

Daily Bible Study

“The Fool and Foolishness” Part - 1

Ecclesiastes 10:1-10

September 22– September 28, 2013

MONDAY –We continue this week in our study of **Ecclesiastes** looking at **Chapter 10:1-10** and we will contemplate *The Fool and Foolishness*. It was a phrase that somewhat came to define the acting career of “Mr. T”; “I pity the fool”. He first used it in Rocky 3 (1982) when he said he “didn’t hate Balboa, but I pity the fool.” He was expressing that Rocky Balboa was making an unwise decision in boxing him for which he would pay. We know that because it was a Hollywood script, Rocky’s decisions turned out right for him; but in life, God says that foolishness and foolish decisions and actions are not only powerful but devastating. This is what we see as we unpack our text for the week. Like a deadly disease, a little foolishness can go a long way wreaking havoc. Scripture elsewhere has a lot to say about foolishness. From, “*The fool has said in his heart, ‘There is no God.’*” (**Psalm 14:1**), to Paul’s, “*For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God*” (**1 Corinthians 1:18**). Jesus even said of the rich man who was tied to the pleasures of this earth without regard for eternal riches and blessing, “*Fool! This night your soul will be required of you; then whose will those things be which you have provided?*” (**Luke 12:20**). Like our Lord and the Apostles, Solomon also teaches about foolishness and uses a derivative of the word translated “folly” 9 times in this chapter. “Folly” speaks among other things of foolishness, foolish decisions, actions, absurdity, and stupidity. **Ecclesiastes 10:1-10**: “*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. ²A wise man’s heart is at his right hand, But a fool’s heart at his left.³Even when a fool walks along the way, He lacks wisdom, And he shows everyone that he is a fool. ⁴If the spirit of the ruler rises against you, Do not leave your post; For conciliation pacifies great offenses. ⁵There is an evil I have seen under the sun, As an error proceeding from the ruler: ⁶Folly is set in great dignity, While the rich sit in a lowly place. ⁷I have seen servants on horses, While princes walk on the ground like servants. ⁸He who digs a pit will fall into it, And whoever breaks through a wall will be bitten by a serpent. ⁹He who quarries stones may be hurt by them, And he who splits wood may be endangered by it. ¹⁰If the ax is dull, And one does not sharpen the edge, Then he must use more strength; But wisdom brings success.*”

Suggestion for Prayer: *Father God, help me learn from Your Word this week and also to be wise and heed the warnings concerning foolishness. Help me see how much damage it can do.*

TUESDAY – **Ecclesiastes 10:1-3**: “*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. ²A wise man’s heart is at his right hand, But a fool’s heart at his left. ³Even when a fool walks along the way, He lacks wisdom, And he shows everyone that he is a fool.*” Solomon had already compared a good name to fragrant perfume (**7:1**), so he now uses this image again. You can lose the beautiful fragrance of a life; dead flies ruin the perfume, and folly ruins the reputation. Conclusion: A wise person will stay away from folly. As it is with folly, so it is with all sin. The Bible uses the picture of a little yeast in bread dough to illustrate its power. A little permeates and causes massive change in the bread. Yeast was often used as a metaphor for corruption and guile but always it points to decisive change and major influence (**Matthew 16:6, 22:23–29, 22:16–21, 1 Corinthians 5:6, Galatians 5:9**). What helps determine if a man has wisdom or foolishness is his heart and where it is. Not the blood pumping organ, as people’s hearts are for the most part in the same place physically. Solomon was referring to the center of your life, the “master control” if you will that are the source for “*the issues of life*” (**Proverbs 4:23**). In the ancient world, the right hand was the place of power, honor, and cleanliness while the left hand represented weakness, rejection, and was used in personal hygiene (**Matthew 25:33, 41**). The idea here is that a wise man’s heart is in the right place, and the foolish man’s is not and it is the inclination of that heart that leads in the right or wrong direction. The fool says Solomon will be recognizable; he needs no help, he will soon give himself away as foolish. He is unaware of the transparency of his foolishness and thinking himself wise he becomes a fool. Paul speaks to this very issue in **Romans 1:21–22**. People often parade their foolishness for all to see. They openly defy the commandments of God to their own temporal and eternal destruction yet they consider themselves to be the wisest.

Suggestion for Prayer: *Father, help me to be so filled with Your Spirit and Your Word that what flows from my heart would be wise and God honoring. Help me see the damaging effects of just a little bit of foolishness and be aware my actions and attitudes are making a statement.*

WEDNESDAY – **Ecclesiastes 10:4-7**: “*If the spirit of the ruler rises against you, Do not leave your post; For conciliation pacifies great offenses. ⁵There is an evil I have seen under the sun, As an error proceeding from the ruler: ⁶Folly is set in great dignity, While the rich sit in a lowly place. ⁷I have seen servants on horses, While princes walk on the ground like servants.*” The fool lacks self-control, even in his dealings with those in authority over him and in these verses Solomon is dealing with the specific situation where the king or some other official is angry with you. When we find ourselves in this position we often sinfully push back and get defensive, proud and “huffy”. The wise man does the very opposite. Instead of storming out, throwing a raging tantrum he seeks to pacify his employer. We are often given good opportunities to show the grace of God to unbelievers in situations like this (**Proverbs 15:1, Colossians 3:12–15**). It isn’t merely dealing with an authority either but these issues are raised

between one another as fellow Christians when we fail to submit to one another in the fear of the Lord. Many times we have witnessed where men and women in church or church related meetings or business have got mad and huffed away because things were not going their way. Again, **verses 4-7** point us to folly taking place from the top, *an error proceeding from the ruler*. Errors in judgment and errors in decision making happen in leadership; it's a difficult calling. Lyndon B. Johnson said, "A president's hardest task is not to *do* what's right, but to *know* what's right." This is true and knowing what's right requires wisdom and humility. The picture here is of a proud ruler who easily becomes angry and takes out his anger on those around him. Scripture says, "*He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty and he who rules his spirit than he who takes a city*" (**Proverbs 16:32**). What adds to the foolishness is when those under the authority get huffy, angry, and bitter as we have seen. It is far better for them to control themselves and seek to bring peace. "*Through patience a ruler can be persuaded, and a gentle tongue can break a bone*" (**Proverbs 25:15**). The problem can also be that the ruler is unwise and a fool himself and puts other fools in high positions and qualified people in low positions. The servants ride on the princess walk. This is why we need to pray for wise leaders and that wisdom would be given to the unwise. Solomon's son Rehoboam was a foolish leader. His foolishness led to the division of the kingdom (**1 Kings 12:1-24**). Instead of following the advice of the wise, older counselors, he listened to his cool, hip, peer, youthful friends. He made the elders walk and he put the young men on the horses as it were. The best rulers put the best people on the horses and don't apologize for it.

Suggestion for Prayer: Father, help me pursue and promote peace by not being huffy and arrogant dealing with those who rule over me in some capacity as well as with those under my care. Teach me to be wise and to pray for Your wisdom to be given and heeded by my leaders.

THURSDAY – Ecclesiastes 10:8-9: 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.* Among students of Scripture, there is some differing opinions as to what Solomon is trying to say in this next section. Is he saying that every job has its occupational hazards? It seems a bit odd that he would take the time here to state and illustrate the obvious. Remember he is talking about foolishness and folly and he certainly is not saying that hard work is foolish because you might get injured since we find overwhelming support throughout Scripture for working hard and enjoying your labor (**Genesis 2:15, Psalm 90:17, 128:2, Proverbs 12:11, 14:23, Ecclesiastes 3:13, 1 Corinthians 4:12**). He is saying you need to be careful in doing your work by making proper planning and preparations and not be foolish which leads to "accidents". You can't just sit back either; you need to work but be wise in it and avoid problems by preparing. If you dig a hole in your yard remember it is there when you go out at night. If you have to tear down an old wall be on the lookout for snakes. You need stones and wood when building so be careful

around giant rocks and watch out that a piece of wood doesn't fly in your face. Here again Solomon is bringing common sense "wisdom" to everyday life and activities as he illustrates to us that foolishness does indeed carry a very high price. Tomorrow we will end our text with Solomon's final illustration relating to this "work smarter not harder" principle.

Suggestion for Prayer: Father, help me embrace hard work with joy to glorify you in it. Thanks for blessing hard work as well. Help me see the danger of working foolishly and doing anything in foolishness for that matter.

FRIDAY – Ecclesiastes 10:10: ¹⁰*If the ax is dull, And one does not sharpen the edge, Then he must use more strength; But wisdom brings success.* As I mentioned yesterday, this last verse is the final illustration that Solomon uses concerning working smarter. Remember these verses are not merely teaching us to be good Boy Scouts as we remember the Scout Motto to "Always Be Prepared" but they are illustrations of the damage that can come by folly and foolishness. He is teaching a spiritual principle here as he is giving practical advice relating to everyday activities. This verse states a very obvious but important rule. Sharpen your ax before you chop wood. If you have a dull ax not only will it require more strength from you in an effort to get the job done but as we saw in the previous verse, you may very well hurt yourself. The fool must learn to be mindful of the dangers awaiting him. The fool rushes headlong into a hard task with a dull ax and without making adequate preparation and beats and burns himself out in the process. How true this can be in relation to service toward Jesus. We go out quickly and attempt to get "Kingdom work" accomplished without sharpening the ax, without the proper preparation of waiting on God, sitting in the presence of God and His Word which prepares and renews our strength for the endeavor (**Isaiah 40:29-31**). The one common denominator among all of Solomon's example "foolish workers" seems to be presumption. They were overconfident and ended up either hurting themselves or making their job harder. Being wise and having God's *wisdom brings success*. Listen to wisdom as she speaks, "*For whoever finds me finds life, And obtains favor from the LORD; But he who sins against me wrongs his own soul; All those who hate me love death*" (**Proverbs 8:35-36**). The New Testament speaks to this principle as well (**James 3:13-17**). As our last verse teaches, a fool's own actions may prove to be his undoing as his foolishness may unleash all kinds of hidden dangers and some of them even result in his destruction. Finally, another place we see this take place in Scripture would be in Esther where we find that Haman was hanged on the gallows that he had built for Mordecai (**Esther 7**).

Suggestion for Prayer: Father, help me to be prepared for whatever work You have me doing. May I sit in Your presence and soak up You and Your Word in order to go out in wisdom and get after the task at hand. Bless the labor of my hands God as I work hard to glorify You and protect me from the danger of folly and foolish decisions. I ask it in Jesus name, Amen.