

Ecclesiastes 10:1-11 “No FOOLin’ around”

Chapter 10 warns us to stay away from folly, which is the antithesis of wisdom.

Solomon will now give us a variety of short stories, case studies, maxims, proverbs, comparisons, and exhortations to reveal two entirely different ways to live.

THE WISE WAY AND THE FOOLISH WAY. . .

As we work through this chapter may you examine yourself and determine, “Am I living wisely or foolishly?” **PRAY**

Sharpen Your Axe Some years ago a young man looking for work approached a foreman of a logging crew and asked him for a job. “It depends,” replied the foreman. “Let’s see you take this tree down.” The young man stepped forward and skillfully felled a great tree. The foreman was impressed and exclaimed, “You can start on Monday!”

Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday rolled by. Thursday afternoon the foreman approached the young man and said, “You can pick up your paycheck on the way out today.” Startled, the young man asked, “I though you paid on Fridays.”

“Normally we do,” answered the foreman, “but we’re letting you go today because you’ve fallen behind. Our daily charts show that you’ve dropped from first place on Monday to last place on Wednesday.” “But I’m a hard worker,” the young man objected. “I arrive first, leave last, and I’ve even worked through my coffee breaks!”

The foreman, sensing the boy’s integrity, thought for a minute and then asked, “Have you been sharpening your ax?” The young man replied, “Well, no sir. I’ve been working too hard to take the time.”

Have you been spending time alone with God? How’s your prayer life? How is your personal Bible study? In fellowship with other believers... every week?

10 Dead flies putrefy the perfumer's ointment, And cause it to give off a foul odor; *So does* a little folly to one respected for wisdom *and* honor.

Note: The word "folly" is used nine times in this chapter

The King James Version sounds a little better **but smells about the same**. "Dead flies cause the ointment of the apothecary to send forth a stinking savour."

The image is so strong that we can almost catch a whiff of the foul perfume. Although there was nothing wrong with the fragrance itself, it had attracted a swarm of flies. Some of the insects had died, and the stench of their carcasses had turned the perfume rancid. (maybe like the smell of rancid maggot infested beef)

As Ryken states, "It does not take much foolishness to turn things sour because folly stinks. All it takes is one rash word, one rude remark, one hasty decision, one foolish pleasure, or one angry outburst to spoil everything. ***It is easier to make a stink than to create sweetness.***"

Deane in his commentary on this verse "This is a metaphorical confirmation of the truth enunciated at the end of the last chapter, 'One sinner destroyeth much good.'"

So does a little folly to one respected for wisdom *and* honor. Even as small dead flies - quite little in proportion to the whole - spoil a fine ointment, so just a little folly spoils the reputation of someone regarded as wise and honorable. Ecclesiastes 10:1 reminds us that *even small things have consequences.*

The conclusion is logical: Wise people will stay away from folly! "One 'whoops" can erase 50 'atta-boys'!"

2 A wise man's heart *is* at his right hand, But a fool's heart at his left. This of course is a political statement (wink, wink) The "right is right" and the "left is wrong".

Solomon has told us many things about the fool already.

He is lazy (Eccl. 4:5), ill-tempered (7:9), morally blind (2:14).

He refuses to take advice (9:17). His life is not pleasing to God (5:4).

Solomon says wisdom and folly are inclinations of the heart.

Which way is your heart leaning – toward God or away from him? Do you have a growing appetite for the Word of God, or does the Bible taste stale? Are you moving toward or away from God in prayer? Are you getting more serious about sin, or have you stopped pursuing personal sanctification? **UNDERSTAND THAT THE LEANING OF THE HEART DETERMINES THE DIRECTION OF LIFE.**

AGAIN, LOOK up *heart* in a theological dictionary... your heart is **all** that you are.

The seat of moral nature and spiritual life, the seat of grief, joy, desires, affections, perceptions, your thoughts, the understanding, the reasoning powers, the imagination, conscience, intentions, purpose, the will, faith... in its moral significance in the O.T. includes emotions, the reason and the will... the ultimate seat of purity or defilement before God is in the heart. —

TOTAL PERSON!

2 A wise man's heart *is* at his *right hand*, But a fool's heart at his left.

The *right hand*...

**The *right hand* is associated with a strength which saves, supports and protects.

**The *right hand* was used to convey blessing, such as the time that Jacob crossed his arms to place his right hand on Ephraim's head and thus give him the greater blessing (Genesis 48:13-20).

The *right hand* was also associated with authority, which is why Jesus sits on the right hand of the Father. **Colossians 3:1 – *If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the *right hand* of God.*

It's no wonder that at the final judgment, the sheep will be on the right, but the goats will be on the left (Matthew 25:31-33).

ON THE CONTRARY. MANY PEOPLE CONSIDERED THE LEFT SIDE TO BE “UNLUCKY.” (THE ENGLISH WORD “SINISTER” COMES FROM A LATIN WORD THAT MEANS “ON THE LEFT HAND.



The sculptor Rodin is also a consistent case in point. It is often overlooked that his famed pair of hands called “The Cathedral” involves two right hands!

Since the fool doesn't have wisdom in his heart, he gravitates toward that which is wrong (the left) and gets into trouble. People try to correct him, but he refuses to listen, and **THIS** tells everybody that he is a fool.

When Solomon says that the fool is on the left, he is telling us that the man is going the wrong direction in life. Are you moving the right way in discipleship or falling away spiritually?

Join me now in verse 3 Even when a fool walks along the way, He lacks wisdom, And he shows everyone *that he is* a fool. **A fool need not wear a sign to identify himself as a fool, for his lack of wisdom announces his own foolishness.**

Most Christians can distinguish good from evil. We know that some things are morally right, while others are morally wrong. Choosing to do the morally wrong think is foolish.

A FOOL ... A “fool” in the Biblical sense is not necessarily someone with below-average intelligence. Folly does not always show up on the low end of the IQ scale. Rather, the term refers to someone who lacks the proper **fear of God** and therefore is prone to go the wrong direction in life. It is the fool who “says in his heart, ‘There is no God’” (Psalm 14:1).

A FOOL is characterized by impulsive disobedience, self-centered arrogance, and rash disregard for the holiness of God.

A FOOL seems to be the only person who does not know that he is a fool!

According to an ancient Malayan proverb, “A fool is like the big drum that beats fast but does not realize its hollowness.”

Fools have a way of refusing to listen to good advice.



Proverbs 12:15 – The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, But he who heeds counsel is wise.



Proverbs 18:2 – A fool has no delight in understanding, But in expressing his own heart.



Proverbs 23:9 – Do not speak in the hearing of a fool, For he will despise the wisdom of your words.



Proverbs 13:16 – very prudent man acts with knowledge, But a fool lays open his folly.

Proverbs 12:23 – A prudent man conceals knowledge, But the heart of fools proclaims foolishness.

Do not be the kind of person who refuses to listen to constructive criticism or ignores what godly people are trying to say or erupts with disproportionate anger every time something goes wrong.

A wise person is capable of doing foolish things but it doesn't make him a fool. At what point does repeated foolishness make a fool of a man?

Foolish... Going to see 50 shades of filth... allow pornography to enter your mind... really anything that God's word has prohibited us from.

GALATIANS 5:19 When you follow the desires of your sinful nature, the results are very clear: sexual immorality, impurity, lustful pleasures, **20** idolatry, sorcery, hostility, quarreling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish ambition, dissension, division, **21** envy, drunkenness, wild parties, and other sins like these.

Sin is Foolish...

God has never given us any command that is not for our good. **He is not a cosmic kill joy**... He has always wanted what is best for us... to walk in wisdom by avoiding sin is always what's best!

AS HUGHES NOTES, "WHEREAS VERSES 1-3 DEFINED THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN WISDOM AND FOLLY, VERSES 4-7 GIVE US PRACTICAL ADVICE FOR DEALING WITH THE MANY FOOLISH PEOPLE WE MEET IN THE WORLD."

4 If the spirit of the ruler rises against you, Do not leave your post; For conciliation pacifies great offenses. **The picture here is of a proud ruler who easily becomes angry and takes out his anger on the attendants around him.**

Unfortunately, there are many foolish people in government. As foolish as they are, they nonetheless manage to work their way into positions of political leadership. Some are completely incompetent. Others use their position for personal advantage. They are more interested in status than service. By the time their folly is exposed, it is too late – the damage has been done. Afterward people wonder how they ever managed to get put in charge.

Mark Twain's frequently-quoted witticisms: "Suppose you were an idiot. And suppose you were a member of Congress. But I repeat myself."

SOLOMON WISELY STATES, "For conciliation pacifies great offenses." Blessed are the peacemakers... **Proverbs 15:1** A soft answer **turns away wrath**, But a harsh word stirs up anger.

The best response to anger is to stay, not to run away, and to remain calm, not to get angry. Getting angry would only make things worse, for as Derek Kidner explains, "it is better to have only one angry person than

to have two.”

Proverbs 16:32 He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty and he who rules his spirit than he who takes a city.

Proverbs 25:28 Whoever has no rule over his own spirit is like a city broken down, without walls.

Next sections taken from R Kent Hughes’ commentary on Ecclesiastes.

This is good counsel for workers with an angry boss, for students with an angry teacher, for parents with an angry child, and for wives with an angry husband (or vice versa). It is good counsel for all the situations in life when someone else is suddenly provoked to anger and it makes us mad that he or she is angry. Just because someone else gets upset does not mean that we have the right to walk away from a relationship, especially if that relationship is ordained by God and is sealed with a promise (the way marriage is, for example). The way to deal with foolish anger is not to be intimidated by it or to respond in kind but to keep calm, which we can only do by the power of the Holy Spirit.

The Apostle Peter gave similar advice. He knew what it was like to deal with angry people, like the fools who told him to stop preaching the gospel. Yet Peter commended a **life of quiet gentleness**. He told Christians to submit to the governing authorities, even when they were persecuting the church, because by doing good deeds, the suffering church would “put to silence the ignorance of foolish people” (1 Peter 2:18-19). He told wives to submit to their husbands, even if they were unbelievers, so that by pure and respectful conduct they might win their husband’s heart for Christ (1 Peter 3:1-2).

If we doubt the wisdom of Peter’s counsel – or if we think that it is impossible for us to follow – then we should remember the example that Peter gives. Why should we keep serving people who make us suffer? Peter said, “Because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps” (1 Peter 2:21).

Then Peter pointed out that Jesus did exactly what Ecclesiastes tells us to do. Angry rulers rose against him – foolish men who treated him with angry contempt until finally they crucified him. Yet Jesus refused to leave his place of service or to fight anger with anger. Instead he calmly did the work that he was called to do: “When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he

suffered, he did not threaten” (1 Peter 2:23). By his calm response, Jesus laid great offenses to rest, carrying our sins upon the cross and forgiving everyone who trusts him, including some of the very men who crucified him.

Now Jesus calls us to follow in his footsteps. Who is the angry or foolish person in your life, and how will you respond? The way to glorify God and to lay great offenses to rest is by keeping the calm of Christ. (Cooler heads prevail!)

5 There is an evil I have seen under the sun, As an error proceeding from the ruler: 6 Folly is set in great dignity, While the rich sit in a lowly place. 7 I have seen servants on horses, While princes walk on the ground like servants.

In Biblical time horses were strongly associated with power, wealth, and royal authority. Slaves generally did not ride on horseback but walked in front of or behind their masters. **BUT WHEN FOLLY SITS ON THE THRONE, EVERYTHING IS TOSY-TURVY. SLAVES RIDE, WHILE PRINCES WALK.**



SOLOMON'S SON REHOBOAM WAS PROUD AND UNYIELDING, AND THIS LED TO THE DIVISION OF THE KINGDOM (1 KINGS 12:1-24). INSTEAD OF FOLLOWING THE ADVICE OF THE WISE COUNSELORS, HE LISTENED TO HIS YOUTHFUL FRIENDS. HE MADE THE ELDERS WALK AND HE PUT THE YOUNG MEN ON THE HORSES.

Whenever we see things turned upside down – whenever a society celebrates immorality, perpetuates wrongful violence, punishes righteousness, denies the authority of God, or persecutes his people – *we may be sure that folly is in control.*

8 He who digs a pit will fall into it, And whoever breaks through a wall will be bitten by a serpent. 9 He who quarries stones may be hurt by them, *And* he who splits wood may be endangered by it. *In the words of Charles Bridges, “Evil shall fall upon the heads of its own authors.”*

True story of women landing on cheating husband



One author explains Solomon's words, "For every folly, there is an equal and opposite self-destruction. The addict seeks the calm of the drink or the thrill of the hit but ends up wasting away. The lusty sinner wants sexual pleasure but by gratifying desire outside the holy bonds of matrimony ends up spiritually and physically unsatisfied. The selfish husband or wife wants to have things his or her own way but in trying to get it ruins the relationship and loses everything. The angry father or mother wants more control, but angry emotions set everyone on edge, which only leads to more chaos, more anger, and ultimately less control. These are some of the pitfalls of folly. Dig the pit, and you will fall in. Break down the wall, and the snake of sin will come back to bite you."

10 If the ax is dull, And one does not sharpen the edge, Then he must use more strength; But wisdom brings success. 11 A serpent may bite when *it is* not charmed; The babbler is no different.

Living wisely may take more time at the beginning, but it saves time in the long run.

Snake charmers were common as entertainers in that day. Snakes have no external ears; they pick up sound waves primarily through the bone structure of the head. More than the music played by the charmer, it is the man's disciplined actions (swaying and "staring") that hold the snake's attention and keep the serpent under control. **It is indeed an art.**

Solomon described a performer who was bitten by the snake before the man had opportunity to "charm" it. Beside risking his life, the charmer could not collect any money from the spectators. They would only laugh at him. **He was a fool because he rushed and acted as though the snake were charmed.** He wanted to collect his money in a hurry and move to another location. The more "shows" he put on, the bigger his income. Instead, he made no money at all.

Some charmers had a mongoose available that "caught" the snake just at the right time and "saved" the man from being bitten. If for some reason the mongoose

missed his cue, the serpent might attack the charmer, and that would be the end of the show. Either way, the man was foolish.

Taken together, verses 10 – 11 show us why we need wisdom from God. Sometimes it is important to take more time to prepare. **“Don’t work harder—work smarter!”** Other times we need to act before it is too late. Wisdom comes in knowing the difference.

More than anything else, what makes a fool a fool is not listening to Jesus and not doing what he says. If we are wise, therefore, we will build our lives on the solid rock of Jesus and his Word – the Word as 2 Timothy 3:15 says, that is able to make us “wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus”.

Jesus illustrates... verse 24... “Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock: *In this brilliant illustration of the two houses, each house looked the same from the outside. The real foundation of our life is usually hidden, and is only proven in the storm.* The two men attend the same church, sing the same songs, send their children to the same schools. But one has been wise,²⁵ and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock.

and the other has been a fool (the Greek word used here is “**moro**”, from which we get moron.)²⁶ “But everyone who hears these sayings of Mine, and does not do them, will be like a foolish man (**the moron**) who built his house on the sand:²⁷ and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; **AND IT FELL. And great was its fall.**”

DONALD CARSON EXPLAINS: The man who builds his house upon the shifting foundation is likened to the person who hears Jesus’ words but who does not put them to practice. The man who builds his house upon the rock is likened to the person who not only hears Jesus’ words but also puts them into practice. The difference between the two houses is therefore likened to the difference between **obedience and disobedience.**

James 1:22 But be **doers** of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.

1 John 2:17 And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who **does** the will of God abides forever.

Luke 11:28 But He said, "More than that, blessed are those who hear the word of God and **keep it!**"

John 13:17 If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them.

1 John 3:7 Little children, let no one deceive you. He who **practices** righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous

The fool and the wise... REVERSE THINKING DVD