

Ecclesiastes 10-12

BACKGROUND

- Proverbial wisdom associates folly not with low intelligence but with rejection of wisdom and righteousness. (The translators of the NIV even say, “The Hebrew words rendered *fool* in Proverbs, and often elsewhere in the Old Testament, denote one who is morally deficient.”) This is made especially clear in *Prov 1:20-29*, but see also:
 - Prov 1:7, “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and discipline.”
 - Ps 14:1, “The fool says in his heart, ‘There is no God.’ They are corrupt, their deeds are vile; there is no one who does good.”
 - and even: Eccl 5:4, “When you make a vow to God, do not delay in fulfilling it. He has no pleasure in fools; fulfill your vow.”
- Eccl 12:3-6 is an elaborate metaphor describing the trials of old age. See attached chart by Kaiser describing Qoheleth’s symbolism.

QUESTIONS

1. Ch. 10 contrasts wisdom and folly, beginning with four proverbs. What do these four proverbs imply?
2. 10:2 associates true wisdom and folly with the state of the heart. This implies that true wisdom is associated with one’s innermost parts. Below are several verses from the NT which are relevant to one’s heart. Given these, and the passages in the Background above describing wisdom, discuss (a) who can be wise, and (b) how.
 - a. *The heart and cleanliness*: Mk 7:20-3, “He went on: ‘What comes out of a man is what makes him “unclean.” For from within, out of men’s hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. All these evils come from inside and make a man “unclean.”’”
 - b. *The heart and one’s treasure*: Mt 6:20-1, “But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”
 - c. *The heart and speech*: Mt 12:34b, “For out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks.”
 - d. *The new heart provided by the New Covenant*: Ezek 36:26, “I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.”



King Solomon and Lady Wisdom, from *Biblia ectypa : Bildnussen auss Heiliger Schrift Alt und Neuen Testaments* by Christoph Weigel.

- e. *The heart and the Law*: Rom 2:29, “No, a man is a Jew if he is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code. Such a man’s praise is not from men, but from God.”
 - f. *The heart and conversion*: Rom 10:10, “For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved.”
3. After the initial proverbs of 10:1-4, Qoheleth talks about how wisdom is not always successful or sufficient. Following this, he argues that wisdom is still worth pursuing, listing its attributes and benefits. What do the proverbs of 10:19-20 assert?
 4. Both Qoheleth (in 11:5) and Jesus (in John 3:5-8) acknowledge our difficulty knowing the mind and actions of God. What does each of them conclude based on this?
 5. The author concludes the main section of the book in 11:7-12:8 by contrasting youth and old age. What motivation does Qoheleth give for remembering God while one is young? How about for enjoying one’s youth? Compare this with Psalm 90. What does the author of Ps 90 say about old age, when “we finish our years with a moan”?
 6. Ecclesiastes represents the worldview of one who knows nothing of the redemption offered by God, either of our souls or of creation. As such, it bears a two-fold message:
 - Life and all creation are ephemeral (1:2), and
 - In this face of this, while respecting the one who judges all (12:13-14), solace is to be found when it can be, in family and work (9:7-10).
 - a. David, ostensibly the father of the author, shared his OT context. Yet the Psalms show David was often full of a hope which is minimal or absent in Ecclesiastes. Why were their viewpoints so different? How does his viewpoint differ from that of the modern atheist?
 - b. Given the limited knowledge of its author, when is Ecclesiastes useful to read or study? Is there anything which is said either uniquely or more clearly in Ecclesiastes than elsewhere in scripture?