

TO LIVE IS CHRIST

Wisdom Is Better Than Folly

Ecclesiastes 9:13—10:20

“As dead flies give perfume a bad smell, so a little folly outweighs wisdom and honor.”

Ecclesiastes 10:1

Day 1: Read Ecclesiastes 9:13–17.

1. What is the value of wisdom in this example story? (vss. 13–15a)
2. How is this similar to the other advantages of wisdom that the Teacher has mentioned? (See 2:13–14a; 7:11–12, 19; 10:12.)
3. How does the story illustrate the Teacher’s point that wisdom has value in the short run but is meaningless in the long run? (See also 2:14b–16.)
4. If we base our assessment of how God feels toward us (9:1) on the long term outcome of events like the one in this passage, what are we led to believe? Does our possession of wisdom, intellect or giftedness provide us any assurance about whether “love or hate awaits” us? (9:1)
5. What does determine how God feels toward us? (See Eph. 2:4–5; 1 John 4:9–10; Titus 3:3–7.) How does this bring you assurance?

Day 2: Read Ecclesiastes 9:18—10:7.

6. What truth do verses 9:18 and 10:1 share about sudden lapses of wisdom or foolish impulses?
7. In the Teacher’s culture, the foolish heart’s inclining to the left (10:2) would have meant that it inclines to the less valuable and the less good. How does this preference show up in the life of the fool? (10:3; See also Prov. 12:23; 13:16.)
8. The Hebrew word translated “error” (NIV) in verse 5 signifies a mistake that comes through negligence, forgetfulness or by accident. What kind of consequences does the ruler’s error in judgment have for his society? (10:6–7)
9. How does this picture of a world turned upside down fit in with the Teacher’s goal of opening our eyes to the meaninglessness of life? (See 1:15, 3:16; 5:8.)

Day 3: Read Ecclesiastes 10:8–11.

10. Verses 8 and 9 give illustrations of people who are engaged in doing their jobs and who fall prey to the dangers inherent in their occupations. What do these stories illustrate in the Teacher's worldview? (See 3:18–19, 22; 7:13–14; 8:7–8; 9:1.)
11. Verse 10b suggests that wisdom or skill will help its possessor to succeed. However, from the Teacher's point of view, what advantage does wisdom or skill provide in tragic situations like the one in verse 11?
12. As Christians how are we to view the types of disastrous situations described in verses 8, 9, and 11? (Consider Romans 5:1–5, 8:28–29, 31, 35–39; 2 Cor. 1:3–10, 4:7–11, 12:9; Heb. 12:7–11.)

Day 4: Read Ecclesiastes 10:12–15.

13. Verses 12 through 15 describe the fool. What is the process of the fool's speech from beginning to end (vs. 13), and what is its outcome? (vs. 12b)
14. What do these verses imply about how the fool thinks of himself and his opinions, and how he thinks about God? (vs. 13) What does scripture say is the root of the fool's folly? (Ps. 14:1)

Day 5: Read Ecclesiastes 10:16–20.

15. The word "servant" in verse 16 is better translated "immature." What characterizes an immature king, and what effect does he have on the land? (cf. Isaiah 3:1–5; 5:11–13, Amos 6:1–7)
16. In contrast, what characterizes a king of nobility and what are the effects of his reign?
17. How is the feast described in verse 19 different from that in verse 16? What does this say about the proper use of God's gifts?
18. Sin has made us twisted and lacking (1:15) as images of God and as subjects of his kingdom. How does Jesus as the true King of nobility (vs. 17) straighten the crookedness of his subjects' hearts (vs. 16)? (See 1 Cor. 10:31; Gal. 5:19–25; Phil. 3:18–21.) Describe a way in which he has done that in your life this week.