

Fools Do It the Hard Way

Ecclesiastes 10:8-20

Halifax: 2 March 2014

Introduction:

Last week in Ecclesiastes, we saw how folly is often honoured.

- If there is a person who is clearly shown to have true wisdom, people will not listen to him but they will gravitate to fools...
 - because fools tell them what they want to hear
- I told you about the exercise place I worked at where people would come in to ask for a program for losing weight...
 - And that owner would tell them to stop eating so much...
 - It was the last thing they wanted to hear...
 - That is why there are all sorts of fat burning pills and magic formulas that people will pour their money into.
- The same is true with marriage and parenting...
 - You send people to the word and prayer, and show them the way of wisdom and they simply don't want to follow it.
 - You show them how to resolve issues biblically, but they don't want that.
 - They want some other solution—a pill—a formula—anything but godliness!
 - Any crazy explanation that puts the root of their problem in something other than their sinful heart...
 - So they delude themselves and run after this and after that.
 - And they never get anything but more trouble.

Sometimes it is just plain painful as a pastor to see people avoiding God's way.

- You know that it won't go well for them.
 - You have been around long enough to see what happens when people follow folly—but they just keep doing it.
 - You see them setting themselves up for more and more misery—more and more hardship and disaster...
- The way of the fool is just so very hard—and ironically,
 - all because they are trying to make it easy for themselves!
 - They want something,
 - so instead of saving up for it, they buy it on credit and then they are strapped with paying the bill with interest for ten years!
 - They are offended with their spouse,
 - but they don't want to go to them to reconcile, so they shackle themselves with years of bitterness...
 - All they had to do was go and work it out, but instead they make themselves bitter and hard.

- A woman doesn't want to bother with looking for a godly spouse, so she sleeps around and ends up with one abusive relationship after another...
 - It is really insane—she just keeps going back for trouble again and again.

In our text today, Solomon shows us how fools make it hard for themselves.

- Listen now as I read to you from this passage—beginning in Ecclesiastes 10:8.

Ecc 10:8-20: He who digs a pit will fall into it, and whoever breaks through a wall will be bitten by a serpent. ⁹ He who quarries stones may be hurt by them, *and* he who splits wood may be endangered by it. ¹⁰ If the ax is dull, and one does not sharpen the edge, then he must use more strength; but wisdom brings success. ¹¹ A serpent may bite when *it is* not charmed; the babblers are no different. ¹² The words of a wise man's mouth *are* gracious, but the lips of a fool shall swallow him up; ¹³ the words of his mouth begin with foolishness, and the end of his talk *is* raving madness. ¹⁴ A fool also multiplies words. No man knows what is to be; who can tell him what will be after him?

¹⁵ The labor of fools wearies them, for they do not even know how to go to the city! ¹⁶ Woe to you, O land, when your king *is* a child, and your princes feast in the morning! ¹⁷ 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! ¹⁸ Because of laziness the building decays, and through idleness of hands the house leaks. ¹⁹ A feast is made for laughter, and wine makes merry; but money answers everything. ²⁰ 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.

May the Lord bless to us the reading of His holy Word.

In this passage I have identified seven ways that fools set themselves up for destruction and hardship.

- But before I begin, I want to mention something to you...a principle that is related to this whole matter...and that is this:
 - That ordinarily, the less time it takes for the consequences of folly to come, the easier it is to see the folly—the more obvious it is to everyone...
 - but the longer it takes to see the consequences, the more serious the consequences often are...
 - For example, if a fellow has five dollars and he is hungry, and he sees a shirt on sale for five dollars at the flea market and goes for it, his folly is easy to see...
 - But it is a little harder to see it when he overextends himself on a mortgage and five years later can't afford to re-shingle his house...
 - The folly happened when he took out the mortgage, but the consequences did not show up until five years later.
 - But even harder to see is the man who is a shrewd and careful investor and who provides well for his family,
 - but who is not rich toward God—who does not tithe and who does not give to the needy...
 - His folly may not be seen by anyone until the day of judgement.

- He has laid up treasures on earth, but he has not laid up treasures in heaven, and though his worldly wisdom was evident to all,
 - His spiritual poverty is what he is left with for all eternity.
- So again, to state the principle,
 - The less time there is between a man's folly and the trouble it brings, the easier it is to see the folly...
 - but the longer the time is between the folly and the trouble it brings, the more devastating the consequences!
- Let's move on and take a look at the seven ways that fools make it hard for themselves...
 - and of course that goal is that we will stop being foolish!

I. The first one is that the fool does things that stir up retribution!

- In other words, he does things that he is likely to get punished for...
 - He has all these breeches of justice that are waiting to come back on him.
- A. In verse 8-9, you have a graphic picture of poetic justice at work...with one of the Bible's favourite pictures...
 1. A fellow digs a pit—
 - This was a way to catch an animal—you dig a deep hole and cover it over so that as soon as the unwary animal comes down the trail, he falls in.
 - This digging of a pit is often used as a figure for someone setting traps for another person...
 - And Solomon observes that it is often the case that the fellow who does this ends up falling into it himself...
 - The world is full of recoil action—
 - You start trying to catch others and you end up getting caught.
 - **Ps 7:15: He made a pit and dug it out, and has fallen into the ditch which he made.**
 2. The same thing happens when you try to break through your neighbour's *hedge*...referred to as a wall in verse 8...
 - You are getting through, but a serpent is lurking in the hedge and bites you.
 - How often those who break in to steal end up bringing more harm than gain to themselves.
 - Not just that they get cut on the glass as they are breaking in, but that they bring troublesome consequences on themselves.
 3. Verse 9 has a more aggressive fellow—
 - He is quarrying stones—literally, removing them—perhaps from his neighbour's wall—and the stones fall on him...
 - Or is breaking through a wooden panel or door it splinters and injures him.

B. Think about this—

1. Whenever you do any kind of harm to your neighbour—cheating him a little—deceiving him—taking what is rightfully his—slandering him...
 - what have you done but set up a situation for him to become angry with you and strike back...
 - With every wrong, you are setting yourself up to receive vengeance.
 - You are setting traps for yourself and it is only a matter of time until you get caught in one of them!
2. And I tell you, even if you are so smooth and so sly that nobody ever catches you, the Lord knows all about it...
 - Do you think you will escape His justice?
 - I think not! He says, “vengeance is mine, I will repay!” and He will!
 - If you have done wrong—even if you don’t think you will get caught,
 - you need to make it right with God—and that involves confessing it to God and to the one you wronged!
 - If you don’t, it shows that you are not a true believer.
 - True believers repent of the sin in their lives—they don’t want anything between them and the God who has reconciled them.
3. So what is this folly of doing things against your neighbour that God calls you love?
 - You are doing nothing else but setting yourself up for retribution—
 - You are digging pits and exposing yourself to serpents and falling rocks and splintering wood...
 - On the opposite, the Lord tells you that if you give to others and bless them, you are preparing yourself for reward...
 - Not only will the ones you bless often return to bless you, but even if they don’t, the Lord Himself will reward you!
 - And the good news is that even though we have done many things that deserve retribution, the Lord Jesus has come to redeem us...
 - And through faith in Him, we can escape God’s justice and receive pardon.
 - If we repent and look to Christ and go to those we have wronged, we will be pardoned and we will not come into judgement.

TRANS> Now let’s look at the second way that fools make trouble for themselves...

II. Next we have the fool making it hard for himself by his lack of preparation.

A. The picture that Solomon gives us is that of a foolish woodsman...

1. He goes to a day’s work with a dull ax...so that he has to work much harder and much longer.
 - Just a little bit of extra effort would have saved him much labour and sweat...
 - But like a big dunce, there he is beating on the wood with an ineffective tool.

2. This is very typical of the fool...
 - He sees no value in preparing himself because preparation has no immediate reward.
 - Why should he spend time sharpening his ax when he could go ahead and get started?
 - Why should he go to school to get training—he could go on and start working now...
 - Of course there is another kind of folly in which a fool finds it easy to stay in school because he can get a loan—
 - but we are talking about a fellow who avoids a few years of training to prepare himself for long term benefits...
 - A little preparation now will pay off many times over.
 - You young people, are you preparing yourself now to take care of a family in the future—or are you just goofing off?
 - Are you gaining the skills that you will need to run a house, or are you just interested in constant entertainment?
 - If it is the latter, you are preparing yourself for bondage—it is really foolish—you will spend your years struggling because you did not prepare...
 - Ask older people who did not prepare and they will tell you!

3. There are millions of things that apply here...

- Do you back up your hard drive—when it is easy to do so—or do you wait until your computer crashes?

B. What about in your walk with the Lord?

1. Do you make preparations to serve Him?

- Do you pray and read the word?
- That is how you prepare yourself to live for God each day...
 - If you neglect prayer and the word day after day after day, you will not be prepared when the evil day comes—the day of temptation.
 - You will not be prepared to respond in a godly way.
 - You will be dry as melba toast when you come into the assembly to worship God—it will all be dull to you.
 - Going into your day without prayer is like going into your day with a dull ax.
 - You won't accomplish much for the glory of God.

2. And are you prepared for the day of judgement?

- You all know the story of Noah...
 - God warned him that the flood was coming and told him to build the ark...
 - It was a huge undertaking—
 - Noah had to give his whole life to it for over a century!
 - But he did it anyway—he prepared the ark for him and his family.
 - He did it because He believed God!

- And do you think Noah regretted it when the flood waters begin to arise? I think not.
- Neither will you regret it if you prepare yourself for the day of judgement.
 - The Lord Jesus is coming to judge the world—He is going to call those who have died from their graves and all will be brought before Him.
 - If you are not prepared in that day, you will be cast into eternal judgement.
 - The fool is the one who does not prepare...
- But you can prepare...
 - God has provided a saviour for us—Jesus is our ark—we are safe if we trust in Him and are walking with Him.
 - Don't delude yourself into thinking that you are trusting in Him if you are not walking with Him...
 - You really can't get away from preparing yourself for judgement in one sense...
 - If you are not preparing yourself for acceptance in Christ, you are preparing yourself for misery and sorrow.

III. Third, the fool brings misery upon himself by provoking others with his words...

- He goes around throwing verbal punches at everyone—it will have consequences!
- A. This is brought out in verse 11-12...
1. In verse 11 the analogy is used of a serpent that bites when it might have been charmed instead...
 - I think it is preferable to translate this verse a little differently than the New King James does though...
 - The word *babbler* could be translated *charmer*, giving you something like this:
 - *If the serpent bites before it is charmed, there is no advantage in a charmer.*
 - The idea is that a few gracious words will go a long way to win friends and influence people...
 - The wise man uses such words to charm those who otherwise might bite him if they are provoked.
 - He speaks kind and considerate words, helpful words, that others deeply appreciate.
 - Words that encourage others and that express appreciation to them.
 2. But a fool turns people against him with his words...
 - He is having a bad day, so he speaks harsh words to his wife and children...
 - He might have drawn them in, but instead he drives them away.
 - Every time he does this, he throws a verbal punch at them...

- He might have made them tender, but instead he hardens them and makes them embittered against him.
 - He is setting himself up for misery—for rejection...
 - He is swallowing himself up by his intemperate speech.
 - The contrast between the fool and the wise is made in verse 12:
 - **Ecc 10:12: The words of a wise man’s mouth are gracious, but the lips of a fool shall swallow him up;**
 - Children, what about you?
 - Do you use gracious speech?
 - Do you tell your parents that you love them?
 - Do you thank them for taking care of you?
 - Do you speak respectfully to them, or do you draw out their anger?
 - What about your words to your brothers and sisters?
 - Do you speak words that turn them against you or words that draw them closer to you?
 - Why would you stir up strife and hatred?
 - You are only harming yourself...your bitterness is destroying your own happiness.
 - That is such a foolish thing to do!
 - With every ugly word spoken, you are investing in that which will bring you miserable returns.
3. We might jump down to consider verse 20 while we are looking at this because it has to do with the same subject...
- It tells you to not even curse people in your heart...
 - **Ecc 10:20: 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.**
 - How foolish it is to do that which will turn those who have the power to hurt you against you!
 - Kings and rulers have a way of finding out who their enemies are...
 - And even if you keep it all inside,
 - your sinful heart-cursing of your king—or your parents—or your husband—or your elders—will very often be discovered!
 - It will come out and it will get to him and it will not be good for you when it does.
 - So instead of cursing your king, bless him and pray for him.
 - Be as David was toward Saul,
 - Even when Saul was earnestly trying to destroy David, David continued to pray for him and to bless him.
 - The scriptures say that he behaved himself wisely.

B. My brothers and sisters, most of all, we need to see to it that our words please the Lord!

1. What does He hear from you—bitterness and complaining—or words of praise and thanksgiving?
 - God hears you grumbling under your breath...about your parents or your spouse...
 - He hears you complaining about Him too—and about what He has given you.
 - Has He done nothing to make you grateful?
2. Oh how we need His grace!
 - James is right—no man can tame the tongue!
 - The problem is that there is bitterness inside of us and it comes out when we speak...
 - bitter envying and strife as James says—that is in us and that is what comes out of us and makes us quarrel...
 - But if we cry out to the Lord and if we humble ourselves and confess when we have spoken wrongly...
 - He will not only forgive us, but He will also give us grace to help us change.
 - That is the hope that we have in Christ.

TRANS> Now let's move on the fourth thing...

IV. Fourth, the fool works himself up into destructive frenzy by his talk.

A. In verse 13, he is said to begin his speaking with foolishness in such a way that the end of his talk is raving madness!

- **Ecc 20:13: The words of his mouth begin with foolishness, and the end of his talk is raving madness.**
1. I am sure you have seen this before—sadly, you have probably done it...
 - You start talking and as you talk—say, perhaps, about how someone has wronged you—and as you go on, you get angry...
 - And the more you talk, the angrier you get...
 - And then you start to exaggerate and you get so worked up that you lose it—you go insane—you say ridiculous things in a ridiculous voice that you would be embarrassed to hear a recording of...
 - You start to plot revenge—
 2. The Pharisees did something that was akin to this in their interaction with Jesus...
 - They started out speaking foolishness—accusing Him of breaking the Sabbath by healing people on that day—of all things!
 - And Jesus exposed their folly...
 - But instead of bringing them to repentance, they keep on talking and soon they were reaching for stones to stone Jesus...
 - It was madness—insanity!
 - They worked themselves up into a foolish frenzy!

3. Fools can also work themselves up into other kinds of frenzies by their words...
 - There are those who stir up their own lusts—
 - They speak words of uncleanness and fornication and the next thing you know, they are engaged in the act...
 - They work up their passions.
- B. There is a much better way to use your speech...
1. Use it to talk sense into yourself—not madness...
 - Instead of going on about what someone has done to you, talk to yourself about what your Saviour bore for you!
 - Turn your words to prayer for patience and prayer for the one that has wronged you.
 - Perhaps he has not really even wronged you at all—or not all that much.
 2. And likewise, instead of stirring your sinful lusts and passions up,
 - speak God’s commandments to yourself...
 - speak of all the glory and majesty of the Lord...
 - speak of His grace and His kindness...
 - speak of the blessings that He has given you and of how wrong it would be to follow after your sinful passions...
- V. Related to this is the fifth thing fools do to their own hurt—they substitute many words for ignorance...**
- This is the subject of verse 14...
- A. It is almost like they think they can convince people that they know what they are talking about if they keep on talking...if they say a lot about it!
1. Or maybe they think that if they say enough, after a while something profound will come out, or they will get something right...
 - But it never works to substitute words for ignorance.
 - If you don’t know what you are talking about, it is much better to shut up.
 2. But often, by their many words, fools convince themselves that they know things that they don’t know at all...
 - They say something over and over, and even though it is ridiculous, it starts to seem true to them because they have heard themselves say it...
 - Perhaps they are joining in with foolish things that others are saying too.
 - I spoke about this with evolution last week—if you step back and look at it, the whole thing makes no sense—but because you find it in all the schools, people think it is true.
 - That is what the fool does—if he says it enough, he thinks it is true.
 - And then they have the problem of arrogance joined with ignorance!
 - It is a very bad combination because they are so sure about things they know nothing about.
 - Or perhaps things that they do know a lot about, but have completely misinterpreted.

- They may even convince themselves that they know the future!
 - Many idiots have fancied themselves to be prophets or those who have special insight into scripture—
 - and they have made predictions about the future...
 - Solomon says here in verse 14, “**No man knows what is to be; who can tell him what will happen after him?**”
3. This can also be in the form of those fools who are always talking about their plans with great confidence...
- They are always ready to tell you about what they are *going* to do, and they substitute talk for action...
 - They will tell you of how they are *going* to get rich—
 - Of how they are *going* to build something—
 - Of good works that they are *going* to do—
 - but it never happens—it is just words substituted for reality.
- B. The way of wisdom is to be slow to speak and ready to listen!
- It is much better to be humble and ready to learn than to be always running your mouth.
 - This is especially the case when it comes to the hearing of God’s word!
 - What arrogance it is to want to talk when He is speaking!
 - Our goal is not to tell what we will do so much as to find out what He wants us to do.
 - He is the Lord and we are His servants.
 - A servant should have a ready ear instead of a big mouth.

VI. Sixth, the fool never learns how to do things well because his heart is not in his work.

- A. Verse 15 explains that his work wearies him because he does not know how to get to the city...
1. He can’t even do the most basic things—like finding his way to town—because his heart is not in his work.
 - You know how this is...
 - If you are interested in something, you learn all about it very quickly...
 - but if not, you are as dumb as a bed post...
 2. Children, is that not true with you in school?
 - You can whine and complain that your math is impossible—that you just can’t figure it out...
 - but then you sit down to play your favourite computer game and you have an amazing set of skills and a very quick mind.
 - And you never seem to get tired of it.
 - You can go on and on doing things that are very hard and challenging.

3. Why can't you be that way about the things of God?
 - It is because you don't love Him the way you should.
 - If God were to get hold of your heart, you would have an appetite for His word—
 - your parents would have to tell you to stop reading your Bible and go to bed!
 - Or they would tell you to take a break from all your serving...

B. But here is the downward spiral that the fool gets himself into...

1. He does not like his work—he does not put his heart in it...
 - so he never learns how to do it well—
 - and then that makes it even more burdensome and taxing to him—
 - he does not have the pleasure of learning and accomplishing so he just wants to get away from it...
 - It just keeps getting worse.
2. The solution for him is to put his heart in his work...
 - The Lord commands us to do that—to do our work heartily as unto the Lord—
 - If the fool would do that, he would start to enjoy it.
 - You can initially put your heart into something—determine to do it earnestly—even if you don't like it...
 - but most of the time if you do that for long, you will actually start to like it.
 - I know that—I used to hate reading—I hated it until I was converted and then I had a reason to read.

VII. Related to this is the seventh thing—that a fool's heart is in feasting rather than working.

- A. Solomon illustrates this in verses 16-17 with the unhappy nation that has an immature king who feasts with his princes in the morning...
- in the morning when they ought to be working!
 - They feast for drunkenness rather than for strength!
 - They feast to avoid work rather than to enhance it and rejoice in it.
 - The point of the king who is a child is not that he is too young, but that he is too immature to lead the nation.
 - Reynolds says,
 - He is passionate, easily distracted, fearful, easily angered, sensual, craving and covetous, easily turned aside by gifts, vain and subject to flattery.
 - He could be 60 years old and be like that...
 - He is unable to stick with a task—he always craves diversion...
 - This is a plague that is sweeping through our society today—with all the things we have to distract us and divert us...

- We are restless like a little child who has a short attention span.
 - The worker reaches for his phone or reaches for a toy or a movie...
 - This is the attitude of those who have not heart for their work but only for the weekend...
 - So that on Monday they are too bummed out and tired to work...
 - And on Thursday and Friday, they are too excited about the weekend to work...
 - They live for vacations and for feasting.
- B. Solomon is not against feasting though—you should know that by now...
1. He is, as verse 17 says, for feasting at the proper time!
 - You ought to be excited about feasting when it is time to feast, but don't take the feast to work with you!
 - Get into your work just as you get into your feasting!
 - Be just as excited about Monday morning as you are about Friday afternoon...
 2. The destructive consequences of feasting when you ought to be working are laid out for us in verses 18-19...
 - This party spirit only brings unhappiness to you...
 - a. Verse 18 shows that you end up making more work for yourself by the neglect of your duties...
 - If you go to a party instead of looking after your roof, it won't be long until the roof is leaking—
 - and then there will be other damages...
 - your rafters will start to sag and one thing will lead to another...
 - I had a very similar experience this past week...
 - Earlier in the week, when it snowed, I went out at about 5:00 in the morning and started shovelling—the snow was very light and I had it done in no time...
 - But then on Friday, there was a similar snow (very light) but not as much of it—
 - but I was complaining about it because I wanted to go on a walk with the boys and I had stuff to do immediately after breakfast
 - so instead of shoveling, I went on the walk...I figured we could do the shovelling later.
 - At 6 pm when we went out to shovel, the light snow had turned into hard ice and was very difficult to remove.
 - By my efforts to make it easy on myself—to indulge in procrastination—I actually made a lot of extra work!
 - By putting off work that I was grumbling about, I made extra work for myself.

- b. Verse 19 shows us another consequence of procrastination...
 - It says:
 - **v. 19: A feast is made for laughter, and wine makes merry; but money answers everything.**
 - This seems to be telling us that the procrastinator who parties when he needs to work will always be looking for money...
 - Money runs through his hands very quickly...
 - not only to support his feasting, but also to fix up what is ruined by his neglect...
 - He never bothered to change the oil, so now he has a big repair bill on his engine...
 - He never bothered to rotate the tires, so now he has to be new tires twice as early as he would have had to...
 - When he runs out of resources, the laughter and merry making at his feasts is not so jovial anymore.
 - He has wasted his substance and now he has to face the problems.
 - Money would answer all his problems!
 - But he has none because he has not been working when he ought to have been working.
- C. My friends, this is true of whatever God-given duties you neglect...
1. If you neglect the prompt discipline of your little children—
 - if you do not bother to correct their bad attitudes...
 - you are busy doing your own thing and can't be bothered...
 - but be sure that it will come back to haunt you!
 - You will have more labour and sorrow with that child than you would have had if you had done the preventive maintenance.
 2. If you neglect the cultivation of your own soul—
 - If you meditate on trivial things—movies, games, toys, parties—and neglect meditating on God's word and on how it applies to you,
 - that neglect will also come back to haunt you.
 - You will be impoverished and you will wish you had some spiritual capital,
 - but like the feasting princes with the leaky roof, you will have no resources.
 - You will be looking for money—spiritual capital!
 3. Please don't disregard what I am saying!
 - Do you think anyone looks back on his life at the end and says, "If only I have taken in more movies instead of being so caught up with family worship..."
 - If only I had built a nicer house instead of giving to the poor.
 - If only I had spent more time at the bar and less time teaching my children.

Conclusion: So you see how the fool is constantly setting himself up for future misery!

- He does not think about long term consequences...
 - All he thinks about is what he wants at the moment.
 - And as I said in the introduction—
 - the great danger with this lies in the fact that short term folly is more visible and obvious than long term folly, but long term folly is much more destructive...
 - That means you can be doing very destructive things and hardly even recognize it!
 - Jesus told us this:
 - **Luke 21:34: take heed to yourselves, lest your hearts be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness, and cares of this life, and that Day come on you unexpectedly. ³⁵ For it will come as a snare on all those who dwell on the face of the whole earth. ³⁶ Watch therefore, and pray always that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man.**
 - He told us to lay up treasures in heaven where treasures last!
 - It is so vain and foolish to lay up treasures on earth where everything will be destroyed.
 - This is not a call to live like a monk though...
 - It is a call to live for God in everything...
 - To receive our possessions in this world as a gift from Him with thanksgiving, and to joyfully use what He has given us for His glory.
 - Don't just say that you are doing that—see to it that you are doing that.
 - Don't prepare misery for yourself by neglecting what matters most...
 - By the grace of God in Jesus Christ, prepare blessing!