

**Intro:**

I am giving this lesson the title, “*Anatomy of a Fool*,” although ‘anatomy’ might not be quite the right descriptor.

It is true that a fool has certain characteristics, but I believe Proverbs displays more than a simple description, but rather a portrait of a man on a path that ends in foolishness ... or worse.

The worse has to do with the wicked – those who are greedy, violent, threaten innocent life, practice deceit and cruelty. These are a special class of fools who are filled with cunning but not wisdom, people whose lives are overturned and live in a chaos of their own making.

The fool may not be wicked [in the Proverbs sense], but his philosophy undergirds and supports all the thinking of the wicked.

Kidner says, “The fool meets us under various names.”<sup>1</sup>

We find all the names in Pr 1.22, although there are two other terms for ‘fool’ that occur elsewhere.

Pr 1.22 “How long, O **naïve** ones, will you love being simple-minded?  
And **scoffers** delight themselves in scoffing  
And **fools** hate knowledge?”

- The naïve (simple KJV)
- The scoffer (scorner KJV)
- The fool

**Proposition:** The fool of Proverbs is a comprehensive look at man in varying degrees of spiritual antagonism to the things of God.

**I. The simple**

A. Chief characteristic: **Gullibility** (1.10)

Pr 1.10 My son, if sinners **entice** you, Do not consent.

1. Same word, in verb form, “If sinners fool you...”

<sup>1</sup> Derek Kidner, *Proverbs: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries 17 (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1964), 36.

## 2. Various meanings, depending on Heb. form

- a. Qal: 'to be gullible'
- b. Niphal: 'to allow oneself to be persuaded'
- c. Piel: 'to seduce, mislead, tempt'<sup>2</sup>

"This root meaning of being easily seduced is maintained in its nominal forms."<sup>3</sup>

## B. Characteristics of the simple

Malleable, "capable of being shaped and improved"<sup>4</sup>

### 1. The simple are but youths (1.4; 7.7)

Pr 1.4 To give prudence to the naive,  
To the youth knowledge and discretion,

Pr 7.7 And I saw among the naive,  
*And* discerned among the youths A young man lacking sense,

### 2. The simple lack sense (7.7; 9.4, 16)

Pr 7.7 And I saw among the naive,  
*And* discerned among the youths A young man lacking sense,

Pr 9.4 "Whoever is naive, let him turn in here!"  
To him who lacks understanding she says,

Pr 9.16 "Whoever is naive, let him turn in here,"  
And to him who lacks understanding she says,

<sup>2</sup> Bruce K Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs: Chapters 1-15*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Pub., 2004), 111.

<sup>3</sup> Waltke, 111.

<sup>4</sup> Waltke, 111.

### 3. The simple are **easily seduced** (7.7, 21-22)

Pr 7.7 And I saw among the naive,  
 And discerned among the youths A young man lacking sense,  
 Pr 7.21-22 With her many persuasions she entices him;  
 With her flattering lips she seduces him.  
 22 Suddenly he follows her  
 As an ox goes to the slaughter,  
 Or as *one in* fetters to the discipline of a fool,

“The *locus classicus* of the ‘simple’ is chapter 7, where he is seen at his most typical: aimless, inexperienced, drifting into temptation – indeed, almost courting it.”<sup>5</sup>

### 4. The simple are **not sensible** (14.15, 18)

Pr 14.15 The naive believes everything,  
 But the sensible man considers his steps.  
 Pr 14.18 The naive inherit foolishness,  
 But the sensible are crowned with knowledge.

### 5. The simple are **weak-willed** (22.3; 27.12)

Pr 22.3 The prudent sees the evil and hides himself,  
 But the naive go on, and are punished for it.  
 Pr 27.12 A prudent man sees evil *and* hides himself,  
 The naive proceed *and* pay the penalty.

### 6. The problem is a **heart** problem (22.15)

Pr 22.15 Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child;  
 The rod of discipline will remove it far from him.

<sup>5</sup> Kidner, *Proverbs: An Introduction and Commentary*, 37.

7. The simple pursues **vanity (emptiness)**

Pr 15.21 Folly is joy to him who lacks sense,  
But a man of understanding walks straight.

Pr 12.11 He who tills his land will have plenty of bread,  
But he who pursues worthless *things* lacks sense.

8. The simple can either be **led** (9.1-6) or **misled** (9.13-18)

## C. Fate of the simple without wisdom

1. Pass on into **foolishness** (14.18)

Pr 14.18 The naive inherit foolishness,  
But the sensible are crowned with knowledge.

2. Ultimately **destruction** (1.32)

Pr 1.32 "For the waywardness of the naive will kill them,  
And the complacency of fools will destroy them.

3. Only cure is turning to **wisdom** (9.4-6)

Pr 9.4-6 "Whoever is naive, let him turn in here!"  
To him who lacks understanding she says,  
5 "Come, eat of my food  
And drink of the wine I have mixed.  
6 "Forsake *your* folly and live,  
And proceed in the way of understanding."

4. A fool may yet need a '**visual aid**'<sup>6</sup> to bring him to repentance (19.25)

Pr 19.25 Strike a scoffer and the naive may become shrewd,  
But reprove one who has understanding and he will gain  
knowledge.

"If [the simple] refuses [wisdom], he will graduate to a more serious condition: 'The simple acquire folly ... but the prudent are crowned with knowledge' (14.25), for one does not stay still: a man who is emptyheaded will end up wrongheaded."<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Kidner, *Proverbs: An Introduction and Commentary*, 36.

<sup>7</sup> Kidner, 16–17.

## D. Application Questions

1. If a man exhibits these characteristics in his thirties and older, can he still be called “simple”?
2. What are some other words to describe the simple person?
3. What will it take for the simple to turn away from folly and turn towards wisdom?
4. How can the wise help the simple turn from folly?

... to be continued

## II. The fool

## III. The scorner (רִיֵּץ /îṣ)