

A word about modern bible studies and bible classes where people “share”

Words from a wise man’s mouth are gracious,
but a fool is consumed by his own lips.

At the beginning his words are folly; at the end they are wicked madness—
and the fool multiplies words.

Ecclesiastes 10.¹²⁻¹⁴

A fool finds no pleasure in understanding...
...but delights in airing his own opinions.

Proverbs 18.²

A prudent man keeps his knowledge to himself...
...but the heart of fools blurts out folly.

Proverbs 12.²³

Over the years I’ve been in many Bible Studies. Too often the term ‘Bible Study’ has the right initials (BS), but doesn’t really tell the truth. Instead these become more “Bull Sessions” where people share their opinions or their feelings or their stories. When I was young, I learned a bit from this. I learned how to share in a way that got compliments, I learned how to “win” arguments or prove a point, and I learned how to use that time to make others feel good. But over the years I’ve learned something else: these kinds of “Bible Study Bull Sessions” (or as I call them, **BS²**) are worthless; or worse – they cause harm.

Almost no one ever changes their minds in one of these things. People can temporarily forget their problems but in the long run they don’t fix anything. No one learns from GOD in one of these sessions, it’s just an opportunity for people to share their ignorance. Everyone becomes a teacher, but no one is qualified. Teaching without having bothered to first learn ... it’s a recipe for disaster.



What’s worse about these sessions is that people continue to insist on having them! The fool loves having a forum for exposing his folly. But what’s funny about fools is that no fool knows he’s a fool. Every foolish woman thinks she’s wise (or at least ‘average’) and every foolish man thinks he’s not only wise, but *needs* to be heard. He gets frustrated when others “won’t listen” to him, and assumes it’s because others are fools who cannot recognize his great truth.

The words from Solomon above are priceless and true. But what's interesting is that we can read those lines and be convinced that he's writing about someone else! He's not talking about ME – right? He's talking about the doofus next to me.

Solomon's wisdom challenges us:

1. First ask yourself if YOU might be the fool, and just haven't seen it.
2. We must learn to correct ourselves
3. Finally, we must help others (if possible)



Step one is to remember that compared to God we are all fools. (1 Corinthians 1.20-27) Humility and the fear of Yahweh go hand-in-hand. To put it simply: yes, you are a fool (and so am I).

Even a fool is thought wise if he keeps silent, and discerning if he holds his tongue.
Proverbs 17.²⁸

To correct for the problem of step one (We're all fools) is simple: be like Jesus. Jesus said that he spoke only the words his Father gave him (John 14.24 & 17.8). If we are careful to study God's word so that the only things we do is repeat what God has told us ... then it doesn't matter if we're fools, because we aren't teaching our own thoughts and ideas, but only those from God. Paul did the same thing (see 1 Corinthians 2.1-5).

The third thing is tricky. Sometimes we're in a group and we've prepared by knowing God's word as best we can, and along comes a fool who hasn't done his homework, and thinks his opinion is equal to everyone else's and begins to make a fool of himself.

That's a problem for two reasons:

First, he's revealing his own folly

Even a fool is thought wise if he keeps silent, and discerning if he holds his tongue.
Proverbs 17.²⁸

Or to put this Proverb another way, "It's better to be silent and be thought a fool, than to open your mouth and remove all doubt." Many times fools spew foolishness out of their mouths, and they don't even realize they're embarrassing themselves. They're so used to others giving them compliments and being careful never to offend, they get to believe they really are clever!

Second, it's a problem because fools can mislead others

Sometimes the fool sounds wise and others are led astray. This is so common in our culture, there are too many examples to name.

WHAT DO WE DO?

It depends on whether or not the blathering fool is a committed disciple.

If he or she *is not a committed disciple* ... then we want to be careful to keep them from being in a position to embarrass themselves and mislead others. Then when we have opportunity, we work with them to become committed disciples.

If the person *is a committed disciple*, then we must do as Jesus said: take him or her aside privately and explain the truth more accurately.

Committed disciples will usually take this well. It'll sting, but we understand. If not, then you take a friend and warn him again. If by now the person hasn't repented, then the whole group (church) should expel him or her from their gatherings, so they don't mislead others.

(See Matthew 18.15-20, Luke 17.3-4, Acts 18.24-26 ... and chart at right)

James wrote that the tongue is a consuming fire. Let's be very careful in our communications!

“Let not many of you become teachers, my brothers, knowing that as such we will incur a stricter judgment. For we all stumble in many ways. If anyone doesn't stumble in what he says, he is a *teleios* man, able to bridle the whole body as well. Now if we put the bits into the horses' mouths so that they'll obey us, we direct their entire body as well. Look at the ships also, though they're so great and are driven by strong winds, are still directed by a very small rudder wherever the inclination of the pilot desires. So also the tongue is a small part of the body, and yet it boasts of great things. See how great a forest is set aflame by such a small fire!”
James 3:¹⁻⁵

