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Ten Kinds of Spiritual Foolishness

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The knowledge of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom (Prov. 9:10). Contrary to this, the beginning of foolishness is to deny God and think and live according to one's own, limited understanding. The natural knowledge and desires of human beings are perverted because of the Fall. A life without the knowledge of God is the breeding-ground for deception and wrong priorities. The Bible refers to the following ten kinds of spiritual foolishness, some of which even Christians may be guilty of:

1. The foolishness of denying God

“The fool has said in his heart, There is no God. They are corrupt and have done abominable iniquity; there is none who does good. God looks down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there are any who understand, who seek God. Every one of them has turned aside; they have together become corrupt; there is none who does good, no, not one” (Ps. 53:1-3). Paul elaborates further upon this moral depravity: “With their tongues they have practised deceit... whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness. Their feet are swift to shed blood; destruction and misery are in their ways; and the way of peace they have not known. There is no fear of God before their eyes” (Rom. 3:13-18).

God looked down upon a heathen world in which there was nobody who was inclined towards Him. Man was created in the image of God and called upon to become conformed to His holiness and righteousness. But they all turned their backs upon Him and became wicked. Instead of manifesting God's image of holiness they lapsed into sinful, immoral lives and apostatised further as time passed by. Some of them served vain idols that were made by their own hands. Others became agnostic and gave free reign to their evil desires.

Fallen man became his own god. He even denied the creation of God and explained his own origin in terms of descent from the animal kingdom. This false reasoning gave rise to the theory of biological evolution. In this way, God is likened to four-footed beasts. Because people have adopted this attitude God abandoned them to be dominated by their perverted nature, which gave rise to all sorts of evil deeds, including sexual perversion and homosexuality:

“For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse, because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man – and birds and four-footed beasts and creeping things. Therefore God also gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts, to dishonour their bodies among themselves, who exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed for ever. Amen. For this reason God gave them up to vile passions. For even their women exchanged the natural use for what is against nature. Likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust for one another, men with men committing what is shameful, and receiving in themselves the penalty of their error which was due. And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting” (Rom. 1:18-28).

2. The foolishness of rebellion against God

The denial of God inevitably leads to rebellion against Him. However, it is a futile exercise to deny the existence of God because He reveals Himself to humanity in many different ways. He manifested Himself through His creation, the calling of Israel, the preaching and warnings of His prophets, the judgements upon His enemies, the grace and salvation which He bestows upon those who fear Him, the incarnation and ministry of His Son, and also through the testimonies of millions of Christians throughout the centuries. Those who refuse to recognise these revelations contemptuously reject God and His words:

“Why do the nations rage and the people plot a vain thing? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take

counsel together against the Lord and against His Anointed, saying, Let us break their bonds in pieces and cast away their cords from us. He who sits in the heavens shall laugh; the Lord shall hold them in derision. Then He shall speak to them in His wrath, and distress them in His deep displeasure: Yet I have set my King on my holy hill of Zion. I will declare the decree: The Lord has said to Me, You are my Son, today I have begotten You. Ask of Me and I will give you the nations for your inheritance and the ends of the earth for your possession. You shall break them with a rod of iron; You shall dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel. Now therefore, be wise, O kings; be instructed, you judges of the earth. Serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling. Kiss the Son, lest He be angry, and you perish in the way when His wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all those who put their trust in Him" (Ps. 2:1-12).

It is obvious that in the end-time there will be a worldwide conspiracy against God and His Son. The Triune God has been written out of constitutions, banished from educational systems, and His Word regarded on an equal level with the books of other religions. Biblical morality has been rejected as it restricts human freedom, condemns their sinful acts, and demands honourable conduct. A rebellious humanity does not accept these restrictions and rejects the supremacy of God. This attitude reflects utter foolishness because the Lord will break them with a rod of iron. The wrath of the Lamb will be poured out upon them during the coming tribulation period.

The Lord Jesus said: "And there will be signs in the sun, in the moon, and in the stars; and on the earth distress of nations, with perplexity, the sea and the waves roaring; men's hearts failing them from fear and the expectation of those things which are coming on the earth, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken" (Luke 21:25-26). During this time of unprecedented natural disasters people will flee to the mountains and call out to the rocks: "Fall on us and hide us from the face of Him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! For the great day of His wrath has come, and who is able to stand?" (Rev. 6:16-17).

During the battle of Armageddon at the end of the tribulation, millions of people who dared to fight against Christ will pay with their lives for this foolish act. "And I saw the beast, the kings of the earth, and their armies, gathered together to make war against Him who sat on the horse and against His army. Then the beast was captured, and with him the false prophet who worked signs in his presence, by which he deceived those who received the mark of the beast and those who worshipped his image. These two were cast alive into the lake of fire burning with brimstone. And the rest were killed with the sword which proceeded from the mouth of Him who sat on the horse" (Rev. 19:19-21).

It is utter foolishness to revolt against God as He has all power in heaven and on earth. He is the one who should be feared and served; that is why Jesus said: "Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell" (Matt. 10:28).

3. The foolishness of succumbing to temptations to sin

The Bible says, "The devising of foolishness is sin" (Prov. 24:9). Sin is the contravention of God's moral characteristics such as righteousness, love, truthfulness and holiness, which He also expects from people who were created in His image. He says, "Be holy, for I am holy" (1 Pet. 1:16; Lev. 11:44). However, because of the Fall the image of God was destroyed in human beings and they all acquired a depraved nature which is inclined towards sinfulness (Rom. 5:12).

The way to spiritual awakening is to restore the broken relationship with God, to live by His grace, walk according to His righteousness and to continually resist the inclination towards sinfulness. "If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin lies at the door. And its desire is for you, but you should rule over it" (Gen. 4:7).

It is foolish to yield to sinful desires and temptations. Unsaved people continuously live in sin since they are under the domination of sin because of the Fall. They are heading for eternal damnation since the wages of sin is death (Rom. 6:23).

Christians can also be tempted to sin but they are under obligation to immediately confess and forsake their wrongdoing (Prov. 28:13; 1 John 1:8-9; 2:1). Should they wilfully continue sinning they forfeit the grace of the Lord: "For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live" (Rom. 8:13).

It is great foolishness to despise the love and graciousness of the Lord Jesus, thereby inviting His anger upon you. Sinners will not go to heaven—only saved people will.

4. The foolishness of the worshipping of idols

It is extreme foolishness to bow the knee in worship before any god but the true, Triune God. Foolishness of this nature is very much on the increase and is driven by the multireligious views of modern times. According to this humanistic dogma there is a universal God of all faiths, and it does not really matter through which mediator we approach him. The way

to him can go through Jesus Christ, but also through Mother Mary, Buddha, Krishna, Mohammed, the ancestral spirits, or any other gods.

Worshipping the image of the Antichrist will be a very common form of idol-service during the coming tribulation. At a certain stage this practice will be made compulsory throughout the world, and refusal to comply will be punished by death (Rev. 13:14-15). But the eternal judgement of God awaits these idol-worshippers (Rev. 14:9-11).

The Father's throne of grace can only be approached through His Son, Jesus Christ, (John 14:6). All other ways which are offered to people are wrong paths which do not lead to the true God but end up with the false god of this world – Satan. He disguises himself as the true God and is intent on deceiving people to keep them away from the true God and the only Saviour of the world, Jesus Christ. Paul refers to these deceived people, "whose minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them" (2 Cor. 4:4).

Since the idea of Satan, who is a blasphemer and adversary of God, is unacceptable to most people, he disguises himself in the image of a large number of idols. In these other capacities he and his demons have succeeded in establishing themselves in all the non-Christian religions. People worship and serve these foreign gods, completely ignorant of the fact that they actually serve the devil.

Paul found it necessary to even remind believing Corinthians of the fact that they actually honour the devil by participating in the sacrifices of heathen religions: "What am I saying then? That an idol is anything, or what is offered to idols is anything? But I say that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice they sacrifice to demons and not to God, and I do not want you to have fellowship with demons" (1 Cor. 10:19-20).

The utmost form of deception is to regard God as being on an equal level with the idols, and therefore also Christianity with the non-Christian religions, as is the case in the interfaith movement. Deceived Corinthians were often warned against interfaith associations:

"Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever? And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: I will dwell in them and walk among them. I will be their God and they shall be my people. Therefore come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, and I will receive you. I will be a Father to you and you shall be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty" (2 Cor. 6:14-18).

We should, intellectually and spiritually, be able to clearly discern between the true God and the great number of false gods. We must take a stand against the idols and teach our children to do the same. Any compromise in this regard will inevitably lead to accepting and worshipping the Antichrist as the god of this world.

5. The foolishness of self-righteousness and reliance on own resources

There are many people all over the world who entertain the humanistic idea of the inherent goodness of humanity. They say that we are the masters of our own destiny, and have the capacity to prevail over evil and improve our own lives. They take pride in themselves and boast about all their achievements, e.g. in the fields of sports, education, politics, the reaching of high professional positions and the amassing of great wealth. Such people also glory in their own morality and good, successful lives.

But the truth is that all people are spiritually dead and morally depraved because of the Fall, and that from God's viewpoint there is no one who does good (Rom. 3:10-12). It is therefore a futile exercise to boast in these personal achievements. The Lord Jesus likens this attitude with a man who builds his house on the sand of self-deception: "Now everyone who hears these sayings of mine, and does not do them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand; and when the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it fell. And great was its fall" (Matthew 7:26-27).

Even the fairest and seemingly most successful life will end up in ruins if it has not been built upon the Rock, Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 3:11). People who are full of themselves and their own abilities are still fragile and insignificant beings who are not adequately equipped against all the storms of life. Even if they appear grandiose on the stage of life they will one day be exposed as failures before the throne of God when they will be weighed and found wanting. All their earthly possessions will remain behind and they will be stripped of their self-righteousness when they appear before the Lord's throne.

. Nobody can save him- or herself.

There are great dangers inherent in a materialistic life since self-glorification and self-enrichment lead to moral depravity. Such a person sinks ever deeper into a quagmire of sin, even though he/she may strongly deny it: "But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain that we can carry nothing out. And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content. But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows. But you, O man of God, flee these things and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, gentleness. Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, to which you were also called and have confessed the good confession in the presence of many witnesses" (1 Tim. 6:6-12).

The rich fool said to himself: "Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease; eat, drink, and be merry. But God said to him, You fool! This night your soul will be required of you; then whose will those things be which you have provided? So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich towards God" (Luke 12:19-21). In this parable the Lord Jesus emphasised the danger of materialism as follows: "Take heed and beware of covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses" (Luke 12:15; cf. 1 Pet. 1:14).

It is utter foolishness to lead a life of unbelief while only engaging in the perishable things of this life.

6. The foolishness of hypocrisy and a form of godliness

How foolish to maintain an outward appearance of religion while your heart is dark and far from the Lord! The scribes and Pharisees developed it into a fine art to conceal their inner depravity behind a saintly appearance. They had a mental knowledge of God's Word but that was only an intellectual exercise – spiritually they were still dead. The Lord Jesus described them as whitewashed tombs with a beautiful outward appearance, but inside they were full of dead men's bones: "Even so you also outwardly appear righteous to men, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness" (Matt. 23:27-28).

These false spiritual leaders taught the people to act in a like manner so they could proceed with a fleshly and sinful lifestyle despite all their religious activities. Jesus said to them: "These people draw near to Me with their mouth and honour Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me. And in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men" (Matt. 15:8-9). That was the work of the Pharisees: "They are blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind lead the blind, both will fall into a ditch" (Matt. 15:14).

Exactly the same situation still prevails today in many churches where unsaved pastors with only a form of godliness are deceiving their members by bringing them under the false impression that they are in the right relationship with God. These preachers are often very popular because, by distorting the truth, they declare people to be saved in an easy manner. Paul says, "For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables" (2 Tim. 4:3-4). They will tell lies aimed at pleasing people. They might tell members that if they have been baptised and confirmed in the congregation they belong to the Lord and nobody can snatch them from His hand. They do, therefore, not really need to have a testimony of being born again. Sinners who are looking for an easy way to heaven welcome comforting statements of this nature.

What will be the end of preachers who deceived members of "Christian" churches in this way? The Lord Jesus said, "Not everyone who says to Me, Lord, Lord, shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in your name, cast out demons in your name, and done many wonders in your name? And then I will declare to them, I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practise lawlessness" (Matt. 7:21-23).

When they hear these words before the Lord's throne one day it will be too late for the false preachers to correct their foolishness, accept the knowledge of the truth and proclaim it to their deceived followers.

7. The foolishness of a carnal lifestyle

Many Christians act foolishly by neglecting to seek after the second work of grace of being filled with the Holy Spirit. Consequently, they are still dominated by the flesh (their old nature) and therefore do not lead Spirit-filled lives which are under the full control of the Holy Spirit. Paul said to the carnal Corinthians: "And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual people but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ. I fed you with milk and not with solid food; for until now you were

not able to receive it, and even now you are still not able; for you are still carnal. For where there are envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like mere men?" (1 Cor. 3:1-3).

These people need to make a full surrender so they can be filled with God's Spirit. Some Christians have already taken this step, only to backslide later and revert to a life of carnality. The very first spiritual characteristic which a backslidden Christian loses is his sanctification. By succumbing to the lusts and desires of the flesh he wilfully abandons the control of the Holy Spirit to again live under the influence and control of the flesh. After having made a good beginning the Galatians later compromised on doctrine and ended up in the flesh: "O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you that you should not obey the truth? ... Are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are you now being made perfect by the flesh?" (Gal. 3:1,3).

When a person has lapsed into this carnal state he is in a spiritual checkmate situation. He is no longer able to fulfil his good intentions since the flesh has been allowed to gain a stronghold in his life, thereby causing a spiritual stumbling-block: "For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish" (Gal. 5:17).

Such carnal Christians do not have the power of the Holy Spirit which they need to be overcomers. Paul says, "Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armour of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil" (Eph. 6:10-11). Carnal Christians are not strong in the Lord and therefore do not have the ability to successfully prevail over temptations.

The foolish virgins of Matthew 25:1-13 tried to practise religion without the enabling power of the Holy Spirit. In this parable the oil refers to the Holy Spirit. These five virgins did not take extra oil in their vessels with them, so their lamps went out at midnight. Christians who neglect to be filled with the Holy Spirit will find that they are not spiritually prepared and ready for the second coming of Christ. Something still lacks in their lives and that is holiness without which no one will see the Lord Jesus as Bridegroom (Heb. 12:14; 2 Cor. 7:1). How foolish to be negligent in fulfilling this important need!

8. The foolishness of short-sightedness

Many Christians only love the Lord to ensure earthly blessings. That results in the foolishness of short-sightedness. Paul says, "If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable" (1 Cor. 15:19). If our priorities and future expectation are correct we will look beyond our earthly interests and also lay up treasures in heaven. That can be achieved by doing works that have value for eternity. We should not only serve the Lord for the fulfilment of our perishable, earthly interests, but become actively involved with the extension of His eternal, heavenly kingdom.

If we only pursue the transient things of this life we will be like the nine lepers who turned away from Jesus after being healed (Luke 17:11-18). The Lord Jesus had many popular followers when He performed miracles but when He explained the demands of true discipleship, i.e. self-denial and full identification with Him, very few of His followers remained with Him (Luke 9:23; John 6:47-71).

Do you love the Lord Jesus for the sake of Himself and His imperishable kingdom, or are you only inclined to the fulfilment of your immediate needs? We act foolishly if we do not have a vision of the city with foundations, whose builder and maker is God. Our eternal interests are there and that is where our biggest investments should be.

9. The foolishness of apostatising

A Christian is unthinkable foolish when he or she deviates from the way of the Lord and backslides into a life of sin and worldliness. This backward movement first leads to a decline in grace (Heb. 12:15) but if it continues it can lead to complete apostatising (1 Tim. 4:1). A good example of foolishness of this nature is that of the prodigal son (Luke 15:11-32). During the wanderings of the son he was spiritually dead and lost (Luke 15:32), but after repenting and reconciling himself with his father he was completely restored as in the beginning.

The statement, "... for this my son was dead and is alive again" (Luke 15:24) literally means: "My son initially lived, after that he died, but now he lives again." Strong's Concordance renders the expression "alive again" (anazao in Greek) "to recover life; live again; revive". It is possible, therefore, to apostatise into a condition of being spiritually dead and to again be restored from that state. Only people who wilfully rebelled against Christ by slandering Him, counting the blood of the covenant a common thing and insulting the Spirit of grace, cannot be spiritually restored (Heb. 6:4-6; 10:26-29). Most backsliders, however, do not go to these extremes and only become victims of moral temptation (the lusts and desires of the flesh) and/or doctrinal deception.

There are different forms of apostatising to which the Bible refers:

• Persons who backslide do not abide in Christ and that inevitably means the end of their spiritual life. The Lord Jesus said, "Abide in Me, and I in you... He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit... If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned" (John 15:4-6). Why do some people not abide in Christ? They are tempted to sin and if it continuously overcomes them sin will eventually destroy their faith: "Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God; but exhort one another daily, while it is called Today, lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin" (Heb. 3:12-13). This was the way of spiritual decline followed by the prodigal son, as well as thousands of others in the world. Paul's former friend, Demas, also loved the world and its corrupt works and because of that he abandoned the way of the Lord (2 Tim. 4:10). We cannot live worldly lives and, at the same time, follow the Lord Jesus – we have to make a choice (Jas. 4:4; 1 John 2:15-17). Christians who indulge in sin are utterly foolish and will ultimately get evil and unbelieving hearts.

• Spiritual deception is also a very common way of apostatising. Deceivers are instigated and used by Satan to proclaim heresies. Paul says, "I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ. For if he who comes preaches another Jesus whom we have not preached, or if you receive a different spirit which you have not received, or a different gospel which you have not accepted, you put up with it well" (2 Cor. 11:3-4). Another Jesus is the result of gross misrepresentations of the true Jesus, in which cardinal aspects such as His virgin birth, deity, and the significance of His crucifixion are denied, as well as His resurrection and ascension. This other Jesus is not "our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ" (Tit. 2:13) since he has been reduced to the level of ordinary man who is unable to save anybody. A different spirit is not the Holy Spirit who convicts people of their sin and regenerates them, but a deceiving spirit from Satan. He instils the idea in unsaved people that their case with God has been settled. Another gospel always involves the denial of the gospel of the cross. False gospels do not honour the all-sufficiency of Christ's grace for salvation and sanctification. The biblical doctrine of salvation is substituted in various ways, e.g. by law-observance, church rituals such as baptism, or strange physical manifestations. Another way in which the Lord's Word is often changed and distorted is in poor translations of the Bible which contain deceptive statements. The judgements of the Lord rest upon fools who are guilty of this practice (Rev. 22:18-19).

• Since the early Christian church there were always groups of people as well as congregations who promoted Old Testament law-observance in association with the grace of Christ. Now, in the end-time, this foolish teaching is strongly re-emerging. It is a false gospel as it undermines salvation through grace by virtue of Jesus Christ's atoning death on the cross. Paul described the Galatians as foolish for doing so (Gal. 3:1-3). He even said that preachers who change the gospel by mixing it with law-observance should be accursed (Gal. 1:6-8). He clearly told believers in the church that they would fall from grace if they deny the all-sufficiency of the gospel of the cross by subjecting it to law-observance: "You have become estranged from Christ, you who attempt to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace" (Gal. 5:4).

• The departing from faith is the result of spiritual backsliding – regardless of whether it results from immoral acts or spiritual deception. When a person severs his relationship with the Lord Jesus he destroys his faith. That is usually the end of a process in which his faith is first weakened and starts faltering, and ultimately ceases to exist. That is a very common phenomenon in the end-time. People first grow cold in their love towards the Lord Jesus because of the increase of evil in the world (Matt. 24:12). If they are foolish enough to continue along this way they will depart from the faith and become followers of the devil: "Now the Spirit expressly says that in the latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons" (1 Tim. 4:1). A person must first become a believer before he can depart from the faith. Apostatising is a wilful act in which a person becomes a fool by rejecting a true faith. Paul says that some have rejected faith and a good conscience, "concerning the faith have suffered shipwreck" (1 Tim. 1:19). There are many of these spiritually shipwrecked persons in the modern world (cf. 2 Tim. 3:1-5; 2 Thess. 2:3).

• The lack of perseverance on the way of the Lord accounts for the spiritual downfall of many people. "For we have become partakers of Christ if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end" (Heb. 3:14). The devil will make various plans to cause us to deviate from the way of the Lord, but we must resist them. "If indeed you continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast, and are not moved away from the hope of the gospel" (Col. 1:23). We need to remain committed every day: "Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful" (Heb. 10:23). Only if we abide in Christ and continue to follow Him, can we lay claim to the promise that no one (no external power) can snatch us from the hand of the Lord. "Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God. He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son" (2 John v.9). Those who do not abide in Christ are in danger of completely losing the light of the Holy Spirit in their lives (1 Thess. 5:19). The Lord Jesus said to a backslidden congregation: "Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love"

ove. Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works; or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place— unless you repent” (Rev. 2:4-5). Backsliders must repent from their wandering ways and turn to the Lord. If they do not repent, darkness will completely enfold them. On their foreheads will be written: “Fools!” if they refuse to turn from the way of self-destruction.

10. The foolishness of ignorance

“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom... His praise endures for ever” (Ps. 111:10; cf. Prov. 1:7; 9:10).

All people act foolish if they continue to be ignorant of the Lord and His Word, since that is the ideal breeding-ground for deception and backsliding. This was Israel’s big problem in Old Testament times: “My people are destroyed for a lack of knowledge” (Hos. 4:6). We should avoid the foolishness of ignorance. The Lord Jesus said, “If you abide in my word, you are my disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free” (John 8:31-32). Paul also exhorts us towards the right conduct in the light of God’s Word: “Awake to righteousness, and do not sin; for some do not have the knowledge of God. I speak this to your shame” (1 Cor. 15:34). Are we not also in danger of being spiritually ruined for a lack of knowledge? Without enough knowledge of God’s righteousness people establish their own righteousness which falls far short of God’s standard.

Paul’s prayer for the Ephesians was “that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, the eyes of your understanding being enlightened” (Eph. 1:17-18). If we know God and His Word, then our mind functions correctly to understand and discern things in the light of God’s Word. Increased knowledge will also produce increased godliness in our lives. Paul wrote to the Colossians: “... we... do not cease to pray for you, and ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; that you may lead a life worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God” (Col. 1:9-10). Do you daily grow in the knowledge of God, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge? (Col. 2:3). People without this divine knowledge are spiritual fools.

Peter concludes his letter with the same call to increased knowledge, while seriously warning believers on deception because of ignorance: “Beware lest you also fall from your own steadfastness, being led away with the error of the wicked; but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ” (2 Pet. 3:17-18). This is a command which we all have to heed. The execution of this command will require something of us since the increase in knowledge is only achieved through disciplined and sustained Bible study, as well as increased holiness and dedication to the Lord. This is a challenge which faces all Christians.

Academic knowledge alone is not enough as we have to grow in knowledge and grace. We do not only need a widening of mental knowledge of the Lord and His Word but also a deepened spiritual experience through the working of the Holy Spirit. He is the Spirit of truth who guides us into all truth (John 16:13) and also reminds us of all things that Jesus has said (John 14:26). Through rededication to Christ and a more thorough embracing of the Lord and His Word we should ensure that we are spiritually enriched by increased knowledge, since knowledge alone puffs up (1 Cor. 8:1).

It was Paul’s main objective to gain more knowledge on the Lord Jesus as that would enable him to more intimately participate in the death and resurrection life of Jesus. Paul was mindful of the fact that a price had to be paid to gain this knowledge and deeper spiritual experience— he had to die to the lusts of the world: “Indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things... that I may gain Christ... that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death” (Phil. 3:8-10).

That should be the main driving force in a Christian’s life: “... till we all come to the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine” (Eph. 4:13-14). The knowledge of God brings wisdom and will protect us against all the eternal dangers of foolishness.