, "Because a few minutes ago, there was this red circle on his stomach." Tom looked and the circle was still visible but very faint. He said, "Well, God just answered our prayer and showed us what's wrong with Jesse. He has Lyme disease. A red circle like this is a classic symptom."

Jesse got the appropriate medication and was feeling normal in a few days. He's never had any recurrence of the disease. By knowing the specific symptoms, Dr. Tom was able to apply the cure.

How healthy are you... spiritually? Do you ever feel a weakness in your spirit: fatigued, rundown, unmotivated to read God's Word or do God's Word? Is it just a common spiritual flu or is it something more serious? Today, in the Book of Proverbs, we're going to look at three sets of symptoms of different forms of spiritual disease. If you don't know the specific symptoms of each, you may never know the right medication to bring the cure. First, we are shown...

#### **I. The Symptoms of the Spiritual Disease of Being Simple.**

Playwright George Bernard Shaw said, "If the other planets are inhabited, they're using the earth as their insane asylum." The word "simple" is used fifteen times in the book of Proverbs. But this word in Hebrew doesn't refer to someone with a low IQ. It denotes those who are easily persuaded or who "lack judgment" (Prov. 9:4). It's talking about a person of any level of intelligence who lacks wisdom. Gary Larson's *Far Side*, catches the biblical idea of being simple with this cartoon:

[Show "Midvale School for the Gifted" cartoon]

The opposite of being simple in Scripture isn't being intelligent but being prudent which means someone with "good judgment." But "good judgment" is always attached to a scale, a template of what is "good." So whether you have good

judgment or not depends on your definition of what is good. The Bible defines what is “good” as that which is in line with God’s Word, which is God’s template of good behavior. But Warren Wiersbe points out that:

We’re living at a time when people who have convictions are considered bigots if not ignoramuses. It’s popular and politically correct to be open-minded and uncritical of what other people think or believe. ...most people don’t believe in absolutes... Except when it comes to cashing a check... [or] getting a prescription... [or] getting directions...<sup>1</sup> Prov. 14:15 says:

**A simple man believes anything,  
but a prudent man gives thought to his steps.**

Some of the most intelligent people in history have actually been simpletons because they rejected the Word of God as their template, their measuring rod for life. The Unabomber, Ted Kaczynski, graduated from Harvard and went on to kill three people and maim 23 because, though he was a brilliant mathematician, his moral code was upside down. Jeffrey Skilling graduated from Harvard Business School in the top 5% of his class and went on to become the CEO of Enron Corporation, where in 2006 he was convicted of masterminding a massive accounting fraud that put him in jail for 24 years and collapsed the company. While he was at Harvard Business School, not one business ethics course was required.

What did these two men have in common? They were both extremely intelligent but, because they focused their intelligence in the wrong direction, they became nothing more than intelligent criminals, men who caused great suffering and pain.

My grandmother never went to college. She spoke broken English and spent most of her life caring for and raising children – first her younger siblings, then working as a nanny, then raising her own children and finally raising the children of her youngest son when his wife left him and ran off with a traveling salesman. But Annie Abramson was no simpleton! In the small Midwestern church I grew up in, if a woman had a difficult marriage or was unsure about how to be a good mom, or if they were depressed or brokenhearted, people at our church would say, “Why don’t you go and have coffee with Annie.” And Annie would sit at her kitchen table with a cup of coffee and her open Bible and she would feed starving souls Swedish Coffee Bread and eternal wisdom from a loving God.

What would the world say today about what happened at my grandmother’s kitchen table? They’d say, “Naïve!! Uneducated!! Misinformed!! Dangerous!!” But I know some of the people who sat at that table and they say something different. They say, “I found answers, I found understanding, I found peace because I met Jesus at Annie’s table.” How is that possible? It’s possible because the promises of Proverbs are true:

**My son, if you accept my words and store up my commands within you,  
...then you will understand the fear of the LORD  
and find the knowledge of God.**

**Then you will understand what is right and just and fair –  
every good path.**

**For wisdom will enter your heart,  
and knowledge will be pleasant to your soul. (Prov. 2:1, 5, 9, 10)**

God's words are the cure for the spiritual disease of being simple! Secondly, we see...

## **II. The Symptoms of the Spiritual Disease of Being a Scornful.**

Some diseases, if left untreated, develop into greater, more dangerous illnesses. High blood pressure, if left untreated, can lead to a stroke or heart attack but if treated, those risks can be greatly reduced or eliminated. The spiritual disease of being scornful is a disease that progresses from an untreated case of being simple. Synonyms for "scornful" are words like: mocker, prideful, know-it-all and arrogant. People with high IQs or people with lots of power are very susceptible to this.

Scornful people are unteachable because they believe they're never wrong! If something goes wrong, it's never their fault! If something goes right, they provided the winning edge. If someone doesn't agree with them, they become a target of their temper and their sharp tongue.

Is it possible for a Christian to be scornful? You bet! The scornful Christian is actually quite common. The scornful Christian is the one who mocks the ungodly, who gleefully speaks of how they will be judged one day by God. The scornful Christian is the one who makes fun of another congregation's form of worship or style of music or theological positions. I'm not saying it's wrong to voice a difference of opinion with another Christian, I'm saying that our Father in Heaven is not pleased when we make fun of another brother or sister in Christ. Romans 14 instructs us:

**Who are you to judge someone else's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. And he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand. Therefore let us stop passing judgment on one another. Instead, make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in your brother's way. (Rom. 14: 4, 13)**

Do you have any symptoms of this disease? Do you ever mock other believers? Do you criticize them behind their back? If you have a difference of opinion, fine! Have lunch with them and talk it out, but don't mock them. Proverbs 9 describes the difference between a mocker (who is an immature Christian) and a wise man (who is a mature believer). It says:

**Do not rebuke a mocker or he will hate you;  
Rebuke a wise man and he will love you.  
Instruct a wise man and he will be wiser still;  
Teach a righteous man and he will add to his learning. (Prov. 9: 8, 9)**

If you aren't humble enough to listen to godly criticism, you're a very immature Christian and you need to ask Jesus to help you grow up. But if all you do is give criticism to other Christians, then you are infected with the spiritual disease of scorn and God the Father is not happy with you. Prov. 13:13 says this:

**He who despises the word will be destroyed,  
But he who fears the commandment will be rewarded.**

We need to be very, very careful how we speak about and how we speak to one another as Christians. Even if he has sinned, that person is someone Christ died for and He loves him very, very much. Let's be wise, not scornful with others.

Lastly, we need to see...

## **III. The Symptoms of the Spiritual Disease of Being a Fool.**

The Hebrew words for “fool” or “foolish” are found 74 times in the Book of Proverbs, which is like three times more than any other book in the Bible. There are three Hebrew words that are translated as “fool” or “foolish.” One is *kesyl*, which means someone who is not thinking clearly (meaning ‘biblically’). The second is *ewiyl*, which refers to someone who is morally corrupt or perverted. And the third word is *nabal*, which is the stubborn person, stubborn like a mule. So together, the biblical fool is one who’s not thinking biblically, is morally corrupt or is just plain stubborn like a mule!

And what are the symptoms of someone with this spiritual disease? The Book of Proverbs lists six symptoms. They are:

1. Fools won’t learn from God’s Word – “*The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and discipline.*” (Prov. 1:7) Fools are the ones who read God’s Word but “despise it,” they don’t accept it as authoritative. Do you know people who read the directions for something but think they know a better way? They’re fools!
2. Fools can’t control their speech – “*The tongue of the wise commends knowledge, but the mouth of the fool gushes folly.*” (Prov. 15:2) Biblical fools can’t resist expressing their opinion because they’re so arrogant, they think their opinion is always right. This is not the mark of a genius but the mark of a fool.
3. Fools can’t control their temper – “*A fool shows his annoyance at once, but a prudent man overlooks an insult.*” (Prov. 12:16) If you insult a fool, he will always lose his temper because “his opinion of himself” is all he has. To lose that is to lose everything! A wise man or woman knows that the Father’s opinion of them is much more important so they can receive criticism graciously. How do you deal with an insult?
4. Fools are proud and self-confident. “*He who trusts in himself is a fool, but he who walks in wisdom is kept safe.*” (Prov. 28:26) Isn’t this a fascinating verse? Voices around us today are screaming that we MUST trust ourselves; “you must, you must, you must! It’s the only way to protect your self-esteem!!” This is folly! Your self-esteem will be safe only when you hear the One who created you say of you, “*My beloved is mine, and I am his.*” (Song of Songs 2:16)
5. Fools don’t know how to use wealth properly “*In the house of the wise are stores of choice food and oil, but a foolish man devours all he has.*” (Prov. 21:20) The wise bless themselves and their families by learning practical lessons like how to live on a budget. Fools curse themselves and their families by living undisciplined lives.
6. Fools create problems and bring sorrow, especially to their parents “*A wise son makes a glad father, but a foolish son grief to his mother*” (Prov. 10:1) There’s no age restriction on being wise or being foolish. We’ll talk more about families next week.

A biblical fool, then, is proud and self-confident, has no control over his or her tongue or temper, has out-of-control spending habits and creates huge problems by bringing great sorrow to those around him. This all stems from the fact that they refuse to bow to the authority of God’s Word. So what, if anything, can be done

about an out-of-control, pain-producing, self-destructing whirlwind like the biblical fool? Know anybody who fits this description?

Saul of Tarsus fits this description. Prov. 16:22 says that “...folly brings punishment to fools” and Prov. 5:23 says of the fool, “He will die for lack of discipline, led astray by his own great folly.” And the apostle Paul says that’s exactly what would have happened to him if something miraculous hadn’t happened. Listen to his story: (Gal. 1:13-17)

**For you have heard of my previous way of life... how intensely I persecuted the church of God and tried to destroy it. I was advancing in Judaism beyond many Jews of my own age and was extremely zealous for the traditions of my fathers. But when God, who set me apart from birth and called me by his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son in me... I did not consult any man... but I went immediately into Arabia and later returned to Damascus.**

Do you know a fool like Saul of Tarsus? What should you do? Pray, fast and pray that our gracious God will reveal His Son to him as He did to Saul. Jesus taught His disciples very clearly that they should not hate their enemies, but:

**...Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you... (Matt. 5:44)**

So, I am confident that many disciples were praying for Saul, who easily was their greatest enemy! Their prayers, combined with the convicting power of the Holy Spirit, did their work. Paul said it himself:

**At one time we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures... But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. (Titus 3:3-5a)**

Your fool is not doomed, if you will pray. Jesus loves your fool more than you do. And none of us who are showing signs of spiritual disease are doomed either. His mercy is available to us all. Before we come to this table, will you call out for His mercy right now?

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<sup>i</sup> Warren Wiersbe, *Be Skillful* (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook Publications, 2004), p. 72