



THE MOST DIFFICULT PEOPLE IN THE WORLD

Fools and Scoffers

There are few things more tragic than a person becoming a fool or a scoffer. A few of the terms that describe this type of person are juvenile delinquent, incorrigible, “know-it-all,” career criminal, belligerent, “smart-mouth,” rebellious, deviate, or self-centered. While anyone could display some aspects of a fool or scoffer for a short time, fools and scoffers demonstrate their destructive behavior as a way of life. Their pattern is to continue in willful sin, to disregard God’s plan for their lives, and to dismiss anyone who attempts to warn them of sin’s consequences.

The speech and actions of fools and scoffers indicate the self-centered condition of their hearts (their real selves), as Jesus indicated in Mark 7:20-23:

And he said, “What comes out of a person is what defiles him. For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person.”

Since fools and scoffers have spiritual “heart disease,” all aspects of their lives and relationships are detrimentally affected. However, due to their self-centeredness, fools and scoffers do not accurately discern the negative impact they have on others. Instead, they persistently live in a manner that proclaims, “It’s all about me.”

Not surprisingly, a confirmed fool or scoffer will not respond in a Christ-honoring manner to loving, biblically-based communication, no matter how diligently a believer utilizes it. This rejection is critical for believers to realize when they try to help someone with characteristics of a fool or scoffer. No believer is gifted or caring enough to change the heart of a fool or scoffer. The only hope for a fool or scoffer is a “heart change,” which is accomplished only by God.

In passing, it is important to note that a believer may temporarily demonstrate some of the characteristics of a fool or scoffer. This can happen if a believer fails to honor Christ by loving God and others and, for a time, reverts to the natural tendency of self-centeredness, living by feelings, and fleshly gratification. When believers are convicted of their sin(s) by the Holy Spirit, they will respond by confessing their sin(s) to the Lord as well as seeking forgiveness from those who are affected by their

sinfulness. They will also acknowledge the correction that others have given them from Scripture and will take steps to be restored to fellowship with the Lord and fellow believers. On the other hand, fools and scoffers will not acknowledge their sin(s) and, consequently, they will not willingly confess or sincerely repent of specific wrongdoings.

In the following study, some of the characteristics of a fool and a scoffer are described. Since various Hebrew words are translated “fool” or “scoffer,” descriptions (*italicized and parenthesized*) are included in the following references to indicate these differences. Other words besides “fool” and “scoffer” are also clarified or amplified in parentheses without italics.

In addition to providing insight into fools and scoffers, God’s Word also alerts believers of what to expect when dealing with fools or scoffers—people who are desperately in need of a spiritual transformation.

CHARACTERISTICS OF A FOOL

- A. A fool despises instruction, hates knowledge, and sets his own self-centered standards as the “rule” for living.

Proverbs 1:7, The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; fools (*those who quarrel, despise wisdom, mock when guilty*) despise wisdom and instruction.

Proverbs 1:22, How long, O simple ones, will you love being simple? How long will scoffers (*scorners, mockers, boasters*) delight in their scoffing (bragging), and fools (*simpletons, arrogant ones*) hate knowledge (or discernment)?

Proverbs 14:9, Fools (*those who quarrel, are licentious, despise wisdom, mock when guilty*) mock at the guilt offering (mock at sin or reinterpret sin), but the upright enjoy acceptance.

Proverbs 12:15, The way of a fool (*one who quarrels, is licentious, despises wisdom, mocks at guilt*) is right in his own eyes, but a wise man listens to advice.

- B. A fool is regularly troubled and easily provoked.

Proverbs 9:13, The woman Folly (or a foolish woman) is clamorous (or disquieted, troubled); she is seductive (or foolish, simple-minded) and knows nothing.

Proverbs 12:16, The vexation (wrath, indignation, frustration, spite) of a fool (*one who quarrels, is licentious, despises wisdom, mocks at guilt*) is known at once, but the prudent ignores an insult.

Proverbs 14:17, A man of quick temper acts foolishly (*quarrelsome, is licentious, despises wisdom, mocks at guilt*), and a man of evil devices is hated.

- C. A fool slanders others, lies, and often conceals his hatred.

Proverbs 10:18, The one who conceals hatred has lying lips, and whoever utters slander (or a defamation, evil report), is a fool (*simpleton, arrogant*).

- D. A fool openly demonstrates and finds satisfaction in his continued sinfulness.

Proverbs 10:23, Doing wrong is like a joke to a fool (*simpleton, arrogant one*), but wisdom is pleasure to a man of understanding.

Proverbs 13:19, A desire fulfilled is sweet to the soul, but to turn away from evil (or mischief, hurt, harm) is an abomination to fools (*simpletons, arrogant ones*).

Proverbs 14:16, One who is wise is cautious (or fears) and turns away from evil, but a fool (*simpleton, arrogant one*) is reckless (or passes over sin) and careless (or bold, secure).

Proverbs 12:23, A prudent man conceals knowledge, but the heart of fools (*simpletons, arrogant ones*) proclaims folly (*quarrels, licentiousness, despising of wisdom, and mocking at guilt*).

Proverbs 13:16, In everything the prudent acts with knowledge (or discernment), but a fool (*simpleton, arrogant one*) flaunts his folly (*quarrels, licentiousness, despising of wisdom, and mocking at guilt*).

- E. A fool will persist in sinful behavior in spite of the consequences.

Proverbs 27:22, Crush a fool (*one who quarrels, is licentious, despises wisdom, mocks when guilty*) in a mortar with a pestle along with crushed grain, yet his folly will not depart from him.

Proverbs 14:8, The wisdom of the prudent is to discern his way: but the folly (*quarrels, licentiousness, despising of wisdom, mocking at guilt*) of fools (*simpletons, arrogant ones*) is deceiving (or treacherous).

Proverbs 26:11, Like a dog that returns to his

vomit is a fool (*simpletons, arrogant ones*) who repeats his folly (*quarrels, licentiousness, despising of wisdom, and mocking at guilt*).

CHARACTERISTICS OF A SCOFFER

- A. A scoffer will not respond to correction.

Proverbs 13:1, A wise son hears his father's instruction, but a scoffer (*mockers, boaster*) does not listen to rebuke.

- B. A scoffer cannot find wisdom.

Proverbs 14:6, A scoffer (*one who boasts, a mocker*) seeks wisdom in vain, but knowledge (or perception, discernment) is easy for a man of understanding (or discernment).

- C. A scoffer enjoys his way of life.

Proverbs 1:22, How long, O simple ones, will you love being simple? How long will scoffers (*mockers, boasters*) delight in their scoffing?

TROUBLE IS INEVITABLE FOR A FOOL OR SCOFFER

- **Psalms 107:17**, Some were fools (*those who quarrel, despise wisdom, mock when guilty*) through their sinful ways, and because of their iniquities suffered affliction (or were humbled, weakened, downcast).
- **Proverbs 3:35**, The wise (prudent) will inherit honor (or reputation), but fools (*simpletons, arrogant ones*) get disgrace (or confusion, shame).
- **Proverbs 9:12**, If you are wise, you are wise for yourself; if you scoff (*mock, boast*), you alone will bear it.
- **Proverbs 10:8**, The wise of heart will receive commandments, but a babbling fool (*one who clamors, babbles, or talks a lot*) will come to ruin.
- **Proverbs 10:14**, The wise lay up knowledge (or discernment), but the mouth of a fool (*those who quarrel, are licentious, despise wisdom, mock when guilty*) brings ruin near.
- **Proverbs 10:21**, The lips of the righteous feed many, but fools (*those who quarrel, are licentious, despise wisdom, mock when guilty*) die for lack of sense.
- **Proverbs 11:29**, Whoever troubles his own household will inherit the wind, and the fool (*those who quarrel, are licentious, despise wisdom, mock when guilty*) will be servant to the wise of heart.

RESPONDING TO A FOOL OR SCOFFER

- A. God's response to the fool or scoffer

- **Proverbs 3:34**, Toward the scorers (*boasters,*

scoffers) he is scornful (mocks, derides), but to the humble he gives favor (or grace).

- B. A professing believer who may actually be a fool or scoffer will be revealed as such by the church discipline and restoration process.

Matthew 18:15-17, If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.

- C. A believer can expect rejection and retaliation when trying to correct a fool or scoffer.

Proverbs 9:6-8, Leave your simple ways (or leave the company of the simple) and live, and walk in the way of insight (or discernment). Whoever corrects a scoffer gets himself abuse, and he who reproves a wicked man incurs injury. Do not reprove a scoffer (*mockers, boaster, arrogant one*), or he will hate you; reprove a wise man, and he will love you.

Proverbs 14:7, Leave the presence of a fool (*simpleton, arrogant one*), for there you do not meet words of knowledge (or perception, discernment, wisdom).

Proverbs 13:20, Whoever walks with the wise becomes wise, but the companion (or special friend, shepherd, teacher) of fools (*simpletons, arrogant ones*) will suffer harm.

Scriptural perspectives of fools and scoffers provide ample warnings of this destructive pattern of life. Apart from divine intervention, fools and scoffers will persist in a continual downward spiral of devastation for themselves, often causing untold pain and heartache for others as well.

The downward spiral of fools and scoffers can only be halted by a heart change. This is accomplished by God's power, not by anyone's good intentions or sincere efforts. If the descriptions of a fool or scoffer fit you and you recognize the necessity for a personal change of direction, there is hope.

Such change begins with the recognition that your failures, what the Bible calls sin, cannot be undone but can be forgiven. This forgiveness is provided by the ultimate sacrifice of Jesus, God's Son, who received divine judgment that was reserved for you. Jesus became your substitute, receiving the penalty of your sins, because of God's merciful love to you. When you, by

faith, believe that Jesus gave His life for you, you will be cleansed of your sin and receive God's gift of eternal life. As a result, you will become a new person and, for the first time in your life, have God's power to live for Christ instead of self-centered desires. Specific truths from Scripture speak to this change that God promises can be yours.

- **Ephesians 2:1-5**, ...we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved
- **John 3:16**, "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life."
- **Romans 5:6-10**, For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die—but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life.
- **Acts 4:12** (*speaking of Jesus*), And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.
- **Ephesians 2:8-9**, For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.
- **2 Corinthians 5:17**, Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.

If you recognize traits of a fool or scoffer in your friends of family members, pray that God will change their hearts so they will receive Christ into their lives as well.

- **Romans 6:23**, For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.
- **John 1:12-13** (*speaking of Jesus*), But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.