

02-04-21b Ecclesiastes

Let's resume our study in Ecclesiastes chapter 10. The passages we are currently examining are in the Psalms and in the Proverbs and talk about different aspects of the human heart. That's where foolishness resides.

We have that very well-known passage, for those of us who are parents, where is foolishness bound up for a child? Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child, but the rod of correction will drive it far from him. How many times has that passage come to my mind over the course of the last 12 years? Well, here we have a number of passages that talk about different aspects of the heart because it is the seat of thinking. So, obviously, foolishness and wisdom, which are categories of thinking or classifications of kinds of thinking, is going to be found in the heart.

We've already seen Psalm 10, which has a number of references to the heart, verse 6, verse 11, verse 13, verse 17. We've seen Psalm 37, verse 31. We also find in the Proverbs, Proverbs chapter 3, that the heart is the place of trust.

If you're going to fear the Lord, you're going to trust him. You're going to respect his word and treat it as true and as real. So, when you get to Proverbs 3, verses 5 and 6, of course, Proverbs 3, a very well-known passage, my son, do not forget my law, let your heart keep my commandments.

That's where God's commandments are kept. It's in the heart. It's by the heart.

Length of days and long life and peace they will add to you. Let not mercy and truth forsake you. Bind them around your neck.

Write them on the tablet of your heart. And so, find favor and high esteem in the sight of God and man. Trust in the Lord with all your heart.

And lean not on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct your paths. So, a lot there in the first five, six verses of Proverbs 3 about the heart as the place of trust.

That is the motivation and the power for keeping God's commands. We have no power to be obedient if we have no faith in what God says. Why would you obey God? Why would you not vindicate yourself? Why would you not seek your own? Why would you not strive to get ahead and make your own way and compete and defend yourself from attacks unless you believe that God would do that for you and that God's standard of measure is better and more valuable than any human evaluation.

You have to believe or you have no power to obey. And one of the big, again, one of the large problems in the approach that is taken in Christianity in Christian circles today is thinking that

obedience will lead to faith instead of faith resulting in obedience. And if we can just help people conform to God's standards by whatever means, we'll disciple, we'll mentor, we'll have small groups, we'll have accountability.

If there's any idea that needs to be shot in the head and buried, it is accountability to other believers that, well, I'm going to make myself accountable. I'm going to get up at 6 o'clock and meet with two other men and we're going to reveal our inmost thoughts to each other and we're going to tell each other about the lust we have for our secretary and how we're battling it. It is the devil's own poison in the life of believers to think that you're going to elbow aside the Holy Spirit and take his place as the one who convinces of sin, righteousness, and judgment and the one who enables and empowers for obedience.

Obedience does not come through accountability. Obedience comes through faith. Faith itself comes by hearing.

And that hearing has to be the content of the Word of God. The object of faith is the Word of God. Why does faith come by hearing and hearing by the Word of God? Because faith, biblically, does not exist apart from the Word of God.

If you're not trusting the Word of God, it's not faith. And trusting in somebody else to ask you the right questions and hold you accountable is a blasphemous lie from the pit of hell. It is a spit in the face of God the Holy Spirit that he's not able to convict.

He is not able to empower. The Word of God is not sufficient. You need people to be sticking their nose into your business and helping you.

If I keep thinking about it, I'm just going to get all upset. Look at what the Word of God says. My son, do not forget my law.

He doesn't say, my son, do not forget my meeting with you at 6 o'clock tomorrow morning where I'm going to be asking you what you did today. He says, don't forget the truth that I've communicated to you as a wise father, as a faithful father to a child. The way I am communicating the Word of God to you, let your heart keep my commands.

Why? Length of days and long life and peace they will add to you. What are the illustrations of spiritual prosperity? It's in the physical realm. Long life, prosperity and peace.

Aren't those the goals that everyone is striving for in the visible human realm? Well, spiritually, that long life and that prosperity and that peace extend beyond the setting of the sun into the kingdom of the Son, into the kingdom of the Father, into eternity. And the key to laying hold of that inheritance and dwelling in the house of the Lord forever is treasuring up wisdom in our heart. It's all about the heart.

That's why chapter 10 of Ecclesiastes talks about the heart tending to the right or tending to the

left. If you're a fool, your heart is not going to latch on to these truths. Do not let mercy and do not let truth forsake you.

Bind them around your neck. Write them on the tablet of your heart. This is how you find favor and high esteem in the sight of God, most importantly, and man.

Trust in the Lord with all your heart. Do not lean on your own understanding. This is one of the hardest, it's the easiest thing to memorize, the hardest thing to implement.

I would wager that better than half of all believers have heard this verse often enough to know it by heart. Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, He will direct your path.

But the doing of it, how do you trust in the Lord with all your heart? Well, you have to prioritize what God says, what the Word of God says, above the evidence of your senses and the evidence of people's experience and what they're saying and what they're telling you and what your fear tells you and what your insecurity tells you. It's not an easy thing. But this takes place in the heart.

The heart, obviously, therefore, is the storage place for the Word of God. That's why it says, write them on the tablet of your heart. You have the same idea in the next chapter of Proverbs.

Proverbs 4.4 says, talking about when I was my father's son, tender and the only one in the sight of my mother, he also taught me and said to me, let your heart retain my words, keep my commandments and live. Get wisdom, get understanding. Do not forget nor turn away from the words of my mouth.

Do not forsake her and she will preserve you. Love her and she will keep you. Wisdom is the principle thing.

Therefore, get wisdom and in all you're getting, get understanding. Exalt her and she will promote you. She will bring you honor when you embrace her.

She will place on your head an ornament of grace, a crown of glory she will deliver to you. What is it in our life that is more important than wisdom? Not just the hearing of it, but the processing of it, the digestion of it, the meditation on it and the thinking that results in meditation on it. What part of our day do we spend in some phase of that process? Either in intake or in... It's just like when you take in food.

What's the whole problem with anorexia and bulimia? People take in the food, but then they expel it again and they don't digest it. They like the taste of the food, they like the experience of having a meal, they want to sample all these things, but they're scared of some unreasonable fear of getting fat or something and so they go throw it all back up again. Well, taking in the food does them no good.

It is the processing of that food and the incorporation of its nutrients into our body, and that is what has to happen with the intake of the Word of God. Intake is essential. We here at Grace and Truth Bible Church have four 40-minute intake sessions each week.

I will tell you that that is insufficient to sustain our souls if that is all we do, is sit down for four 40-minute Bible classes out of a seven-day week. It's a wonderful thing to be able to do that, but if you and I do not spend additional time thinking about that truth and praying in the light of that truth and spending time in reflection and fellowship with God, with that truth uppermost in our minds, we will die spiritually of starvation in the sense of not enough power to accomplish the task, not enough to see beyond the setting of the sun. If we fail and if we are weak and if we are tripped up time and again by our besetting sin, what's the problem? Malnourishment.

The Word of God dwells in our heart. What did Paul say? Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly. Where does it dwell? In the heart.

Where is the seat of thinking and the seat of meditation? The heart. In that law doth he meditate day and night. You go back to the very first Psalm.

No matter how many times I look at this, it never ceases to impress me. Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stands in the path of sinners, nor sits in the seat of the scornful. His delight is in the law of the Lord, and in His law he meditates day and night.

What is the result? Verse 3 and following is Psalm 1. He shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water that brings forth its fruit in its season. We were just on the break looking at this little avocado tree we have in the living room, and how much effort does a tree have to exert to put forth its buds and put forth its fruit? If it's planted in the right soil, and if it has the right water, it's built in. It's a part of the genetic code that with the right nutrients available and the right water at its roots, in its season, when it's the right age, when it's the right time of year, it will bring forth its fruit in its season.

It obeys the command of God because it's in the right place with the right nutrients available to it. And that's how we are. If we make sure that we are in the right place spiritually and that we have available to our souls the right nutrients, if we are the tree planted by the rivers of water, we will bring forth our fruit in its season.

We don't have to work at it. We don't have to worry over it. We don't have to try to speculate, what is my spiritual gift? What is my spirit-controlled temperament? Am I a phlegmatic or a choleric or a melancholy or a sanguine? What mix do I have? Have I prayed the prayer of Jabez? Have I done any other of these formulaic things? Am I experiencing God? All we have to do is make sure that the Word of God is written on the tablet of our heart, that we do not distract ourselves and get off the path by walking in the counsel of the ungodly.

What is the counsel of the ungodly? That's their advice, isn't it? That's what they say you should

do. What does the world tell us we should do? Well, we should not let our chewing gum lose its flavor. We should not drive an old car.

We should not look anything less than like the model on the cover of Vogue. I mean, you get a constant diet all around us of what the world thinks is success and what the world thinks is a standard of appearance and what the world thinks we ought to be spending our time on. The man is blessed who does not walk in that advice, who doesn't take the advice of the world on how to succeed.

He doesn't stand in the way of sinners. If we do look around and realize that we have bought into the world system, the human viewpoint, the things that do not reflect faith and are therefore sin, we don't stand there. We get out of that.

We walk away. We don't tolerate the company of fools, as Solomon tells us this morning in Ecclesiastes chapter 10 and in our scripture reading from the Proverbs this morning. When you hear the lips of a fool not speaking knowledge, you part company.

We do not sit in the seat of the scornful. The scornful are the ones who despise the Lord, and they are the fools. They are the ones who are not going to... We have to analyze ourselves.

We have to look at our life. We have to look at the way we spend our day. We have to meditate on the law of the Lord, or we will fail.

We are not going to be the tree planted by the rivers of water that brings forth its fruit in its season, whose leaf also shall not wither, and whatever he does shall prosper. And this is genuine prosperity. This is not measured by the standard of the world.

This is measured by God's standard. If we want to be the good and faithful servant, we've got to stop goofing off. We've got to stop screwing around and pay attention to the fact that we only get each day one time, and we can't afford to waste it.

What are the ungodly like in verse 4 of Psalm 1? They are like the chaff which the wind drives away. Therefore, the ungodly shall not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous. Notice, the ungodly and the sinners are not going to be assembled with the righteous.

The righteous are going to be assembled one place. The sinners and the unrighteous are going to be assembled in another. There will be a division of the people of God after the judgment.

They're not all going to stand together. Some of them are going to be in the light and in the place of feasting. Others are going to be in the darkness which is outside.

How many different ways does the Bible have to tell us this before we believe it? There are going to be the rich men, and there are going to be the Lazaruses. There are going to be the scribes

and Pharisees on the outside, and there are going to be those who sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob on the inside. There will be those who by faith and patience inherit the promises, and there are going to be those who fall back unto perdition, unto loss of those things.

There will be those who by patient continuance and well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality. They are going to receive the eternal life reward and benefit package, and there are those who don't. Romans chapter 2. Why? Verse 6 of Psalm 1. The Lord knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the ungodly shall perish.

Well, this is all taking place in the heart. If you go forward again to Proverbs, Proverbs chapter 4 talks about the city limits of life, if you will. It says, Let your heart retain my words, keep my commandments, and live.

You go down to verse 23. He says, well, you can start in verse 20. My son, give attention to my words, incline your ear to my sayings, do not let them depart from your eyes, keep them in the midst of your heart, for they are life to those who find them and health to all their flesh.

Keep your heart, guard your heart with all diligence, for out of it springs the issues of life. And it's fascinating, I don't have time to go into the details of the Hebrew here, but the idea of guarding your heart, it has the idea of the edges or the borders of something. This is posting a guard at the city limits.

I could talk a lot about the cities of refuge and about what you could be safe as long as you were inside the city limits, even if you were guilty and the avenger of blood was on your trail, if you were within the city limits, you were safe. Guard the perimeter. Don't let somebody cross your border.

This is what's inherent. When it says guard your heart, you're keeping the words of wisdom and these sayings of divine truth in your heart. And it says, guard the borders of your heart with all diligence, because if you keep those things in there, all of the issues of life, the important things of life, are all going to spring from that.

If you don't guard the perimeter, and this means you've got to catch something, you've got to have early warning, you've got to have detection. They've had this spate of supposedly gang-related graffiti in our neighborhood. And I would love to sit out there all night at the edge of my property and watch for somebody with a spray can and take that can of paint away from them and paint them with it.

Let them go home with their little purple paint all over their face and explain it to their parents. But I can't always be on the perimeters of my property and I can't stay awake all night, night after night, hoping to catch one of these little miscreant delinquents. But I would sure love to.

But I can guard the borders of my heart. I can watch my perimeter and not let it be infiltrated by

faulty thinking, by worldly thinking, and let my wisdom go the other direction. Keep your heart with all diligence because that's where, out of the heart, is where the issues of life spring.

Jesus talked about that. Out of the heart. He says don't worry about cleansing.

Are you washing your hands before you eat and so forth? He says it's not what goes in that defiles a man, it's what comes out. Because out of the heart spring all of these issues. So if you guard the perimeter of your heart and keep it clean.

We talked about this earlier in Luke when we were talking about the light being inside. If you have integrity, there's light everywhere. You don't let darkness come in and darken your eye and darken your heart because that's going to affect everything you see and everything you do.

The heart is also the place of correction. Look in chapter 5 of Proverbs. Proverbs 5.12. He says, Hear me, my children.

Do not depart from the words of my mouth. Remove your way far from the lips of the immoral woman and so forth. Why? Because later on you're going to mourn when your flesh and your body are consumed and you're going to say, How I have hated instruction and my heart despised correction.

I didn't like correction. Nobody likes correction. Nobody likes to be rebuked.

Nobody likes to be instructed and shown something that implies or explicitly states that they've fallen short of the mark. We hate that. All of us do.

Nobody likes correction. But, How I have hated instruction, my heart despised correction, I have not obeyed the voice of my teachers nor inclined my ear to those who instructed me. I was on the verge of total ruin in the midst of the assembly and the congregation.

I was right here in the midst of all the people, right in the center of the nation of Israel, right here in God's people, but because my heart despised correction, I was on the verge of ruin even as I stood there. If you look at me, I'm just another face in the crowd, but I was actually on the verge of ruin. So, the heart is the place of correction.

The heart is the planning center. By the way, if you're making notes here, the points I have made thus far, the heart is the seat of thinking. We saw that in Psalm 10, all of those verses, and in Psalm 37, 31.

The heart is the place of trust, Proverbs 3, 5, and 6. The heart is the storage place for the word of God, Proverbs 4, 4. The heart is the city limits of life. That's where your limits are. That's where your borders are that determine whether you're going to have good things or bad things.

You've got to guard the perimeter, Proverbs 4, 23. The heart is the place of correction, Proverbs

5, 12. Now, the heart is the planning center.

This is where our schemes and plans, our goals are set, our objectives are weighed and established. This is Proverbs 6, 18. The heart that devises wicked plans is one of the seven things that God hates.

Remember that? These six things the Lord hates, yea, seven, are an abomination to Him, a proud look, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked plans. Well, this is not the fiendish criminal. This is not the villain of the scene rubbing his hands together in a dark, smoky room somewhere.

The heart that devises a wicked plan, whatever is not of faith is sin. So if we're making plans in our heart and they're not grounded in faith, guess what? They are wicked imaginings. They are wicked plans.

And God hates and finds that to be an abomination. Deficiency of heart destroys the soul. You find this in Proverbs 6, 32.

Whoever commits adultery with a woman lacks understanding. He who does so destroys his own soul. The phrase translated lacks understanding there, the word is not understanding, the word is heart.

And what it literally says in Hebrew is whoever commits adultery with a woman is deficient of heart. There is a lack in the heart. There's a gap, there's something missing.

There's a deficiency in the heart. The Hebrew word for heart is lev, l-e-v, l-e-b rather. It's a soft b so it comes out as a v. But l-e-b, lamed and bait are the two consonants for that word.

And that's the word that is translated understanding. Lacks in the heart. Something's missing.

We say, oh, that was bad judgment. He was lured away by lust and so on. It wouldn't have happened except that there was a lack in the heart.

Some condition preceded that adultery. And that fall into error was a lack in the heart. Anyplace you see that phrase, lacks understanding in the Proverbs and it is quite frequent, that's your phrase.

There is a deficiency in the heart. You find this, for example, in chapter 7, verse 3. It says, my son, keep my words, treasure my commands within you. Proverbs 7, keep my commands and live and my law is the apple of your eye.

Bind them on your fingers, write them on the tablet of your heart. If you don't have the wisdom of God written on the tablet of your heart, you've got a blank tablet. It's a lack.

It's a deficiency. And when you get down to verse 7, if you write it on the tablet of your heart and

you say to wisdom, you are my sister and you call understanding your nearest kin, it will keep you from the immoral woman, from the seductress who flatters with her words. For at the window of my house I looked through my lattice and I saw among the simple, I perceived among the youths, a young man lacking in heart.

That's what it says. Didn't have the laws written on the tablet of his heart. And what happens to him? He passed along the street near a corner.

He took the path to her house. Read the rest of that and find out all the bad things that happened to him. Verse 10, a woman met him with the attire of a harlot and a crafty heart.

And she takes advantage of him and leads him down a bad path. So what is the conclusion in verse 24 and following? Now therefore, listen to me, my children. Pay attention to the words of my mouth.

Do not let your heart turn aside to her ways. Do not stray into her paths, for she has cast down many wounded. And all who were slain by her were strong men.

Her house is the way to Sheol, descending to the chambers of death. A fruitless, profitless life. What is the remedy for the lacking heart? Look at Proverbs 9. Wisdom has built her house.

She has hewn out her seven pillars. She has slaughtered her meat. She has mixed her wine.

She has furnished her table. This is the alternate woman. Instead of the seductress who trips up and destroys the man lacking in heart, you have a woman of wisdom here, who hews out and builds a house of seven pillars.

Look at verse 4. Whoever is simple, let him turn in here. As for him who is lacking in heart, she says to him, come and eat of my bread, and drink of the wine I have mixed. Forsake foolishness and live, and go in the way of understanding.

In Proverbs 10, verses 19-21, you find again the principle that foolishness and lack in the heart is revealed in speech. In the multitude of words, sin is not lacking, but he who restrains his lips is wise. The tongue of the righteous is choice silver, but the heart of the wicked is lacking.

It's the same phrase that's translated devoid of understanding elsewhere. The lips of the righteous feed many, but fools die for lack of wisdom. They die of starvation, of soul, because they don't take the bread that comes from the lips of the righteous.

And just look at teenagers. I have a good friend who's trying to deal with some teenagers who completely will not listen to the voice of wisdom. Water off a duck's back.

There are people who will only be convinced when they themselves experience horrible suffering and pain, because they would not listen to the voice of their teachers. They wouldn't listen to their

parents. They despise instruction.

They have a lack in the heart, and the bread is available to fill that lack, to feed that need, and they despise it. They ignore it, and many times they never do wake up. But sometimes they have to knock their head and bloody themselves repeatedly on error in life before they will wake up and start paying attention to wisdom.

We want to avoid that error, because in verse 22, the blessing of the Lord will make one rich, and he adds no sorrow with it. It doesn't come at the expense of sorrow. If we are stubborn, if we are willful and do not heed these words, we will lose our inheritance and end up serving those who are wise of heart.

You find this in Proverbs 11, 29. He who troubles his own house will inherit the wind, and the fool will be servant to the wise of heart. The fool in the heart is going to serve the wise of heart.

And is not going to have an inheritance. Remember the woman who tears down her house with her hands because she's foolish? He who troubles his own house will inherit the wind. How much inheritance is there in the wind? There's none.

There's a very famous work of literature called *Inherit the Wind*. It's amazing how they beg, borrow, and steal from God's Word. Eugene O'Neill wrote *Absalom, Absalom*, which is a play.

Anyway, he who troubles his own house will inherit the wind. You will lose your inheritance in the hereafter if you tear down your house. And if you're a fool, if you lack in the heart, you're going to be a servant.

You're going to be chopping cotton on the plantation of somebody who paid attention and took these words to heart. The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life, and he who wins souls is wise. If the righteous will be recompensed on the earth, how much more the ungodly and the sinner? That's how Proverbs 11 ends up.

And you can compare this with Proverbs 29.9. There's a similar turn of phrase in Proverbs 29.9 that says, If a wise man contends with a foolish man, whether the fool rages or laughs, there is no peace. What is the characteristic of the foolish man who's going to end up serving the wise? He rages. He either rages or he laughs.

He hears the words of wisdom, and instead of taking them to heart, he's either going to respond in anger or he's going to scoff and make sport and laugh. And you see examples of this all over in our modern society. People scoff and mock at the voice of wisdom or they get angry and they attack it.

The place of discerning substance from frivolity is the heart. How do we figure out what's real and what's frivolous? Proverbs 12.8-11 A man will be commended according to his wisdom, but he who is of a perverse heart will be despised. Better is the one who is slighted but has a servant

than he who honors himself but lacks bread.

Where is that servant going to come from? The fool is going to be serving him in the next life. A righteous man regards the life of his animal, but the tender mercies of the wicked are cruel. That's why there's no ox at the trough, because he has no foresight.

He doesn't look ahead. A righteous man regards the life of his animal. He looks ahead and recognizes that this is a stewardship from God.

The fool, the wicked, his tenderest moment is cruelty. He who tills his land will be satisfied with bread, but he who follows frivolity is lacking in heart. When we find ourselves wrapped up in frivolity, it's because we're lacking in heart.

The wicked covet the catch of evil, but the root of righteousness yields fruit. There's so many different ways this truth is stated. We can also discern deceit.

If you turn the page there in Proverbs chapter 12 and look at verses 19 through 22, the truthful lip shall be established forever, but a lying tongue is but for a moment. Our speech determines whether our fruit is eternal or momentary. Deceit is in the heart of those who devise evil, but counselors of peace have joy.

No grave trouble will overtake the righteous. But the wicked shall be filled with evil. Lying lips are an abomination to the Lord, but those who deal truthfully are his delight.

Why? Because that fruit of the lips is coming from either a wise heart or a foolish heart. God will be delighted with those who deal truthfully because what comes out of the lips is coming from a wise heart. Well, there's no end of communication from God about the heart.

But turn now to Ecclesiastes chapter 10 because this is all background, and this was all known. This was in the Bible, so to speak, of the people to whom Solomon is talking. And I want to quickly point out this structure here because beginning in verse 1 and going through verse 3, you have eyes... You remember the subjectivity.

What are the three categories of subjectivity? You have your eyes on self, you have your eyes on people, or you have your eyes on circumstances. Well, in the same way, the provenance of wisdom or foolishness is going to find its application in those same three areas. If you're not going to be subjective and you're going to be objective, you still have to deal with yourself, you still have to deal with people, and you still have to deal with circumstances.

But instead of being subjective and being tripped up and overthrown by foolishness in those areas, which is subjectivity, the objective believer, the wise believer, is going to prevail by means of wisdom in those three areas. So if you look at these verses, what do you have? What's in view in the first three verses of chapter 10? Well, you have the spoiling of your own wisdom through a

little foolishness. You have your own heart that is guiding you to the right or to the left.

And in verse 3, you are either demonstrating that you're wise or a fool by the way that you walk. But verses 1-3 are really dealing with your personal consequences of being wise or being a fool. That's self.

In the second three verses, verses 4-7, you have dealing with people. You have specifically people in authority, people who have influence over you. The spirit of the ruler that rises up against you.

And the error that proceeds from a ruler that sets folly and great dignity and the rich are consigned to a lowly place. How do you cope with that? And third, in verses 8 and 9, he who digs a pit will fall into it. Whoever breaks through a wall will be bitten by a serpent.

He who quarries stones may be hurt by them. He who splits wood may be in danger by it. We're not looking at self.

I'm not looking at people. Now we're looking at circumstances. You've got an undertaking going on.

You're excavating. You're clearing away old buildings. You're trying to quarry some stone.

You're trying to get some building materials to build something new in the place of what's been wiped away. You've built a pit to get your foundation going. You're going to lay the stones and then you're going to build a wooden construction on top of it.

This is a project. These are circumstances. These are undertakings in life.

So broadly speaking, Solomon in these first nine verses has talked about the area of how you cope with things personally, how you cope with people who put obstacles in your path and shuffle things wrongly and prioritize things wrongly and put high things low and low things high. And then here is obstacles and dangers in what you undertake, what you tackle by way of challenges in your circumstances. So what's the point here? Well, how do you meet the challenge of personal folly that can be the flies of death in your ointment? Well, you've got to meet it with wisdom.

You've got to personally cultivate wisdom. You've got to let wisdom be written on the tablets of your heart. How do you cope with people in authority who make bad decisions and their spirit rises up against you for no good reason? You've got to stand your ground, the ground of wisdom on which you've built your house.

Wisdom has built its house with seven pillars. The wise man builds his house on the rock rather than the fool who builds it on the sand. You've got to try to pull together and heal that breach with wisdom.

So what is the answer for problems with self? Wisdom in the heart. What's the answer for problems with people? Wisdom in the heart. What is the answer for challenges and circumstances and undertakings and things we're trying to get done? We're trying to move out old things, trying to dig out the old dirt, trying to get rid of the old walls that are obstructing.

Well, there's dangers inherent in that. This is really where we pick up this morning after an extensive review and background here. But it says in verse 8 and 9, he who digs a pit will fall into it.

And this is not will. It's may. This is the use of the imperfect to introduce a possibility.

It doesn't mean every time you dig a pit, you're going to fall into it. I mean, that's ludicrous. People wouldn't dig pits if every single time you dug a pit, you inevitably fell into it.

It just wouldn't be worth doing. But he who digs a pit may fall into it. You can go to Gesenius, Couch, Cowley, the standard advanced Hebrew grammar, and it will tell you that often the imperfect is used in this way to introduce a possibility.

He who digs a pit may fall into it. Whoever breaks through a wall may be bitten by a serpent. He who quarries stones may be hurt by them.

He who splits wood may be endangered by it. There are risks. There are pitfalls, if you will.

I mean, that's about as literal as you can get. There are pitfalls when you undertake to do certain things. And these circumstances almost inevitably involve people.

And we're going to see that because I'm giving you this to set up the chiasm. Just think of it this way. Verses 1-3, we have the idea of self.

And you've got to meet the challenge of personal folly with wisdom. Verses 4-7 is the second element. People, specifically people in authority.

You've got to meet the challenge of the leader's folly, his spirit rising up against you or him promoting fools to high places and making the wise people walk on the ground. You've got to stand your ground. You've got to heal and pull together that breach.

We saw that last time. Verses 8-9 in the area of circumstances. The pit.

What is the inherent danger in the pit? There's a possibility of falling into it. You don't want to fall into the pit. The wall.

What's the danger in breaking down a wall? Well, remember ancient walls, the mortar that held them together was mud and it had voids and would wash away. And serpents loved to crawl in there because the sun would warm up the stones and reptiles liked that. This was a common

resting place and hiding place for reptiles, specifically snakes.

So somebody was going to break down an old wall, it was not uncommon to find snakes in there. If you didn't think ahead before you knew it, you're bitten by a serpent. You're busy trying to move this wall out of the way and not thinking about it and whang, you're bit by a serpent.

You've got these stones. The word here that says he who quarries stones may be hurt by them, the word for hurt, its primary usage is something that brings grief and by extension the pain that's associated with grief. It will come to grief, is what it literally says.

He who quarries stones may come to grief as a result of them. He who splits wood may be endangered by it. So, circumstances, the pit, the wall, the stones and the wood.

The pit and the wall, you're removing things that are in existence. You've got stuff there that you don't want there. You want a pit there? There's not a pit there.

I need to put in a pool? I've got to move the dirt. You've got stuff in the way. You've got to remove the old walls, but there's dangers.

Be careful when you're removing the old things. Why would somebody quarry stone and why would someone split wood? Because they want to build something new. Out with the old, in with the new.

How many places in Dallas do you see this taking place? Just up, not far from here, they've knocked down Montgomery wards and they're building something new there. Well, there are inherent risks. You've got to anticipate.

Wisdom looks ahead. How many times have I tried to instill this in my children? When you undertake something, think about what might happen. Set the pan further up on the cupboard.

Don't leave slippery stuff on the floor. Think about what could happen. Don't leave pointed things in the rug.

Think about what could happen. Don't leave stuff on the stairway. Think about what could happen.

This is what wisdom does. Wisdom raises its eyes and looks ahead. How can you get somebody to look beyond the setting of the sun? Well, start by looking under the setting of the sun, under the sun in the sky.

Anticipate the pitfalls. You can't get any more close to the text than that. Anticipate the pitfalls.

The first two actions are preparatory, clearing out the old. The second two are building up, shaping and molding, using something new. Right at the center of this, because we're going to see these same elements in reverse order coming back out, but the very next thing we have in

verse 10, this is the center of archaism.

We have self, we have people, we have circumstances pictured with these different things, and then we have verse 10. Verse 10 says, if the axe is dull and one does not sharpen the edge, you must use more strength, but wisdom brings success. Literally, this is not the word for axe.

It's the word for iron, the iron tool. Why? Because we're also talking about the quarrying of the stone here. You're using an iron tool to quarry the stone.

You're using an iron tool to try to split the wood. And if what you're using on the stone or on the wood is dull, what do you have to do to try to make it work? You've got to swing harder. You've got to apply more force.

When do accidents typically happen? When you are doing careful precision work and taking your time and going slow and you've got an excellent sharp tool? No. But this is the point, and I apologize for running long, but we really need to get this all in one helping, I think. The lack of wisdom results in increased application of effort.

And you will find, we all find, that when we are not walking in the way of wisdom, we wind up employing our own strength. We are straining. We are stressing.

We are falling back because we're not using wisdom. We're not using a sharp tool that makes the job easy. Inevitably, we have to use more strength, and we start using our own strength, and we swing harder, and we push more forcefully, and we will hack and hew by might and main, and we will make this thing happen.

We will get it done, and the duller our bit gets, the harder we push, and the more inevitable it becomes that injury will follow. You know, it's when you're shoveling away and shoveling and you're working and working and your shovel is dull, you're going to stumble and fall right into the pit that you're digging. When you are breaking down the wall and it's not yielding, and you're using a bigger battering ram and you're pushing harder, you're going to forget about the possibility of a serpent, and it's going to come and bite you because you're using your own strength.

You're not doing the way of wisdom. You're trying to quarry the stone. You're trying to chip out these stones and get a nice square one that you can use to build your house, but the iron is dull.

You're going to have to beat harder, and you're going to spoil the stone, and you're going to fling chips that are going to injure you and wound you and cause you grief. You're trying to split the wood, and it won't split because your axe is dull, and you're swinging harder, and you're going to spoil the wood. Anybody that has ever split wood knows we used to split it with a sledgehammer and a wedge, and when you can't get the wedge to go in, the wedge is dull, we haven't sharpened it in a while, you've got to swing harder.

Well, if you miss, I mean, my dad hit himself in the shin, I hit myself in the shin, that wedge, because you're swinging so hard, would fly off and hit somebody in the shin or in the foot. I can't tell you how many shin bruises I got, and a couple of times both my dad and I got a pretty serious injury about the legs because of this whole sledgehammer and chisel approach to splitting wood. You want a nice, sharp implement that will work well, and wisdom is that sharp edge.

And verse 10 says, if the iron is dull, because it's not just talking about the axe, it's also talking about what are you digging your pit with, what are you knocking your wall down with, you know you have a pry bar, you can stick in there and pry this wall apart and be at a safe distance. You're not having to get up there and push and lever and forget about the dangers. The application of human effort makes us lose our vision, lose our foresight, lose our long-term perspective.

The advantage of wisdom goes away when we don't use it. We don't keep our tools sharp. That's what verse 10 says, if the iron is dull and one does not sharpen the edge, and there's some real tricky Hebrew here, but this is the sense of it.

Edge is literally the word face. You've got faces on a tool. You've got a side that you want to hone.

And the word here for sharpen is actually a word in the pil-pil, which is an unusual formation of the pea ale, which is intensive. And it has the idea, its root meaning is to shake something or to move it back and forth. And what's it talking about? You've got to stop your work.

Stop busting down the wall. Stop digging the pit. Stop quarrying the stone and stop splitting the wood when the axe gets dull.

Stop. Take some time and do this back and forth motion. This intensive sharpening of the face of your tool.

Stop and meditate on the Word of God. Stop and avail yourself of the wisdom that should be written on the tablets of your heart. Don't hew and go all elbows and knees, hacking and swinging by might and main trying to make this thing happen.

Stop. And it's a fascinating word in Hebrew here for sharpening in verse 10. It's kil-qal, q-i-l-q-a-l.

It's from qalal. And kil-qal, it means to sand something back and forth, to shake it back and forth, to move it back and forth in a polishing motion that will sharpen the face, that will put an edge back on the tool so that the tool is doing the work. Wisdom is the axe.

The Word of God is sharper than a two-edged sword. Don't let your sword get dull so that you have to do the swinging. You have to make things happen by your force.

If the iron is sharp enough, you don't have to swing with any effort at all. It does the work. The tool does the work.

I learned that when I was a small boy driving nails. One of the first things my dad told me when he put a hammer in my hand to let me drive my first nail, he said, you don't force the nail in with your arm. You swing the hammer and you let the hammer do the work.

The hammer drives the nail. The axe splits the wood, not your arm strength. As you come back out of this chiasm, take a look at what follows, verse 10.

A serpent may bite when it is not charmed. The babbler is no different. What on earth? How did we get into snake charming? Where have we seen a serpent in the immediate context? This is the serpent that's in the wall.

What is the solution to a serpent? Believe it or not, there's lots of scriptures. If you want an interesting little exercise this coming week, look up charming of serpents in the Word of God. It occurs several places.

It's mentioned over in Isaiah and Amos and a few other places. It was a common skill, reptile removal, calming a serpent down. This doesn't mean the little flute noise that's coming up out of the basket type of thing.

Charming a snake meant here's this upset reptile that's wanting to bite somebody. It's the cobra with its hood out. There were men who specialized in calming them down to the point where they could reach around behind and grab them and remove them safely.

This was snake charming. But what he's saying here in verse 11 is you've gone to the trouble to learn how to handle reptiles. You know the art of charming, i.e. you know the art of reptile removal.

You know how to encounter one and how to safely control it and remove it from your project area, from your wall that you're excavating and removing. But all of the effort and the time that you spent learning to charm the reptile does no good if he bites you before you get the chance to charm him. And how did that happen? You're in there swinging by might and main.

You've got your big breaker bar in there trying to bust down the wall, and it's dull, and you've stopped thinking. You've stopped saying, you know, there might be a serpent in here. Ah, I'm watching.

I see him. I am alert. And now that I see him, I'm going to use my skills.

The Word of God gives us coping skills for these dangers that are inherent in dealing with people and circumstances and our own inadequacies. But it's useless to us if we don't slow down and use it. You can go to all the trouble to learn how to charm the serpent, but if you get in there and forget and he bites you before you get the chance to use it, what good is it? And what does he say? He says, literally, 11b says, That's literal from the Hebrew.

The master of the tongue is no different. Remember what James says? The man who bridles his tongue can bridle his whole body. Well, guess what? How do we rush in where angels fear to tread? How do we go in by might and main? We start talking.

We start babbling. We start rambling on. We let our tongue get away with us, and we don't charm the serpent.

We've got to stop and reflect on wisdom, and that serpent is not going to come out of our mouth and bite ourselves and others. We've got to stop and sharpen the axe. Or we're going to try to fix it all with talking, and we're just going to unleash the serpent's bite.

It does no good to know the Word of God and talk about bridling the tongue if we don't use it, if we don't stop and charm the serpent before it bites. Same thing in verse 12. The words of a wise man's mouth are gracious, but the lips of a fool shall swallow him up.

What's the image of being swallowed up? Falling into the pit. We're reversing the order of what we saw in the first nine verses. The wall and the pit are what are in view here.

And this is verbal sin. We're dealing with circumstances. We're dealing with people by talking to them by the multitude of words.

So, charming the serpent, this is ability or skill acquired in advance. We've studied the Word of God. We have the fruit of the Spirit, which is self-control.

But if we don't exercise it, if we don't charm that serpent, it's going to bite us. And this is a surprise, right? It comes up unexpectedly. We've got to learn to handle the unexpected.

There is no advantage to having the skill if you're not prepared and able to use it to avoid harm and loss. The master of the tongue is no different. The serpent, in need of control, is our own tongue.

You can look back up at verse 3 to see that. The fool that lacks wisdom shows everyone, declares to everyone that he is a fool. It comes out in the speech.

We've seen that throughout those heart passages. So then verse 12, our conversation either results in benefit or causes harm. Bridling the tongue yields grace.

When we fail to do so, we put ourselves in the pit. And a lot of times, we drag others in with us. Verse 13, the words of the mouth of the fool begin with foolishness and the end of his talk is raving madness.

This is literally evil rantings. We have ra-ah for evil and rantings is our old friend, cholot. Remember, cholot means to praise and when you put it in the pl, it means to rant, to become incoherent.

You've just gone over the top and you're no longer making sense. A bad beginning never gets better. And when you talk about being on the edge of the pit, when you start falling into the pit, you don't fall halfway and then fall back up, do you? When you start falling down the pit, you fall all the way to the bottom.

And this is the bite of the serpent. You can't un-ring the bell. If you start talking foolishly, it's just going to get worse.

And what you've got to do is rein in the tongue. Shut up. Stop.

Put an edge on the ax before you go any further. A bad beginning never gets better. We don't fall up.

We fall down. Evil ranting will follow the fool's mouth. Well, we need to go ahead and stop at this point.

When we resume our study next time, we'll finish seeing the symmetry here in this passage, at the center of which is this exhortation. If the iron is dull and one does not stop and sharpen the edge, scrape the face, polish the face, then we must use more strength. But what is the key? It says in the New King James, Wisdom brings success.

Literally, you can translate this either Wisdom is the successful prophet or the prophet of skill is wisdom. I like the first one. Wisdom is the successful prophet.

And you know what the word prophet is? Yitron. Right at the center of this chiasm, we have Yitron. That's how Solomon began this book.

What is the prophet? What do you have in your hand? What prophet is there to a man? Well, Wisdom is the successful Yitron. Wisdom yields that success in this life and in the next. If you know how to measure success, then even in this life, you are successful and you're going to have that Yitron that is going to carry over into the next.

Wisdom is the successful Yitron. That's what's at the center of the chiasm. That is the point that is being made, whether you're dealing with people, whether you're dealing with your own shortfalls, whether you're dealing with challenges of circumstances.

And people and circumstances are intermingled. We start out seeing the wall and the pit and the quarrying of the stone and the splitting of the wood as challenges in what we're trying to accomplish. But as you go forward, you see that it's all about the tongue.

Because to get these things done, you're dealing with people. Forging your way through life and through circumstances, you inevitably come up talking to people. When you have a challenge and it's difficult to meet, what do we do? We start talking.

We start complaining. We start bad-mouthing. We start assigning blame.

We start finding justification for why things went wrong. And the relationship between the heart and the tongue is mentioned all through Scripture. That's what we saw when we went through our heart passages.

What's in the heart is reflected in the speech. The way of wisdom is to bridle the tongue and to focus on the wise heart. Well, that is a big chunk to bite off and meditate on for this week.

But there is nothing more important. What is there in this life that is more important than living in a way that's pleasing to God? Well, the means of doing that has been laid out before us this morning. It is seizing and laying hold of that wisdom, making sure that it reposes itself in our hearts, that that wisdom doesn't lay fallow, but reflects itself in our speech, because out of the mouth comes the fruit of the heart.

And that is a good measure of where we stand with regard to examining ourselves to see if we are in the faith. If we respect God, if we fear the Lord, that's the beginning of wisdom. Wisdom will be characteristic of our heart.

Wisdom will be characteristic of our speech. And that is the advantage, that is the Yitrone that we're looking for. That's the Yitrone that Solomon raised the question about at the beginning of this book.

And that's where he's going as he moves toward his conclusion at the end. Let's close here in a word of prayer. Father, we thank You for the fact that You have not only established a standard and a goal for us to reach in this life as believers, but You have also given us the means of attaining it and fulfilling it.

We pray that God the Holy Spirit will impress these truths on our hearts. We pray that we will find them at hand and ready to influence our thoughts and our actions and certainly our conversation with one another as we move through the obstacles and the challenges of the days ahead. We pray that as a result our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be glorified in our lives.

We ask it in His name. Amen.