

Words of Truth



Is It Sinful To Call Someone A Fool?

By: Brian A. Yeager

On September 3rd I received an email wherein the writer was defending a false teacher I had marked on my website. While he did not agree with the authority to mark a false teacher (cf. Romans 16:17-18), he took issue with me calling this particular false teacher a fool. He used this Scripture in his email to me: *“But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire”* (Matthew 5:22).

When we examine the aforementioned Scripture we find that it is wrong to be angry with a brother WITHOUT a cause. We find we cannot say “Raca” [empty one; worthless; Strong’s # 4469] about a brother. We also find that we cannot call a brother a fool without being in danger of going to hell over it. Here is the question we must now ask: where does Matthew 5:22 teach that calling a FALSE TEACHER a fool is wrong?

We must always be sure that we check that our understanding of a verse is in agreement with the remainder of God’s word. Studying to be sure that we are using a verse correctly is called “rightly dividing the word of truth” (II Timothy 2:15). Let me quickly answer this incorrect usage of Matthew 5:22 and then we’re going to study some things about fools.

What we are about to read are words from the pen of the Apostle Paul. What Paul wrote was not his own words, but those of Christ through the Holy Spirit (John 16:13 and I Corinthians 2:9-13). From the inspired words that Paul wrote (II Timothy 3:16-17), we learn that it is RIGHT to call erring brethren fools. Notice the following: *“O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you, that ye should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ hath been evidently set forth, crucified among you? This only would I learn of you, Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? Are ye so foolish? having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh”* (Galatians 3:1-3)? Outside of Paul’s words, we find the term fool is often applied to those who err spiritually.

The Word Of God Shows Us That Those Who Err Are Fools

Notice how Jesus used the word “fool”: *“Ye fools and blind: for whether is greater, the gold, or the temple that sanctifieth the gold... Ye fools and blind: for whether is greater, the gift, or the altar that sanctifieth the gift... Ye fools, did not he that made that which is without make that which is within also... Then he said unto them, O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken”* (Matthew 23:17, Matthew 23:19, Luke 11:40, and Luke 24:25). In the first three references Jesus was talking to the erring scribes and Pharisees. In the last reference, Jesus was walking and talking with two men whom were His disciples. The Pharisees and scribes obviously were fools in that they

rejected Christ. The disciples, they were fools in that they did not learn of Christ while He taught them. In all four of the verses quoted, Jesus was rebuking people who erred. Those who reject God's word and those who do not learn the truth, they are equally fools. This is not a derogatory remark. When you study the Scriptures to find out what a fool is, you find that someone who is ignorant of the truth (willfully or not) is a fool.

Who Is A Fool?

When you truly study what a fool is you find that a fool is someone who does not understand, someone who is not wise, someone who is disobedient, someone who does not want taught, those who mock at sin, etc. Consider the following Scriptures as our study of the term fool: *"The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God. They are corrupt, they have done abominable works, there is none that doeth good... A brutish [stupid] man knoweth not; neither doth a fool understand this... Understand, ye brutish among the people: and ye fools, when will ye be wise... The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge: but fools despise wisdom and instruction... O ye simple, understand wisdom: and, ye fools, be ye of an understanding heart... The wise in heart will receive commandments: but a prating fool shall fall... The lips of the righteous feed many: but fools die for want of wisdom... Fools make a mock at sin: but among the righteous there is favour... A wise man feareth, and departeth from evil: but the fool rageth, and is confident... A fool despiseth his father's instruction: but he that regardeth reproof is prudent... The heart of him that hath understanding seeketh knowledge: but the mouth of fools feedeth on foolishness... He that trusteth in his own heart is a fool: but whoso walketh wisely, he shall be delivered... And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand... For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. For it is written, He taketh the wise in their own craftiness"* (Psalms 14:1, Psalms 92:6, Psalms 94:8, Proverbs 1:7, Proverbs 8:5, Proverbs 10:8, Proverbs 10:21, Proverbs 14:9, Proverbs 14:16, Proverbs 15:5, Proverbs 15:14, Proverbs 28:26, Matthew 7:26, and I Corinthians 3:19).

Like most sins, people who are foolish are often self-deceived (cf. Galatians 6:3). Notice what God says about fools being self-deceived: *"The way of a fool is right in his own eyes: but he that hearkeneth unto counsel is wise... Keep thy foot when thou goest to the house of God, and be more ready to hear, than to give the sacrifice of fools: for they consider not that they do evil"* (Proverbs 12:15 and Ecclesiastes 5:1). The fool does not seek to prepare him or herself to meet the Lord (Matthew 25:1-13). In reality, anyone who is not a faithful Christian is a fool (Titus 3:3). If you reject that Scriptural truth, you then are taking a position that someone who is not saved is actually walking in wisdom. That statement, in itself, is the epitome of foolishness! It is God Himself who says that those who are not obediently prepared to meet Him are fools (Proverbs 19:3 and Luke 12:13-21).

Conclusion

It is wrong to call a brother a fool. To rightly understand this, we must remind ourselves that our brethren are those who are presently obeying the Lord's will (Matthew 12:46-50 and I John 3:1-7). The term "brother" does not protect us from being fools. Our obedience to Christ shows that we are wise, not acting foolishly (Ephesians 5:14-17). When you choose not to obediently surrender your entire life to Christ, you are certainly a fool (Psalms 5:5)!