

Living with the End in Mind: Choosing Wisdom Over Folly

Ecclesiastes 10:1-20

April 26, 2020

Last week's study of chapter 9 we learned that once we accept that death is unavoidable and life is unpredictable, we can enjoy life's simple pleasures. But enjoying life's pleasures does not mean that we should throw all care to the wind and do what we please. In chapter 10, Solomon reminds his readers of the importance of wisdom and the dangers of folly.

1. The Principle Explained (1-3)

- a. Folly creates problems for those who practice it (1).
 - i. Just as dead flies in perfume cause it to stink, folly destroys a good reputation.
 - ii. King David's adultery with Bathsheba marred his reputation
- b. Folly comes from a heart that is inclined to foolishness reinforced by foolish decisions (2-3).
 - i. In the ancient world, the right hand was the place of power and honor, while the left hand represented weakness and rejection (Matthew 25:33, 41).
 - ii. Since the fool's heart is bereft of wisdom, he chooses folly by default.
 1. Wisdom comes from God (Proverbs 2:6-8; James 1:5).
 2. Jeremiah 17:9 "The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked:"

2. The Principle Illustrated (4-20)

- a. Beware of Folly in Your Government (4-7).
 - i. A calm, respectful spirit is often a protection against a foolish ruler (4).
 1. 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."
 - ii. Foolish governments exalt foolish people and penalize the wise (5-7).
 1. Rehoboam despised the counsel of the older and wiser counselors, choosing the counsel of the young inexperienced counselors, and he lost half his kingdom (1 Kings 12:1-24).
- b. Beware of Folly in Your Workplace (8-11).
 - i. The foolish laborer is either overconfident or too lazy to make wise decisions.
 1. Digging a pit, and then falling into it (8a)
 2. Breaking through a hedge, and then getting bitten by a snake (8b)
 3. Removing stones, and incurring an injury (9a)
 4. Chopping wood with a dull ax (9b-10)
 5. Enchanting a snake and getting bitten (11)
- c. Beware of Folly in Your Words (12-15).
 - i. Foolish words can get us into big trouble (12).
 1. James 3:5-6 "Even so the tongue is a little member, and boasteth great things. Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth! And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity..."
 2. Proverbs 21:23 "Whoso keepeth his mouth and his tongue keepeth his soul from troubles."
 - ii. Foolish words are often emotionally charged which blind us to reality (13).
 1. Ecclesiastes 5:3 "a fool's voice is known by multitude of words."
 2. Titus 1:10 "For there are many unruly and vain talkers and deceivers,"
 - iii. Foolish words are presumptuous (14-15).
 1. Proverbs 27:1 "Boast not thyself of tomorrow; for thou knowest not what day bring forth."
 2. James 4:15-16 "For that ye ought to say, if the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that. But now ye rejoice in your boastings: all such rejoicing is evil."
- d. Beware of Folly in Your Rulers (16-20).
 - i. Foolish rulers are indulgent (16-17)
 1. Foolish rulers use their position for self-aggrandizement.
 2. Wise rulers use their position for the good of the nation.
 - ii. Foolish rulers are incompetent (18-19).
 1. Their inexperience (16a) leads to neglect (18).
 2. They think that money is the answer to every problem (19).

iii. Admonition: Even though your rulers may be foolish, do not curse them (20).

1. Disrespect can imperil those who speak foolishly, especially in lands that restrict free speech.
2. We must respect the office (Romans 13:1-7; 1 Peter 2:13-17).

Conclusion:

1. The death and uncertainty around us can be a spur to grow wiser or an opportunity to descend deeper into foolishness. Which have you been choosing during this pandemic?
2. Pay attention to the small patterns and habits that are forming during this time. Are they forming through intention or through neglect? Are they forming around truth or around emotion?
3. Your words and attitudes are revealing your wisdom or foolishness. What words and attitudes do you need to focus on changing?