

# The Actions of the Wise and the Fool

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*“A wise man feareth, and departeth from evil: but the fool rageth and is confident.” - Proverbs 14:16 (Cf. 12:15; 22:3).*

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Solomon seemed to both curious and instructive about the thinking, feeling and actions of his listeners, and rightly so, being the instructor and teacher that God had made him. His wisdom extended to such a level so as to make what he had to say entirely worth listening to and making a part of our lives. This, I suspect, was God’s intention in bringing to him the great wisdom that Solomon was noted for.

One of the chief characteristics that he touches on again and again, is the contrast between those who are wise and those who are foolish, such as in this verse. Here, he makes a very clear statement for us to think over carefully and to be sure that our lives are in knowing submission to; it is, after all, the teaching of one whom God sent to “instruct us, and teach us in the way in which we should go”.

The first appellation, “wise man” is one that appears a great deal in the Bible:

In Genesis 41:33 we see Pharaoh choose Joseph because he saw him as a “wise man”.

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<sup>33</sup> *“Now therefore, let Pharaoh select a discerning and wise man, and set him over the land of Egypt.*

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1 Kings 2:9 we read, among David’s instructions to Solomon just before his death, that he calls Solomon a “wise man” meaning that he had the wisdom, the sense to make good decisions concerning the kingdom that he (Solomon) would be inheriting.

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<sup>9</sup> *Now therefore, do not hold him guiltless, for you are a wise man and know what you ought to do to him; but bring his gray hair down to the grave with blood.”*

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1 Chronicles 27:32 speaks of a a counselor, a fellow who was David’s uncle, named Jehonathan who was a counselor and a “wise man”.

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<sup>32</sup> *Also Jehonathan, David’s uncle, was a counselor, a wise man, and a scribe; and Jehiel the son of Hachmoni was with the king’s sons.*

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In Job 15 Eliphaz, as a part of the three “friends” and their “comforting” of Job actually defends himself by telling Job that he was just doing what a “wise man” has to do...

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<sup>2</sup> *“Should a wise man answer with empty knowledge,  
And fill himself with the east wind? (Job 15:2)*

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In Job 17:10 we see Job replying to his “counselors” with a kind of sarcastic tone to his reply:

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<sup>10</sup> *“But please, come back again, all of you,  
For I shall not find one wise man among you.*

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There are a wealth of this kind of reference here in Proverbs, of which the one we are looking at, Prov. 14:16, is only one. For instance, over in Proverbs 17:10, Solomon says:

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<sup>10</sup> *Rebuke is more effective for a wise man  
Than a hundred blows on a fool.*

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This one is hardly complimentary to the “fool” is it? (nor would we expect it to be!). It seems to be telling us how “dull” or resistant to rebuke or correction a fool is. That concept is very similar to the one we are looking at here in 14:16. The wise many responds easily correction, whereas the “fool” rejects or is hardened against, sometimes to a virtually ridiculous extent.

Proverbs 24:5 has Solomon speaking of the result of wisdom being strength; of course not physical strength but spiritual and, likely in the sense of an ability to affect the family and other parts of the circle in which he walks.

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<sup>5</sup> *A wise man is strong,  
Yes, a man of knowledge increases strength;*

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The in Proverbs 29:9 we see virtually the same language, at least in part, that he uses here in 14:16. It seems that the wise man is willing to pay whatever the price, with regard to a personal relationship in order to do and say the right thing. It doesn’t matter what response to his “contending” he receives.

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<sup>9</sup> *If a wise man contends with a foolish man,  
Whether the fool rages or laughs, there is no peace.*

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He goes on, along the same line just a couple verses later Proverbs 29:11, once again speaking about the way that wise man vs. a fool deals with others.

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<sup>11</sup> *A fool vents all his feelings,  
But a wise man holds them back.*

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Over in Ecclesiastes 2:14 Solomon talks about perception and how it is different in a wise man versus a fool:

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<sup>14</sup> *The wise man’s eyes are in his head,  
But the fool walks in darkness.  
Yet I myself perceived  
That the same event happens to them all.*

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Solomon was very good at using some form of sarcastic comparison to make his point in a given verse. That is the case in this Ecclesiastes verse. The

wise man sees what is in front of him. However, the fool's sight is much akin to his being in darkness, he can't see much at all! The same event, Solomon says, happens to all men, but the implication is that the wise man "sees" it coming while the fool is virtually taken unawares.

There are a number of other references that fit in here as well:

- Eccl. 2:16, 6:8, 7:7, 8:1, 8:5, 8:17, 9:15, 10:2, 10:12, Jer. 9:12, & 9:23
- In Matthew 7:24 & Luke 6:47–49 Jesus, while telling the Parable of the Two Builders, uses this phrase "a wise man" to illustrate the one who both hears and does the good and wise thing:

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<sup>24</sup> *"Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock:*

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Paul, in 1 Corinthians 6:5 said, quite harshly that was not a single wise man present amongst the Corinthian church.

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<sup>5</sup> *I say this to your shame. Is it so, that there is not a wise man among you, not even one, who will be able to judge between his brethren?*

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Getting back to Proverbs 14:16;

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*"A wise man feareth, and departeth from evil: but the fool rageth and is confident."* - Proverbs 14:16 (Cf. 12:15; 22:3).

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We must note that the one called "a wise man" is one who does two basic things:

1. He "fears evil...
  - "to fear has all of the normal, everyday, meanings, but also, in a more basic and general sense it speaks of one who sees a thing as terrible and a thing to be avoided at all costs, with there being an emotional component to their reaction to it. Hence, the "fear" application of the word. When used of spiritual matters, it speaks of one who sees a thing as having results so terrible that it is avoided at all costs. The fear of the Lord, speaks of the one who is aware of the nature of God and views the violation or offense of His nature as being a thing is so terrible that it is to be avoided!
2. He then departs from evil
  - Because of this fearing of evil, this one "departs" from it. The word means to remove self from the object of the verb.

There is an idea here that we must take to heart. The godly man, the wise man MUST keep the fear of God, and thus the fear of evil at the forefront of his life. Because this fear is a powerful and obvious matter in his life

A wise man, through fear of God and of the consequences of a false step, will start back when advised of danger, or return from a perilous course on which he may have entered. The fool, on the other hand, will betray his folly by boldly rushing on in headlong self-sufficiency, and even upbraiding those who would keep him back from ruin.

There are a number of illustrations we could look towards to illuminate our thinking:

- Lot showed wisdom at last in escaping from the judgment which his sons-in-law, seeing no signs of it, laughed to scorn.
- Goliath raged and was confident, while rushing on to his own destruction.
- Rehoboam acted the part of a madman when, in his arrogance, despising wise counsels, he threatened those he should have conciliated.
- Naaman began by acting foolishly when he was ready to turn away from Jordan in a rage, but, listening to counsel, proved himself wise in the end.
- Sennacherib, like a madman, defying the God of Israel, precipitated his own downfall.
- The obstinate incredulity of Gedaliah, in the teeth of warning, made it impossible to save him from assassination (Jer. 40; 41).
- How earnestly does Peter, taught by sad experience, inculcate in his old age the wisdom of holy fear (1 Pet. 1:17; 5:5, etc.)!

And how might we apply the idea that self-confidence imposes upon the world. By arrogant impetuosity men have pushed their way to high places. But the proportion of those who thus succeed is probably very small compared with those who fail. And in many instances it would be found, where the success appeared due to presumption, that there was more prudence and caution and management in the background than was acknowledged. At any rate, it may be laid down as a rule that, in temporal matters, he will be most prosperous who is least rash, who weighs matters instead of deciding off-hand, is willing to hear opinions, and to retrace a false step if made. Whereas, he who resents the laws of prudence, and would rather be wrong in his own way than right in another's, will make many a grave mistake. Still more is this true with regard to the things eternal. A holy dread of displeasing God, and of the consequences of sin,—this is wisdom. And the fruit of this will be a prayerful spirit of dependence upon God for direction, a humble self-mistrust, a modest deference to the wisdom and experience of those who are competent and authorized to teach. In this spirit evil will be escaped and salvation wrought out (Phil. 2:12). While the heady and high-minded, giving the reins to his passions, rejecting counsel, and persisting in his own way, will confess as well as prove himself a fool at last. For “he who lives without fear shall die without hope.”