

Ecclesiastes

Part Seven

Ecclesiastes 10:1 [New King James] *“Dead flies putrefy the perfumer’s ointment, and cause it to give off a foul odour; so does a little folly to one respected for wisdom and honour.”*

Wisdom is excellent, but when compared with folly it is at a disadvantage because **a little folly in a wise person can cause a disproportionately large effect to the same folly in the life of a fool.**

Also a single fool can undo the work of many wise men.

Ecclesiastes 10:2-3 [New King James] *“A wise man’s heart is at his right hand, but a fool’s heart at his left. Even when a fool walks along the way, he lacks wisdom, and he shows everyone that he is a fool.”*

Jesus Christ uses the same figure of speech, left and right hands in Matthew 25:31-41, the obedient being on His right hand, as the wise are in Ecclesiastes. It is a matter of where our heart [motivation] is.

The life of a fool is very obvious to all other people.

Ecclesiastes 10:4 [New King James] *“If the spirit of the ruler rises against you, do not leave your post; for conciliation pacifies great offenses.”*

When folly manifests itself in high places, the course of wisdom is patience and conciliation. If this is seen as a policy of appeasement, the answer Solomon gives is that a wise person is guided by time and judgement, [**Ecclesiastes 8:15**] and a time to speak and a time to be silent, [**Ecclesiastes 3:7**].

Ecclesiastes 10:5-7 [New King James] *“There is an evil I have seen under the sun, as an error proceeding from the ruler: folly is set in great dignity, while the rich sit in a lowly place. I have seen servants on horses, while princes walk on the ground like servants.”*

That folly does invade high places is proved by the familiar observation that fools are exalted to honour and dignity in a state for political reasons even if they have made many errors. Also that true worth often passes unrecognised.

The “rich” probably is referring to those of hereditary wealth.

Ecclesiastes 10:8-10 [New King James] *“He who digs a pit will fall into it, and whoever breaks through a wall will be bitten by a serpent. He who quarries stones may be hurt by them, and he who splits wood may be endangered by it. If the ax is dull, and one does not sharpen the edge, then he must use more strength; but wisdom brings success.”*

What is being considered in these verses is that there is no change without risk, especially for anyone who interferes with established institutions.

Before embarking on any such enterprise it is well to count the cost and that you have the adequate skill and resources to complete the task, [**Luke 14:28-30**].

Ecclesiastes 10:11 [New King James] *“A serpent may bite when it is not charmed; the babbler is no different.”*

A babbler’s tongue is like an uncharmed snake, evil and full of poison, to contradict them only makes them more violent. We have to find a way to keep such a person calm.

Ecclesiastes 10:12-15 [New King James] *“The words of a wise man's mouth are gracious, but the lips of a fool shall swallow him up; the words of his mouth begin with foolishness, and the end of his talk is raving madness. A fool also multiplies words. No man knows what is to be; who can tell him what will be after him? The labour of fools wearies them, for they do not even know how to go to the city!”*

Solomon in these verses touches on the fact that speaking before we consider the effect our words will have on those who hear them is the height of foolishness. The capacity for pain and evil is unlimited, [James 3:5-6].

“Know the way to the city” is a proverbial expression for practical wisdom that leads to effective action. The fool has plenty to say, has many opinions, but they are incapable of wise action.

James 4:13 [New King James] *“Come now, you who say, ‘Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, spend a year there, buy and sell, and make a profit’;”*

James links true wisdom with meekness, not endless vain talk.

Ecclesiastes 10:16-18 [New King James] *“Woe to you, O land, when your king is a child, and your princes feast in the morning! Blessed are you, O land, when your king is the son of nobles, and your princes feast at the proper time, for strength and not for drunkenness! Because of laziness the building decays, and through idleness of hands the house leaks.”*

The Hebrew word translated “child” is “naar” from root word meaning to be tossed up and down, unstable.

A person who is lacking practical experience, within such a group of people, are those who have been in “politics” in some form throughout all their working life, and are thus “out of touch” with most adult working people.

We have the historical examples of Israel and the decline of the nation when the leaders were immature, irresponsible and mainly concerned about themselves, [1st and 2nd Kings].

These verses in Ecclesiastes pinpoint the basic problems of such immature leaders, selfishness and laziness.

Daniel 4:17 [New King James] *“This decision is by the decree of the watchers, and the sentence by the word of the holy ones, in order that the living may know that the Most High rules in the kingdom of men, gives it to whomever He will, and sets over it the lowest of men.”*

This could be the reason we have poor leadership today, it is part of the Creator’s plan to show what happens when He is left out of the guidelines.

Ecclesiastes 10:19 [New King James] *“A feast is made for laughter, and wine makes merry; but money answers everything.”*

Government leaders who are acting immaturely seem to consider that if you “throw enough money at the problem” that it will go away.

Yet Solomon includes this in the actions of an immature leader.

Ecclesiastes 10:20 [New King James] *“Do not curse the king, even in your thought; do not curse the rich, even in your bedroom; for a bird of the air may carry your voice, and a bird in flight may tell the matter.”*

Even if we do not say anything detrimental against the leaders, without any real proof, and only in our thoughts, the Creator God knows it, [Psalms 139:1-4].

I pray that what I have just expanded from God's Word, the Christian Bible, will not be held against me in the Creator God's judgement as being presumptuous.

Psalms 19:13-14 [New King James] *“Keep back Your servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me. Then I shall be blameless, and I shall be innocent of great transgression. Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in Your sight, O LORD, my strength and my Redeemer.”*

For I constantly remind myself of **James 3:1** which means I will receive a stricter judgement from my Creator.

This thought prompts me to stay close to God and constantly ask Him to send the Holy Spirit to lead me, [**John 16:13**].

Also I constantly acknowledge that of my own self I cannot accomplish anything of lasting value, [**John 15:5**].

Ecclesiastes 11:1-4 [New King James] *“Cast your bread upon the waters, for you will find it after many days. Give a serving to seven, and also to eight, for you do not know what evil will be on the earth. If the clouds are full of rain, they empty themselves upon the earth; and if a tree falls to the south or the north, in the place where the tree falls, there it shall lie. He who observes the wind will not sow, and he who regards the clouds will not reap.”*

Solomon is reminding us that life involves both risk and opportunity.

Because life has no guarantees, we must be prepared to seize opportunities as they come along, **not** merely *“play it safe.”*

Solomon does **not** support a despairing attitude towards life, just because life is uncertain does **not** mean that we do nothing.

Facing life's risks and opportunities should be with God-directed faith and enthusiasm.

The parable of the *“falling tree”* reminds us that there are some things in life over which we have no control.

Waiting for perfect conditions is especially applicable to our spiritual life. If we wait for the perfect time for prayer and study and meditation in God's Word, the Christian Bible, we will never begin.

Take steps **now** to grow spiritually, do **not** wait for conditions that may never come.

Colossians 4:5 [New King James] *“Walk in wisdom toward those who are outside, **redeeming the time**”*

To “redeem the time” means to make the most of every moment of our lives, always living with a purpose which does include rest and recreation, enough to keep us active physically and mentally.

Ecclesiastes 11:5-6 [King James] *“As thou knowest not what is the way of the spirit, nor how the bones do grow in the womb of her that is with child: even so thou knowest not the works of God who maketh all. In the morning sow thy seed, and in the evening withhold not thine hand: for thou knowest not whether shall prosper, either this or that, or whether they both shall be alike good.”*

The word *“spirit”* refers to the Holy Spirit [**John 3:8**] or the growth of a child in the womb, [**Psalms 139:13**], both of these are of God and known of God.

Likewise we do **not** know what will be the eventual outcome of what we do when we are children and when we come to the last years of our life.

1 Corinthians 3:5-8 [New King James] *“Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers through whom you believed, as the Lord gave to each one? I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase. So then neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase. Now he who plants and he who waters are one, and each one will receive his own reward according to his own labour.”*

We can plant, when young, and water during our lifetime, but any spiritual harvest we may be a part of is totally in the Creator God’s hands.

We should apply this to our personal life as well as the witness we may give to this world that is mostly, as yet, without knowledge of the One and Only True Creator God.

Ecclesiastes 11:7-8 [New King James] *“Truly the light is sweet, and it is pleasant for the eyes to behold the sun; but if a man lives many years and rejoices in them all, yet let him remember the days of darkness, for they will be many. All that is coming is vanity.”*

A wise recognition of the uncertainty of the future makes the present all the more important, for the present is the only time that is available at our disposal, tomorrow is always in the hands of the Creator God.

This does **not** imply a total disregard for the future, on the contrary it is only possible to **not** be anxious about tomorrow if we are concerned about our spiritual future.

Matthew 6:31-34 [New King James] *“Therefore do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.”*

The future that we should be concerned about is the eternal life that we seek as a gift from our Creator God, [**Romans 6:23**].

Rejoice in the light of our present physical life, for our days of darkness, after death, awaiting in the grave for our resurrection, will be many, [Ecclesiastes 9:5-6; Psalms 146:3-4; Psalms 6:4-5**].**

Luke 12:15-21 [New King James] *“And He said to them, ‘Take heed and beware of covetousness, for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses.’ Then He spoke a parable to them, saying: ‘The ground of a certain rich man yielded plentifully. And he thought within himself, saying, “What shall I do, since I have no room to store my crops?” So he said, “I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build greater, and there I will store all my crops and my goods. And I will say to my soul, ‘Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease; eat, drink, and be merry.’” But God said to him, “Fool! This night your soul will be required of you; then whose will those things be which you have provided?” ‘So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.’”*

The only plans we can make for the future are spiritual in nature, for our future life will be in the spirit realm.

Approach all our problems from the perspective of our Creator God who lives in an eternal spiritual world.

Ecclesiastes 11:9-10 [New King James] *“Rejoice, O young man, in your youth, and let your heart cheer you in the days of your youth; walk in the ways of your heart, and in the sight of your eyes; but know that for all these God will bring you into judgment. Therefore remove sorrow from your heart, and put away evil from your flesh, for childhood and youth are vanity.”*

Consider what impact the decision we are about to make will affect our life in ten years’ time and our eternal life.

Enjoy life now but do not do anything physically, morally or spiritually that will prevent you enjoying life in the future.

Solomon is directing this wisdom to those who are starting out in life, but there is never a time in life that stops us from starting on a new direction, more in harmony with the life the Creator God intended we should live.

It just becomes harder to change as we grow old because we are so set in our ways.

The Hebrew word that is translated “vanity” here and in many other places in Ecclesiastes is “hâbêl” and refers to something that is transitory and unsatisfactory.

Ecclesiastes 12:1-8 [New King James] *“Remember now your Creator in the days of your youth, before the difficult days come, and the years draw near when you say, ‘I have no pleasure in them’: while the sun and the light, the moon and the stars, are not darkened, and the clouds do not return after the rain; in the day when the keepers of the house tremble, and the strong men bow down; when the grinders cease because they are few, and those that look through the windows grow dim; when the doors are shut in the streets, and the sound of grinding is low; when one rises up at the sound of a bird, and all the daughters of music are brought low. Also they are afraid of height, and of terrors in the way; when the almond tree blossoms, the grasshopper is a burden, and desire fails. For man goes to his eternal home, and the mourners go about the streets. Remember your Creator before the silver cord is loosed, or the golden bowl is broken, or the pitcher shattered at the fountain, or the wheel broken at the well. Then the dust will return to the earth as it was, and the spirit will return to God who gave it. ‘Vanity of vanities,’ says the Preacher, ‘All is vanity.’”*

A life that has been without the Creator God and His Word, the Christian Bible, in it can in old age produce a bitter, lonely and without hope.

A life centred around the Creator God is fulfilling at any age.

Being young is exciting, but this excitement of youth can become a barrier to closeness to the Creator God and His Word, the Christian Bible.

Young people tend to focus on passing pleasures instead of eternal values.

Make your youthful strength available to the Creator God while it is still yours, during your youthful years.

Do **not** waste your youthful strength on evil or meaningless activities that become bad habits and make you callous.

We have in **verses 2-7** figurative description of the decay and dissolution of physical life, difficult to interpret in detail.

The picture of the approaching storm [**verse 2**] may be intended to suggest the approach of death in a general way, or more particularly the decay of the inner faculties, [**verses 3-4**].

“*Keepers of the house*” being our hands.

“*Strong men*” the legs.

“*The grinders*” our teeth.

“*Look through the windows*” our eyes.

“*The doors*” our ears.

The remaining items of **verse 4** seem all to refer to the decay of the powers of speech and song, the voice of the old becomes weak and tends to resemble the chirp of a bird.

The allegory is abandoned in **verse 5** and literal description takes its place.

The old are afraid of heights and even timid of venturing out at all.

The almond tree points towards grey hair and lifting small things becomes difficult, and desire to be active physically declines.

The allegory is resumed in **verse 6**, the silver cord, golden bowl, pitcher for drawing life-giving water from well all refer to the dissolution of life and were familiar symbols of life in antiquity.

The “*spirit*” that is referred to is what I call the “*human spirit*” that Job tells us is the source of intellect, our awareness of life, [**Job 32:8**] and Paul in **1 Corinthians 2:11**, also referred to by Solomon in **Proverbs 20:27**.

Ecclesiastes 12:8 [New King James] “*‘Vanity of vanities,’ says the Preacher, ‘All is vanity.’*”

Stripped of our “*human spirit*” our bodies return to the dust.

Stripped of God’s purpose, our physical work is in vain.

Stripped of God’s Holy Spirit and its major “*fruit*”, love, our service towards God and other human beings is futile.

Knowing that life is futile without the Creator God in it motivates a wise person to seek God first.

Ecclesiastes 12:9-12 [New King James] “*And moreover, because the Preacher was wise, he still taught the people knowledge; yes, he pondered and sought out and set in order many proverbs. The Preacher sought to find acceptable words; and what was written was upright, words of truth. The words of the wise are like goads, and the words of scholars are like well-driven nails, given by one Shepherd. And further, my son, be admonished by these. Of making many books there is no end, and much study is wearisome to the flesh.*”

The remainder of Ecclesiastes consists of an editorial postscript in which the writer, Solomon, attempts to sum up the conclusions of his teachings.

A goad, also called an oxgoad, was a sharp metal tip at the end of rod to keep oxen or cattle moving. We may find a wise statement unpleasant when first applied but it will keep us moving in the direction that our Creator God is taking us.

The Book of Ecclesiastes cannot be understood correctly without meditating on the final two verses.

Ecclesiastes 12:13-14 [New King James] “*Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: fear God and keep His commandments, for this is man’s all. For God will bring every work into judgment, including every secret thing, whether good or evil.*”

No matter what mysteries or apparent contradictions of life are, we must work towards the single purpose of seeking to know God.

To “*know*” the Creator God in the human use of the word “*know*” is impossible, for we are created and God is the Creator, [**Isaiah 64:8; Romans 9:20-21; Isaiah 55:8-9**].

The whole of eternity would **not** be enough.

John 17:3 [New King James] *“And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.”*

The Greek word translated “know” is “ginōskō” meaning an intimate relationship as that in a marriage between a man and woman, [**Luke 1:34** – same word used].

This intimate relationship can begin now [**1 John 5:11**].

The Hebrew word translated “duty” is “dâbâr” meaning cause, reason for the existence of human beings.

Genesis 1:26-27 [New King James] *“Then God said, ‘Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.’ So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.”*

Note only “image” was and is created in every human being, Hebrew word “tselem” meaning shadow, resemblance, outward form. Not “likeness,” Hebrew word “demûwth” meaning attributes or character which is only formed over time spent with the one whose character we wish to reflect.

The word translated “duty” also includes advice and answers.

How well we stand in awe of our Creator God, worshipping Him with our whole life, body, mind and human spirit, [**Romans 12:1**] and obey His commands, will be judged at the end of our physical life, [**2 Corinthians 5:10-12**], as nothing can be hid from our Creator God, [**Psalms 139:1-13**].

In Ecclesiastes, Solomon shows us that we should enjoy this life that the Creator God has given us, but this does **not** exempt us from obeying His commandments and fulfil the very reason for our existence as a human being that is expounded very clearly in His Word, the Christian Bible, and the life of The Word, His Son Jesus Christ, [**John 1:1-5, 14**].