

Study of Ecclesiastes: Chapter 10

Questions for Discussion

1. What illustration is used to show how folly ruins the reputation of the wise and honorable? How does this apply to our day-to-day conduct?
(vv. 1, Exo 30:34–35; ICo 5:1-9, Mat 5:13-16)
2. What is the significance of the right versus the left? When does the fool display his folly to everyone? (vv. 2-3; 8:2-5; Pro 16:14; Rom 13:1-7)
3. How should one respond when the anger of the ruler rises against them? (v. 4)
4. What injustices did the Koheleth see coming from those in power?
(vv. 5-7; 9:11-12; Prov 19:10; 30:21–23)
5. What do the six illustrations in these verses say about the nature of life and how we should approach it? (vv. 8-11; 9:11-12)
6. How does Koheleth characterize the words from a wise man? The words and actions of a foolish man? (vv. 12-15; 5:1-3; Pro 16:23; 18:7; Jam 1:19-21)
7. How does the Koheleth contrast the woeful land with the blessed land? What are the differences? (vv. 16-19; Isa 5:11-13)
8. Why should one not curse the king nor the rich? (vv. 20; Phil 4:5)

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Notes & Answers

(1) What illustration is used to show how folly ruins the reputation of the wise and honorable? How does this apply to our day-to-day conduct?

(vv. 1, Exo 30:34–35; ICo 5:1-9, Mat 5:13-16)

Ecclesiastes 10:1 (ESV)

¹ Dead flies make the perfumer's ointment give off a stench;

so a little folly outweighs wisdom and honor.

Exodus 30:34–35 (ESV)

³⁴ The LORD said to Moses, "Take sweet spices, stacte, and onycha, and galbanum, sweet spices with pure frankincense (of each shall there be an equal part), ³⁵ and make an incense blended as by the perfumer, seasoned with salt, pure and holy.

1 Corinthians 5:1–9 (ESV)

¹ It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that is not tolerated even among pagans, for a man has his father's wife. ² And you are arrogant! Ought you not rather to mourn? Let him who has done this be removed from among you.

³ For though absent in body, I am present in spirit; and as if present, I have already pronounced judgment on the one who did such a thing. ⁴ When you are assembled in the name of the Lord Jesus and my spirit is present, with the power of our Lord Jesus, ⁵ you are to deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord.

⁶ Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? ⁷ Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. ⁸ Let us therefore celebrate the festival, not with the old leaven, the leaven of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.

⁹ I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people—

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Matthew 5:13–16 (ESV)

¹³ “You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people’s feet.

¹⁴ “You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. ¹⁵ Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. ¹⁶ In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.

(2) What is the significance of the right versus the left? When does the fool display his folly to everyone? (vv. 2-3; 8:2-5; Pro 16:14; Rom 13:1-7)

Ecclesiastes 10:2–3 (ESV)

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.

Ecclesiastes 8:2–5 (ESV)

² I say: Keep the king’s command, because of God’s oath to him. ³ Be not hasty to go from his presence. Do not take your stand in an evil cause, for he does whatever he pleases. ⁴ For the word of the king is supreme, and who may say to him, “What are you doing?” ⁵ Whoever keeps a command will know no evil thing, and the wise heart will know the proper time and the just way.

Proverbs 16:14 (ESV)

¹⁴ A king’s wrath is a messenger of death,
and a wise man will appease it.

Romans 13:1–7 (ESV)

¹ Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. ² Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. ³ For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Would you have no fear of the one who is in

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authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive his approval,⁴ for he is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God's wrath on the wrongdoer.⁵ Therefore one must be in subjection, not only to avoid God's wrath but also for the sake of conscience.⁶ For because of this you also pay taxes, for the authorities are ministers of God, attending to this very thing.⁷ Pay to all what is owed to them: taxes to whom taxes are owed, revenue to whom revenue is owed, respect to whom respect is owed, honor to whom honor is owed.

(3) How should one respond when the anger of the ruler rises against them? (v. 4)

Ecclesiastes 10:4 (ESV)

⁴ If the anger of the ruler rises against you, do not leave your place,
for calmness will lay great offenses to rest.

(4) What injustices did the Koheleth see coming from those in power? (vv. 5-7; 9:11-12; Prov 19:10; 30:21-23)

Ecclesiastes 10:5-7 (ESV)

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.

Ecclesiastes 9:11-12 (ESV)

¹¹ 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.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.

Proverbs 19:10 (ESV)

¹⁰ It is not fitting for a fool to live in luxury,
much less for a slave to rule over princes.

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Proverbs 30:21–23 (ESV)

²¹ Under three things the earth trembles;

under four it cannot bear up:

²² a slave when he becomes king,

and a fool when he is filled with food;

²³ an unloved woman when she gets a husband,

and a maidservant when she displaces her mistress.

(5) What do the six illustrations in these verses say about the nature of life and how we should approach it? (vv. 8-11; 9:11-12)

Ecclesiastes 10:8–11 (ESV)

⁸ 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.

¹¹ If the serpent bites before it is charmed,

there is no advantage to the charmer.

Ecclesiastes 9:11–12 (ESV)

¹¹ 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. 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.

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(6) How does Koheleth characterize the words from a wise man? The words and actions of a foolish man? (vv. 12-15; 5:1-3; Pro 16:23; 18:7; Jam 1:19-21)

Ecclesiastes 10:12–15 (ESV)

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.

Ecclesiastes 5:1–3 (ESV)

¹ Guard your steps when you go to the house of God. To draw near to listen is better than to offer the sacrifice of fools, for they do not know that they are doing evil. ² Be not rash with your mouth, nor let your heart be hasty to utter a word before God, for God is in heaven and you are on earth. Therefore let your words be few. ³ For a dream comes with much business, and a fool's voice with many words.

Proverbs 16:23 (ESV)

²³ The heart of the wise makes his speech judicious
and adds persuasiveness to his lips.

Proverbs 18:7 (ESV)

⁷ A fool's mouth is his ruin,
and his lips are a snare to his soul.

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James 1:19–21 (ESV)

¹⁹ Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; ²⁰ for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God. ²¹ Therefore put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.

(7) How does the Koheleth contrast the woeful land with the blessed land? What are the differences? (vv. 16-19; Isa 5:11-13)

Ecclesiastes 10:16–19 (ESV)

¹⁶ 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.

Isaiah 5:11–13 (ESV)

¹¹ Woe to those who rise early in the morning,
that they may run after strong drink,
who tarry late into the evening
as wine inflames them!

¹² They have lyre and harp,
tambourine and flute and wine at their feasts,

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but they do not regard the deeds of the LORD,
or see the work of his hands.

¹³ Therefore my people go into exile
for lack of knowledge;
their honored men go hungry,
and their multitude is parched with thirst.

(8) Why should one not curse the king nor the rich? (vv. 20; Phil 4:5)

Ecclesiastes 10:20 (ESV)

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.

Philippians 4:5 (ESV)

⁵ Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand;