

Becoming Exceptionally Stupid by Pastor Marty

Most of us have, at one time or another, made a joke about someone we know—or even about ourselves—being exceptionally stupid or foolish in some way. I’m not talking about those things said out of malice or abuse, for there is no place for that. However, there are times we make comments more innocently. Maybe we spent 20 minutes searching for car keys that we were holding in our hand the whole time, or we relayed to someone on the phone our distress over not knowing where we left our phone, or we struggled to open the wrong end of a box of cereal. There are innumerable ways we can end up doing silly things when our mind is focused on something else. At other times, we might recognize that we are not as smart or wise as others when things don’t “click” for us, such as solving a riddle, remembering why we walked into a room, or finding a solution to a problem. For most of us, we can read books and listen to differing perspectives, and those things help us to gain more knowledge. However, if we spend much time watching the news—especially over the last year—we have probably heard at least one or two arguments that seem to boggle the mind. We eventually realize that people with lower IQs can be in possession of much more common sense and wisdom than many of those individuals our society identifies as geniuses.

The people society identifies as smartest may really have the least common sense.

In a biblical context, the “stupidity” I am referencing is often referred to as being foolish. The term “fool” in the Bible—especially in the Old Testament—is much more serious than just a reference to someone who is not very wise or knowledgeable about a subject. When Proverbs describes a fool, it is someone who denies the existence of God, follows a destructive path, or chooses to embrace an immoral lifestyle. A fool

is a person who makes decisions opposing the clear counsel of God. Regrettably, the greatest example of a fool in the Old Testament is seen in the person who was also known as being the wisest: Solomon. God had given King Solomon greater wisdom than all before or after him up until Jesus. He had wisdom and knowledge in every known area. The entire book of Proverbs is an instruction manual on being wise and not being a fool. Over and over again, Solomon had repeatedly warned of the dangers of sexual sin and the foolishness of turning away from God to worship idols. Nevertheless, that is exactly what he did. Even after God specifically warned him about letting his heart be turned away to other gods, he let his love for his many pagan wives turn his heart to false gods. He eventually built altars and offered sacrifices to idols. The man who had been the wisest of all became the most foolish; the one who most understood the right way to go chose what was greatest wrong.

In Solomon, we see the one who was the wisest of all become the greatest of fools.

Of course, there were many kings in the Old Testament who were much more evil than Solomon; however, none of them started with his wisdom and proclaimed the dangers of sin as clearly as he did. He knew what was the right thing to do ... but he chose to do what he knew was wrong. He personified the fool. This is what Paul talks about in his letter to the Romans. He begins with the earliest days of life on earth to give a clear description of what makes a fool. As we read Genesis, we find that the first husband and wife did not forget about God after the fall. They told their children about God. We see God talk to Cain before he slew Abel, warning him of the dangers of sin, and he knew enough about God to ask for protection even as God was pronouncing judgment. The human race did not

suddenly lose all knowledge of God. However, within a few centuries, the earth had become so corrupted that God had to send a flood. How did that happen? Paul describes it for us in a clear step-by-step progression. He explains that even while people professed to be wise, they became fools. How did they become fools? He states that they KNEW who God was but CHOSE to worship other things in place of God. It was as a result of this CHOICE that God gave them over to their depraved minds and hearts. This is extremely important for us to understand. The knowledge of God—the understanding of who He is and what He is like—was not “accidentally” lost from the earth; humanity as a whole chose to believe a lie and wipe all knowledge of God from memory. When they made that choice, things declined at light speed. The only reason any of us are here now is because eight people refused to give up their knowledge of God. The whole earth faced annihilation because people made the intentional choice to believe a lie.

The whole earth faced total destruction because humanity chose to believe a lie.

Paul tells us that Eve was deceived into eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil while Adam knew very well what he was doing. However, they both disobeyed God. That act of sin came after the conversation with the serpent. Between the first words spoken to Eve and the eating of the fruit by Adam, there was a point where the man and woman made a choice. They chose to believe what the serpent said instead of what God said; they chose a lie instead of the truth. However, they most likely did not realize the full extent of their choice at the time. It is very doubtful they would willingly have chosen sin and death over eternal life with God if they had completely understood all the consequences of their decision. Still, complete understanding of the results was not necessary. They knew that they were making a voluntary choice to reject what God had spoken to them.

Once they had done that, their next sins came in rapid succession: covering their guilt, hiding from God, and shifting the blame. However, it was only as time went on and they experienced pain and death that they realized the complete consequences of their poor choice. In a prior newsletter, we saw that part of what it means to be human is an ability to “become” and to “change.” This change, whether good or evil, is often a process. Solomon did not become a fool in a single day. It says that his foreign wives “turned his heart away” from God. The sense of the verb here is an effect taking place over time. Solomon did exactly as he warned others not to do—he allowed himself to take one step at a time down a path to complete destruction.

Solomon did not become a fool overnight; he slowly changed over a period of time.

It is not clear if Solomon knew from the beginning the extent of the change that would take place in his heart. In some sense, he had to be aware of the idolatrous motives of his wives. Like Samson, perhaps he embraced denial so he could rationalize each step. Having 700 wives and 300 concubines, he clearly had a weakness when it came to resisting temptation. However, the fact that his wives turned his heart away from God indicates it was first turned toward God. It was over time that his heart hardened and became cold. Many years after dedicating the temple of God with a prayer of unwavering commitment, he found himself before an altar of Baal, the god of sexual perversions, offering unholy sacrifices. In ancient times, Baal worship always led to the worship of Molech, which involved child sacrifice, and the author of Kings states that Solomon worshipped Chemosh and Milcom, other names for Molech. By that time, his heart was so hardened that idolatry became easy for him. His conscience had been seared. Each of the choices he made changed his mind and heart until he lost his wisdom and became a fool. However, he didn’t start by worshipping

other gods; his heart was turned away over a period of time. Maybe his first poor choice was making an altar for one of his wives under the false belief that he could eventually convert her to a belief in the one true God. Perhaps he did not realize where it would lead. There is a truth in the old saying, “the road to Hell is paved with good intentions.” The biggest sins often come from the smallest seeds of unwise decisions.

Most of our bad decisions come from not realizing how things will really turn out.

I remember once having a conversation with a friend about a lifestyle issue. This person did not see any danger in making a compromise when it came to a certain life choice. I pointed out how huge falls begin with small steps that may seem relatively harmless or even innocent. This friend understood the point but didn't feel any need to reverse course. I wish I could say I was wrong about what I'd foreseen, but in this case, I wasn't. It led to profound destruction. Now, I am not infallible, but one of my gifts is an ability at times to see the potential danger in how some things play out. I think I developed this gift—or at least honed it—during a specific time in my life when I resolved to spending an hour every morning reading the Bible. I read for quantity, trying to read as much as I could each day. Additionally, I also read the book of Psalms and Proverbs over and over. I began to see not only how God works but also how He made the world to work. Another large part came from all the reading I've done on C. S. Lewis and Leanne Payne, describing how significant the smallest changes in our theology can become. Of course, my study of history helped me in this. However, I think this is an ability that anyone can develop by taking the time to examine history and think carefully about all of the possible consequences and repercussions of our immediate actions.

Anyone can learn to “glimpse the future” by taking time to consider all the results.

In the Church, we sometimes state that no one sin is worse than another. Of course, there is truth in that. Paul states that all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God, and any who sin in one aspect of the law have then sinned against the whole law. Sin is sin. Still, it's also entirely wrong in another context. Through the Bible, we see some people—such as Moses, David, and Solomon—held to a higher standard than others because there was a greater level of the knowledge of God in their lives. They had more reason to know better. As Uncle Ben said to Peter Parker, “with great power comes great responsibility” ... or as Jesus Himself phrased it, “To whom much is given, much more is then to be expected.” Solomon was the greatest fool in the Old Testament because he had first been the wisest of all. Moses was judged harshly for his disobedience because he had seen the full extent of God's power at work and spoken with Him face-to-face. The more that we know God and His truth, the more we are accountable for the choices we make. Again, this is not just my personal opinion, for Jesus declared that those who know what is right and still choose wrong will be punished more than those who didn't know the extent of the wrong (Luke 12: 47-48).

Those who know the truth and choose to believe a lie commit a much greater sin.

Many in the Church today have chosen to believe and embrace lies because they have not understood the consequences of the choice they make. They have not recognized how very small changes in one area can result in very big changes in others. The Gospel of John declares that “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” John made a statement that forms the absolute core of the Christian faith. However, there is a translation out there that reads, “the Word was a god.” The tiny insertion of a single letter has a profound effect not only on the meaning of this single verse but also on the difference between

orthodoxy and heresy. One single letter causes the entire gospel to unravel, and—as seen even in the way it is written—changes “God” to be “god” ... which is a change not only in definition but also in nature. Thankfully, those who know better have shown us that such a small change cannot fit the true context of true orthodoxy. However, some deceptions are not so easy to discern. Postmodern culture and its relativistic approach to truth have succeeded in elevating what we “believe” to the same level as what is “true.” This has created a whole generation of believers who evaluate ideas and concepts in light of how reasonable or rational they seem in a specific context instead of the effect they may have in the larger context of truth. We don’t see that this is precisely what the serpent did in Eden. By redefining “death” and rephrasing it in a specific context, he introduced destruction in the entire world. Sometimes, the meaning of a thing may be much more important than the small context we initially tend to ascribe to it.

A thing’s meaning might be much more important than the context we ascribe it.

As we have discussed, some people are more responsible and accountable than others because they have been given more. Solomon is a prime example of this because he had every reason to know better. At some point, he made a choice to do what he knew was wrong, and in a domino effect, each choice eroded his ability to recognize the truth of the next choice until he became a fool. As we read Proverbs, we see clearly that this works both ways: we are able to gain wisdom, but we are also able to lose our wisdom. Regrettably, many in the Church today are following Solomon’s example. They choose to examine or evaluate current issues in light of specific contexts and then adjust their personal beliefs accordingly. In the process, they do not realize the extent that doing so not only affects their ability to discern truth and error but also changes their theology. God repeatedly warned

Israel that giving even the smallest foot of land to the pagan nations would lead to corruption, but they did not listen. He commanded them to have nothing to do with those who worshipped idols because He knew they would eventually embrace those practices ... and even worse, the people would—as Paul clearly describes—begin to lose their knowledge of God and His nature.

What may seem to be a harmless step can lead to losing our knowledge of God.

Today, we are seeing this effect play out in the Church in three different ways. First, we have whole generations of believers who do not evaluate the coherence of their theology. If they don’t like a certain belief, then they simply reject it. They do not realize that some beliefs intrinsically affect others even if the connection is not obvious. As I described in my prior series, an accurate understanding of the nature of God both depends on and informs an accurate view of the nature of man and woman; losing either one directly damages the other. Second, we see many believers compromise on what they see as minor issues without realizing the damage it might cause in the long run. They believe it will result in worthwhile results. In reality, it causes destruction to the gospel while it erodes their discernment and their ability to know God. As I have discussed in prior newsletters, any idea or position can be presented in a way that makes it seem desirable. Third, we are watching whole denominations divide over changes in theology. On the one hand, Jesus told us the world would know we are His by our love for one another; on the other hand, He condemned those who accepted false teaching and said they should be put out of the church. Instead, many that hold the most orthodox positions are identified as the most unloving and suffer condemnation or persecution by those who claim enlightenment. Most regrettably, as we compromise our beliefs and lose our knowledge of who God really is, those who actually suffer the most are the lost.