

The Appeal to the Benighted, v. 5: Wisdom Challenges the Naïve to Understand Prudence & Fools Wisdom; Naïve Lack Understanding, Fools Make Wrong Choices

Verse 5: the Appeal to the Benighted:

Proverbs 8:5 - “O naïve ones, understand prudence; and, O fools, understand wisdom.” (NASB)

1. Wisdom now addresses specific categories of her audience. The first are the “naïve”: the masculine plural of the noun פְּתִי *pethi*, described as “the immature or simple ones who are open to all kinds of enticement; those not having developed a discriminating judgment as to what is right or wrong.”¹
2. Throughout proverbs the naïve are considered immature believers who without wisdom can be easily led into believing the lie (Proverbs 14:15, “The naïve believe everything.”). If the naïve refuses to learn, then he will accept the instruction of the Dark Side and his norms and standards will have a distorted view of moral values and doctrinal principles: “The naïve inherit foolishness” (Proverbs 14:18).
3. To avoid this, the naïve are commanded to “understand prudence.” The verb is the Hiphil imperative of בִּין *bin*: “to be caused to understand.” It refers to doctrine understood and transferred to the *kardia* where it is retained for application. Just as its derivative *tebunah* in verse 1, this verb refers to discernment.
4. To be caused to discern requires a volitional decision to respond to Wisdom’s mandate by having an interest in her message.
5. Benighted people exist in a state of intellectual, moral, and social darkness. Unenlightened, they are prone to behave in ways that reflect a complete ignorance of how to function in genteel society, let alone honor God.
6. These types have received no training in social graces, they easily submit to the trends of their sinful natures, their morals are defined by whatever the current Zeitgeist suggests, and their worldview is developed by doctrines of demons.
7. The reason for their naïveté is a lack of understanding. Wisdom commands them to acquire the discernment of prudence, the feminine noun עֲרֻמָּה *‘ormah* which has both negative and positive applications in Scripture; here, Solomon intends the latter.
8. Prudence is defined positively as:

Prudence: 1. the ability to govern and discipline oneself by the use of reason. 3. skill and good judgment in the use of resources. 4. caution or circumspection as to danger or risk.

¹ R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke, “פְּתִי *pethi*,” in *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 1980), 742.

Prudent: a: marked by wisdom or judiciousness. b: shrewd in the management of practical affairs.²

9. In Proverbs 8:12, Wisdom says that her neighbor is prudence therefore wherever wisdom is found in the soul of a believer there also will reside prudence.
10. The mandate to develop discerning prudence goes farther than the development of morality; it stresses the need for intellectual sagacity to function in the devil's world:

“(The educational process) did not educate men to change the existing world into something better, but to make their way successfully in the world as it is.”³
11. To accomplish this, a person must be spiritually self-sustaining and this begins with spiritual self-esteem followed by spiritual autonomy.
12. Those who are unable to manage their lives from internal resources of divine viewpoint are what are described in verse 5 as naïve.
13. To be naïve one must first be benighted and benighted people are most gullible. The benighted are in intellectual or moral ignorance, typically owing to lack of opportunity, which describes the result of the dumbing down of the nation's youth over the last fifty years.
14. An ignorant person has no inventory of ideas from which to develop wisdom or sound judgment, therefore he is incapable of interpreting incoming data.
15. As a result they are gullible, i.e., easily persuaded by anyone who has a pleasing personality, says he wants to help them, and then convinces them to support his ideas.
16. The gullible are victimized by salesmen of various categories: politicians, ideologues, theologians, and journalists to name a few.
17. The second group addressed is “fools,” the masculine plural of the Hebrew noun **כֶּסִּיל** *kesil*. This word refers to those who have a propensity to make wrong choices:

² *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, 11th ed., s.v. “prudence” and “prudent.”

³ H. Niehr, “עֲרֻמָּה ‘orma,” in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, eds. G. Johannes Botterweck, Helmer Ringgren, and Heinz-Josef Fabry, trans. David E. Green (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2001), 11:362.

Kesil refers to a way of life that is enticing to the immature, but can lead to destruction and ruin. We note the kind of choices which the *kesil* makes. His eyes are unable to see any proper way or conduct. He may roam the earth seeking it, but miss it completely. The fool imagines that he can buy wisdom [חֹכְמָה *chochmah*] when actually he has no inclination for it (Proverbs 17:16 [Of what use is money in the hands of a fool, since he has no intention of acquiring wisdom?]). He takes no delight in understanding [בִּין *bin*] (Proverbs 18:2 [A fool take no pleasure in understanding but only in disclosing what is on his mind.], hates knowledge [דַּ'אֶת *da'ath*] (Proverbs 1:22 [How long will you simpletons love naiveté? How long will mockers delight in mockery and fools hate knowledge?]), and therefore does not choose the fear of the Lord (Proverbs 1:29).

The fool is a serious menace to the community. Associating with a fool, who has a twisted sense of values deprives one of knowledge [דַּ'אֶת *da'ath*] (Proverbs 14:7 [Leave the presence of a fool, or you will not discern words of knowledge.])⁴

18. The fool is devoid of divine viewpoint and as a result he consistently makes wrong choices. Absence of understanding means he has not used his volition to (1) present himself to the teachings of the Bible which (2) make it impossible for him to acquire any knowledge of divine principles, therefore (3) he has not learned anything, and (4) without understanding he has no inventory from which to draw in the decision-making process.
19. Since he is a dufus, he is commanded to acquire understanding. The actual phrase that ends this verse is **בִּין לֵב** *bin lev*, literally, “understand in the heart.” The heart is the area of the soul that contains long-term memory of *epignōsis* understanding from which wisdom is developed.
20. To understand in the heart refers to wisdom applied. In the verse we have as the objects of Wisdom’s mandates the naïve and the fool, each a believer without necessary discernment to make good decisions due to the lack of a biblical frame of reference.

Proverbs 8:5 - O immature believers who are easily enticed, understand prudence—the assets of self-discipline and good judgment that provide discernment; O fools, understand how to apply doctrine with discernment. (CTL)

21. The tragedy of our present national circumstance is that those who could deliver the country, namely believers in Christ, are the very ones who have allowed the nation to drift into reversionism.

⁴ R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke, “כֶּסִּיל *kesil*,” in *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1980), 449.