

Ecclesiastes 10:1 ¶ Dead flies cause the ointment of the apothecary to send forth a stinking savour: so doth a little folly him that is in reputation for wisdom and honour.

Reading through this chapter makes one think he is in the book of Proverbs; the manner of expression seems very similar to me.

As I read through this verse, I thought about *Galatians 5:9*, “A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump.” The presence of a dead fly in the perfume will turn its sweet smell into a stinky odor. In the same way, one foolish deed can ruin a person’s good reputation. This is an important truth to teach our children. It takes years to establish a good reputation, but that reputation can be destroyed in a moment—and rebuilding that good reputation will be a bit harder the second time around.

I think every Christian should soberly consider this observation from the commentary by Jamieson, Faucett & Brown: “The more delicate the perfume, the more easily spoiled is the ointment. Common oil is not so liable to injury. So the higher a man’s religious character is, the more hurt is caused by a sinful folly in him.”

Ecclesiastes 10:2-3 A wise man’s heart is at his right hand; but a fool’s heart at his left. Yea also, when he that is a fool walketh by the way, his wisdom faileth him, and he saith to every one that he is a fool.

The reference to the “right hand” is a reference to strength, authority, blessing and honor in scripture.

Mark 14:62 “And Jesus said, I am: and ye shall see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven.”

Exodus 15:6 “Thy right hand, O LORD, is become glorious in power: thy right hand, O LORD, hath dashed in pieces the enemy.”

Isaiah 62:8 “The LORD hath sworn by his right hand, and by the arm of his strength....”

Psalms 18:35 “Thou hast also given me the shield of thy salvation: and thy right hand hath holden me up, and thy gentleness hath made me great.”

Though the reference in scripture to the left hand is not always negative, there is one section of scripture that comes to mind.

Matthew 25:34 & 41 “Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world....” Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels:”

I think the context is clear that the right and left are being used as a positive/negative contrast. The wise man's heart is associated with his right hand, while the fool's heart is associated with his left. Verse 3 goes on to declare that you can discern the wise man from the fool by observing how he lives and the choices he makes.

I did think it was interesting that the Hebrew for "left hand" made reference to being enveloped by the dark. Scripture often equates darkness with sin and wickedness and light with good and righteousness. The Apostle John recorded one of the clearest statements of this truth.

1 John 1:5-7 "This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth: But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin."

The wise man is obviously one who walks according to the revealed will of God, while the foolish man chooses to ignore the truth of God's word.

Ecclesiastes 10:4 ¶ If the spirit of the ruler rise up against thee, leave not thy place; for yielding pacifieth great offences.

Solomon is basically advising one who finds himself in trouble with one in authority over him, he should stay calm and avoid the instinct to run away in fear or respond in anger. Proving oneself calm and with self control in such circumstances go a long way in defusing the situation and restoring normalcy.

I thought it was interesting that the Hebrew for "yielding" made reference to being curative and healing. We are so quick to associate *yielding* with weakness while it is actually often an action showing strength and self-control.

Ecclesiastes 10:5-7 There is an evil which I have seen under the sun, as an error which proceedeth from the ruler: Folly is set in great dignity, and the rich sit in low place. I have seen servants upon horses, and princes walking as servants upon the earth.

I think the NLT stated the heart of the meaning the best: *"Kings and rulers make a grave mistake if they give foolish people great authority, and if they fail to give people of proven worth their rightful place of dignity."*

I think this truth is in great evidence today as we look at many of the appointments that President Obama has made. I know that God has some purpose for allowing Mr. Obama to hold the office of President in our country at this time; I'm just afraid it might be a case of reaping what we have sown. I will continue to pray for Him to come to a true understanding of God's word and respond with a soft heart, and I hope that there are many Christians joining me in that prayer.

Ecclesiastes 10:8-11 He that diggeth a pit shall fall into it; and whoso breaketh an hedge, a serpent shall bite him. Whoso removeth stones shall be hurt therewith; and he that cleaveth wood shall be endangered thereby. If the iron be blunt, and he do not whet the edge, then must he put to more strength: but wisdom is profitable to direct. Surely the serpent will bite without enchantment; and a babbler is no better.

In this section of verses Solomon is basically stating that life is full of risks, but those risks can be limited when we use wisdom. Preparing well, taking safety precautions and making use of good instruments facilitate achieving one's objective efficiently and without mishap.

Other translations made the last verse much easier to understand; it is basically saying that there is no benefit to the snake charmer in charming a snake after it bites. It helps to know that the Hebrew for *babblers* means master. This seems to be saying that one's expertise can be useless if not utilized in a timely manner.

Ecclesiastes 10:12-14 ¶ The words of a wise man's mouth are gracious; but the lips of a fool will swallow up himself. The beginning of the words of his mouth is foolishness: and the end of his talk is mischievous madness. A fool also is full of words: a man cannot tell what shall be; and what shall be after him, who can tell him?

This is another of many sections of scripture that speak to the importance of controlling one's tongue. The words of a wise man are characterized by graciousness—showing kindness and mercy. He is looking to accomplish good with what he says.

The words of a fool, however, are characterized by destruction—both to himself and those to whom he speaks. It brings to mind a common saying, "Open mouth, insert foot." The wise man recognizes that the more you say, the more apt you are to find those words turned against you. The foolish man just loves to hear himself talk; he is not that interested in listening or in considering the possible consequences of having those words used against him.

This brings to mind Solomon's words from chapter 5: "*Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thine heart be hasty to utter any thing before God: for God is in heaven, and thou upon earth: therefore let thy words be few.*"

And these words from the Proverbs:

Proverbs 21:23 "Whoso keepeth his mouth and his tongue keepeth his soul from troubles."

Only God knows the future, and only a foolish man would claim to know anything about the future other than what God has revealed.

Proverbs 27:1 "Boast not thyself of to morrow; for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth."

Ecclesiastes 10:15 The labour of the foolish wearith every one of them, because he knoweth not how to go to the city.

Foolish people weary themselves by investing time and energy in things that are of no real benefit. This is a direct result of embracing the wisdom of this world and rejecting the wisdom of God as revealed in His word.

The IVP New Bible Commentary was helpful with this verse; it states: "Towns are conspicuous but the fool misses the way even to what is obvious."

Ecclesiastes 10:16-17 ¶ Woe to thee, O land, when thy king is a child, and thy princes eat in the morning! Blessed art thou, O land, when thy king is the son of nobles, and thy princes eat in due season, for strength, and not for drunkenness!

In these verses Solomon is drawing a contrast between immature, inexperienced leadership and mature, sober leadership. A nation whose leader is immature and is ruled by his flesh will not provide the leadership necessary to protect his nation and implement practices that will promote its health and welfare. A nation whose leader is mature and self-controlled is more likely to provide the leadership necessary to benefit his people.

Age is not necessarily the defining factor in this context. Some children are mature and wise beyond their years, while some adults are immature and foolish. I couldn't help but think of King Josiah, who ascended to the throne at age 8, as I read these verses. Though he was very young, scripture tells us that *he "did that which was right in the sight of the LORD, and walked in all the way of David his father, and turned not aside to the right hand or to the left."* (2Kings 22:2) He was young, but he was wise.

Psalms 111:10 "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom: a good understanding have all they that do his commandments: his praise endureth for ever."

Ecclesiastes 10:18 By much slothfulness the building decayeth; and through idleness of the hands the house droppeth through.

This verse is a commentary on laziness. A building that is left unattended by its lazy, inattentive owner will soon fall into disrepair. Idleness is a serious sin and character trait that resulted in the destruction of Sodom.

Ezekiel 16:49 "Behold, this was the iniquity of thy sister Sodom, pride, fulness of bread, and abundance of idleness was in her and in her daughters, neither did she strengthen the hand of the poor and needy."

Ecclesiastes 10:19 A feast is made for laughter, and wine maketh merry: but money answereth all things.

At first read I connected this statement to worldly wisdom; but as I continued to think about it, I realized that it is a very wise man that understands this to be the mindset of those in this world—those who have no spiritual understanding. To avoid being entrapped by the deceit of the enemy, you have to be able to recognize his traps. The enemy has been very successful in establishing a mindset of “It’s all about me” and in promoting success as the attainment of wealth. Those who have lots of money know that money doesn’t answer all things. There are many things money can’t buy, and these things are those of true value in life—the most valuable being sincere love. Money can’t buy peace of mind, though many have tried. Money can’t buy true friendship; just ask anyone who has lost his money and position of prestige.

Paul was very clear in advising Timothy against the temptations that come with wealth.

1 Timothy 6:9-10 “But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.”

Ecclesiastes 10:20 Curse not the king, no not in thy thought; and curse not the rich in thy bedchamber: for a bird of the air shall carry the voice, and that which hath wings shall tell the matter.

I would assume this verse to be the source of the old saying, “A little bird told me.” If so, it finds its roots in a wise admonition against even thinking bad thoughts about those in authority over you. Why? Because “*for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh.*” (Matthew 12:34)

Our thoughts are the source of many of our words. And if you choose to voice those thoughts even in the bedroom, a place of privacy, you are at risk of having your thoughts revealed to that authority. I marveled at how much more serious is this admonition today with current technology. I recently reread 1984, by George Orwell. As I teenager I remember thinking how far-fetched this guy’s imagination was. Today I view him as a man of prescience and amazing insight to the inventive abilities and character of man.