

William MacDonald:

“A wise man will hear.” (Prov. 1:5)

The essential difference between the wise man and the fool in the book of Proverbs is that the wise man will hear and the fool won't.

It isn't a question of the fool's mental capacity. Actually he may have unusual intellectual ability. But he just cannot be told anything. He labors under the fatal delusion that his knowledge is infinite and his judgments are infallible. If his friends try to counsel him, they receive scorn for their efforts. They watch him trying to escape the inevitable results of sinful and stupid actions, but they are helpless to avert the crash. And so he goes on from one crisis to another. Now his finances are a disaster. Now his personal life is in shambles. Now his business totters on the edge of chaos. But he rationalizes that life is giving him a bad deal. It never occurs to him that he is his own worst enemy. He is generous in dispensing advice to others, oblivious of his inability to run his own life. A compulsive talker, he holds forth with the aplomb of an oracle.

The wise man is made of better stuff. He realizes that everyone's mental wires have been somewhat crossed by the Fall. He knows that others can sometimes see aspects of a problem that he has overlooked. He is willing to acknowledge that his memory may be faulty at times. He is teachable, welcoming any input that will help him make the right decisions. Actually he solicits the advice of others because he knows that “in the multitude of counselors there is safety” (Prov. 11:14). Like everyone else, he sometimes makes mistakes. But he has this saving virtue that he learns from his mistakes and makes every failure a springboard to success. He is grateful for a deserved rebuke and is willing to say, “I was wrong. I am sorry.” Wise children submit to parental discipline; fools rebel. Wise young people obey the scriptural precepts concerning moral purity; fools do their own thing. Wise adults judge everything by whether it is well-pleasing to the Lord; fools act according to what pleases themselves.

And so it is that the wise grow wiser, and the fools are stuck fast in the rut of their own folly.