



Uncommon Common Sense

Ecclesiastes 10: 1-3

Manuscript and Discussion Guide for September 27, 2020

Stephen Davey

On the morning of February 22, 1911, an inventor by the name of Hervieu climbed the Eiffel Tower to test a new parachute he had devised for pilots. He checked the wind speed, took a nervous breath, and began the test. His parachute worked perfectly, floating safely to the ground. Hervieu didn't make the jump himself but had attached a 160 pound test dummy to the parachute.

But another inventor in the race to perfect the parachute believed this was an act of cowardice. Reichelt was an Austrian tailor who denounced the use of a dummy and, one year later, arrived at the Eiffel Tower to prove his point — and prove his parachute was superior.

As he posed for the throng of reporters and photographers, he announced, "I am so convinced my device will work properly, I will jump with it myself." Hervieu was there and pulled Reichelt aside to try and talk him out of it. There were technical reasons it wouldn't work — for one, he was using less than half the amount of fabric used in tested

parachutes. A team of experts had also weighed in, warning Reichelt that the parachute was too small and that he would break his neck in the fall.

Come to find out, he was not only going to ignore all of them, he was already ignoring his own experience. He had tested this parachute using dummies, and they crashed; he had tested it himself by jumping 30 feet into a haystack and had crashed; he had tested it himself at 20 feet without a haystack and had broken his leg when he hit the ground.

But he wouldn't listen to reason and he pressed on.

Reporters covering the event recorded that when he jumped from the Eiffel Tower, he fell for nearly five seconds, accelerating constantly, until he hit the ground at sixty miles an hour, dying instantly in the fall.

He became a dramatic example of so many tragedies today; but he also became an example of someone lacking

what we would call just plain-old common sense.



Has there ever been a time in your life where you rejected wise counsel? What was the result?

He didn't lack an education; he didn't lack a good job; he didn't lack courage or determination or persistence:

- he lacked the common sense to apply what he had learned in the past to what he planned to do in the future;
- he lacked the common sense to know when he ought to be listening instead of talking;
- he lacked that intangible, protective common sense, which we often say today is no longer common.

Uncommon common sense.

Solomon has essentially described on several occasions in his journal his observations of this kind of individual. In his Book of Proverbs, he further describes someone who is naive, stubborn, willfully ignorant.

In fact, Solomon will use terms like fool, foolish and folly more than 100 times in his wisdom literature.

In chapter 10 of Ecclesiastes, Solomon is going to use these terms nine different times.

Folly, or foolishness, literally describes someone we would refer to as someone who lacks common sense.

And Solomon opens chapter 10 with three illustrations, **notice verse 1:**

Dead flies make the perfumer's ointment give off a stench; so a little folly outweighs wisdom and honor.

Ecclesiastes 10:1

In the ancient world, perfume was a highly skilled science. In Daniel's generation in Babylon, the wise men, or Magi, were in charge of the best formulas. Royalty during the days of Esther had merchants scouring the known world for the latest fragrance — cologne, lotions and perfumes.

But of course, the most expensive bottle of perfume could instantly become worthless — and it evidently happened enough times for Solomon to have seen this happen — some flies or insects got into the formula and fouled the bottle of perfume.

Think about our own world. If you went through that drive thru at Starbucks across the street, to get that incredibly overpriced cup of coffee, and you opened the lid to stir the caramel drizzle into your white chocolate mocha, and you noticed, floating on top was a dead fly. You

wouldn't back up to that window and ask the employee, "Hey would you mind grabbing a spoon and just scooping out this fly so I can drink my coffee?"

No, that fly ruined the entire thing. That little fly contaminated everything.

Solomon is making a connection that we don't necessarily want to make, but common sense tells us it's true.

Just as some dead flies can ruin expensive perfume, so just a little folly can cast a shadow over a life otherwise characterized by a good reputation.

In principle form, we could summarize this illustration this way:

Small sins will eventually dirty a good reputation

Just a little folly; just a little lie; just a little padding on the expense account; just a little exaggeration on the resume. We've seen it happen among church leaders and world leaders.

Suddenly, that folly is brought to light and it robs the reputation of the aroma of integrity and dignity and honesty.

Worldly sense would say, "Oh, lighten up! Get as close to the line as you can without getting caught."

Common sense whispers "Stay as far away from the line as you possibly can."

I have visited people in prison and receive letters from inmates who tell their story of how it all began with just one little step of folly.

In 1859, Charles Spurgeon, the famous London pastor, preached a sermon entitled "Little Sins" and he said: "The [wisest among us] have always been afraid of little sins; we recognize that Hell is slumbering in the smallest sins . . . there is a world of iniquity hidden in a single act, or thought, or imagination of sin and we should avoid it with horror. Little sins lead to great ones – so stand [far away]!"

Little sins will eventually dirty or even destroy a good reputation.

Solomon provides another illustration of folly, he writes in **verse 2:**

*A wise man's heart inclines
him to the right, but a fool's
heart to the left.*

Ecclesiastes 10:2

In principle form we could summarize this by saying:

Heartfelt perspectives will eventually dominate a person's direction

When Solomon writes that wise people move to the right and fools move to the left, he is not making a political statement.

Neither is Solomon trying to offend people who are left-handed.

There is categorical truth revealed here.

He's referring to generations of custom, as well as God's own vocabulary about the right hand:

- The right hand was the hand of blessing — from the days of the Patriarchs (**Genesis 48**);
- it was associated with divine protection — God holds us by our right hand (**Psalms 17:7**);
- it refers to God's authority which is why Jesus sits at the right hand of the Father (**Colossians 3:1**);
- To this day we raise our right hand in making an oath in court to promise to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth;
- And to this day we shake the right hand of someone when we're establishing a word-of-mouth promise or agreement — we shake on it.
- And to this day we give greetings to one another by shaking the right hand.

Solomon is simply saying here that the master control room which determines and dominates our direction, moving us to the left or to the right, is the heart.

Those hidden perspectives you have about God and life and truth and right and wrong resides in your heart and your hearts, he writes, incline us, lean us, dominate our decisions which move us to the right or to the left.

Everything in life ultimately follows the heart.

And what Solomon writes here is the truth that if your hidden heart, so to speak, is

leaning to the right, it will incline you toward God; if it's leaning to the left it will incline you away from God.

If you're leaning to the right, you are essentially moving toward the authority of God's throne and His word; and leaning to the left will lead you away from the authority of God's word and His glory.

Listen, I think it is indeed ironic that 3,000 years after Solomon wrote this here in his journal, our world is still borrowing God's vocabulary here which Solomon wrote down as inspired scripture regarding the right and the left.

Someone will refer to a conservative Christian today as one of those right-wing evangelicals; and they will refer to those who deny the values of Scripture as those on the left.

You might not like Solomon's description here in **verse 2**:

"A wise man's heart inclines him to the right, but a fool's heart to the left," but he's clearly announcing that if you're leaning toward the right, you're wise, and if you're leaning to the left, you're a fool.

I'm just repeating what the Bible says — so take up your argument with the word of God. But listen, God isn't just trying to make you argue — God wants us to evaluate our hearts.

And the question we need to ask ourselves is, "Which way is my heart taking me, which way am I leaning?"

Common sense would say you need to lean toward God and His word and His

glory. But folly will say, “No, don’t box yourself in; don’t ruin the party; and don’t worry about God — He probably doesn’t even exist.”

Oh no, that God-created little intangible element inside us called common sense tells us that:

Small sins will eventually dirty a good reputation

Heartfelt perspectives will eventually dominate a person’s direction

Now here’s a third illustration – **verse 3:**

*Even when the fool walks
on the road, he lacks sense,
and he says to everyone
that he is a fool.*

Ecclesiastes 10:3

Solomon is effectively telling us here that a foolish person lacks common sense. Even if he never says a word, he’s just walking down the road of life, but the way he conducts himself says that his foolishness is more than he is even aware.

We could put this text into principle form and say it this way:

Fools will eventually be distinguished by their actions

They can’t hide it. It will leak out.

One author comments that this person is unaware how transparent his foolishness is — he more than likely thinks he’s wise, even though he’s a fool.

Remember, in Scripture, a fool is not a derogatory term, it’s a descriptive term for the one who denies the Creator God.

This is described more fully in **Romans chapter 1**, where those who deny that God created the heavens and the earth — instead of thanking God, they refuse to acknowledge Him — wander around with their speculations about origins along with their wandering moral standards, which digress throughout chapter 1, and God makes this announcement:

*For although they knew
[about] God, they did not
honor Him as God or give
thanks to Him, but they
became futile in their
thinking, and their foolish
hearts were darkened.
Claiming to be wise, they
became fools.*

Romans 1:21-22a

Some of the brightest, most talented, most popular, most educated people on the planet lived out the truth of this warning — they wandered from speculation to speculation.

I came across one study where the writings of famous people over the past 200 years were analyzed in an exhaustive study to determine what these people believed to be the meaning of life. And none of them really came up with much of an answer.

- 17% of them believed that life was simply to be enjoyed because once it was lived it was over.

- 11% percent said life had no meaning at all — this from Clarence Darrow, who wrote that life is like a ship, “tossed by every wave and by every wind; a ship headed to no port and no harbor, with no rudder, no compass, no pilot, simply floating for a time and then lost in the waves.”
- 5% believed we created our own meaning for life — such as Carl Sagan who wrote, “We live in a vast and awesome universe . . . where humanity clings to an obscure clod of rock. The significance of our lives . . . derives from our own wisdom.”

“The significance of our lives comes from our own wisdom.” Well, how is that wisdom working out? That’s like jumping off the Eiffel Tower with a parachute that has failed over and over again, but still trying it one more time.

The wisdom of this world has consistently failed to answer the most important questions of human existence:

- Where did we come from?
- What’s the meaning of life?
- Is there a God out there in the universe?
- Is there anything beyond this life?
- And what do I do with this guilt that I feel inside?

Maybe we just need to try harder and look out into the universe a little farther —

let’s keep searching the universe for answers.

Just a few years ago, researchers at the University of California at Berkeley announced they would be part of a \$100 million-dollar project for space travel to see if there’s intelligent life in the universe. Maybe they have some answers. The plan is to send tiny nano crafts, traveling at one-fifth the speed of light, to Alpha Centauri.

Stephen Hawking, still alive at the time, expressed the purpose of this project by stating, “It is important to know if we are alone in the dark.”

- Never mind the word of God.
- Never mind the evidence of history.
- Never mind fulfilled prophecy.
- Never mind an empty tomb.

But we need to do something religious — common sense tells us we’re religious creatures.

So, religion steps in and only adds to the confusion:

- and more speculations that cannot cleanse the guilt of sin;
- that offers no confidence beyond the grave;
- that provides no Savior beyond ourselves;
- that simply tells us we’re okay but try to do better.

And so, mankind:

- troubled by the dead flies of sin in his character;
- troubled by a sinful heart that dominates his direction;
- troubled by the foolishness he senses in the world around him;
- clings to a false religion that removes the sufficient atonement of Christ for our sin and for our redemption.

Yes, it makes common sense to the honest person that they need a God, but not the God of the Bible. But they use the Bible just enough to sound religious.

There's a church in northern California I read about recently. It has portraits of famous people hanging in its beautiful lobby. There is a portrait of Socrates and another of Eleanor Roosevelt. There is a portrait of Abraham Lincoln and Gandhi and even one of Jesus — as the painter imagined Him. Above the assembled portraits is a statement from the Bible, written in beautiful gold letters and it reads, **“You are all children of God”**.

I can imagine people passing in and out of that lobby struck by the message that everyone is a child of God. How tragic:

- It's one thing to have a heart that leads you in making a wrong decision;
- it's one thing to have a reputation sullied by some exposed sin;

- it's one thing to think you're really intelligent when people around you can see that you're not really all that together — all those things can really **mess up your life now**;
- but it's another thing — on an entirely different level — to believe the wrong message and be misled not only in this life, but for your eternal life to come.

For you see, that church lobby only put up the first part of a verse, found in **Galatians chapter 3**.

They left out the last part of the verse. The entire verse says, **“For you are all children of God through faith in Jesus Christ”**.



When you need wisdom, a light to make your path straight, who do you turn to?
Who should you turn to?

Listen to Jesus Christ who says, stop wandering around in the darkness of your own speculations — he says in **John 8:12**: **“I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.”**

Light and wisdom for life today, so;

- Which way are you leaning?
- Who are you following?

- What direction are you taking?

Not just for this life, but as you journey through life toward that eternal life to come.

© Copyright 2020 Stephen Davey
All rights reserved.

Access the complete archive of Stephen Davey's teaching ministry at
wisdomonline.org or on the **Wisdom for the Heart app**.