

Life Lesson (Part 3)

Ecclesiastes 10:1-20

1. Introduction.

- a. This chapter is another set of Solomon's proverbs.
- b. The theme of these proverbs are centered on the nature of leadership.
 - i. Specifically, within the context, Solomon is giving instruction and warning regarding political leadership.
 - ii. However, the principles behind the proverbs are broad and capture more than leadership in the political world.
 - iii. Most of them tend to focus on decision making and sins of the mouth.
- c. The limitations of wisdom.

2. V. 1

- a. This proverb continues the point from 9:18.
- b. 9:18 references the effects of a fool on his community, but 10:1 references the effects of a fool on the individual. Indeed, the effects of the fool upon himself.
- c. The point of the proverb is that a little folly will destroy much good.
- d. The idea of "perfume" is to illustrate that no amount of wisdom can actually mask the true nature of what a fool is at heart. They take the very thing meant for good (i.e., wisdom) and corrupt it.
- e. The warning, then, is to be aware of yourself, your words, and what you're really about. The smallest amount of wisdom can corrupt and destroy much good.

3. Vss. 2-3

- a. Throughout Scripture, to be on the "right" is to sit in the place of privilege and prosperity.
 - i. Gen. 48:14.

- ii. Psalm 16:11.
- b. To be on the “left” is to be on the path of folly and destruction (Matt. 25:32-33).
- c. The point of the proverb is that the way of wisdom and the way of folly are not difficult to discern.
 - i. Both paths are clear, and both paths can be seen in a person’s life.
 - ii. Words are not the mark of wisdom, but the fruit of someone’s decisions and life.
 - 1. We all live in public, even within our home.
 - 2. People are watching and can spot wisdom from folly rather easily.
 - iii. The point, then, is that wise people seek wisdom from those who are already wise (i.e., from those on the right).
 - 1. The reason is that a fool’s heart is already inclined to go “left” (v.2).
 - 2. In the midst of recognizing their life is difficult due to their own folly, they are still given to the “left.” It is the default direction of the fool.
 - iv. The fool lacks sense to get off the path of destruction and move themselves to the path of wisdom and prosperity (v.3).
 - 1. A fool is always wise in his own eyes.
 - 2. Avoid such people.

4. V. 4

- a. When you disagree with a person in authority, their temper will rise against you. Solomon’s best prescription in this situation is to stand firm and maintain composure, especially if the one in authority is a wise person.
- b. Solomon had a unique perspective on this kind of situation. Since he was king, he was most likely the one in authority who got angry.
 - i. In this situation, wisdom means you don’t become a “yes-man.”

- ii. The point is that once the temper of the king settles, you'll most likely be listened to, or at least endeared to the king, for your composure and integrity.

5. Vss. 5-7

- a. There is incredible folly in the realm of leadership.
- b. Sometimes, even wise leaders, will make the mistake of placing fools into positions of power.
- c. Solomon calls this “evil,” as that one fool can destroy much progress and good.
- d. The tragedy of this situation is that the king actually had a wise and skilled person fit for the job. Leaders can sometimes become blinded, especially due to past success of a person.
- e. When folly is placed into power, particularly, political power, it can have devastating consequences on social structures (7).

6. Vss. 8-11

- a. There is inherent risk to life (8-9).
 - i. No one knows the absolute future.
 - ii. There are many unknowns in life.
- b. There is still an advantage to weighing out risk with wisdom (10).
 - i. Even in the midst of life's many unknowns, there is still a better way to typically do things—and it is the way of wisdom.
 - ii. Therefore, do not despise counsel. Always seek wisdom and instruction.

7. Vss. 12-15

- a. The contrast of wisdom and folly as it pertains to issues of the tongue.
- b. Speech always comes from the heart.
 - i. Wise words are a fountain of life.

- ii. Foolish words consume and destroy.
 - c. Fools are not interested in understanding, but only in talking.
 - i. A person's life is always the best mark of wisdom, never their words.
 - 1. Seek counsel from those whose life is worthy of modeling.
 - 2. Heb. 13: 7.
 - d. Fools talk, even though they don't know what's to come (14). Yet they speak with authority and are almost always wrong.
 - e. The tragedy of a fool's life is they typically don't even know their own life is a mess (15).
8. Vss. 16-17
- a. A curse and a blessing.
 - i. "Feasting in the morning" is a reference to gluttony and drunkenness. (cf. Isa. 5:11).
 - 1. Solomon is not against young leaders (cf. Ecc. 4:13).
 - 2. However, these are sins more prone to young leaders drunk with their new authority.
 - 3. A fool uses his position of authority, not to prosper those below him, but to self-indulge.
 - a. The hard part is that these leaders are usually in a position that no one can question.
 - b. It is a curse to the land because the king gets fat, while the people suffer.
 - ii. "Eating at the appropriate time" is a reference to a king (or person in leadership) who understands the nature and role of his office.
 - 1. The mark of a good leader is they view themselves as a servant.

2. They have been given power and authority to bring blessing to people, not to self-indulge.

9. Vss. 18-19

- a. A proverb in reference to the lazy sluggard.
 - i. This is a political context, and therefore speaking of the passive leader who simply assumes things are being taken care of.
 1. This laziness might be due to past performance, assuming people are still doing what they are supposed to be doing, or simply because they don't want to be bothered with simple management.
 2. Sometimes leaders feel they are only worthy of "more important matters" and don't feel they should be bothered with overseeing lesser tasks.
 - ii. In the end, this proverb is a warning against passivity.
- b. The connection between verse 18 and 19 is that Solomon doesn't want the pendulum to swing too far.
 - i. He's warning leaders against passivity and laziness, but he also warns against becoming a workaholic.
 - ii. In the end, the goal of work is to enjoy the gifts of God in the details of life—money simply provides the opportunity.
 - iii. This is Solomon keeping a consistent theology—joy in life doesn't come through the big accomplishments, but in learning to enjoy the everyday details of life (c.f., 2:24, 3:12-13, 5:18, 8:15, 9:7, 11:7-19).

10. V. 20

- a. Solomon concludes with a warning.
 - i. If you're not the one in authority, take great care in what you choose to say. There is much foolishness in grumbling and gossip.
 1. "Bedchamber" is a reference to servants. In other words, those who are not in charge.

2. Loyalty lies with those at top. As such, there's little value in grumbling about the king to one who has sworn allegiance to the king.

b. Words of folly always have a way of finding the ears of those in authority.

11. Conclusion

a. Wisdom is always better.

b. While it won't solve the problems of hebel, wisdom is still key for a joyful life, and never anything less than worship—which is why we've been created.

c. In the end, folly is not an issue of intellect, but an issue of the heart.

Small Group Questions:

1. What stood out to you in this sermon?
2. What is wisdom, and why is it important for one who claims to follow Christ?
3. What are the areas in your life in which God has given you leadership? Where could you apply some of Solomon's proverbs?
4. What are ways in which your tongue has gotten you into trouble? What are some things you can put in place to help grow in this area?
5. What are ways in which you've grown lazy and passive in areas of responsibility? What are some things you can put in place to help grow you in this area?
6. Why is Christ important in all of this?