

Romans 1:22

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools,

Analysis

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The irony is stark: phaskontes einai sophoi emōranthēsan (φάσκοντες εἶναι σοφοὶ ἐμωράνθησαν, 'claiming to be wise, they became fools'). Phaskontes (φάσκω, claiming/professing) indicates self-assessment, not divine verdict. They esteemed themselves sophoi (σοφοί, wise)—philosophers, sages, cultural elites. Yet the verdict is emōranthēsan (ἐμωράνθησαν, they became fools). Emōranthēsan (from mōrainō) means to be made foolish, to become morally and intellectually bankrupt.

This echoes Psalm 14:1: 'The fool has said in his heart, "There is no God."' Practical atheism—living as if God does not exist—is the ultimate folly. Paul will elaborate in 1 Corinthians 1:18-25 that God has made the wisdom of this world foolish through the cross. Human wisdom, apart from God, is folly; divine folly (the gospel) is true wisdom. The exchange of glory for idols (v. 23) exemplifies this inversion—worshiping creatures is absurd, yet it is the logical endpoint of suppressing truth. The greatest intellects, when rejecting God, become the greatest fools.

Historical Context

Greek culture prided itself on philosophy—Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Stoics, Epicureans. Athens was the intellectual capital. Yet for all their wisdom, Greeks worshiped Zeus, Athena, Dionysus, and engaged in temple prostitution and orgiastic rites. Roman religion was equally debased—gods with human vices, emperors claiming divinity. Paul confronted Greek philosophers at Mars Hill (Acts

17), declaring the 'unknown god' they ignorantly worshiped. First Corinthians addresses Corinth's intellectual pride. Wisdom without God is folly.

Related Passages

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Study Questions

1. In what ways does modern intellectual culture 'profess to be wise' (φάσκω εἶναι σοφός) while demonstrating profound foolishness?
2. How does rejecting God lead inevitably to irrational beliefs and behaviors, despite claims of rationality?
3. Where might you be trusting your own wisdom rather than fearing the Lord, which is the beginning of true wisdom (Proverbs 9:10)?

Interlinear Text

φάσκοντες	εἶναι	σοφοὶ	ἐμωράνθησαν
Professing themselves	to be	wise	they became fools
G5335	G1511	G4680	G3471

Additional Cross-References

Proverbs 26:12 (Parallel theme): Seest thou a man wise in his own conceit? there is more hope of a fool than of him.

Romans 11:25 (Parallel theme): For I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits; that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in.

Proverbs 25:14 (Parallel theme): Whoso boasteth himself of a false gift is like clouds and wind without rain.

Jeremiah 10:14 (Parallel theme): Every man is brutish in his knowledge: every founder is confounded by the graven image: for his molten image is falsehood, and there is no breath in them.

Isaiah 47:10 (Parallel theme): For thou hast trusted in thy wickedness: thou hast said, None seeth me. Thy wisdom and thy knowledge, it hath perverted thee; and thou hast said in thine heart, I am, and none else beside me.

Matthew 6:23 (Parallel theme): But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness!