

**Message #37****Ecclesiastes 10:12-20**

If you look long enough and if you listen carefully enough, it doesn't take long to determine whether you are in the presence of one wise or one who is a fool. Solomon learned to spot fools. In fact, much of what he writes in the book of Proverbs is a contrast between one who is wise and one who is a fool (i.e. Prov. 1:7).

As we come to this passage of Scripture, Solomon was intent on us realizing how to recognize a fool. Now let me give three reasons why Solomon would want us to know this: 1) We have all played the part of a fool in our own lives; 2) We need to make certain our own life is moving in the direction of one wise and not one foolish; 3) We need to distance ourselves from those who are fools.

**WE MAY DETERMINE ONE WHO IS WISE FROM ONE WHO IS FOOLISH BY OBSERVING THEIR SPEECH, THEIR WORK AND BY THEIR ATTITUDE TOWARD LEADERSHIP.**

Roland Murphy, in his commentary, believes that the contextual connection concerning a ruler or leadership is seen in **verse 20**. It is very possible that this discussion does concern the speech, work ethic and attitude of a fool toward leadership (p. 102). If this is true, one's attitudes and actions toward leadership determine whether one is wise or foolish.

**WAY #1** – We may detect whether one is wise or foolish by his speech. **10:12-14**

**Fact #1** - A wise person uses gracious words. **10:12a**

The word “gracious” is one that refers to speech that contains words that are favorable, of good will and beautiful, especially from God's perspective (Gesenius, pp. 290-291). This particularly has to do with setting forth the truth of God.

When Jesus Christ was here on earth, He went into the synagogue in Nazareth and expounded a text from Isaiah (Luke 4:16-21). In the aftermath of His exposition we discover that people classified His teaching as presenting “gracious word” (Luke 4:22). It is well to point out that ultimately, these same words filled all in the synagogue “with rage” and they wanted to kill him (Luke 4:28-29).

**Fact #2** – A foolish person uses consuming speech. **10:12b-14**

The word “consume” means that the fool is one who uses words that devour and destroy both himself and others (*Ibid.*, p. 123). In direct contrast to the wise person who is intent on communicating truth, the fool is just interested in his own agenda and it does not matter to him whether he ends up destroying himself or others with his foolish speech.

**(Trait #1)** – The speech of a fool is foolish at the start. **10:13a**

The word “folly” is one that means to be bold, fleshly, firm and large (*Ibid.*, pp. 407-408). A fool begins his speech by presenting himself or herself to be a shining constellation. The speech will be bold, large and convincing. It will be fleshly and it will not truly reveal the pure truth of God.

**(Trait #2)** – The speech of a fool is wicked madness at its end. **10:13b**

One commentator wisely observed–“By the time he (the fool) has finished, he has committed himself to statements that are worse than silly, that are presumptuous, frenzied, indicative of mental and moral depravity.”

This same writer goes on to say, “Intemperate language about the secrets of God’s providence and the moral government of the world may be intended” (Pulpit Commentary, Vol. 9, p. 253).

A fool magnifies himself and minimizes God. A fool has a shallow grasp of God’s sovereignty and talks and talks and talks in ways that God classifies as wicked madness. The problem is a fool usually gets a hearing.

Every “idle word” will be brought against him at judgment (Matt. 12:36-37).

**(Trait #3)** – The speech of a fool is persistent speech. **10:14a**

The word for fool here speaks of a person who is empty and fruitless in the mind of God (p. 586). A fool does not, cannot and will not shut his mouth. One who is foolish multiplies words. A wise person is quick to hear and slow to speak (James 1:19). The fool opens his mouth wide and often. He is not interested in hearing God’s Word or learning God’s Word; he is only interested in getting before someone so he can set forth his foolish, insane speech. A fool not only speaks foolishness, he won’t cease from speaking foolishness.

**(Trait #4)** – The speech of a fool is prophetic speech. **10:14a**

A fool is one who speaks foolishly about everything, including the future. You will not hear a fool speaking of the coming judgment of God or the coming of Jesus Christ, but you will hear a fool making brazen predictions about this or that. Fools love to speculate and postulate about things they know nothing about.

**WAY #2** – We may detect whether one is wise or foolish by his work. **10:15-19**

**Trait #1** - A fool is always tired of his work. **10:15-19**

A fool is never happy or content with his job; he is always tired and wearied by it.

A fool will always complain how hard he works and how tired he is. Wise people like their work and they like to work hard. That is the mark of wisdom.

**Trait #2** - A fool is never knowledgeable of his work. **10:15b**

A fool never seems to learn what he is supposed to do. He is so tired that sometimes he will not even go to a city to find work. A fool does not know who to talk to or what really to say to get the job done.

**Trait #3** - A fool lacks maturity in his work. **10:16a**

A fool loves to have the responsibility, but he lacks the necessary maturity to fulfill those responsibilities.

**Trait #4** - A fool lacks discipline in his work. **10:16b**

A fool does not realize when to aggressively work and when to relax. His sense of timing and discipline are all confused. Feasting should be done in the evening after the work is done, but the fool lacks the discipline for this, so he feasts first and then works later. He lacks discipline.

**Trait #5** - A wise person has knowledge and discipline in his work. **10:17**

Wise people know when to work and when to celebrate. They know the appropriate times for celebration. When an institution or organization has quality disciplined leaders at its helm, there is strength and that society is truly blessed and on its way toward blessing.

**Trait #6** - A fool neglects his responsibilities. **10:18**

A fool is one who does not take care of his responsibilities. He just continues to feast while everything around him is falling apart.

**Trait #7** - A fool is motivated by pleasure and money. **10:19**

A fool is motivated by two things, neither of which is the will of God: self-gratification and money. To a fool these two things are the answer for everything. To a fool here is the meaning to life—if it gives one pleasure or makes one more money.

**WAY #3** – We may detect whether one is wise or foolish by attitude toward leadership. **10:20**

A person will prove himself to be a fool by how quick he is to speak out against leadership. I don't care if it is a king, a president, a pastor or an elder or deacon; a fool is one who will quickly speak out against God-appointed leadership. Who of us cannot help but be impressed with Michael, the high-ranking angel of God who would not even speak against Satan (Jude 9).

In this verse, God makes it clear that private communication against a leader will eventually be discovered by the leader. God will see to it. People may have their private meetings or petitions, but God will publicly surface it—we can count on it. Traitors will always be exposed for who and what they are. When we decide to speak out against leadership, we are not safe anywhere because we are always on display before the seeing eye and hearing ear of God.

God says he ordains “all” leadership (Romans 13:1).

Three keys to wisdom this week:

- 1) Guard our speech;
- 2) Work hard;
- 3) Do not speak against leadership. Instead, pray for it and submit to it.