

Review:

Solomon has ended the preceding section speaking of observing “all the work of God,” and noting how no one can exhaustively “find it out” (8:17). He begins chapter 9 referring to “all this” (9:1) referring to the investigation into life that he has undertaken and commented upon in chapters 1 - 8. Solomon now asks us to consider: If everything is *hebel* - vapor, does that also include wisdom? Is wisdom immune to the *hebel*-ness of life? If you are wise, will you rise above the vaporous quality of life under the sun? Will you be able to leverage things in order to escape the curse and death? Absolutely not! Solomon commends the superiority of wisdom; but he cannot do it without qualifying his commendation. Wisdom is superior, but wisdom is also vulnerable. Wisdom is God’s gift that will bring one success in life - but only limited success.

Everyone’s deeds are in the hands of God. Death comes to all alike, whether one is righteous or wicked. However, the Preacher commands us to live in hope: Eat our bread with joy, drink our wine with a merry heart for God approves of this. We should enjoy life with our spouse and labor with all our might.

Luther wrote this advice to his friend Jerome Weller in 1530 regarding resisting various temptations: “Be of good courage, therefore, and cast these dreadful thoughts out of your mind. Whenever the devil pesters you with these thoughts, at once seek out the company of other Christian men, drink more, joke and jest, or engage in some other form of merriment. Sometimes it is necessary to drink a little more, play, jest, or even commit some infraction in defiance and contempt. Accordingly if the devil should say, ‘Do not drink,’ you should reply to him, ‘On this very account, because you forbid it, I shall drink, and what is more, I shall drink a generous amount.’ Thus one must always do the opposite of that which Satan prohibits. What do you think is my reason for drinking wine undiluted, talking freely, and eating more often, if it is not to torment and vex the devil who made up his mind to torment and vex me.” (*Luther: Letters of Spiritual Counsel*, Westminster Press, 1960)

Continuing where we left off last week, Solomon now returns in verses 11-12 to the same theme in verses 2 & 3:

Ecc 9:2-3 It is the same for all, since the same event happens to the righteous and the wicked, to the good and the evil, to the clean and the unclean, to him who sacrifices and him who does not sacrifice. As the good one is, so is the sinner, and he who swears is as he who shuns an oath. (3) This is an evil in all that is done under the sun, that the same event happens to all. Also, the hearts of the children of man are full of evil, and madness is in their hearts while they live, and after that they go to the dead.

C. Only Human (Eccl.9:11-18)

Solomon reminds us of our human frailty and our need to depend upon the Lord. Here he gives us caution about the limits of wisdom. He has been speaking to us about what it means to live in hope. He spoke of contentment, celebration, companionship, and commitment. He envisions enjoyment of life as the gift of God. A mandate from God based upon the personal acceptance of each believer by God. We must be careful, however, to draw a distinction between God's mandate for our lives and God's providence in our lives. We are given gifts to use, things to do, and promises to claim, all to be lived out in faith, hope, and love, in the joy of the Lord.

We also need to have a balanced outlook on life. Jesus told us in John 16:33 that in the world we will have tribulation. Solomon gives us four points about wisdom to illustrate our need for balanced and realistic expectations in life.

Ecc 9:11-18 Again I saw that under the sun the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, nor bread to the wise, nor riches to the intelligent, nor favor to those with knowledge, but time and chance happen to them all.

1. Accomplishments do not guarantee success (v. 11)
 - a. Five examples
 - 1) The race is not to the swift
 - 2) The battle is not to the strong
 - 3) Nor bread to the wise
 - 4) Nor riches to men of understanding
 - 5) Nor favor to men of skill
 - b. Time and chance happen to them all: God is working out His sovereign purposes. (Eccl. 3; 8:17)
2. Ignorant of the future and sudden calamities surprise us (v. 12)

(12) For man does not know his time. Like fish that are taken in an evil net, and like birds that are caught in a snare, so the children of man are snared at an evil time, when it suddenly falls upon them.

3. Wisdom is frequently unrecognized (vv. 13-16)

(13) I have also seen this example of wisdom under the sun, and it seemed great to me. (14) There was a little city with few men in it, and a great king came against it and besieged it, building great siegeworks against it. (15) But there was found in it a poor, wise man, and he by his wisdom delivered the city. Yet no one remembered that poor man. (16) But I say that wisdom is better than might, though the poor man's wisdom is despised and his words are not heard.

- a. Wisdom should be prized as a great gift
- b. Be prepared for disappointments
- 4. Wisdom is often overthrown (vv. 17-18)

(17) The words of the wise heard in quiet are better than the shouting of a ruler among fools. (18) Wisdom is better than weapons of war, but one sinner destroys much good.

I. The Heart of Folly (Eccl. 10:1-20)

A. The contours of Folly (10:1-3)

Ecc 10:1-3 Dead flies make the perfumer's ointment give off a stench; so a little folly outweighs wisdom and honor. (2) A wise man's heart inclines him to the right, but a fool's heart to the left. (3) Even when the fool walks on the road, he lacks sense, and he says to everyone that he is a fool.

1. Folly's small beginning (v.1)
 - a. Dead flies - Flies of death: Ruins costly perfume
 - 1) Hebrew *zebub*
 - 2) *Beel-zebub* - Lord of the Flies, Satan
 - b. Takes one act of folly to ruin the wise.
 - 1) Careless remark
 - 2) Careless action
 - c. Damage control strategies
 - 1) Personal discipline
 - 2) Vigilance
2. Folly is a heart matter (v.2)
 - a. Heart - the innermost nature, the core commitments and orientation.
 - b. Direction
 - 1) Right - symbolically the position of favor, strength, protection, blessing, and honor.
 - 2) Left - Dishonor, ineptness, and disfavor.
 - 3) The divergent paths of the right and left are a figurative way of saying that the wise and the foolish start from different precommitments and will inevitably chart separate courses to radically opposing goals.
3. Folly will 'out' itself (v.3)

B. Insights on Folly (10:4-20)

Ecc 10:4-7 If the anger of the ruler rises against you, do not leave your place, for calmness will lay great offenses to rest. (5) There is an evil that I have seen under the sun, as it were an error proceeding from the ruler: (6) folly is set in many high places, and the rich sit in a low place. (7) I have seen slaves on horses, and princes walking on

the ground like slaves.

1. Evil arises from fools in government (10:4-7)
 - a. Unjustified anger? Respond calmly and remain at your post (v. 4)
 - b. Role-reversals (vv. 5-7)
 - 1) Fools in high positions vs. wise in low positions
 - 2) Slaves on horseback vs. princes on foot.
2. The practice of Folly (v. 8-10)

The fool must be mindful of the dangers awaiting him if he does not take care-only wisdom brings success.

Ecc 10:8-10 He who digs a pit will fall into it, and a serpent will bite him who breaks through a wall. (9) He who quarries stones is hurt by them, and he who splits logs is endangered by them. (10) If the iron is blunt, and one does not sharpen the edge, he must use more strength, but wisdom helps one to succeed.

- a. His own actions may be his undoing (v. 8a)
- b. His foolishness may release hidden dangers (v. 8b)
- c. He may be destroyed by the product of his own labor (v. 9)
- d. He may rush into a task before adequate preparation (v.10)

3. The publicity of Folly (vv.11-14)

Ecc 10:11-15 If the serpent bites before it is charmed, there is no advantage to the charmer. (12) The words of a wise man's mouth win him favor, but the lips of a fool consume him. (13) The beginning of the words of his mouth is foolishness, and the end of his talk is evil madness. (14) A fool multiplies words, though no man knows what is to be, and who can tell him what will be after him? (15) The toil of a fool wearies him, for he does not know the way to the city.

- a. The Fool's great publicity agent is his own tongue (v. 11)
 - 1) **Pro 10:14** The wise lay up knowledge, but the mouth of a fool brings ruin near.
 - 2) **Pro 10:32** The lips of the righteous know what is acceptable, but the mouth of the wicked, what is perverse.
 - 3) **Pro 12:14-19** From the fruit of his mouth a man is satisfied with good, and the work of a man's hand comes back to him. (15) The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, but a wise man listens to advice. (16) The vexation of a fool is known at once, but the prudent ignores an insult. (17) Whoever speaks the truth gives honest evidence, but a false witness utters deceit. (18) There is one whose rash words are like sword thrusts, but the tongue of the wise brings healing. (19)

Truthful lips endure forever, but a lying tongue is but for a moment.

4) [Jas 3:8](#) but no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. (It is like an uncharmed snake, and just as deadly!)

b. The Fool's publicity is devouring (v. 12)

1) Verse 11 is connected to verse 12

2) The speech of the wise is gracious.

3) The speech of Fools often hurts others and themselves.

c. The Fool's publicity is maddening (v. 13) - A momentary act becomes a pathological condition, a state of being.

d. The Fool's publicity is ignorant and multiplies words (v. 14)

1) Fool mistakes quality with quantity.

2) Cannot speak wisely because he has no wisdom.

a) Rejects the inscrutability of ways of the world.

b) believes he can 'predict' what will be from what is.

3) Cannot speak truthfully because he does not know the truth.

4) The Fool speaks from the abundance of his heart. [Mat 12:34](#) **You brood of vipers! How can you speak good, when you are evil? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks.**

5) The Fool trusts in his labor for leverage (v. 15)

a) His labor here is his speaking.

b) His own speaking wearies him.

c) "Going to the city" - seeking the counsel of others.

4. The politics of Folly: Four needs denied to a land by a foolish ruler (vv. 15-20)

Ecc 10:16-20 Woe to you, O land, when your king is a child, and your princes feast in the morning! (17) Happy are you, O land, when your king is the son of the nobility, and your princes feast at the proper time, for strength, and not for drunkenness! (18) Through sloth the roof sinks in, and through indolence the house leaks. (19) Bread is made for laughter, and wine gladdens life, and money answers everything. (20) Even in your thoughts, do not curse the king, nor in your bedroom curse the rich, for a bird of the air will carry your voice, or some winged creature tell the matter.

a. Need for maturity (vv. 16-17)

1) Child - petulant and guided by bad advisors

2) Son of nobility - groomed for rule; wise advisors

3) God's judgement: [Isa 3:1-5](#) **For behold, the Lord GOD of hosts is going to remove from Jerusalem and Judah Both**

supply and support, the whole supply of bread And the whole supply of water; (2) The mighty man and the warrior, The judge and the prophet, The diviner and the elder, (3) The captain of fifty and the honorable man, The counselor and the expert artisan, And the skillful enchanter. (4) And I will make mere lads their princes, And capricious children will rule over them, (5) And the people will be oppressed, Each one by another, and each one by his neighbor; The youth will storm against the elder And the inferior against the honorable.

b. Need for industry (v. 18)

- 1) The foolish ruler refuses to act.
- 2) The foolish ruler and those he rules reap the consequences of his inactivity, i.e., decay

c. Need for prudence (v.19)

- 1) The foolish ruler has become indifferent to the needs of his subjects and his responsibilities.
- 2) The foolish ruler satisfies only his own lusts lavishly.
- 3) The bribe solves all problems.
- 4) The fool lives a life of excess.

d) Need for caution (v. 20)

- 1) Small lapses in judgement can cause great grief.
- 2) Rebellious thoughts have a way of becoming public.

This section has moved from the power of wisdom to the reality of its vulnerability. One of the follies it is easy for a wise man to fall into is to believe that his wisdom somehow renders him powerful and protected. Wisdom's power to protect, such as it is, lies in acknowledging one's limitations and vulnerabilities.