

Ecclesiastes 10:1-20 | Dead flies make the perfumer's ointment give off a stench; so a little folly outweighs wisdom and honor. ² A wise man's heart inclines him to the right, but a fool's heart to the left. ³ Even when the fool walks on the road, he lacks sense, and he says to everyone that he is a fool.

⁴If the anger of the ruler rises against you, do not leave your place, for calmness will lay great offenses to rest. ⁵ There is an evil that I have seen under the sun, as it were an error proceeding from the ruler: ⁶ folly is set in many high places, and the rich sit in a low place. ⁷ I have seen slaves on horses, and princes walking on the ground like slaves.

⁸ He who digs a pit will fall into it, and a serpent will bite him who breaks through a wall. ⁹ He who quarries stones is hurt by them, and he who splits logs is endangered by them. ¹⁰ If the iron is blunt, and one does not sharpen the edge, he must use more strength, but wisdom helps one to succeed. ¹¹ If the serpent bites before it is charmed, there is no advantage to the charmer.

¹² The words of a wise man's mouth win him favor, but the lips of a fool consume him. ¹³ The beginning of the words of his mouth is foolishness, and the end of his talk is evil madness. ¹⁴ A fool multiplies words, though no man knows what is to be, and who can tell him what will be after him? ¹⁵ The toil of a fool wearies him, for he does not know the way to the city.

¹⁶ Woe to you, O land, when your king is a child, and your princes feast in the morning! ¹⁷ Happy are you, O land, when your king is the son of the nobility, and your princes feast at the proper time, for strength, and not for drunkenness! ¹⁸ Through sloth the roof sinks in, and through indolence the house leaks. ¹⁹ Bread is made for laughter, and wine gladdens life, and money answers everything. ²⁰ Even in your thoughts, do not curse the king, nor in your bedroom curse the rich, for a bird of the air will carry your voice, or some winged creature tell the matter.

Ecclesiastes 10 | Wisdom for Life

Having forced us through the problems of death and chance Solomon returns to the problems of ordinary life. We might think we could do one instead of the other. If we solved the problem of ordinary life we might be able to hack our way past death and chance. Or if we solved the problem of death and chance we might not have to deal with the dangers of life. Solomon knows better. The answer to the biggest questions still requires solving the smallest. And this is right where Solomon begins with the dangers of the smallest amount of folly. Folly matters because the world is dangerous, decaying, and unequally distributed.

Ecclesiastes 10:1 | Dead flies make the perfumer's ointment give off a stench; so a little folly outweighs wisdom and honor.

Just some flies and the perfume turns from aroma to stench. Such is a little folly mixed into wisdom and honor. It is small but it ways more. There is a horrible asymmetry to folly

as compared to wisdom and honor. Just a little drunkenness on the side, just a little flirtation, just a little gambling, just a little folly compared to all you got right and held together, it just weighs more.

Ecclesiastes 10:2-3 | A wise man's heart inclines him to the right, but a fool's heart to the left. ³ Even when the fool walks on the road, he lacks sense, and he says to everyone that he is a fool.

Part of the weight of folly is its creation of a disposition. A wise man's heart has an inclination towards what is good and true, a fool's heart has a disposition towards the useless and fleeting. A little folly can change your tastes and twist your desires. And you can tell, you can see the fool coming just in the way he walks down the road. He tells everyone he is a fool. I think you know exactly what Solomon means. His warning is just a little and that can be you.

But don't think the fool Solomon is describing is dull. He is not dull, he can be very bright. The fool lacks sense because he begins his thinking without God in mind. He thinks he can reason through the world without acknowledging God's upholding of it. You can be brilliant and a fool. You can be dull and wise. But even the brilliant fool you can see coming. The warning is to pay attention to the little parts of your life where you ignore God's ruling.

Do you think God is unaware of how you sell your next client, of how you manage your employees? Do you think you are facing a mental health problem outside the bounds of the word of God? Just a little bit of that and wisdom and honor are outweighed. Of course this shows us one of the great dangers of the world is that we can encounter foolishness above us.

Ecclesiastes 10:4 | If the anger of the ruler rises against you, do not leave your place, for calmness will lay great offenses to rest. ⁵ There is an evil that I have seen under the sun, as it were an error proceeding from the ruler: ⁶ folly is set in many high places, and the rich sit in a low place. ⁷ I have seen slaves on horses, and princes walking on the ground like slaves.

Kings are like T-Rex's. If he gets mad stay still. Don't go off in a huff. Remember he's the king. He is just as likely to go off in a huff because of his foolishness as you are in yours. But he can make it worse for you than you can make it for him. Calmness is a power you have in the face of the king's anger.

Likewise be aware. Do not think the higher you climb the more wisdom you will discover. One of the evils you will find is that folly is set in many high places. Solomon has observed all kinds of upside down worlds. Slaves on horses and princes on the ground because of the inequality of their foolishness. Do not think the lower you look the more foolishness you will discover. If only it were so simple. There are luxurious expensive places of sin in the center of the city, there are poor broken down ones on the outskirts.

Ecclesiastes 10:8-9 | He who digs a pit will fall into it, and a serpent will bite him who breaks through a wall. ⁹ He who quarries stones is hurt by them, and he who splits logs is endangered by them.

Well perhaps you can minimize your risk by avoiding those places. Well in one sense you can but in another you must recognize the risk is built into what you do. The first example is avoidable. If you dig a pit you fall into it and breaking through the wall to get bit by the serpent have the ring of poetic justice. But the second example is much less avoidable. The people who quarry stones are the ones who get hurt by stones, and splitting logs are the ones who get splinters in there eyes.

If you marry her, she'll be the one you argue with. If you take the sensible job you'll be confronted by the boredom of stability. If you take the risky job, you'll be tired from the stress. Why do the Christians always argue with each other? the same reason you have fought more with your sibling than anyone else. They're the ones sitting next to you in the car.

Ecclesiastes 10:12-13 | The words of a wise man's mouth win him favor, but the lips of a fool consume him. ¹³ The beginning of the words of his mouth is foolishness, and the end of his talk is evil madness.

Solomon as he does with his other wisdom literature often turns us to the power of words in discussing wisdom and foolishness. The wise mans words are what win him favor. He knows the right thing to say at the right time. Consider Nehemiah before the king who gains the kings favor and receives full funding for his rebuilding project as his reward. Then consider the lips of the fool which consume him. Consider the man who doesn't understand the justice of David and lies telling David that he killed Saul (when in fact he didn't) because he wants to gain the kings favor. But because of his lie he dies for a crime he didn't commit. Maybe don't tell the king your a king killer.

Ecclesiastes 10:14 | A fool multiplies words, though no man knows what is to be, and who can tell him what will be after him?

The fool multiplies words which is foolish because nobody knows what will be and nobody can tell him what will be after him. The wise man understands this fundamental limit and therefore doesn't try to create a world with no remainder. The madman has a world with no remainder. Chesterton puts his finger on it.

"The madman is not the man who has lost his reason. The madman is the man who has lost everything except his reason. The madman's explanation of a thing is always complete, and often in a purely rational sense satisfactory." - G.K. Chesterton,

One way to say it is the madman thinks he knows what God has done from the beginning to the end. It can't be argued against for its tightness and the only cure is on the other side

of some ignorance. Not an ignorance resolved but an ignorance accepted. There is a tragedy to this fool, because he cannot be reasoned out of his position. Chesterton shows describes a picture of this in materialism. It is the pure reason of a madman who think he can explain everything by asserting that the world is only material cause and effect. But obviously this leaves out the angels and demons.

Ecclesiastes 10:15 | The toil of a fool wearies him, for he does not know the way to the city.

The warning for the fool ends with a point of comedy. The fool is multiplying words and wearing himself out in toil but he cannot find the way to the city. It's easy to find your way to the city. The ordinary course of affairs however is too far from the tight circle of reasoning afforded to the fool. It is God who breaks this paradigm. The recognition of God as God is a recognition that there are lots of things you don't know.

Ecclesiastes 10:16-17 | Woe to you, O land, when your king is a child, and your princes feast in the morning! ¹⁷ Happy are you, O land, when your king is the son of the nobility, and your princes feast at the proper time, for strength, and not for drunkenness!

Solomon returns to the theme of of eking, but it is no longer how to act before him it is a recognition of the right king to have. It will be bad for a whole land if the king is a child and utilizes his position to Satisfy his own desires. It will be good if the king is a son of the nobility, meaning he has been trained up for the weight he will bear. And he feasts when it is appropriate to feast. Even his feasting is a benefit to his people because it builds his strength, not drunkenness. This matters because the world requires maintenance.

Ecclesiastes 10:18-19 | Through sloth the roof sinks in, and through indolence the house leaks. ¹⁹ Bread is made for laughter, and wine gladdens life, and money answers everything.

Just by doing nothing you'll get a leaky roof. So you must know what to do with the things of life. Bread, wine, money. You should make sure you have those on hand.

Ecclesiastes 10:20 | Even in your thoughts, do not curse the king, nor in your bedroom curse the rich, for a bird of the air will carry your voice, or some winged creature tell the matter.

You may think you have the wrong king, and mind find sport in cursing him. But there are no secrets to the ones above you. Honor your mother and father. Once again it is only in the truth of Christ where find the final remedy for our foolishness. To know Christ is not to know everything, it is not to know the end from the beginning, but it it to know the fullness of the revelation of God the one who knows everything. He rules over the dangerous kings, and brings the wisdom of the wise to foolishness at the foot of the cross.