

# THE BABBLING TALK OF THE FOOLISH

**Ecclesiastes 10:11-20**  
**ADEOYE, EMMANUEL**  
**(EVANGELIST)**

Snake charmers were common as entertainers in that day (v. 11, and see [Ps 58:4-5](#) and [Jer 8:17](#)). Snakes have no external ears; they pick up sound waves primarily through the bone structure of the head. More than the music played by the charmer, it is the man's disciplined actions (swaying and "staring") that hold the snake's attention and keep the serpent under control. It is indeed an art.

Solomon described a performer who was bitten by the snake before the man had opportunity to "charm" it.

Besides risking his life, the charmer could not collect any money from the spectators (see v. 11, NIV). They would only laugh at him. He was a fool because he rushed and acted as though the snake was charmed. He wanted to collect his money in a hurry and move to another location. The more "shows" he put on, the bigger his income. Instead, he made no money at all. Some charmers had a mongoose available that "caught" the snake just at the right time and "saved" the man from being bitten.

If for some reason the mongoose missed his cue, the serpent might attack the charmer, and that would be the end of the show. Either way, the man was foolish. The common denominator among these "*foolish workers*" seems to be presumption. They were overconfident and ended up either hurting themselves or making their jobs harder.

## **FOOLISH TALKERS (ECCL 10:12-15)**

In the book of Proverbs, Solomon had much to say about the speech of fools. **HE POINTED OUT FOUR CHARACTERISTICS OF THEIR WORDS.**

### **FIRST,**

They are **DESTRUCTIVE** words (v. 12). The wise person will speak gracious words that are suited to the listeners and the occasion (Prov 10:32; 25:11). Whether in personal conversation or public ministry, our Lord always knew the right thing to say at the right time (Isa 50:4). We should try to emulate Him. But the fool blurts out whatever is on his mind and doesn't stop to consider who might be hurt by it. In the end, it is the fool himself who is hurt the most: "*a fool is consumed by his own lips*" (Eccl 10:12, NIV).

In Scripture, destructive words are compared to weapons of war (**Prov 25:18**), a fire (**James 3:5-6**), and a poisonous beast (**James 3:7-8**).

We may try to hurt others with our lies, slander, and angry words, but we are really hurting ourselves the most. "He who guards his mouth preserves his life, but he who opens wide his lips shall have destruction" (**Prov 13:3, NKJV**). "Whoever guards his mouth and tongue keeps his soul from troubles" (**Prov 21:23, NKJV**).

## SECOND

They are **UNREASONABLE** words (**v. 13**). What he says doesn't make sense. And the longer he talks, the crazier it becomes. "The beginning of his talking is folly, and the end of it is wicked madness" (NASB). He would be better off to keep quiet, because all that he says only lets everybody know that he is a fool (5:3). Paul called these people "unruly and vain talkers" (Titus 1:10), which J.B. Phillips translates "who will not recognize authority, who talk nonsense".

Occasionally in my travels, I meet people who will talk about anything anybody brings up, as though they were the greatest living experts on that subject.

When the Bible or religion comes into the conversation, I quietly wait for them to hang themselves, and they rarely disappoint me. The Jewish writer Shalom Aleichem said, "You can tell when a fool speaks: he grinds much and produces little."

## THIRD

They are **UNCONTROLLED** words (**v. 14a**). The fool is "full of words" without realizing that he is saying nothing. "In the multitude of words, sin is not lacking, but he who restrains his lips is wise" (**Prov 10:19, NKJV**). The person who can control his or her tongue is able to discipline the entire body (**James 3:1-2**). Jesus said, "But let your 'Yes' be 'Yes' and your 'No' be 'No.' For whatever is more than this is from the evil one" (**Matt 5:37, NKJV**).

## FINALLY

They are **BOASTFUL** words (**14b-15**). Foolish people talk about the future as though they either know all about it or are in control of what will happen. "Do not boast about tomorrow, for you do not know what a day may bring forth" (**Prov 27:1, NKJV**). Several times before, Solomon has emphasized man's ignorance of the future (**3:22; 6:12; 8:7; 9:12**), a truth that wise people receive but fools reject. (**James 4:13-17.**)

There is a bit of humor here. The fool boasts about his future plans and wearies people with his talk, but he can't even find the way to the city. In Bible times, the roads to the cities were well-marked so that any traveler could find his way, but the fool is so busy talking about the future that he loses his way in the present. "He can't find his way to the city" was probably an ancient proverb about stupidity, not unlike our "He's so dumb, he couldn't learn the route to run an elevator."

## **FOOLISH OFFICERS (ECCL 10:16-20)**

Solomon has already described foolish rulers. Now he exposes the folly of the officers who work under those rulers, the bureaucrats who were a part of the machinery of the kingdom.

### **HE GAVE FOUR CHARACTERISTICS OF THESE FOOLISH MEN.**

#### **INDULGENCE (VV. 16-17).**

If the king is immature, the people he gathers around him will reflect that immaturity and take advantage of it. But if he is a true noble-man, he will surround himself with noble officers who will put the good of the country first.

Real leaders use their authority to build the nation, while mere officeholders use the nation to build their authority. They use public funds for their own selfish purposes, throwing parties and having a good time.

It is a judgment of God when a people are given immature leaders (*Isa 3:1-5*). This can happen to a nation or to a local church. The term "elder" (*Titus 1:5ff*) implies maturity and experience in the Christian life, and it is wrong for a believer to be thrust into leadership too soon (*1 Tim 3:6*). Age is no guarantee of maturity (*1 Cor 3:1-4; Heb 5:11-14*), and youth sometimes outstrips its elders in spiritual zeal.

Oswald Chambers said, "Spiritual maturity is not reached by the passing of the years, but by obedience to the will of God." The important thing is maturity, not just age., "Woe to you, O land whose king was a servant." The suggestion is that this servant became king with the help of his friends (cf. 4:13-14).

Now he was obligated to give them all jobs so he could remain on the throne. In spite of their selfish and expensive indulgence, these hirelings could not be dismissed, because the king's security depended on them. To the victor belong the spoils!

#### **INCOMPETENCE (V. 18).**

These foolish officers are so busy with enjoyment that they have no time for employment, and both the buildings and the organization start to fall apart. "He also who is slothful in his work is brother to him that is a great waster". There is a difference between those who *use* an office and those who merely *hold* an office. Immature people enjoy the privileges and ignore the responsibilities, while mature people see the responsibilities as privileges and use them to help Others.

Woodrow Wilson wrote, "A friend of mine says that every man who takes office in Washington either grows or swells; when I give a man an office, I watch him carefully to see whether he is swelling or growing.

#### ■ **"INDIFFERENCE (v. 19).**

This verse declares the personal philosophy of the foolish officers: Eat all you can, enjoy all you can, and get all you can. They are totally indifferent to the responsibilities of their office or the needs of the people.

In recent years, various developing nations have seen how easy it is for unscrupulous leaders to steal government funds in order to build their own kingdoms. Unfortunately, it has also happened recently to some religious organizations. "For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil" (**1 Tim 6:10**, NKJV).

The prophet Amos cried out against the wicked rulers of his day who trampled on the heads of the poor and treated them like the dust of the earth (**Amos 2:7**, and see **4:1; 5:11-12**). The courts might not catch up with all the unscrupulous politicians, but God will eventually judge them, and His judgment will be just.

### **INDISCRETION (V. 20).**

The familiar saying "A little bird told me" probably originated from this verse. You can imagine a group of these officers having a party in one of their private rooms and, instead of toasting the king, they are cursing ["making light of"] him.

Of course, they wouldn't do this if any of the king's friends were present, but they were sure that the company would faithfully keep the secret. Alas, somebody told the king what was said, and this gave him reason to punish them or dismiss them from their offices.

Even if we can't respect the person in the office, we must respect the office (**Rom 13:1-7; 1 Peter 2:13-17**). "You shall not revile God, nor curse a ruler of your people" (**Ex 22:28**). These hirelings were certainly indiscreet when they cursed the king, for they should have known that one of their number would use this event either to intimidate his friends or to ingratiate himself with the ruler. This completes Solomon's review of his fourth argument that life is not worth living, "the certainty of death" (2:12-23).

He has concluded that life is indeed worth living, even though death is unavoidable (9:1-10) and life is unpredictable (9:11-18). What we must do is avoid folly and live by the wisdom of God. This also concludes the second part of his discourse.

He has reviewed the four arguments presented in chapters 1 and 2, and has decided that life was really worth living after all. The best thing we can do is to trust God, do our work, accept what God sends us, and enjoy each day of our lives to the glory of God (**3:12-15,22; 5:18-20; 8:15; 9:7-10**).

### **CONCLUSION**

All that remains for the Preacher is to conclude his discourse with a practical application, and this he does in chapters 11 and 12. He will bring together all the various strands of truth that he has woven into his sermon, and he will show us what God expects us to do if we are to be satisfied.