

## The Foolishness Of Bias

Misguided Zeal and Human Reasoning

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Given 27-Oct-07; Sermon #852

In his novel, *State of Fear*, Michael Crichton explains the problem of bias. In his research for his book he found that:

In medical experiments double blind experiments are required. There are good reasons why this is important. Every scientist has some idea of how his experiment is going to turn out. Otherwise he wouldn't do the experiment in the first place. He has an expectation. And expectation works in mysterious ways; and totally unconsciously.

Studies of scientific bias have been done to analyze its effect. Here is a simple example:

A group of genetically identical rats is sent to two different labs for testing. One lab is told that the rats were bred for intelligence and will run a maze faster than normal. The other lab is told that the rats are dumb and will run a maze slowly. Results come back. Faster in one lab and slower in the other, yet the rats are genetically identical. The labs said that they recorded the data accurately.

The next example:

A group of survey takers were told, "Look, we know that pollsters are influenced in subtle ways. We want to avoid that. So when you knock on the door and someone answers we want you to read only what is written on this card."

"Hello, I am doing a survey and I am reading from this card in order not to influence you, etc."

The polltakers say nothing, except what is on the card. One group of pollsters is told "This questionnaire will get 70% positive answers."

They tell another group, "You can expect 30% positive answers." Identical questionnaires. The results come back 70% and 30%.

That says a lot about human nature. There are hundreds of studies proving again and again that expectations determine outcome. People find what they think they will find. That is human nature, and that is the reason for double blind experiments—to eliminate bias.

The experiment is divided up among different people who do not know each other. The people who prepare the experiment do not know the people who will conduct the experiment, or the people who will handle the result. These groups never communicate in any way. Their spouses and children never meet.

The groups are in different universities, and hopefully in different countries. That is supposedly how new drugs are tested, because that is the only way to prevent bias from creeping in. There is a well-known saying that expresses this bias:

It is never a good policy for the fox to guard the hen house.

So the polls that are taken for politics and such cannot be believed at all because they are all tainted with human bias.

Most people obey an instinct within them. They cannot explain it and, of course, sometimes this is elevated almost into the position of a supreme virtue. The problem is that human nature cannot be trusted. "There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death." You are very familiar with that scripture.

There are people who really believe that instinctive judgments are better than judgments that are based on reason and understanding. Many of you remember the saying of the late 1960s, "If it feels good, do it!" This is an expression of guidance by instinct.

Instinctive judgments may be good if righteous habits based on solid biblical principles have been developed over time; or, in a general sense, as the result of God-given gifts. Husbands often rely on the instinctive judgment of their wives in areas of social interaction. This is well-known as "woman's intuition." I know that Herbert Armstrong said that he relied heavily on his wife, Loma, because she could see through people when he could not. Mr. Armstrong said that he was not a good judge of a person on the surface.

There may be something to that. But all I am saying is that if you elevate that into a life-

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guiding principle, you are doing something that is dangerous, and is contrary to biblical teaching. It puts too much stock in human reasoning, and that is very foolish.

The terms "fools" and "folly" are portrayed in the book of Proverbs as negative images. Fools are angry, arrogant and self-centered. Their tempers are quick to flare up. They seem to enjoy quarrels and fights. They trust their own fund of knowledge and refuse to take advice from anyone else is the way that the book of Proverbs portrays it.

It also portrays fools as being "wise in their own eyes." They even reject the guidance of their parents as beneath them. Fools also find it impossible to control their emotions and their actions; they lack self-control in many areas of their lives, but especially in their ability to control their tongues.

Biblically, the most often seen pattern associated with folly is that it is inevitably self-destructive. It "misleads" the fool; it is itself "the punishment" of fools; it "tears down" a house; it "leads to ruin"; and it is so powerful that even "a little folly outweighs wisdom and honor." A main cause of the fool's self-destructive behavior is a lack of discipline.

**Proverbs 5:23** He shall die for lack of instruction, and in the greatness of his folly he shall go astray.

Proverb after proverb gives us the same description of the fool and folly.

The foolish person is very often governed by zeal. Generally, we like zealous people. We should all be zealous. But there is a serious danger if we are governed by zeal. Zeal and sincerity are wonderful, but they are never meant to be in control, and if you put them in control, there will eventually be failure.

There are many people who are governed by their zeal. They see something and they want to do it, so they rush on without considering anything else. They assume that because they are zealous they must be right. Big mistake! They can be sincerely wrong. I remember Herbert Armstrong saying about those who are religious, in general, and about Christianity, "They are sincere, but they are sincerely wrong."

You can be zealous in a false cause. All one need do is look at the "global warming" (or, to be more politically correct—the "climate change") environmental movement. A substantial number of scientists have come forward with scientific proof that "global warming" cannot be proven to be a global crisis. But, because of the massive amount of money involved with it—corrupt governments, lying academia, grant-receiving scientists,

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and the sensationalizing media are happy to promote false information regarding it. One professor, Alston Chase, put it this way:

When the search for truth is confused with political advocacy, the pursuit of knowledge is reduced to the quest for power.

The lies perpetrated by Al Gore and his Globalist cronies have been exposed for the deception that they are. Yet little is said about it in the mainstream media. It is all about greed and power over the world's resources. So now they have focused their deception on "climate change." And who can argue with climate change? Climate is constantly changing, because God has designed into the earth's environment for the climate cycles to shift and change over decades, centuries and even millennia.

It has been said that "fire is a good servant, but a bad master." The same is true of zeal. You could say, "Zeal is a good servant, but a bad master." Zeal can lead to fanaticism, to cruelty, to persecution. It has been one of the most devastating influences in the long history of the church. Zeal that is not under control, and that is not governed and guided by wisdom and by understanding, is a terror.

The Muslim terrorists are zealots! They are emotional zealots without wisdom and real understanding and truth. They yell, "Death to America!" But with all America's faults, she has still been a blessing to the world, as God promised Abraham through his grandson Jacob's descendents, the descendents of Israel.

**Genesis 12:2-3** I will make you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name great; and you shall be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.

But Abraham's descendants humanly reasoned themselves into foolishness because of their enmity against the God who gave them the blessing in the first place. So today we see the great blessings of abundance, which God has given the descendants of ancient Israel, being used perversely. Instead of being a benevolent people, the descendants of the ancient Israelites have become self-serving, prideful, conquering zealots.

God can change a self-serving zealot. Saul (later known as the apostle Paul) experienced the irresistible drive of perverse zeal which he manifested against Stephen and many other early Christians.

**Acts 7:58** and they cast him out of the city and stoned him. And the witnesses laid down their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul.

**Acts 8:1-3** Now Saul was consenting to his death. At that time a great persecution arose against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. And devout men carried Stephen to his burial, and made great lamentation over him. As for Saul, he made havoc of the church, entering every house, and dragging off men and women, committing them to prison.

**Acts 9:1-2** Then Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and asked letters from him to the synagogues of Damascus, so that if he found any who were of the Way, whether men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.

Here we see the enthusiasm of a bad zealot. You know the story. God confronted Saul on the way to Damascus, and later Ananias baptized him, and then Saul preached Christ vigorously with great zeal.

**Acts 9:20-22** Immediately he preached the Christ in the synagogues, that He is the Son of God. Then all who heard were amazed, and said, "Is this not he who destroyed those who called on this name in Jerusalem, and has come here for that purpose, so that he might bring them bound to the chief priests?" But Saul increased all the more in strength, and confounded the Jews who dwelt in Damascus, proving that this Jesus is the Christ.

God can do anything to change and convert even a zealot, and make him into a useful human being. Saul was the epitome of a foolish person who trusted his zeal. According to his folly he is right, and he is sincere. His human nature tells him that if he is sincere he must be right. When Saul's knowledge and focus was right, his zeal became an asset to God and His people.

**Proverbs 14:16-17** A wise man fears and departs from evil, but a fool rages and is self-confident. A quick-tempered man acts foolishly, and a man of wicked intentions is hated.

This certainly described Saul in his earlier years. Now public education in the modern

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world over the past hundred years has taught and promoted a similar fallacy. What is it that society has told us? Society has programmed people to believe that it does not matter very much what a person believes as long as he is sincere. As a result of this human reasoning most people rely on their own earthly wisdom. Unwarranted confidence in one's own wisdom results in the fool's self-destructive behavior.

**Proverbs 3:7** Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the Lord and depart from evil.

**Proverbs 16:2** All the ways of a man are pure in his own eyes, but the Lord weighs the spirits.

And so the foolish person rushes madly into trouble because he has exalted and elevated zeal to the supreme position in his own mind. And often others suffer along the way.

It amounts to this—the foolish person is one who does not think adequately. He does not think correctly about a subject or situation; actually he does not think ahead at all. He is only concerned about the present moment, and that is the essence of a fool, is it not?

A fool sees something he wants and sets his mind to get it. He does not think ahead at all. The only moment that matters to him is now. This has formed into a popular worldly philosophy called "existentialism"—this moment is all that matters, this immediate moment.

In everyone's lives there are moments of ultimate final decision; and in the case of the apostle Paul, it was a moment of spiritual conversion. But if we elevate the present moment into a controlling universal principle without regard to the future, it becomes devastatingly dangerous because we are not only alive at this moment, we will be alive in the next moment, and the next, and so on. The wise understand that spiritual conversion is an ongoing process; whereas, the fool thinks conversion is instantaneous—once saved, always saved.

So our decision now has a bearing on, and a reference to, the upcoming moments. If it does harm to the future, it is wrong now, though it may appear to us to be right at this moment. But the fool rarely thinks ahead. He is concerned exclusively with immediate gratification, and nothing else matters.

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There is another way that we can express this—in a slightly different form. The fool does not consider consequences. This is wisdom, that we look thoroughly at the subject and we consider not only the immediate results but the remote results, the possible consequences.

Sue and I taught our children short, memorable words of wisdom that our parents taught us:

"Consider the end!" and "When in doubt, don't!"

The fool is impatient of all of this. "I want it now," he says. And he reasons that if you keep on looking at possible consequences you will never do anything at all, and so he lives for the moment. But according to scripture, folly can actually become an insatiable appetite on which "the mouths of fools feed," or something that fools uncontrollably "pour out."

In the world today, we see heart wrenching tragedies, because people have lived for this existential moment and have refused to consider what their real conscience and the relics of wisdom within them are urging them to do with respect to the consequences.

There is a kind of consistency in the fool. Because he will not look ahead and, because he will not consider the consequences, he is always impatient. That is a primary characteristic of anybody lacking wisdom.

It is the whole difficulty with a little child. The child wants to act at once. He is impatient. We sometimes try to teach him by holding something back from him, but he cannot control himself; he wants it immediately. If he has not been trained or given any direction before, that is exactly what he says, "I want it, and I want it now." Lack of wisdom is characteristic of a child, so when we see an adult that is like that we say, "What a foolish, impatient person!" Remember, we can be impatient in a good cause as well as a bad one. Impatience is generally not a very fine quality.

A person may see a desirable goal, but then, because he lacks wisdom he rushes in like a bull. He does not wait; he does not see that the right way to get it is to go carefully and to make sure of what he is doing. He does not think things through. The fool rushes in where angels fear to tread, and does more damage and harm to his own efforts and goal than the person who is active and a militant opponent of his cause. And all because he is impatient, and cannot wait for the right and appropriate time for things to happen.

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In many ways, the real trouble with the foolish person is that he only sees one thing at a time. And this monopolizes his attention. He is blind to everything else.

**Jeremiah 5:21** Hear this now, O foolish people, without understanding, who have eyes and see not, and who have ears and hear not:

So whether it is an individual, or a group of people, the fool is blind, while the wise person "has eyes in his head" through which he clearly sees and patiently analyzes—that is, is clear thinking and can successfully navigate the obstacles of life.

In contrast, the fool lives blindly, walking into all kinds of problems and difficulties.

**Ecclesiastes 2:12-17** Then I turned myself to consider wisdom and madness and folly; for what can the man do who succeeds the king?—only what he has already done. Then I saw that wisdom excels folly as light excels darkness. The wise man's eyes are in his head, but the fool walks in darkness. Yet I myself perceived that the same event happens to them all. So I said in my heart, "As it happens to the fool, it also happens to me, and why was I then more wise?" Then I said in my heart, "This also is vanity." For there is no more remembrance of the wise than of the fool forever, since all that now is will be forgotten in the days to come. And how does a wise man die? As the fool! Therefore I hated life because the work that was done under the sun was distressing to me, for all is vanity and grasping for the wind.

Physically, both the wise and the foolish eventually die; but spiritually, the wise are potentially useful and more prepared for God's coming kingdom. One who walks in darkness is blind to his environment and the dangers facing him.

In religion we see people who see only one doctrine (e.g. preaching the gospel to the world), and everything else is forgotten. The result is an unbalanced and even an immoral church. Because of concentration on one element the whole thing becomes lopsided. The fool always lacks balance. The apostle Paul warned about this unbalance here in Ephesians:

**Ephesians 5:15-17** See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is.

The verb translated "walk" or "live" in verse 15 is *peripateo* and has been used four times previously in Ephesians 4 and 5. It had been used with the contrast of light and darkness and is now replaced by the contrast between wisdom and folly.

"Circumspectly" is from the Greek word *akribos* meaning accurately or carefully. The phrase "that you walk circumspectly" highlights our need for the greatest concentration on leading an irreproachable life. We should no longer act like simpletons since God's own wisdom is always available to us. The wise man is not guilty of stupidity or dumbness.

"Redeeming the time" means that we are to make the most out of every opportunity. We are to make the best possible use of all circumstances like cautious and practical managers. We are to manage our lives in a careful and wise way.

What is wisdom, or rather, what is wisdom not? Well, wisdom is not mere fact. It is not merely secular wisdom, what we call worldly wisdom. The conflict is always between the wisdom from above and the wisdom of the world. It is not mere discretion.

Wisdom does not merely mean a cautious spirit. There are many who are very cautious and careful but they are not wise. They often give the appearance of being this way, and are often thought of as being very wise.

This nation is suffering tremendously in all areas of life: immorality, unethical business methods, war, false religions, twisted public education, perverse healthcare companies pushing drugs like a drug cartel, and many other areas of society.

Yet, most people sit quietly and say very little. Even when animated discussions are going on about these wrongs, there is a fearful silence. We are programmed to believe that "silence is golden." But silence is not good if it condones the destruction of good morals and decency. That is not wisdom.

So how can we tell if a silent person is wise? Listen to what he says when he does talk, and you will see the difference. The wise person has a contribution to make and he makes it. But the foolish person has little or no contribution to make. Wisdom does not consist in mere silence. It is the right use of knowledge. If a person spends most of his time calculating and does nothing about it, that is not wisdom.

The book of Proverbs points out that folly tends to make itself obvious. So then, "the mind of a fool broadcasts folly," "the fool displays folly," "the simple are adorned with

folly," and "the foolish woman is loud." So there are times for being silent or quiet. This loudness has an element of consistency. Whether a man or a woman talks constantly, the result is still the same—they look foolish. There is another of Solomon's proverbs that says, "Even a fool is thought to be wise, when he holds his tongue." So there is a time to be silent and there is a time to talk.

In a similar vein in Proverbs, folly permeates a fool's life: a fool is "immersed in folly" and "folly is bound up in the heart of a boy" until "discipline drives it far away." As I said before, the book of Proverbs is full of those comparisons of wisdom and folly.

While attending Johns Hopkins University, I took a class called "Technical Writing." This was way back in the 1970's. One of the topics covered was "Fallacies in Human Reasoning." The professor came up with thirteen. Others have come up with more than this, but these will suffice to express the problem of human bias.

## **1. Over-generalization**

This type of reasoning jumps to conclusions following the observation of one or two cases. Over-generalization goes something like this—if something happened once or twice, then it must be true all of the time. This type of reasoning usually contains the words "all," "none," or "never." Stereotyping is one form of this type of erroneous reasoning. For example, it has been said that Christians never care about the environment. This is obviously not a true statement. There are Christians who treasure God's creation, realizing that we are to dress and keep it. God has given us dominion over it; but He has commissioned us to be responsible for its care.

## **2. Thin Entering Wedge**

It is a special type of over-generalization involving prediction. If this is done, then that will follow. For example, psychics attempt to predict what will happen to people in such general terms that it will probably happen because it already happens to most people anyway. But there are plenty of people who are more than willing to believe this.

The "slippery slope" side of this reasoning jumps to the conclusion that a change in procedure, law, or action, will result in adverse consequences. It has been said enough for all of us to recognize some variation of the statement: "If it was good enough for my father it is good enough for me." Hopefully if you say that, your father was a Christian and a very righteous man.

In defense of the King James Version of the Bible, one woman once said, "If the King

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James Version was good enough for Jesus, it is good enough for me!" The folly of her statement was that the King James Version of the Bible was authorized by King James of England and initially completed in 1611 A.D., almost sixteen centuries after the death of Jesus. Also the writers of the New Testament books did not write most, if not all, of the New Testament books until after Jesus' death. The woman's zeal to defend the King James Version was admirable, but poorly reasoned.

It does not necessarily follow that just because we make changes, a "slippery slope" will occur. Of course, caution is wise when considering changes in anything. There have been some improvements to the King James Version of the Bible, in the accuracy of the words used today compared to what was used back in 1611.

### 3. Getting Personal

This faulty reasoning forsakes the issue to attack the character of its defender. This not only happens in election campaigns, but also in religion. For example, false ministers attacked Herbert Armstrong's character rather than using scripture to disprove the true doctrines of God's church, because they could not prove their own foolish doctrines biblically. They had used human reasoning and the traditions of men as their authority to establish another gospel.

John the Baptizer and Jesus Christ were attacked personally because their enemies could not find fault with what they were teaching.

**Matthew 11:18-19** For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, 'He has a demon.' The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, 'Look, a glutton and a winebibber, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!' But wisdom is justified by her children.

The children of wisdom are the wise; they are those who understand what John and Jesus taught because God was opening their minds. Although that generation of Pharisees and fault-finders did not appreciate John's and Jesus' conduct, the "wise," the sincere, the faithful—those who understood the reasons for their way of life—would use the knowledge they gained from them and apply it rightly in their own lives. But it was impossible for the Scribes and Pharisees and Sadducees to do that, so they attack the person of John the Baptizer and Jesus Christ.

### 4. Justifying a False Premise

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The fool argues, "My point may be bad, but yours is just as bad, so that makes us even." Two wrongs do not make a right. This silly reasoning tries to justify what one did by accusing someone else of doing the same thing or worse. It is a form of denial. For example, one might say, "I may believe the earth is flat, but you believe it is square, so my argument is just as good as yours." That makes no sense at all.

## 5. The Misapplication of Cause and Effect

It happened after the event, so it was caused by the event, is the argument. If event B comes after event A, then it is assumed to be the result of A, for those of you who are into algebra and calculus. This reasoning is time dependant and the basis of superstition.

For example, before the sun comes up the rooster crows, therefore, the rooster's crow makes the sun come up. That is the shallowness of the reasoning. In Jeremiah we will see a biblical example of this, and how serious it can be when it is applied spiritually.

Similarly, the Jews became superstitious. When God delayed punishing the Jews who went to Egypt and worshipped the queen of heaven, and because He allowed them a certain amount of prosperity for a while, the people reasoned that it was the queen of heaven's blessing rather than God's mercy. Then when God began to carry out His judgment on them and they were forced to stop worshipping the queen of heaven, they reasoned that she had stopped blessing them because they had stopped diligently worshipping her. Their thought processing and reasoning was perverse; they were nothing but fools.

**Jeremiah 44:1** The word that came to Jeremiah concerning all the Jews who dwell in the land of Egypt, who dwell at Migdol, at Tahpanhes, at Noph, and in the country of Pathros, saying,

God reminds the Jews that they have seen the calamity that He brought against Judah, and especially against Jerusalem. They have forgotten what happened to their ancestors because of their wickedness, and they were still not humble nor obeyed God, and that meant that He would have to punish them.

**Jeremiah 44:15-18** Then all the men who knew that their wives had burned incense to other gods, with all the women who stood by, a great multitude, and all the people who dwelt in the land of Egypt, in Pathros, answered Jeremiah, saying: "As for the word that you have spoken to us in the name of

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the Lord, we will not listen to you! But we will certainly do whatever has gone out of our own mouth, to burn incense to the queen of heaven and pour out drink offerings to her, as we have done, we and our fathers, our kings and our princes, in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem. For then we had plenty of food, were well-off, and saw no trouble. But since we stopped burning incense to the queen of heaven and pouring out drink offerings to her, we have lacked everything and have been consumed by the sword and by famine."

**Jeremiah 44:25** Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, saying: 'You and your wives have spoken with your mouths and fulfilled with your hands, saying, "We will surely keep our vows that we have made, to burn incense to the queen of heaven and pour out drink offerings to her." You will surely keep your vows and perform your vows!'

**Jeremiah 44:27** Behold, I will watch over them for adversity and not for good. And all the men of Judah who are in the land of Egypt shall be consumed by the sword and by famine, until there is an end to them.

These Jews actually were committing several of the fallacies of human reasoning. So God had to destroy most of the Jews who went to Egypt, allowing only a remnant to survive as a witness to whose words were powerful and permanent, the queen of heaven's, or theirs, or the Creator God's. The Jew's superstitious behavior caused them a tremendous amount of grief and devastation. What we have here is cause and effect being humanly reasoned emotionally and rebelliously. They were thumbing their nose up at God, and that is how far their reasoning had gone.

## 6. False Analogies

This situation, it is argued, is exactly like that situation—but in reality it is not. We also say that it is like comparing apples with oranges.

**Romans 12:6** Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, let us prophesy in proportion to our faith;

One of the things that Paul's phrase "let us prophesy, in proportion to our faith," signifies is the harmony of the different parts of scripture. The parts of scripture must be explained according to the tone of the whole, and we should not bring any one small

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part conspicuously into view and obscure or contradict others. All scripture must agree with each other. For example, men through fallacious reasoning and tradition have exaggerated the physical and spiritual role of the virgin Mary's relationship to Jesus Christ. The effect has tended to obscure the doctrines relating to Christ as the only Mediator.

It is important to follow the analogy of the faith by studying the scriptures with a love of truth for its own sake and not with the purpose of finding proof for opinions already formed. In contrast to this example is the persistent false analogy of the virgin Mary as mediator having been humanly raised by men to the level of usurper of Christ's own divine role and responsibility. They took one little small segment of scripture and raised the virgin Mary to the level of mediator, pushing Christ aside and it actually brought them to the point of being idolatrous in the literal sense.

## 7. Wise Men Cannot Be Wrong

This is the attempt to clinch an argument by an appeal to authority. It uses the words of an "expert" or authority as the basis of the argument, instead of using logic and evidence of facts and truth that supports an argument. Simply because an authority makes a claim does not necessarily mean he got it right. The testimony of an "expert" should accompany the sources of facts and evidence behind it.

**Deuteronomy 19:15** One witness shall not rise against a man concerning any iniquity or any sin that he commits; by the mouth of two or three witnesses the matter shall be established.

Today, academics, scientists, theologians, government officials, and school administrators will quote various sources and pseudo-facts to give credence to their arguments. So we have to make it our diligent lifelong goal to seek the truth in all things. Basically, we cannot believe very much of what the world tells us at all, and we are to prove all things.

What happens in the case of a false witness? God will take care of it, but we are not to be duped by them. Ask God for wisdom and discernment, and let Him handle it.

**Deuteronomy 19:16-20** If a false witness rises against any man to testify against him of wrongdoing, then both men in the controversy shall stand before the Lord, before the priests and the judges who serve in those days. And the judges shall make careful inquiry, and indeed, if the witness is a

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false witness, who has testified falsely against his brother, then you shall do to him as he thought to have done to his brother; so you shall put away the evil from among you. And those who remain shall hear and fear, and hereafter they shall not again commit such evil among you.

## **8. Figures Prove**

This is a subclass of "Wise Men Cannot Be Wrong." It is especially popular in the U.S. today. Simply because someone can point to a few favorable numbers says nothing about overall chances. "More people enjoy our brand than any other brand." Averages can be misleading or phony. "Six out of ten agree." But 40% disagree! There are many of these catch phrases, statistics and polls that are used to deceive us.

For example, anyone who goes to Las Vegas' gambling casinos will see people winning at the tables and slots. The casino managers make sure to install bells and whistles to announce the victors, while the losers never get mentioned. This may lead one to conclude that the chances of winning appear good while in actuality just the opposite true. The casinos often put signs up that say 97% win probability, which means you will lose \$30 for every \$1000 you gamble on average. That is a loser, not a winner!

I flew to Las Vegas for a trade show in the Television Broadcasting Industry. Sitting next to me was a man who flew there once a month to gamble. I asked, "How did you do?" He proceeded to list all of his winnings over the past year. But, when I asked him how much that he had lost, he changed the subject. Deep down he knew that he had lost more than he had won. The winnings that he was telling me about were in the thousands, so his losses were probably in the thousands as well.

## **9. Appeal to the Crowd**

This is also called the "bandwagon fallacy." Linked to this fallacy is the "appeal to tradition." Just because people practice a tradition, says nothing about its viability. Quite often, religious beliefs fall into this reasoning. This type distorts an issue with mass prejudices. It concludes that an idea has merit simply because many people believe it or practice it. Simply because many people believe something says nothing about the fact of that something.

For example, similar to casinos, organizers of lotteries use this fallacy by giving maximum publicity to winners and, of course, none to losers, so this increases people's expectation of winning. Also, in mainstream Protestantism almost everyone believes

good people go to heaven. But John 3:13 says, "No man has ascended to heaven except Christ who came down from heaven." Tradition trumps truth in human reasoning!

## **10. Arguing in Circles**

This is using your proposal as proof for what you are trying to prove. This is done by using a conclusion to prove itself. For example, setting dates on when the dinosaurs lived. Archeologists claim that the Pterosaur lived during the Jurassic Period, 180 million years ago. They date it according to the bones they find there, while at the same time dating the bones by what period they are found in. So they are dating the bones by the bones. Hopefully they have furthered their technology and are able to get a little closer on that.

## **11. Self-Evident Truths**

Trying to win an argument by saying "everybody knows it's true," so it must be. This is similar to the "bandwagon" and "appeal to the crowd" arguments. It also often pulls from tradition, but with an emphasis on the time-honored history of the truth, which in reality is false.

For example, most individuals in mainstream Christianity keep Sunday as their Sabbath because "everyone else does." Everyone cannot be wrong for so long, can they? They ignore the fact that Christ and the apostles and all the members of the church, up until the 4<sup>th</sup> century, kept the seventh day Sabbath on Saturday, not on the day of the sun worshippers. They kept it for hundreds of years, until the Roman Catholic Church changed it, and they also changed Passover in the 4<sup>th</sup> century.

## **12. Black or White**

This is also called a "false dichotomy" because it considers only the extremes. Often people tend to describe things in terms of up or down, left or right, and black or white. You either like it, or you do not. This reasoning forces an issue with many aspects into just two sides, and so neglecting important shades of gray or middle ground. In politics today we have the conservative and the liberal party, the democrats and the republicans. Any time there is an independent trying to break into the fray the media makes sure that they are pushed to the side and swept under the carpet.

For example, marriages often suffer from this reasoning. "Either you love me, or you do not." In a case of divorce and remarriage this reasoning might state, "You can divorce in every case" or, "You cannot divorce in every case." It is always dealing with extremes.

### 13. Guilt by Association

This is also called the "straw man" fallacy. This occurs when making a false identification between two dissimilar persons or events. One creates a false scenario and then attacks it. It paints your opponent with false colors to deflect from the purpose of the argument. Politicians and social movements are infamous for this fallacy in reasoning.

For example, the history of human reasoning is a condemnatory one. Mankind has killed thousands of our fellow human beings because they believed that they had signed a contract with the devil, and had become witches. The 17<sup>th</sup> century British colony of Massachusetts is a case in point. The Salem Witch Trials murdered innocent people. Some of those victims were merely seventh day Sabbath keepers. Humanity still kills more than a thousand people each year for witchcraft.

These fallacies in human reasoning bring to mind Isaiah's comments:

**Isaiah 5:21** Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes, and prudent in their own sight!

Instead of bringing people together, human reasoning drives people apart, because it is at enmity against God and His Truth. The truth is not important to a person using human reasoning. Preconceived prejudice and bias mixed with how things appear drive human reasoning!

What then is wisdom? The wise person always thinks. He does not act merely on the basis of instinct, impulse or desire. He insists on thought, reason and meditation. He thoroughly examines every proposal or challenge that confronts him.

He, first and foremost, listens to all the evidence. He is not like the judges that we have today who become the advocate and takes sides at the beginning of a case. The wise person refuses to do that. He holds himself back and listens to the evidence on both sides. The wise person gives the argument a fair hearing from every conceivable angle and he does so with great patience. Remember that we talked about how the fool is very impatient.

A positive trait of the wise person is that he is a good listener. He is a good listener because he is gathering information, getting all the facts. He knows that he cannot arrive at a judgment without having all the data before him; therefore, he is very patient.

He does not rush.

The wise person looks at the subject from all angles and after gathering all the evidence, he then proceeds to sift it, to weigh it, and to evaluate it. And that takes time. It may take a long time or a short time—that depends on the person, his experience and his circumstances. But he never acts without having made his review of the total situation.

This can be illustrated by a look at the history of the church. How often has error been brought into the church? Some men suddenly become full of one idea and, at the expense of everything else, are carried away by it. But there is a completeness, a wholeness, and a balance that the apostle Paul calls "the measure of faith."

**Romans 12:3** For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith.

William Barclay suggests that verse 3 can be rendered:

For, through the grace that has been given to me, I [Paul] say to everyone among you, not to have a mind proud beyond that which a mind should be, but to have a mind directed towards wisdom, as God has given the measures of faith to each one of you.

"Faith" here is used in a different sense than it is used earlier in Paul's letter. Here it refers to the spiritual power given to each Christian for the discharge of his special responsibility. This relates directly to the church as a body.

The members of the body neither argue with each other, nor envy each other, nor dispute about their relative importance. Each part of the body carries out its own function. It does not matter whether the function is obvious to all, or it is a low profile job. Each member has a duty to do; and it is only when each contributes the help of his own duty that the body of the church functions as it should.

But the fool cannot function in this environment. The book of Proverbs uses a few telling and, at times, humorous descriptions of the actions of the fool. The talk of fools is like whips on their own backs. And, one might as well cut off one's foot as send a message via a fool. These are very strong condemnations of the lack of value of a fool's

contributions.

All these things must be considered as affecting the body of the unit of the church. It must be seen as a whole and the person who has wisdom has a complete, balanced view of doctrine and practice, or at least he is attempting to and he is working toward that end—not only doctrine, not only practice, but both, and always together. It is the same in everything. So the wise person sits and weighs his evidence.

Then, having weighed the evidence, the wise person relates it all to fundamental principles. The secret of wisdom is that even though the wise person has taken his time and has been patient and has gathered all the facts and organized all the evidence; has looked at the subject from all angles, even then he does not arrive at his decision by himself and immediately.

The wise person takes all of this and he examines it in light of fundamental eternal godly principles. He is not subjective in this; he is always objective. The secret of wisdom is that we keep ourselves out—what we are by nature and by instinct—and all along we are relating what we find and discover to the essential fundamental absolutes that God has revealed to us.

Human bias is often driven by fear. Fear includes a feeling of uneasiness or nervousness: for instance, a fear of looking foolish.

The chief priests, the Scribes, and the elders came to Christ to accuse Him while He was walking in the temple in Jerusalem. Mark recorded the incident:

**Mark 11:28-33** And they said to Him, "By what authority are You doing these things? And who gave You this authority to do these things?" But Jesus answered and said to them, "I also will ask you one question; then answer Me, and I will tell you by what authority I do these things: The baptism of John—was it from heaven or from men? Answer Me." And they reasoned among themselves, saying, "If we say, 'From heaven,' He will say, 'Why then did you not believe him?' But if we say, 'From men'"—they feared the people, for all counted John to have been a prophet indeed. So they answered and said to Jesus, "We do not know." And Jesus answered and said to them, "Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things."

The chief priests, the Scribes, and the elders were more worried about appearances than with the truth. They feared the opinion of others, and then lied to protect their

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images. They were envious and self-seeking. These foolish priests did not care in the least about what was true or about appropriate behavior, only what furthered their schemes.

What a contrast that was, compared with the life and teachings of Jesus Christ. James put it succinctly in his description of the two extremes.

**James 3:13-16** Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show by good conduct that his works are done in the meekness of wisdom. But if you have bitter envy and self-seeking in your hearts, do not boast and lie against the truth. This wisdom does not descend from above, but is earthly, sensual, demonic. For where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing are there.

The effect of this bitter and earthly wisdom produces disorder and chaos. Instead of bringing people together it drives them apart and produces strife.

**James 3:17** But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy.

So these character traits, these attributes, show who is wise and who is foolish. A good test to see if wisdom and reasoning is heavenly or earthly is to look at the motive behind it and the fruit that it produces. These are eternal and immutable truths of God. All is related to them, and in the light of these principles the verdict is arrived at and is disseminated. That is the essence of wisdom. The apostle Paul says it all here:

**Ephesians 5:15-17** See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is.

That is the ultimate. There are the eternal principles, and all that we have learned and have discovered must be put into the light of these eternal principles. In other words, though we have collected the facts so carefully and sifted them, we do not let our mood decide what our verdict is.

Now having arrived at our decision in that way and being sure of ourselves, because we

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have used God's eternal principles, we proceed to put them into practice with enthusiasm, with zeal, with energy, and with all the vigor that God has given us.

Remember Paul's example. He was giving all the zeal that he could, but in the wrong direction. But with the change of mind that God performed as a miracle within him, he was able to turn all of that zeal for the glory of God.

**Ecclesiastes 9:10** Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might; for there is no work or device or knowledge or wisdom in the grave where you are going.

The difference between having sincerity and zeal as hired servants and not as masters is that we, as instruments, carry out what is right, instead of determining what is right. In this way, a person is not governed by excitement, zeal, enthusiasm or impatience, but always by his knowledge of, and his desire to serve and to be governed and controlled by the truth of God as it is in Jesus Christ.

Misguided zeal and enthusiasm has often been responsible for serious harm. The fool can rush in and have immediate, flashing, startling results, but they do not last. The Christian must seek wisdom, seek understanding, and walk with wisdom. "See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise."

The spiritual root cause of the problem is expressed in Psalm 14:1, "The fool says in his heart, 'There is no God.'" This confirms Proverbs 1:7, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and instruction."

By declaring "there is no God," the fool shows that he has no fear of God; therefore, the fool does not have access to true knowledge. And, without true knowledge there can be no wisdom, because wisdom is the right use of knowledge.

Solomon arrived at the essential conclusion of the whole matter of human life—fear God and keep His commandments.

**Ecclesiastes 12:8-14** "Vanity of vanities," says the Preacher, "All is vanity." And moreover, because the Preacher was wise, he still taught the people knowledge; yes, he pondered and sought out and set in order many proverbs. The Preacher sought to find acceptable words; and what was written was upright—words of truth. The words of the wise are like goads, and the words of scholars are like well-driven nails, given by one Shepherd.

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And further, my son, be admonished by these. Of making many books there is no end, and much study is wearisome to the flesh. Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is man's all. For God will bring every work into judgment, including every secret thing, whether good or evil.

And I might add, whether wise or foolish!