

Fools — Wise and Otherwise

by H. A. Ironside

I am going to ask your attention to two passages of Scripture, as I begin this message. We may turn to a number more as we go along. In the book of Proverbs, chapter ten, the last part of verse twenty-one, we read: "Fools die for want of wisdom."

And then in First Corinthians, chapter 3, verse 18: "Let no man deceive himself. If any man among you seemeth to be wise in this world, let him become a fool, that he may be wise."

These verses may seem almost paradoxical, but in the one instance God is speaking from the divine standpoint when He uses the word *fools*. "Fools die for the want of wisdom." A fool is an unthinking, a thoughtless, a careless person, a person without true understanding — in plain English, a "simpleton." And God says these fools die, die in their sins, die under the divine judgment for want of wisdom.

In the other passage the word *fools* is used from the standpoint of ungodly men who look upon those who have been awakened by the Spirit of the Lord and who have turned to God in repentance and have put their trust in the Lord Jesus Christ, as though they were the fools. We know that is a very common thing in this world. We have seen people living in all kinds of sin, ruining their own lives and wrecking the happiness of others. Then when they came to Christ and everything was changed and they lived new lives to the glory of God, unthinking, godless worldlings dubbed them fools. And God says, as it were, "If you are looking at it from this standpoint, if any among you seemeth to be wise in this world, let him become a fool, that he may be wise." So there are unwise fools, and there are wise fools! There are fools for the devil, and there are fools for Christ's sake.

I was on a ferryboat going from Oakland to San Francisco with a group of Christians. Among us was a dear friend of mine who played an English concertina. Our little group sat together in one corner and he played and we joined in singing. I even joined in myself, which is a very rare thing! But we were all enjoying the singing, till a man came up in a perfect rage, and said: "What do

you mean, you fools, singing religious hymns here on the ship?" My friend was an Irishman and he jumped right up and said: "We are fools for Christ's sake; whose fool are you?" The man looked at us and ran. He wasn't waiting to hear any more.

That is the question I would like to ask you. A lot of us through infinite grace are fools for Christ's sake. We are content to be counted fools by the world who rejected our Saviour. But those whom the world counts fools, God counts wise. *Whose fool are you?* Are you a fool for the devil, or are you a fool for God? It is very interesting to run through the Word and trace out many different kinds of fools for the devil of which we read in the Bible. In fact, there are so many of them I wouldn't dare take time tonight to refer to them all. But there are seven that came especially before me as I was threading my way through the Book.

There is the atheistic fool of whom we read in the fourteenth Psalm and the first verse: "The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God," There are a great many people who take that position, and they imagine they are very wise because they come to the conclusion that there is no God. But the Bible does not mince matters concerning these people. God says that people who say there is no God are fools, just imagine anyone with common sense going out at night and looking up into the starry heavens, or in the daytime gazing upon the sun and the marvels of this world, and then saying there is no God! How did it all come into existence then? Can you conceive of a universe without a mind, an intelligent mind, behind that universe? "He that formed the ear, shall he not hear, and he that formed the eye, shall he not see?" Surely. The wise in heart know there is a God, and He has spoken to them not only in creation but in His holy Word. If you deny the existence of God, don't pride yourself on your culture. Don't pride yourself on your intelligence. Don't pride yourself on your understanding. God calls you a fool. "The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God."

Then in the first chapter of the book of Proverbs and the seventh verse we read of another kind of a fool, though he is very closely allied to this one. "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge: but fools despise wisdom and instruction." That is the ignorant fool. God has spoken in His Word. He has given instruction here in His blessed Book. He has shown us the path

of life, He warns of judgment to come, He tells us plainly the way of salvation, and men turn away with a sneer and they say, "I don't believe that book. I don't understand it anyway!" And they are only telling us what they are. God calls them fools! "Fools despise wisdom and instruction." If you have never given heed to the wisdom and instruction God has given in His Word, then this is His name for you tonight, a fool. I have no right to call you that. The Lord. Jesus has told us that we are not to call one another fools. He said, "Whosoever calleth his brother a fool is in danger of hell fire." So I wouldn't dare use that name for you, but I am telling you what God says about you. He Himself who reads the hearts of men says, if people despise His Word, if they despise wisdom and instruction, they are simply fools.

Closely linked with this, we have the opinionated fool, the fool who will not learn anything because he is not teachable. Proverbs 12:15 says: "The way of a fool is right in his own eyes: but he that hearkeneth unto counsel is wise." He is not ready to listen, he is not willing to learn. He understands, he has investigated, and he has come to a conclusion, and he is absolutely certain that his way is right and yet he is living in disobedience to the Word of God! This opinionated fool is shutting his eyes to the great realities of eternity as set forth in the Holy Scriptures. He is a bigot and a fool. God says so.

Then we have, in the fourteenth chapter of the book of Proverbs and the ninth verse, the mocking fool. "Fools make a mock at sin." Did you ever see a fool like that? When the man of God dwells upon the exceeding sinfulness of sin, when the one whose eyes have been opened by the Spirit recognizes the awfulness of sin against a Holy God, fools mock and jeer. They revel in iniquity "as if sin were sin no longer and life were no more vanity." One shudders today when he hears young people, young men and young women, some scarcely out of their teens, some, in fact, still in their teens, mocking and sneering in regard to things that a generation ago people thought of most seriously. Nothing is sacred any more, and these poor young fools, as God's Word designates them, mock at everything pure and everything holy. They ridicule the boy or girl or man or woman who seeks to stand against the abounding temptations of the day. They scoff and sneer if you point out that this or that course of conduct is sinful and wicked in the sight of God. They imagine they are showing their brilliance, their smartness, when thus they

mock at sin. God says, Oh, no, they are just telling out what is in their hearts. It is fools that make a mock at sin, not wise men.

There is a fool of whom we read in the tenth chapter of the book of Proverbs that comes home rather close, I am afraid, to some folks. The eighteenth verse of the tenth chapter of Proverbs: "He that hideth hatred with lying lips, and he that uttereth a slander, is a fool." I wonder if any of us are fools like that! "He that uttereth a slander is a fool." We know it is not very nice to repeat evil tales about people, but I wonder if we ever faced what God says about this thing of uttering slander. "He that uttereth a slander, is a fool." They that pass along an evil story about others, malign their character, seek to wreck their reputation, may think themselves abounding in smartness, but God says they are fools. "The word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart." It finds us out just where we are, and it doesn't mince matters. It calls us by our names and enables us to realize what God thinks of us.

In the twenty-fourth chapter of Luke's Gospel there is a sixth character. In this instance our blessed Lord was actually speaking to believers. Sometimes real believers can do and say very foolish things. He says in the twenty-fourth chapter of Luke and the twenty-fifth verse: "O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken." This is the unbelieving fool, the fool who has the Word of God in his hand, who reads its testimony and yet who refuses to believe it. The blessed Lord designates such a one as a fool, or simpleton.

There is just one other of these characters that I will take time to notice, and that is the covetous fool of whom we read in the twelfth chapter of Luke's Gospel. In verse 16 we are told that the Lord spake a parable unto them saying:

"The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully: and he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits? And he said, This will I do: I will pull down my barns, and Build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry. But God said unto him, Thou

fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided?"

And now listen — "So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God" (vs. 16-21). So our Lord tells us that every man and every woman who is more concerned about getting some of this world's goods, about getting along in life, about making money: about having a nice home, about enjoying the abundance of good things that money will provide, than he is about eternal things, is a fool. He who is not concerned about the home in heaven, who is not concerned about riches that never fail, who is not concerned about laying up treasure! where moth and rust doth not corrupt and where thieves do not break through and steal, is a fool.

I have often told the story, and you have often heard it, of the king's fool. In the oldest days a king had in his court a jester. And this court jester was such an amusing comedian that on one occasion the king handed him a rod and said: "Look, I want you to take that. It is my scepter. I am giving it to you because you are the biggest fool I have ever seen in all my life. I want you to take that and if you ever find a bigger fool than yourself, give it to him." You remember the story, how years went by, and one day a messenger came to the poor fool to say to him, "The king is dying, and he would like to see you before he dies." And the poor fool got the rod and went to see his master. The master said, "Fool, I am going on a long journey, a journey from which I shall never return. I have called you here to say farewell to you." And the fool looked at him and said, "You are going on a long journey; I suppose then you have made inquiry about the place to which you are going and about the conditions that prevail there and that you have made proper preparation for it." "No," said the king, "I have been so busy I haven't had any opportunity or inclination to pay any attention to the life beyond the grave or to prepare for it. I am going on this long journey, but I don't know where I am going." The fool looked at him for a moment and then handed him the rod and said, "Take it. Take it. You gave this to me long ago, because you said I was the biggest fool you had ever known, and you told me to keep it until I found a bigger fool than myself. A man who is going on a journey from which he will never return and doesn't even take the trouble to find out anything about the place where he is going, who is indifferent to his future and the condition of his

soul, is a bigger fool than I am, for I have given attention to these things. Take the rod!"

Who can be a greater fool than the man who thinks only of feathering his nest for time, of getting along in this poor world, and forgets the eternity that is yet to come?

One day a young woman in a pensive state of mind was walking through a conservatory looking at the beautiful flowers, and she took a card out of her purse and wrote a few lines on it.

"To think of summers yet to be
That I am not to see.
To think a weed is yet to bloom
From dust that I shall be!"

She laid it down by one of the plants and went on. A little later somebody else picked it up and wrote a few lines on the other side. The lines he wrote were these:

"To think when Heaven and earth have fled,
And time and seasons o'er,
When all that can die shall be dead
Then I shall die no more!
Oh, what will then my portion be?
Where shall I spend eternity?"

Oh, the folly of the man and the woman who are indifferent to the consideration of their eternal destiny! Dear unsaved one, if tonight the same voice that spoke to the covetous fool of old were to say to you in silence and the darkness: "Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee," what would you have to say for yourself? You know better. You know that Christ has died. You know there is a heaven to gain and a hell to shun. You know that God has provided salvation for you, and you have neglected it. God calls the man or woman who does that a fool.

But now we have the other side. We are told that "the preaching of the cross," which is God's only remedy for sin, "is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God." And the Apostle Paul says that which the world counts folly we have rested our souls upon, and if any man desires wisdom, let him take his place in identification with the Lord Jesus Christ, no matter what the world thinks of Him, and

he will be assured of that wisdom which cometh down from above and which guarantees an eternity of bliss. So he says, "We are fools for Christ's sake." We are willing for the world to look upon us as out of our minds, we are willing that we be accounted as the very off-scouring of the earth because we have turned to Christ, whose precious blood alone can save.

I remember years ago when I was a young Salvation Army officer, we were conducting an open-air meeting, and a man stepped out and told how he had been a drunkard, how he had been down in the depths of sin, and how God in grace had spoken to his soul in the Salvation Army hall, and he, penitent and broken, had yielded himself to Christ and trusted Him as His Saviour. He told how Jesus had given him a new life and a new nature, and now everything was different. As that dear man was giving his testimony, urging others to come to Christ, a very well-dressed man in the audience who looked as if he ought to have known better, stepped forward and cried, "Wake up, old man, you are asleep, you are dreaming! There is nothing in it! Wake up!" A little girl ran through the crowd and caught the man by his coat and said: "Please, sir, don't wake him up! Sir, don't wake him up!" The man looked at her and said, "What do you mean?" "Don't wake him up. That is my daddy, and before he went to sleep like this, he was such a bad daddy. He was drunk nearly all the time and he beat Mama and beat me and we never had enough to eat. But since he began to dream like this everything is different. Now he is so kind, so good, and we have all that we need at home. Please don't wake him up!"

In the eyes of the worldling that man was a fool. But he was a fool for Christ's sake, and he had the wisdom that cometh down from above. Friend, face it honestly for yourself. Are you one of the devil's fools? Or are you willing to be a fool for Christ's sake? Are you going on denying God and rejecting His testimony and priding yourself that you don't need to be instructed by the Word of God, living in self-righteousness and in covetousness and in unbelief? Or do you know Christ as your own personal Saviour? Oh, if you have never known Him before, you can know Him now. I would like to introduce you to Him. I would like to take you by the hand and bring you face to face with our blessed Saviour. I would like to hear you say to Him: "Lord Jesus, I am coming to Thee as a poor sinner; and if Thou canst do for me what Thou hast done for thousands and millions of

others, I am ready to trust Thee tonight." He will take you up in grace and make you a new creature and deliver you from your sins and your folly, and He will give you the true wisdom that comes from above. The world will dub you a fool. The world will think perhaps that you are out of your mind, but you will know that you have the wisdom that is given by God Himself.

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