

March 12, 2017

“Are You Wise or Foolish?”

Focal Passage: Ecclesiastes 10:1-20 (NASB)

Cross References: Proverbs 6:6-19; 10:32; 18:7; 27:17; 28:12; 29:2; Luke 12:1-3; Acts 2:42-47; Ephesians 4:29; Titus 3:2; Hebrews 10:24-25; James 1:5-7, 26; 3:1-12

Lesson Idea: We need to seek to be wise and not foolish.

BIBLE IN A YEAR READING PLAN

Mar 5 Deut 17-20	Mar 6 Deut 21-23
Mar 7 Deut 24-27	Mar 8 Deut 28-29
Mar 9 Deut 30-31	Mar 10 Deut 32-34
Mar 11 Joshua 1-4	Mar 12 Joshua 5-8

Background: Solomon utilizes consistent themes in Ecclesiastes to emphasize the vanity of life “under the sun.” In today’s passage, he continues his contrast of wisdom and foolishness. He demonstrates how wisdom profits a person in all areas of his life, while foolishness does the opposite. He uses proverbs to show the consequences of both in hopes that we will always choose to follow wisdom. During this study, we should keep in mind the promise and warning about wisdom from God in James 1:5-7:

5 If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you. 6 But when you ask, you must believe and not doubt, because the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. 7 That person should not expect to receive anything from the Lord. 8 Such a person is double-minded and unstable in all they do.

Ecclesiastes 10:1-20

1 Dead flies make a perfumer’s oil stink, so a little foolishness is weightier than wisdom and honor. 2 A wise man’s heart directs him toward the right, but the foolish man’s heart directs him toward the left. 3 Even when the fool walks along the road, his sense is lacking and he demonstrates to everyone that he is a fool. 4 If the ruler’s temper rises against you, do not abandon your position, because composure allays great offenses.

5 There is an evil I have seen under the sun, like an error which goes forth from the ruler— 6 folly is set in many

exalted places while rich men sit in humble places. 7 I have seen slaves riding on horses and princes walking like slaves on the land.

8 He who digs a pit may fall into it, and a serpent may bite him who breaks through a wall. 9 He who quarries stones may be hurt by them, and he who splits logs may be endangered by them. 10 If the axe is dull and he does not sharpen its edge, then he must exert more strength. Wisdom has the advantage of giving success. 11 If the serpent bites before being charmed, there is no profit for the charmer. 12 Words from the mouth of a wise man are gracious, while the lips of a fool consume him; 13 the beginning of his talking is folly and the end of it is wicked madness. 14 Yet the fool multiplies words. No man knows what will happen, and who can tell him what will come after him? 15 The toil of a fool so wearies him that he does not even know how to go to a city. 16 Woe to you, O land, whose king is a lad and whose princes feast in the morning. 17 Blessed are you, O land, whose king is of nobility and whose princes eat at the appropriate time—for strength and not for drunkenness. 18 Through indolence the rafters sag, and through slackness the house leaks. 19 Men prepare a meal for enjoyment, and wine makes life merry, and money is the answer to everything. 20 Furthermore, in your bedchamber do not curse a king, and in your sleeping rooms do not curse a rich man, for a bird of the heavens will carry the sound and the winged creature will make the matter known.

DISCUSSION:

- v 1. How does foolishness ruin wisdom and honor?

NOTE: from Guzik:

Dead flies putrefy the perfumer’s ointment:

Solomon here followed a familiar form in stating proverbs. An obvious statement is made: that dead flies spoil a fine ointment and cause it to smell.

“This is a metaphorical confirmation of the truth enunciated at the end of the last chapter, ‘One sinner destroyeth much good.’” (Deane)

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.

- v 2-3. How is foolishness evident in the way someone lives his or her life?

- v 4. What was Solomon’s advice when someone in authority gets mad at you? Why is this wise advice? How could this be applied at work? ...at school? ...at home?
- v 5-7. What other folly did Solomon see, and why did he see it as an evil?

Compare your thoughts with how these verses are translated in the New Living Translation: *5 There is another evil I have seen under the sun. Kings and rulers make a grave mistake 6 when they give great authority to foolish people and low positions to people of proven worth. 7 I have even seen servants riding horseback like princes—and princes walking like servants!* (see also Proverbs 28:12; 29:2)

- v 8-9. What words of wisdom does Solomon express in the proverbs in these verses?
- v 10-11. How does wisdom bring success even to things like chopping wood and charming snakes? Read Proverbs 27:17. How do we sharpen one another? (see also Acts 2:42-47; Hebrews 10:24-25)

NOTE: *A woodsman was once asked, “What would you do if you had just five minutes to chop down a tree?” He answered, “I would spend the first two and a half minutes sharpening my axe.”*

- v 12-14. What observations does Solomon make concerning the conversations of fools? What warnings should we take from his advice? (see Proverbs 10:32; 18:7. See also what the New Testament says about “taming the tongue” in James 3:1-12)

NOTE: from Guzik:

A fool also multiplies words ... who can tell him what will be after him? The fool is known by his many words, and by his presumption about the future – when no man knows what is to be.

“The word for ‘fool’ here is *sakal*, which implies a dense, confused thinker.” (Deane)

- v 15. The New Living Translation renders this verse in this way: *Fools are so exhausted by a little work that they can’t even find their way home.* Why would this be so?

NOTE: from Guzik:

The labor of fools wearies them: The fool has no desire to work; or when they do they quickly become wearied. They can’t see that it is wise to work now in order to prepare for the future.

They do not even know how to go to the city! The Preacher continued to subtly back away from his previous under the sun premise. The fool has no sense of direction or goal. They live their life as if it were meaningless, directionless.

“The phrase, ‘how to go to the city,’ seems to be a kind of proverbial comparison for anything that is very plain and conspicuous.” (Maclaren)

- v 16-17. What kind of leaders did Solomon say were bad for a land? What kind of leaders bring blessings to the land? How could we use these verses to pray for those who are our leaders?
- v 18. *Indolence* and *slackness* are synonyms with *laziness*. What lessons do we learn from sagging rafters and leaking houses?
- v 19. This verse relates more of Solomon’s “under-the-sun” observations. How do even these things need to be guided by the grace of God?
- v 20. What advice does Solomon give about even your most private conversations? Why should you never speak curses about others? (see Proverbs 6:16-19; Luke 12:1-3; Ephesians 4:29; Titus 3:2; James 1:26)

APPLICATION:

- ✓ Does your life reflect Godly wisdom, or does it stink of foolishness? Why?
- ✓ Does your life need sharpening? Who could help sharpen you and receive the same from you by spending time together this week (discussing your relationship with Jesus, studying the Bible, praying together, and talking about life)?
- ✓ Are you careless with you words? Are there times or places or certain people that bring out the worst in your speech? What do you need to do to repent of that foolishness?