



# HICKORY GROVE

BAPTIST CHURCH

A Serious-Minded Christian

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Ecclesiastes 10:1-3

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*Dead flies make the perfumer's ointment give off a stench;*

*so a little folly outweighs wisdom and honor.*

<sup>2</sup>*A wise man's heart inclines him to the right,*

*but a fool's heart to the left.*

*(Pastor prays)*

When the Apostle Paul wrote to the wayward church in Corinth, he cleared the air when he said, *but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles,*<sup>24</sup> *but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.* Christ, the power of God and the wisdom of God.

Has there ever been a more crucial time for us needing the power of God and the wisdom of God, both of which are found in Christ? Whether you are a student in the throes of adolescence or an adult wishing for younger days, the wisdom of God waits to be engaged. She is not elusive or coy. Wisdom does not play hide and seek or only appear to a few experienced people. Proverbs 1:20 says, *Wisdom cries aloud in the street, in the markets she raises her voice;* and here's what she says: the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge. Wisdom doesn't come with degrees and diplomas; wisdom is not a product of where you've been or how you've lived. Wisdom is a product of who you know! And in this passage the preacher is exposing our need for Christ. It's as if he is aware of the flimsy, doctrineless Christianity that people love so much because it demands so little. And in these three little verses, Solomon clears up the cloudy water of vague religion. And he invites us to take the God of the Bible seriously.

We live in troubled times of shifting morality and godless worldviews. And this point in history calls for God's people to strengthen what remains so that the faith once and for all delivered to the saints remains intact.

What I want to do today is to take this passage and show you how we need to get serious about what it actually means to be a Christian because the cultural heat is being turned up even as we speak. And we need to be able to withstand it for the glory of God and the flourishing of the Gospel.

### **This World Needs Serious-Minded Christians**

There are three problems that I see.

#### **We don't take sin seriously enough**

Let me show you what I mean. You'll find it in verse 1. Watch what the preacher does. He splits verse 1. He gives an illustration, then makes a point. Let's read it and then talk about it. *Dead flies make the perfumer's ointment give off a stench; so a little folly outweighs wisdom and honor.*

Do you see the picture the preacher is painting? It's of the apothecary, druggist, pharmacist – a well-trained expert. This one is a perfume maker, performing his aromatic alchemy. He carefully brings forth the finest ingredients and painstakingly and masterfully mixes those ingredients into a beautiful and fragile fragrance. This is not heavy like menthol or diffused like essential oils. It's not strong like Polo cologne or Christmas tree air freshener. No, the perfumer is exact and careful, patiently mixing all of the ingredients together, obsessively protecting his concoctions from any impurities. And as he is so carefully watching his labor of love, he notices tiny spots of rottenness. He gets closer to see what it is and he catches the foul odor which is the very opposite of what he was making. And as his eyes regain their focus, he sees a few rotting flies in his masterpiece. And those few rotten flies have ruined the entire project. Now the preacher takes a step back and gives us the lesson. *Dead flies make the perfumer's ointment give off a stench; so a little folly outweighs wisdom and honor.*

So a little folly, sin, outweighs a lifetime of wisdom and honor. There is a principle in here that reminds us that evil has an advantage. It takes far less to ruin something than to create it. It's

much easier to take life than to create it. It's much easier to make something foul than to make something beautiful. It's much easier to ruin a reputation than to build one. This passage is making a point. This is not the obvious sinner that just lives in rebellion to God. No, this is something far more tragic. This is not Esau and his lifetime of rebellion or Sampson and his muscular buffooning, or even Jephthah and his wayward tendencies. This is the picture of a careful life of honor and wisdom and obedience being tarnished in an unguarded moment. This is Moses striking the rock and missing the Promised Land. This is Aaron fashioning the golden calf. This is David looking down from the rooftop at Bathsheba. This is Peter with his thrice denial. This is the fragrant aroma of an otherwise godly life being befouled by a sudden lapse or a foolish impulse. This is the *little* sin, the *little* lie, the *little* heresy, the *little* pornography. This is a *little* anger problem. This is the *little* character flaw. This is what Thomas Watson meant when he said, "What fools are those that drink a drop of pleasure and receive a sea of wrath." And what the preacher is saying here is that it's the little foxes that ruined the vineyard. It's the hairline fracture that breaks the bones. It's the microbe that creates the fever. It's a few grains of sand in the gearbox that bring the vehicle to a halt. I think his point here is that we need to take those *little* sins that we all have and we all excuse and I think he's calling us to take them more seriously. To take real action.

This should drive us to be careful how we live and with our words. This should drive us to repentance, humility, accountability, discipline and thought life. This should drive us to gratitude for grace, prayer for help, a mindfulness of the Gospel. Preach it to yourself. This world needs serious-minded Christians, and we don't take sin seriously enough.

### **We don't take discipleship seriously enough**

At first glance, verse 2 seems pretty straightforward. Now be careful. I can imagine someone putting this on a bumper sticker and making it political. Let's read verse 2. <sup>2</sup>*A wise man's heart inclines him to the right, but a fool's heart to the left.* Right and left, wisdom and folly. Let's define terms and then make some application. With apologies to all of you who are left-handed, in the Bible, to be on the right equals honor and blessing. Jesus sits at the right hand of God. When Jesus talked about the sheep and goats, the sheep are on the right and the goats are on the left. I realized Ehud was left-handed. Judges 20 says the stone slingers in Gibeah

were left-handed. But generally speaking, the right equaled wisdom and the left equaled sin and folly.

The Latin word for left-handed is sinister. And in verse 2, the preacher sets up two paths that your heart will be inclined toward. It's a balanced aphorism. It is contrasting the wise man and his path with the foolish man and his path. All through the Bible we are presented with two roads, two paths. Isn't that what Jesus says in Matthew 7:13? *"Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many."*

The wide path is easy and smooth and lots of people are on it. It's the narrow path that is difficult. And I think the confusion we see so often is those who claim to be changed in heart and yet live on the wide path. That's where I think genuine discipleship comes into play, because I don't think most self-professed believers are actually and actively growing as disciples. And that needs to change. When I say discipleship, I mean a specific kind of learning about Christ and how to actually live as a follower of Christ in this present world. I think it will include a clear and robust doctrine. It is what you are believing and what you reject! I believe it is genuine Bible saturation. It's the stories, principles, Gospel, psalms, themes and directives. It's strength and hope and moral courage. It would also include a deepening prayer life. It is God as the subject of our prayer, the length of our prayer, and the joy in our prayer. It's not always asking. This life would also be a strong community, vibrant worship and precise moral judgment. This world needs serious-minded Christians. We don't take sin seriously enough and we don't take discipleship seriously enough.

### **We don't take being different seriously enough**

Verse 3 is like the preacher is looking out the window and he sees a fool walking down the road. Let's read it. <sup>3</sup> *Even when the fool walks on the road, he lacks sense, and he says to everyone that he is a fool.* Everyone can tell by just observing, by just watching him, by just looking at his everyday life, that he is a fool. I went back and looked and the preacher says a lot about the fool in Ecclesiastes. In Chapter 2 he says a fool is morally blind and in Chapter 4 he calls a fool "lazy." In Chapter 5 a fool talks too much and God takes no pleasure in him. In Chapter 7 a fool is rowdy and shallow and constantly irritated. In Chapter 9 the preacher says a fool won't listen to anyone. And the idea seems to be in verse 3 that the foolish person is obvious to everyone.

How you live genuinely reflects who you know. I started this message with a quote from the Apostle Paul: "We preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to the Jews and folly to the Gentiles. But to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God." I want you to have the power of God and the wisdom of God found in Jesus.

What is the Gospel we preach? That Jesus lived a perfect life. He died on the cross in place of sinners paying for all the sins of every sinner who will ever be saved. God raised Him from the dead and now He calls on every man and woman everywhere to repent and believe in Jesus.

Bow your heads, and as we close we will pray. I want to ask you a couple of questions. Is there a small sin in your life that you have not been serious enough about? Have you been lazy about discipleship and your own walk with the Lord? Do you struggle about the societies you live in? Have you been serious about being different?

Father, make us serious-minded believers who love Christ above all. In Jesus' name we pray.  
Amen.