

PROVERBS

Chapter 14

The wise woman builds her house, but with her own hands the foolish one tears hers down. ² He whose walk is upright fears the LORD, but he whose ways are devious despises him. ³ A fool's talk brings a rod to his back, but the lips of the wise protect them. ⁴ Where there are no oxen, the manger is empty, but from the strength of an ox comes an abundant harvest. ⁵ A truthful witness does not deceive, but a false witness pours out lies. ⁶ The mocker seeks wisdom and finds none, but knowledge comes easily to the discerning. ⁷ Stay away from a foolish man, for you will not find knowledge on his lips. ⁸ The wisdom of the prudent is to give thought to their ways, but the folly of fools is deception. ⁹ Fools mock at making amends for sin, but goodwill is found among the upright. ¹⁰ Each heart knows its own bitterness, and no one else can share its joy. ¹¹ The house of the wicked will be destroyed, but the tent of the upright will flourish. ¹² There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death. ¹³ Even in laughter the heart may ache, and joy may end in grief. ¹⁴ The faithless will be fully repaid for their ways, and the good man rewarded for his. ¹⁵ A simple man believes anything, but a prudent man gives thought to his steps. ¹⁶ A wise man fears the LORD and shuns evil, but a fool is hotheaded and reckless. ¹⁷ A quick-tempered man does foolish things, and a crafty man is hated. ¹⁸ The simple inherit folly, but the prudent are crowned with knowledge. ¹⁹ Evil men will bow down in the presence of the good, and the wicked at the gates of the righteous. ²⁰ The poor are shunned even by their neighbors, but the rich have many friends. ²¹ He who despises his neighbor sins, but blessed is he who is kind to the needy. ²² Do not those who plot evil go astray? But those who plan what is good find^e love and faithfulness. ²³ All hard work brings a profit, but mere talk leads only to poverty. ²⁴ The wealth of the wise is their crown, but the folly of fools yields folly. ²⁵ A truthful witness saves lives, but a false witness is deceitful. ²⁶ He who fears the LORD has a secure fortress, and for his children it will be a refuge. ²⁷ The fear of the LORD is a fountain of life, turning a man from the snares of death. ²⁸ A large population is a king's glory, but without subjects a prince is ruined. ²⁹ A patient man has great understanding, but a quick-tempered man displays folly. ³⁰ A heart at peace gives life to the body, but envy rots the bones. ³¹ He who oppresses the poor shows contempt for their Maker, but whoever is kind to the needy honors God. ³² When calamity comes, the wicked are brought down, but even in death the righteous have a refuge. ³³ Wisdom reposes in the heart of the discerning and even among fools she lets herself be known. ³⁴ Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a disgrace to any people. ³⁵ A king delights in a wise servant, but a shameful servant incurs his wrath.

14:1 *wise woman builds her house.* She is a source of strength and an example of diligence for her family (see 31:10–31). Cf. the house built by wisdom in 9:1. (CSB)

Task of running the household was primarily fulfilled by women in Solomon’s time (9:1; 31:10–31). This was a great responsibility, which included not only domestic chores but also the nurture and instruction of their children in the faith (31:26). (TLSB)

She builds her house, that is, she nurtures and encourages her family or household. (The Hebrew language does not have separate words for house and home.) In the ancient Jewish home – as in the modern Christian home – the woman had a great deal of responsibility (see Proverbs 31:10-31). But she doesn’t build her home alone. The rest of the family takes part and, more important, the Lord takes part. In Psalm 127:1, Solomon wrote, “Unless the Lord builds the house, its builders labor in vain.” (PBC)

WITH HER OWN HANDS THE FOOLISH ONE TEARS HERS DOWN –
The foolish woman destroys her family life by unfaithfulness, laziness, or quarreling. (PBC)

14:2 *fears the LORD.* See note on 1:7. (CSB)

One’s outward behavior matches with his inner attitude toward the Lord. (PBC)

14:3 *rod to his back.* See 10:13; 19:29; 26:3. (CSB)

The fool expresses his unbelief in what he says. If punishment does not come in this life, ‘it’ll come later. We see the godly and wicked differ in three ways: (1) their attitude – fear of the Lord verses despising the Lord, (2) their behavior – upright verses devious walk, and (3) their end – God’s protection verses punishment. (PBC)

14:4 Oxen were used for plowing and threshing. Enjoying the benefits of life (such as an abundant harvest) requires that certain expenses be paid (such as the cost of filling the manger to feed the oxen). Such resources and investments should be managed wisely. (TLSB)

Perhaps the thought is that men need to take good care of their oxen (the means of production) if they expect an abundant harvest (see 12:10). – The Israelites used the ox for plowing and for threshing grain. The idea of this verse seems to be that if you want to enjoy the benefits of owning an ox, you have to be prepared to take care of the animal. The farmer with no oxen didn’t have to put food in the manger. But he couldn’t have as good a harvest without the help of this animal. In modern day terms, we might liken this to a teenager who wants to

have a car but doesn't want to keep it up. To enjoy certain benefits in life, we must be willing to pay certain costs. (PBC)

14:5 See note on 6:19. (CSB)

Sprinkled throughout Proverbs are reminders of the differences between a truthful witness and a deceiver. In addition to this verse, we find another one later in this chapter (verse 25). It may be that these verses have a double purpose. They keep the importance of being truthful ever before us. They also serve as little markers saying, "These proverbs you are studying are the truth." (PBC)

14:6 *mock*. See 1:22 and note. (CSB)

His own arrogance will not allow him to receive wise instruction from others. Cf 13:1.(TLSB)

seeks wisdom and finds none. Because he refuses to fear the Lord or accept any correction. (CSB)

WISDOM – hokmah – The most frequently used word for wisdom and refers to practical wisdom. Practical wisdom is the chief concept in Proverbs. The mocker can't find wisdom, because he has started from the wrong premise. Instead of fearing the Lord – which is the "beginning of knowledge" (1:7) – he scoffs. (PBC)

14:7 NOT FIND KNOWLEDGE – KNOWLEDGE – *dah'-ath knowledge*:—cunning, know(-ledge), awares (wittingly). (QV)

In order to find true knowledge, we need to keep going back to God's Word. (PBC)

14:8 WISDOM – hokmah – The most frequently used word for wisdom and refers to practical wisdom. Practical wisdom is the chief concept in Proverbs.- The point of this verse is that wisdom guides us through life. (PBC)

folly of fools is deception. What a fool believes to be prudent (but is really folly) does not bring success; instead, it tends toward his ruin. (CSB)

14:9 *mock at making amends for sin.* Cf. 19:28. (CSB)

One of several offerings prescribed by God in the OT. An act of confession may have preceded the guilt offering. Cf Lv 5:14–6:7. (TLSB)

The people of this world – namely, fools – consider the Bible’s talk about sin and the need for forgiveness nonsense. To them, the message of Christ’s crucified is “foolishness” (1 Corinthians 1:23). (PBC)

Fools in Proverbs

God often teaches the way of wisdom by using contrast. As a skilled artist sets his or her subject matter against a contrasting background, so the Lord, through His inspired writers, sets the bright gem of wisdom against the dismal backdrop of foolishness.

When the Bible in general—and Proverbs in particular—speaks of foolishness, the first and most important point to remember is that it describes a moral and *spiritual* condition. We should not confuse foolishness with lack of academic prowess or a low IQ. Some people who are brilliant may, in God’s eyes, be fools. For example, Ps 14:1 and 53:1 state, “The fool says in his heart, ‘There is no God.’ ” In Proverbs, the fool is one who does not have a proper fear of the Lord. Consequently, such a person is likely to deny God’s Word.

The Hebrew language in which Proverbs was originally written makes a distinction among different kinds of foolishness or fools. Awareness of these differences will help you more fully appreciate the message of Proverbs.

The simple Hbr *pethi*, the person who is easily lured or deceived; gullible. Of the various types of fools, this one is the least hardened in his or her foolishness. These naive and inexperienced people drift along aimlessly, until they fall easy prey to temptation (14:15). Such gullibility, of course, is not an excuse for sinning. Gullible people are responsible for their actions and may even end up killing themselves (1:32). In Pr 7, Solomon observes the gullible people and notes one who is drifting along aimlessly, ripe for a prostitute’s picking. If they are to escape their ways “and live,” the gullible need wisdom (9:4–6). Indeed, wisdom invites them by calling out, “Whoever is gullible, turn in here!”

The fool Hbr *kesit*; if the gullible person doesn’t learn, he or she may well move to the next level of foolishness and become a regular fool. This Hbr word is used 50 times in Proverbs and is the Book’s most common term for fool. In the end, “fools die for lack of sense” (10:21).

Stubborn fool Hbr *’ewil*, occurs 20 times in Proverbs. What can be said about the “generic fool” can

also be said about this fool. As the term “stubborn” implies, however, the individual at this level of foolishness is more hardened and persistent. “Fools mock at the guilt offering, but the upright enjoy acceptance” (14:9). This category of fool is connected to the word for foolishness and stupidity, or folly. Sadly, it’s a trait often found in children: “Folly is bound up in the heart of a child, but the rod of discipline drives it far from him” (22:15). As the child becomes a grown-up, the trait is even more difficult to correct: “Crush a fool in a mortar with a pestle along with crushed grain, yet his folly will not depart from him” (27:22).

The godless fool Hbr *nabal*, appears only three times in Proverbs. This is the word used in the psalms quoted earlier in this article. Those people who say to themselves, “There is no God.” Their mind is closed; they have rejected the Lord. This word is used in Pr 30:21–23, which states that one of four things under which the earth trembles is “a fool when he is filled with food.” Once such a person’s physical needs are satisfied, who knows what havoc he or she will bring to others? We find the epitome of this boorish and domineering fool in the man named Nabal (1Sm 25). He was “harsh and badly behaved” (v 3), and one of his own servants said of him, “He is such a worthless man that one cannot speak to him” (v 17).

Scripture and the Fool

As we look closely at the fool in Proverbs and the rest of Scripture, we come face-to-face with sinful human beings and with the “natural man.” In other words, we see ourselves. The believer realizes, “There but for the grace of God go I.” Even the author and compiler of Proverbs, wise King Solomon, became such a fool that he fell into idolatry (1Ki 11:4–11). As long as we are in this world, we will struggle against giving in to our sinful, foolish tendencies.

The remedy for foolishness is for God’s Word to remain our daily companion (Pr 2:1). The foolishness of the world is overcome by the foolishness of Christ. As the apostle Paul says, “If anyone among you thinks that he is wise in this age, let him become a fool that he may become wise” (1Co 3:18). It comes down to this: to know Christ and Him crucified is to know God’s wisdom (1Co 1:23–25). His forgiveness destroys our sinful foolishness. Through the Savior, we become truly wise and able to offer that wisdom to others as well. (TLSB)

Consequently, they remain in their sinful condition and under the wrath of God. (PBC)

goodwill ... among the upright. See 11:27 and note. (CSB)

Not those without sin but, as this proverb implies, those who confess their sin and rely on God's mercy. Through faith, they enjoy God's acceptance. (TLSB)

14:10 *knows its own bitterness.* See 1Ki 8:38. Cf. the experience of Hannah (1Sa 1:10) and Peter (Mt 26:75). (CSB)

We can know one another and share our joys and sorrows. But at the deepest level, no human is able to communicate to another exactly how he feels. (PBC)

can share its joy. Cf. Mt 13:44; 1Pe 1:8. (CSB)

The deepest emotions of the heart cannot always be fully shared with others. Jesus, however, always knows exactly how we feel. (Cf Jn 10:14–15.). (TLSB)

When an athlete trains for years and finally wins an Olympic gold medal, does anyone else truly feel the same exhilaration, as he or she stands on the winner's podium? Even among fellow athletes, the experience is slightly different for each one. (PBC)

14:11 HOUSE OF WICK WILL BE DESTROYED – The wicked build their permanent house in this world. But since this world is perishing, their house will too. (PBC)

TENT OF UPRIGHT WILL FLOURISH – St Paul says, "Now we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands" (2 Corinthians 5:1). Because of God's protection, our temporary tent is more secure than the house of the wicked. (PBC)

14:12 *in the end it leads to death.* See 5:4, 23; 7:21–27; Mt 7:13–14. (CSB)

Plural. There are many ways leading off the one straight way of the Lord. (TLSB)

Most people believe there is a God. Most also feel they are on the right path to heaven, by earning their way with their good deeds. This is the way "that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death." (PBC)

14:13 *in laughter the heart may ache.* Cf. Ezr 3:11–12. (CSB)

Do not let outward expressions deceive you. (TLSB)

Even on a happy occasion, there are tinges of sadness. We might be sad over a loved one who couldn't be there or over the recent heartache of some friend. (PBC)

joy may end in grief. As the death of Rachel in childbirth (Ge 35:17–18). (CSB)

Life in this fallen world is like that. And if we had was this world, every joy would end in the sadness of death. (PBC)

14:14 See 1:31; 12:14 and notes; see also 11:5, 8; 18:20; 22:8; Job 4:8. (CSB)

backslider. Hbr *sug*, “to deviate,” “be disloyal.” One who turns from God, undoing repentance (cf 1:23). (TLSB)

Sometimes the good are recognized and honored in this life. More often, they must wait. As for God's rewarding the good man, we might wonder how this fits with God's grace. The Lord does see our good deeds and lovingly rewards us. But it is a reward of grace, in that Christ has won our salvation for us. He has paid the complete price for our sins. (PBC)

14:15 *simple man.* See note on 1:4. (CSB)

Ambrose: “They know not what deceit is, they gladly believe of others what they themselves are, while they cannot suspect others to be what they themselves are not” (*NPNF 2* 10:78). (TLSB)

Be gullible. Believe anything. Avoid being prudent and thoughtful. (PBC)

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gives thought to his steps. See 4:26 and note; 21:29. (CSB)

14:16 *fears the LORD and shuns evil.* See notes on 1:7; 3:7. (CSB)

hotheaded. Cf. 21:24. (PBC)

reckless. In words (12:18; 13:3) and actions (Jdg 9:4). (CSB)

Pay no heed to the Lord, and don’t avoid evil. Instead, boldly rush right into it. (PBC)

14:17 *quick-tempered.* See Tit 1:7. (CSB)

crafty. Cf. 12:2; Job 5:12–13; 1Co 3:19. (CSB)

If people hate you for it, so much the better. It shows they respect you. (PBC)

14:18 SIMPLE INHERIT FOLLY – Don’t waste time learning, when there’s so much to enjoy. Let the wise have their knowledge. Worry about that later. (PBC)

crowned with knowledge. Adorned and blessed with knowledge (see note on 4:9; see also v. 24; 12:4; Ps 103:4). (CSB)

14:19 *Evil men will bow down.* Cf. 17:2. (CSB)

At the final judgment, everyone will bow before and acknowledge Jesus Christ as Lord. (PBC)

at the gates of the righteous. Perhaps to beg for some favor (cf. 1Sa 2:36). (CSB)

14:20 *shunned even by their neighbors.* And sometimes by their relatives (see 19:7). (CSB)

Solomon describes what fair weather friends are all about. One commentator speaks of it as “a part of the dark side of human nature.” It’s when we’re down and out that we discover who our true friends are. As Solomon says later, “A friend loves at all times” (Proverbs 17:17). (PBC)

14:21 *blessed is he who is kind to the needy.* Sharing food (22:9), lending money (28:8) and defending rights (31:9) are ways one can show kindness. Such a person “honors God” (v. 31; cf. 17:5) and will lack nothing (28:27). Cf. 21:13; Ps 41:1. (CSB)

Honored recipients of God’s favor. Their faith in Christ is expressed by their trust in God (16:20), by their observance of His Word (29:18), and here by their generosity to the poor. (TLSB)

This verse tells us to be sure not to be fair weather friends, who despise his needy neighbor. While the world couldn’t care less, God who is kind toward the needy, is watching. (PBC)

14:22 *plot evil.* See 3:29; 6:14, 18; Mic 2:1. (CSB)

We reap what we sow. (PBC)

go astray. See 5:23; 12:26. (CSB)

meet. Hbr text is unclear. Those who do good can either “receive” steadfast love for themselves or “show” that love to others. (TLSB)

find love and faithfulness. Receive the support and care of faithful friends (cf. 3:3; 16:6; 20:28)—perhaps God’s support and care are also implied here. (CSB)

In turn, they receive love and faithfulness from many sources. (PBC)

14:23 *hard work brings a profit.* See note on 10:4; see also 21:5. (CSB)

MERE TALK LEADS ONLY TO POVERTY – The poverty spoken of in this verse is not that of verses 20 and 21. This poverty is brought about by laziness. (PBC)

14:24 *wealth ... is their crown.* The wise obtain wealth, and it adorns them like a crown (see 10:22). (CSB)

Does not mean that all the wise are wealthy but contrasts the benefits of wisdom (monetary or spiritual) with the folly of fools, which never offers any reward. (TLSB)

The wise realize benefits from their wisdom, whether those benefits be monetary or other. (PBC)

yields folly. An empty inheritance (see v. 18; 3:35). (CSB)

The foolish produce nothing but more foolishness. (PBC)

14:25 See v. 5; 12:17; see also note on 6:19. (CSB)

Especially when we share the truth of God's grace can it be said that we are saving lives. Deceit destroys, instead of saving. (PBC)

14:26 *fears the LORD.* See 1:7; 3:7 and notes. (CSB)

secure fortress ... refuge. Means either that the father's godliness will result in blessing for himself and his children (see 20:7) or that the "fear of the LORD" will be a strong tower where the children also can find refuge (see 18:10; Ps 71:7; Isa 33:6). (CSB)

God protects us from the onslaughts of Satan. (PBC)

14:27 See note on 10:11; see also 13:14. (CSB)

This verse is nearly identical to 13:14. (TLSB)

As our fountain of life, He has created us and also given us the gift of eternal life. With assurances such as these, we can face life, death, and eternity brimming with confidence. (PBC)

14:28 WITHOUT SUBJECTS A PRINCE IS RUINED – Mere outward show of royalty is empty, Similarly, all outward pretense without real substance behind it is emptiness. (PBC)

14:29 *patient man.* See 15:18; 16:32; 19:11; Jas 1:19. (CSB)

Patience is one of the characteristics of the sevenfold fruit of the Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:22). Everywhere, the Bible commends and encourages it. (PBC)

QUICK-TEMPERED MAN – This is neither encouraged or commended. James comments: “My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, for man’s anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires” (James 1:19-20). (PBC)

14:30 *gives life to the body.* Cf. the healthy effects of fearing the Lord and walking in wisdom in 3:7–8, 16–18. (CSB)

In this verse Solomon again stresses the tremendous influence that our inner spiritual life has on the rest of life, including our physical health. (PBC)

envy rots the bones. See note on 3:8; see also 12:4; Ps 37:7–8. (CSB)

Like a cancer, envy destroys from the inside. (TLSB)

It eats away at one like a deadly cancer. (PBC)

14:31 *shows contempt for their Maker.* Because God created both the rich and the poor in his image (see 22:2; Job 31:15; Jas 3:9). (CSB)

Jesus accords similar importance to the good works we do, or fail to do, for the needy (Mt 25:40, 45). (TLSB)

Poverty can be the result of laziness (Verse 23; 24:30-34). Often, however, circumstances beyond people’s control leads to their poverty. Along with poverty, they suffer injustice (13:23) and loneliness (19:4,7). To add to their misery is to show contempt for God Himself. In His parable of the Last Judgment, Jesus addresses our accountability to those in need: “I tell you the truth, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me” (Matthew 25:45). (PBC)

kind to the needy. See note on v. 21. (CSB)

honors God. Does God’s will, and in a sense gives to God himself (see 19:17; Mt 25:40). (CSB)

To help those in need is to honor God: “I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me” (Matthew 25:40). (PBC)

14:32 *wicked are brought down.* See 1:26–27 and note; 11:5; 24:16. (CSB)

When calamity comes, the wicked have nothing to fall back on. Their hopes are in this world and the things of this world. (PBC)

even in death the righteous have a refuge. Their faith in God gives them hope beyond the grave (see note on 12:28; see also Ps 49:14–15; 73:24). (CSB)

Because God gives eternal life. Luther: “For if death is feared on account of sin, it should be desired much more on account of sins, because death alone puts an end to sin and slays it. Therefore death, the murderer of sin, should be loved as much as sin is feared” (AE 29:138). (TLSB)

What a word of comfort believers have in this verse. Death itself cannot overwhelm God’s people. They still have refuge in Almighty God. (PBC)

14:33 WISDOM – *hokmah* – The most frequently used word for wisdom and refers to practical wisdom. Practical wisdom is the chief concept in Proverbs. (PBC)

DISCERNING – *bene* A primitive root; to *separate* mentally (or *distinguish*), that is, (generally) *understand*:—attend, consider, be cunning, diligently, direct, discern, eloquent, feel, inform, instruct, have intelligence, know, look well to, mark, perceive, be prudent. (QV)

even among fools she lets herself be known. Perhaps means that even fools occasionally display a bit of wisdom (cf. Ac 17:27–28; Ro 1:19–20), but see NIV text note. – (but in the heart of fools she is not known). (CSB)

So-called wisdom will be greatly discussed among fools but will never be allowed to settle and provide its benefits. (TLSB)

This rare proverb says that on occasion even fools are able to recognize wisdom. They can’t see the wisdom within a wise person’s heart. Yet by his actions they see something they themselves lack. Perhaps by the life he leads, a wise man can help a fool step over to the other side, to that of wisdom. (PBC)

14:34 *Righteousness exalts a nation.* See note on 11:11. Israel was promised prosperity and prestige if she obeyed God’s laws (see Dt 28:1–14). (CSB)

Reminder aimed esp at rulers and other public servants that their good example is beneficial to the entire nation. Their sin, likewise, affects and disgraces all who live under their rule. Israel received blessings from the Lord through faithfulness. The Canaanites were cursed and cast out. (TLSB)

This one of those proverbs that seems to rise above the rest in catching our attention. Its few words speak volumes about world history and current events.

The word “nation” applies to groups of people. God judges nations not by their economies, military power, or natural resources. He weighs them on the scales of sin and righteousness. Because of the wickedness of its king and rulers, the mighty empire of Babylon was brought down swiftly and unexpectedly (Daniel 5). Modern America faces God’s judgment because of its sins, which have become a national disgrace – the breakdown of the family, abortion, materialism, moral indifference. Wherever we may live, we need to promote righteousness. This includes civic righteousness, by which basic ethical standards are honored and applied. It includes the righteousness of Christ as well. Through the gospel of Christ, not only are nations brought from the brink of destruction, but individual souls are saved for eternity. (PBC)

sin is a disgrace to any people. The Canaanites were driven out because of their terrible sin (Lev 18:24–25), and Israel later received the same curse (Dt 28:15–68; cf. 2Sa 12:10). (CSB)

14:35 *incurs his wrath.* See 16:14; 19:12; Da 2:12. (CSB)

While it’s true that good people at times suffer under unjust governments, the general principles still apply. Those rulers and governments that make a habit of punishing good citizens and favoring the wicked will not stand much longer. (PBC)