

THE AUSTRALIAN ANABAPTIST

God's solid foundation stands firm. 2 Timothy 2-19

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Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel,
but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in
the house.

Matthew 5:15

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For A Conservative Anabaptist Perspective

From The Editor's Desk

Spiritual Light and Treasure.

From the very beginning God commanded that there be light in the world, Genesis 1:3, it was obviously very important to God as it was one of the first things created. David in Psalm 27 calls the Lord the light of his salvation, in Psalm 119:105 he calls God's word a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path, Isaiah also calls on the house of Jacob to walk in the light of the Lord. In Isaiah chapter 2 and chapters 9 and 10 we have the prophecy of Christ's coming in these words: "The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light: they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined." Isaiah 9:2 and quoted in Matthew 4:16.

Light, true light is indeed a treasure without which we would remain in darkness and never be able to see our destination or the way to it, We sing the song You are the light of the world, referring to Jesus, we are also told to lay up treasures in heaven versus treasures upon earth! How could we do that if we do not have light? How does this relate to the magnificent Christmas story of the Light coming to a people living in an exceedingly dark era? God "commanded the light Jesus to shine out of darkness" we see that Jesus in John 1:4 as the one who "In him was life; and the life was the light of men"

May the "Light of the world" give us the vision to understand what He really desires in and for us and the courage to repent where God requires. Then the mirror of our heart will be able to reflect God's glory in all brilliancy. To this end were we created.

In the final stage of Jesus' supreme sacrifice, when the sun normally should have been shining its brightest, "there was darkness over the whole land" (Mark. 15:33) for three hours. God withdrew the earth's light as Jesus suffered the darkness of sin for us.

Now Jesus proclaims, "I am the light of the world: he that follows me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life" John 8:12. This is spiritual light!

May the Lord be our light and our salvation, a lamp unto our feet and the everlasting illumination to our path as we follow Him who was sent into the world to be a light unto all mankind.

J.v.L.



From the Pulpit

*Number 10 of 12 expository messages from:
The Book of Ecclesiastes by
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The Realities of Wisdom and Folly

Editor's Note: Number 9 in this series of 12 messages was previously published in the December 2017 issue of the Australian Anabaptist and is thus not replubished.

As we have walked through this book over the past year we have seen a vast spread of what might be called vanity, folly under the sun, that which the writer says is useless, hopeless, we've also seen some little insights and little windows into life that are worthwhile, that which is not vanity but rather that which is true wisdom and here in the last part of the book the preacher is beginning to direct his arguments in the direction that he intended to go all along, I hope you will see that as we go through chapter 10 today.

I have used the metaphor of a ship that the preacher has sailed in many different directions to show us the meaninglessness of life and now today we are still a little bit out of sight of land we are beginning to tack in the direction towards meaning and truth and we will see this more clearly as we come to chapter 11 and chapter 12.

Just for some context here for chapter 10 let me remind you that there is a bit of a contrast here, you know in previous chapters it seems as if the preacher is saying don't plan ahead, don't worry about tomorrow just live it up today this is all you've got. And now in chapter 10 we are going to find a different message a message that says no, plan ahead, be wise and careful understand the risk and deal with it accordingly.

And you might say well why is he contradicting himself? Well to understand that you need to understand something else in the context and I've reminded you of this time and time again, earlier especially the preacher is talking about life under the sun, the perspective that we have only in the here and now, only the temporal perspective and what he says about this as

all we've got is true, if that is the only perspective we have, but it is not the only perspective we have and it is not the only perspective that the preacher is going to try to unveil for us.

If we look to just this life, if we do not have a perspective beyond this life, we will be pushed to act foolishly, if we understand that there is a perspective beyond this life it should push us to act wisely and so in the previous chapter 9 the preacher deals with this issue of wisdom and foolishness and he contrasts wisdom and foolishness, he does this again here in chapter 10 and basically what his message is is that even in the life under the sun wisdom is still better than foolishness, although not ultimately better, but it does work better if you are wise in the things of this world in this life even in temporal things wisdom is still better than foolishness.

Now this theme of wisdom and foolishness runs throughout the Wisdom literature that we find in Scripture, it is a central theme here in Ecclesiastes. There are a lot of ways we can categorise people, there are a lot of ways we can talk about people, we talk about rich people and poor people, we talk about black people and white people, young people and old people, tall people and short people, we talk about Republicans and Democrats, we talk about liberal and conservative, we talk about educated and uneducated, employed and unemployed, there's all these categories that we have to talk about people, the category that Ecclesiastes talks about is wise people and foolish people.

Some of you say I don't like that, I don't like that I have to be in those two categories. Well you might be you might know which side you are on because that is what the Bible talks about – wise people and foolish people. And so we come to this knowing that we have to investigate our lives, are we wise or are we foolish? And why does it matter?

Now the good news is that if we are fools, and I would say to you right at the outset here that we are all foolish to some extent or another, if we are fools we don't have to stay fools because God in his infinite grace has enabled us to become wise, so it is not hopeless, okay, you can do and be something different than you are by the grace of God.

Maybe it would help if we go to define these terms here, this wisdom that we are talking about.

What is the wisdom that the Bible speaks off?

Well I would define it this way, wisdom is thinking what God thinks and doing what God says. Thinking what God thinks and doing what God says that to me would be a good definition of wisdom.

Wisdom is not necessarily being clever, wisdom is not necessarily being innovative or new, sometimes wisdom is old, sometimes wisdom is just simply plodding along.

So wisdom is thinking what God thinks and what God thinks is old, what God thinks is true and tried and sure.

And then doing what God says that is an important part of wisdom, who is God, what does He think and what does He say, what does He tell us to do?

You see we don't need to be brilliant, we don't need to be innovative, we don't have to have a bunch of new things but we do need to be humble and faithful and we need to be faithful in following what God says. That is how wisdom comes to us.

One other note about this context if you remember the sermon from Ecclesiastes chapter 9 what we are dealing with here is the political realm and we are going to mention this a couple of times as we go through chapter 10, but let it be known that this passage can be applied much more broadly than just what happens in the political world, this passage can and should be applied to what happens to our world.

Now in our world today, and it has always been this way, we see that fools are often in charge, fools are often in charge, and we see people that yell the loudest have the most influence but we see that doesn't necessarily mean they are wise, in fact wisdom is often misunderstood and sometimes ignored as we saw in chapter 9, and I would suggest to you this, this misunderstanding and ignorance of wisdom, is an occupational hazard of living wisely, the reality is though that foolishness also has its hazards, foolishness is also dangerous and we will see that in this passage is well.

Why don't we start reading at verse 17 of chapter 9 just to get a bit of the context here. Remember the little city the great King came against it but a

wise man, a poor wise man, by his wisdom delivered the city and yet they forgot him.

The words of the wise, verse 17,

Ecclesiastes 9:17-18 ^(ESV) The words of the wise heard in quiet are better than the shouting of a ruler among fools. ¹⁸ Wisdom is better than weapons of war, but one sinner destroys much good.

Ecclesiastes 10:1-20 ^(ESV) Dead flies make the perfumer's ointment give off a stench; so a little folly outweighs wisdom and honor. ² A wise man's heart inclines him to the right, but a fool's heart to the left. ³ Even when the fool walks on the road, he lacks sense, and he says to everyone that he is a fool. ⁴ If the anger of the ruler rises against you, do not leave your place, for calmness will lay great offenses to rest. ⁵ There is an evil that I have seen under the sun, as it were an error proceeding from the ruler: ⁶ folly is set in many high places, and the rich sit in a low place. ⁷ I have seen slaves on horses, and princes walking on the ground like slaves. ⁸ He who digs a pit will fall into it, and a serpent will bite him who breaks through a wall. ⁹ He who quarries stones is hurt by them, and he who splits logs is endangered by them. ¹⁰ If the iron is blunt, and one does not sharpen the edge, he must use more strength, but wisdom helps one to succeed. ¹¹ If the serpent bites before it is charmed, there is no advantage to the charmer. ¹² The words of a wise man's mouth win him favor, but the lips of a fool consume him. ¹³ The beginning of the words of his mouth is foolishness, and the end of his talk is evil madness. ¹⁴ A fool multiplies words, though no man knows what is to be, and who can tell him what will be after him? ¹⁵ The toil of a fool wearies him, for he does not know the way to the city. ¹⁶ Woe to you, O land, when your king is a child, and your princes feast in the morning! ¹⁷ Happy are you, O land, when your king is the son of the nobility, and your princes feast at the proper time, for strength, and not for drunkenness! ¹⁸ Through sloth the roof sinks in, and through indolence the house leaks. ¹⁹ Bread is made for laughter, and wine gladdens life, and money answers everything. ²⁰ Even in your thoughts, do not curse the king, nor in your bedroom curse the rich, for a bird of the air will carry your voice, or some winged creature tell the matter.

Verse 1, how many dead flies can get into your drink before you throw it out?

So at my place of work I sometimes open a can of Mountain Dew or Dr Pepper, Pepsi or some sweet drink and I'll sit it on my desk, if it's summer time flies soon find it and every now and then one of them will crawl down into it and then I will come back to my desk a few minutes later and pick it up to take a swig and ugh, I throw the whole thing out.

One little fly, he is not very big but he ruins the whole thing.

The message for us here is it only takes a little bit of foolishness, just a little bit of foolishness to ruin something really good, a little bit of foolishness to create a big stench, a moment of careless foolishness can destroy and undermine a whole lifetime of wisdom and honour.

Let me give you another illustration.

One unbecoming picture on Facebook can ruin your otherwise good reputation. That's all it takes!

Little flies, dead flies, a little folly outweighs great wisdom and honour.

Now the reality of this wisdom and folly is that we do live out of the heart that is within us and so if you are wise it will show by your life and if you are foolish that will show even more quickly.

You see it takes a lot of hard work to develop a good reputation of wisdom and honour, that's hard work, it takes a long time but it only takes a little bit of foolishness to ruin it and the reality of our hearts is we all have this little bit of foolishness that still exists within us, we are not perfectly sanctified yet!

And what are we going to do with that?

We will get to that in the conclusion but first we have to recognise it as the reality that we live with, the realities of wisdom and foolishness and the reality that wisdom and foolishness flow out of our hearts. That's what it is saying here in verse 2 a wise man's heart inclines him to the right, so a wise man is going to do certain things because his heart is wise, a foolish person is going to do certain things because his heart is foolish and so the cure or the fix for this problem is not just to get the flies out of the ointment, that's a temporary fix, the flies will be back tomorrow maybe even in the next few minutes.

The fix is to get rid of the flies, to have a change of heart.

You must actually be wise, it is not enough to just act wise, this wisdom must actually flow from a heart that is wise. Too many times we want a shortcut here, we see wisdom and honour as something to be valued, something to be sought after, we see those people who are wise and honourable and say I want to be like them and so I'm going to do what they do.

Okay that's fine to whatever extent it lasts but it is not going to take care of this problem, it is not going to get you where you need to go, you have to be wise, you have to be honourable in your heart.

As a matter of fact if your heart is not wise verse 3 tells us that it will show up in the most mundane and most public ways.

So let's fast forward to Ecclesiastes 2013, what should verse 3 say in 2013?

Even when the fool drives down the road he lacks sense and he proclaims, demonstrates, to everyone that he is a fool. Everyone know what I'm talking about here? All right I have a couple of illustrations just to kind of puts in pictures in your mind.

I happen to be in the car business don't hold it against me but I have seen cars with fools in them, cars that might be worth 500 to 1000 dollars on a good day yet some fool has put \$2000 worth of 26 inch chrome wheels under this car and he is driving down the road in this thing and he is saying to the world, look at me I'm a fool!

Or maybe, maybe he puts the 26 inch chrome wheels on his big jacked up pickup truck and then he does like I saw one day when I was driving in a snowstorm, a big jacked up pickup truck big wide wheels, the snow was dumping down 6 inches on the road, I'm in the right lane trying not to get off into the ditch and here comes this big pickup truck, pulling a trailer mind you, and he's blowing by me at 70 mph, I'm doing good to keep up to 40, and I say to myself there goes a fool, there he goes!

Sure enough 3 miles later I see headlights pointing back at me and there he is all jack-knifed in the median with all his four-wheels on his trailer scattered across the grass and this truck all bent up.

See, you can tell it when they go down the road they lack sense, they proclaim to the world look how much of a fool I am!

Or maybe it is somebody who cuts to close in front of you and then you become the fool and you shake your fist at them and you yell and you roll

down the window and make obscene gestures, hopefully not, what are you saying? All that will do it will demonstrate your foolishness.

In contrast a wise person, a wise person takes the longer view, a longer term view, a wise person endures the present injustice when cut off in traffic, a wise person endures that injustice, they realise they can't change it anyway, I mean what is yelling and screaming about it going to do?

The wise person endures this injustice because he knows that it will work better in the end, verse 4, even if the King or the boss gets upset remember, remember oftentimes foolish people are in charge, sometimes they tell you to do something that doesn't make any sense they get upset at the way you are doing something and the foolish thing to do is just to leave quickly abandoning your post and saying, hah, I'm not going to stay here!

No, that's the foolish way, the wise person says no, stay calm, keep to your post, do what you are tasked with doing. The irritation, the frustration, the injustice that will pass.

That's a wise person, a wise person stays calm, a wise person waits until the frustration blows over.

Now verses 5 to 7 reveal a reality that these wisdom and foolishness issues, this problem, is always a present reality but it is particularly noticeable in politics see what it says here, wisdom and foolishness are not always rewarded appropriately, sometimes foolish people are promoted especially if somebody foolish is in charge they tend to promote other foolish people and sometimes wise people are demoted.

That is the risk you take in being wise.

The wise person says that's okay, I can deal with that, can walk if I have to, I don't have to ride the horse because the wise person knows that wisdom takes a longer view not the short view. This is one of the risks we take in being wise, it is one of the occupational hazards of being wise but it is still better in the long run. Just because your wisdom is not recognised, just because you are not rewarded appropriately doesn't change the fact that you are still a wise person, it doesn't change the fact that you still must act in ways that are wise and honourable.

So we see that there are some risks even in being wise, yes we know that there are risks in being foolish we can all see that, but are you prepared to take the risk of being wise?

Verses 8 and 9 tell us that life has a lot of risks.

Every lot in life, every vocation, every work has its own risks we read that here. You need to understand this going in, you need to count the cost as the passage in Luke tells us, you need to understand that when you are engaged even in good things, even in good work, even in wise ways there is some risks, there is some potential problems.

Now this is illustrated to us in occupation. Hans here he cuts up meat, he is a butcher, there is a certain risk associated with that occupation, there are a lot of sharp knives, okay.

There are some other people here who are electricians there is a lot of risk associated with that occupation you can have a more shocking experience than you intended to have.

I work on cars put them up on the lift and crawl around underneath them, there are risks, they might fall on me.

Everything we do has risk, you dig a pit you might fall in it, you do some remodelling some tearing down walls, there might be something in that wall that you're not looking for it might come out and bite you, it's called snake. We'll talk about that in a little bit, there is a way to deal with that and it's called snake charming and we will find out about that in a few verses.

But you go quarry stone in the quarry, maybe some of you like to do some blasting and some excavating there is some risk, rock might fall on you.

You like to cut wood, I used to till I got hurt a few times, sometimes a tree will come and get you, okay, it's just the way it works, it's the risk you take.

Now the difference between the wise person and the foolish person is two-fold, one is that the wise person takes the risk, accepts the risk and deals with it. The foolish person says, oh there is a lion in the street I am not going to go out, so it says in Proverbs, there is scary stuff out there so I'm not going to do anything I'm going to stay home.

That's not wise that is foolishness.

But what does the wise person do with this risk, what does a wise person do?

Well the way to deal with risk is to plan ahead.

Look what it says here it talks about this, verse 10, if the axe is blunt and one that is not sharp on the edge he must use more strength. So if you didn't plan ahead and sharpen your axe or your chainsaw it's going to take a lot longer and it's going to be a lot harder work but if you plan ahead a little bit you can deal with some of this, you need to work smarter not just harder.

Sometimes the risk can be overcome, at least for a while, by simply overpowering it with brute force, you can just deal with it that way but in the end it says the one who succeeds is the one who is wise who planned ahead.

So what your plan, what is your plan?

Not just in your occupation it is good to have a risk management plan whatever business you're in, whatever job you have but I'm not talking about that right now, I'm switching gears a little bit I am talking about your spiritual life, your family life, your church life, what is your plan, do you even have a plan? Do you even know what you're supposed to be doing? That's the first step, but do you have a plan, do you have a budget?

You see wise people know that if I have a plan to do maintenance on my house then I'll build equity in that house it will continue to be worth more.

Wise people know that if I change the oil in my car regularly, that is more than once every presidential election, if I do that my car will last longer.

People that are wise say well if I want to be in good shape and healthy then I need to exercise I need to eat right.

People who are wise with their money say I need a budget I need to carefully plan for potential problems my budget needs to include unknown peril, danger, risk.

So what is your plan?

What is your plan for wisdom, what is your plan for spiritual life and growth, for family, for church?

We as pastors have been spending some time planning, it's a good thing to do but it is not enough.

Look at verse 11, planning by itself is not enough it is not enough merely to know what to do and to plan ahead you actually have to follow the plan, so you can know everything and you can have a good plan but if you don't follow the plan you're going to have a problem.

So in this instance you might know how to charm the snake, in verse 11, you might have a plan about when to charm the snake but if you fail to actually charm the snake he is going to bite you!

Now wise people know that life is dangerous, wise people know that life is full of risk but they don't just shrink back because of the risk, wise people know they need a plan but they need more than just a plan they need to work their plan, that's why it says here in verse 11 if the snake bites before it is charmed there is no profit for the charmer.

So you get the picture here, so here is this person he is laying there dying from snakebite just got bitten by the snake and you say, "What happened?"

And he says, "The snake bit me!"

And you say, "But you're a snake charmer!"

"I know."

"Why didn't you charm the snake?"

"Well because I'm an idiot, I am foolish. You see I went to snake charming school, that's a tongue twister if I ever saw one, I went to snake charming school I got a Ph.D. in snake charming, I wrote a book about how to charm snakes, oh and I forgot to charm the snake!"

But isn't that what we do? We know enough, many times we don't need more information, sometimes we don't even need a better plan most times what we just need to do is follow the plan and act on the information that we have.

So how many of you have a diet that you don't do?

How many of you have a budget that you don't follow?

How many of you have goals and ambitions that you don't pursue?

How many of us have a desire to know the Scriptures and don't even have a plan to pursue that and if we have a plan we keep hitting the snooze button every morning and miss it.

You see oftentimes the difference between wise people and foolish people is not what they want or how they plan to get it sometimes the difference simply is wise people actually do it and foolish people don't.

It is not enough to have a budget you have to actually follow it.

It is not enough to have a Bible reading plan you actually have to read it.

It is not enough to come up with a diet you actually have to obey it.

It is not enough to think that working hard and honestly and showing up on time is being a good employee it is no good if you don't actually do it.

I believe that is why the Bible says to him who knows to do good and does not do it, what is to him? It is sin.

Now most of us in this room we have received enough instruction, we know what we should be doing and oftentimes the failure comes in execution, we don't do it. So just like the snake charmer – life bites us.

Sometimes we get wounded, sometimes terrible things happen, now we can't control all of that but many times we can say I can tell you why I'm in debt because I didn't follow my budget, I didn't plan ahead.

I can tell you why my health is not so good because I don't watch what I eat and I don't exercise properly.

Or I can tell you why I don't have a lot of wisdom, I have a copy of the Bible but I haven't connected the dots yet, haven't read it, haven't meditated, haven't sought God's wisdom yet.

Wisdom. It is available to all of us.

As I said before we don't have to remain fools but some of us neglect wisdom. The Book of James says do not merely listen to the word of God and so deceive yourselves rather do what it says.

That's what he is talking about here. We live in a society where information is vast and increasing but what we are lacking is wisdom, we are not lacking facts, we are not lacking information we are lacking wisdom.

So avail yourself of the wisdom that God has provided you.

Now one of the ways that God has provided wisdom is through other people, in fact this is often one of the ways that we can deal with some of the risk in life, by listening to wise counsellors. Proverbs says in the multitude of counsellors there is much wisdom. But not just any counsellor is a good one, you can find somebody with a degree somewhere and they will tell you just about anything you want to hear, just about anything. So not all counsellors are good ones, how do we tell the difference?

How do we know who is wise counsellor? Well this passage gives us some clues here one of the ways you can tell a person is wise or foolish is by listening to them talk. A wise person it says his speech is gracious but the lips of a fool consume him.

Basically what this means is that a wise person's speech is that which benefits other people but a fool's speech is that which is all about himself.

So you hear somebody talking about himself a lot chances are pretty good you are dealing with a fool.

You hear somebody that is interested in other people and serving and benefiting chances are that is a wise person.

Wise people have gracious speech that benefits others, the fool on the other hand is selfish he looks out for his own self and he is consumed with himself, it isn't so smart to listen to a fool. It says here a fool speaks all kinds of stuff, the beginning of the words of his mouth is foolishness and the end of his talk is evil madness.

So you start down this road, you listen to a fool and it might seem innocent at first but the outcome of that if you follow his counsel is increasingly more and more crazy, more and more evil, more and more insane.

So the preacher is saying here if you want to be wise too pursue counselors that are wise. It says in Proverbs he who walks with the wise grows wise, a companion of fools suffers much harm.

So if you want to be wise in a particular area you go and find someone who is wise and listen to them, you need to be selective who you listen to, don't listen to fools.

Here is the problem though in verse 14, no one, not the wise person, not the foolish, no one really knows what is coming. The bottom line is we don't know, we know a little but we don't know enough to see all the problems that will come, it doesn't mean we shouldn't plan, it doesn't mean we shouldn't follow our plan what it does mean is that if somebody tells you that they have it all figured out, if somebody guarantees you that if you follow their plan you won't ever have any more trouble, if somebody tells you that if you just take their magic potion and all your health problems will be no more – if somebody is telling you that they are a fool because nobody knows what tomorrow will bring no one knows what will happen the day after tomorrow.

The wise person is not so arrogant, the wise person knows that we must trust God, we must be faithful in whatever God brings to us we must be flexible in our plan.

This is the definition of wisdom.

Now the irony is in verse 15, the fool who claims to have it all figured out oftentimes can't even find his own way home, can't even find his way to the city, the fool is busy running from one place to another but never getting anywhere, wearing himself out.

So it goes like this:

"Well where are you going?"

"To town."

"Where is town?"

"I have no idea."

"How long have you been going?"

"I don't know, I'm tired."

"Well I am sure you are. Are you sure you are going to town?"

"Well if I keep walking I will eventually get to town."

"No you won't, you might get somewhere but not necessarily town. You might miss town altogether."

But people live their lives this way; some of us live our lives this way.

Some people say I don't know where I'm going.

Well how are you going know if you get there?

How is it going? I'm tired, I'm worn out.

Yeah I would be too if I didn't know where I was going and didn't know when I was going to get there or even know where "there" was.

That is the mark of foolishness.

Verses 16 and 17 give a demonstration of wisdom and the key is in understanding the proper time and place for things and taking a long term perspective.

The illustration given here in these verses is about an immature ruler, a childlike ruler versus a more mature experienced ruler and the immature sees the present satisfaction of feasting and can't even wait till the work is done to get started so they can party all night and wake up in the morning and go after it again and they end up consuming all the resources that they have.

On the other hand a more mature ruler will see that the work is done first and then the feasting and partying for good reasons at a proper time.

How many of us have seen the results of doing good things at the wrong time, the wrong priorities perhaps? That is the difference between foolishness and wisdom.

There is a time and a place as has already been said in Ecclesiastes there is a time and a place for everything and if we get those things out of place and out of time we will be living with the results of foolishness.

Verses 18 and 19 show us that the immature, the foolish, end up living in a broken down house because they were so busy partying and sleeping off their hangover that they forgot that the roof was leaking, that the rafters were falling in, they didn't plan ahead, they didn't follow through so even the place they call home is damaged beyond repair.

Now the wise person on the other hand realises that as good as feasting and celebrating is, and it is good in its place, you must work to provide for that there must be money, money will buy you this stuff but you've got to work for it, you've got to plan ahead, so the wise person works hard and works smart and they plan ahead so they actually have something to celebrate with and the wise person's house stays in good repair because they take care of the little things and don't let it go.

You see preventative maintenance is a good thing and not just for houses and cars, wisdom is preventative maintenance, wisdom is like diet and exercise it keeps you from all kinds of problems, people who don't do their homework don't learn, people who don't pay attention, people who don't heed counsel they suffer.

Verse 20 in the end if we are wise we won't necessarily be the most wealthy, we won't be the most successful, we won't even be the one in charge many times, and that's okay, but the temptations exists to criticise those who are in charge or those who seem to have it better than we do. Don't do that, don't succumb to that temptation, not even in private, not even to think about it. You see word will get around, word will get around and it will come back to bite you.

Remember how many flies does it take to spoil the ointment? Not very many.

So rather be content with the place and the location and the calling that God has given you, work and plan wisely to make the best of this life and

the next and if someone else succeeds beyond you then bless them, don't curse them.

What foolish people tend to do is to blame rich people for their problems. Don't fall into that temptation.

Remember to trust God with the stuff and the King and the ruler.

So in conclusion what we can do from here? What if you realise that you are foolish?

You are starting to see the results of foolishness in your life how can you be wise, how are you going to deal with the risks of life?

The Bible tells us that wisdom comes from repentance, wisdom can only be received by those who fear the Lord, the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom and fools despise wisdom and knowledge and discipline.

The fear of God, that's where wisdom begins.

Furthermore wisdom comes through prayer to those who seek it, James 1:5, Does any of you lack wisdom? Let him ask of God who gives in abundance without finding fault.

You and I, all of us, we need wisdom, we need wisdom as individuals, we need wisdom as a congregation, we need wisdom as families, we must be praying, we must be asking God for wisdom.

Fear God, pray, ask for wisdom He will give it to you He gives it abundantly but He gives in certain ways, He might not give it in the way you want, He tells us He gives wisdom through the Holy Spirit who comes to us, the Spirit of wisdom, and He brings us wisdom through his word, 2nd Timothy 3, Paul tells us you have known from infancy the scriptures which have made you wise unto salvation. The Scripture is breathed out by God, it is profitable for teaching, correcting, rebuking, training in righteousness so that you can be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

I don't know about the rest of you but I sometimes don't like rebuke, I don't like correction, I don't like training and discipline but that is how wisdom comes, that is the only way wisdom comes.

Colossians 2 verse 3 tells us that in Jesus are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge of God. In Christ is where this wisdom is, in Christ is hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge of God.

Remember what is wisdom?

Thinking God's thoughts and doing what He says and the way we know that is through Jesus Christ as He is revealed through the Holy Scriptures.

So what you do with your foolishness?

Well you must repent, you must change your mind about this realising that your own way is not the right way, you must seek God through Christ as revealed in the Holy Scriptures. Seek the counsel of godly wise people, not foolish people, but wise people, take some risks plan accordingly, sharpen that axe, don't forget to follow through on the plan and if God rearranges your life don't get upset but rather be faithful, be faithful and flexible and seek God for the next plan, what does He want you to do now?

And finally don't forget to share your wisdom, other people can benefit from what you have learned, others who are seeking wisdom. This is a whole lot better than complaining about stuff you can't change anyway, be constructive and wise and it might not always go so well with you here in this life and you might have to take some risks and endure some injustice and you probably won't come out on top but that is not what matters in the end.

What God says matters whether or not you are wise, whether or not you think his thoughts or follow him.

Let's pray.

Father God we thank you for your word to us, we understand that it is that which makes us wise, that which teaches and corrects and rebukes and trains and I pray that you would help us to repent of our own foolishness seeking our own way before yours. May we ask you for wisdom and you have promised to give it to us liberally. Help us to take good risks and to make good plans and to follow through and may you guide us even in the unknowns of life so that we can respond in ways that are wise, in ways that call other people to you, point other people to you.

Guide us and protect us and watch over us and care for us in the risks of living wisely. We pray in Jesus name, Amen.



A DELIBERATE DECISION

Not all decisions are deliberate—many are made on the spur of the moment and are greatly influenced by superficial emotions. A deliberate decision is "characterized by, or resulting from careful and thorough consideration," and "by awareness of the consequences." It is this type of decision that is needed to faithfully follow the Lord Jesus in discipleship.

Whenever a man must make a choice that impacts his soul, whether he is a Christian dealing with matters of discipleship or a sinner under conviction to repent, the Holy Spirit is present. It is part of His work to make the individual aware that the matter at hand needs careful and thorough consideration. He is faithful to point out the self-cost so that one can make a full surrender. The Holy Ghost always leads one to a deliberate decision. Decisions, resolutions, commitments, or propositions that are less than deliberate will quickly change under the inevitable tests that come. For this reason, many commitments are short-lived, the Holy Spirit is grieved, and the individual is left disillusioned and perhaps with a pricking conscience because of his unfulfilled obedience.

It is this very thing of deliberate decision that Jesus addressed as Luke recorded, "And there went great multitudes with him: and he turned, and said unto them ... which of you, intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost, whether he have sufficient to finish it ... So likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14:25-33). Our Lord went on to say that unless our decision to follow Him is made with a complete surrender of self, it is of questionable worth (w. 34, 35).

We are nearing the ending of the old year and the beginning of a new year, which, seen in the light of God's grace and promises, holds great potential. However, on the other hand the Scriptures give us no indication that the flood of evil and darkness will abate. Rather, the witness of the Holy Ghost everywhere confirms the Word that evil will wax worse and worse. While Christians in many countries are not presently threatened with bodily persecution, the subtlety of being led astray by the desires of the flesh is a far greater danger. In this setting, a halfhearted decision to serve the Lord may well result in someone ending up on the broad road to ruin.

The church today must regain the vision of the persecuted church of the sixteenth century. Then, under the constant threat of the sword, baptism into the church was almost like signing one's own death warrant and forfeiting your property to be confiscated. In that setting, baptism certainly had no social advantages. It was an outward symbol of accepting the heavy cross of persecution—of being willing to suffer with Christ. We have in those courageous converts a good example of a deliberate decision for the truth. This connotation of baptism should be kept in mind as our young converts are received into church membership.

Moses is an example of a man who made a conscious and deliberate decision to be wholeheartedly on the side of the Lord. "By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; Esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompense of the reward" (Heb. 11:24-26).

Three points are outstanding in Moses' decision, and they are relevant for us today. We will take them in the sequence in which the sacred writer records them.

*First, Moses renounced the world—he refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter.

*Secondly, Moses made a decision that was completely contrary to fleshly thinking—he chose to suffer.

*Thirdly, as a result of Moses deliberate decision, he had a new vision, or a new sense of values—he esteemed the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt.

When Moses' decision was made, he no longer was a "citizen" of the kingdom of Egypt. He became an outcast to Egyptian society; he identified with the oppressed people of God. Even though he made mistakes in the course of his life, his decision to serve God with His people held firm from the time he left Pharaoh's palace until he died on Mount Pisgah. For us today, Egypt symbolizes the world and its power, and nothing short of refusing to be called a "child of the world" will do.

Some want to walk half in the world and half in the church, but that is not the type of decision Moses' faith moved him to make. Deliberate decisions to forsake the world with all its lusts will do for us today just what they did

for the heroes of faith: "For they that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country. And truly, if they had been mindful of that country from whence they came out, they might have had opportunity to have returned. But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city" (Hebrews 11:14-16).

Moses' decision to suffer, and a like decision today, defies the carnal mind. But it is just such a decision and set of the mind that is at the heart of discipleship. Jesus suffered, and Paul speaks with fervency of wanting to "know him ... and the fellowship of his sufferings" (Phil. 3:10). A deliberate decision to cast our lot with the suffering Savior opens a door to blessed fellowship and comfort unknown to the halfhearted. When Peter and the other apostles were beaten for the name of Christ, "they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name" (Acts 5:41).

Given the present atmosphere in society, we are much in need of the sense of values that Moses had as a result of his commitment. By faith he comprehended that the things of this earth life were only temporal. They are still, even now, perishing—passing away, and at the crash of eternity, they will be utterly worthless. In fact, on that great day, will not men see the terrible deception that materialism wrought, and even wish to disown those things for which they strove? By faith the Christian obtains hidden wisdom, which is real and enduring, and that wisdom teaches him that "the reproach of Christ [is] greater riches than the treasures" of this world.

In one sense, many may be as the prophet saw, "Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision: for the day of the Lord is near in the valley of decision" (Joel 3:14). Who will step forward and make the necessary deliberate decision to gain heaven?

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A SECURE TRUST

To speak of God's greatness in a thousand words is preposterous. To describe only His attribute of love, one poet said, would require an ocean of ink.

God is perfect (Deuteronomy 32:4; Psalm 18:30). Some man-made machines may approach perfection in some small aspect; not so with God. Through his Word, we understand that He is perfect in every way. "I know that, whatsoever God doeth, it shall be forever: nothing can be put to it, nor any thing taken from it: and God doeth it, that men should fear before him" (Ecclesiastes 3:14). He has neither flaw nor falseness. He lacks no understanding. Perfection implies having no limits in time, space, or existence. God is never late, never early, never impulsive, nor unprepared.

Could we perceive it in fullness, we would realize His unsurpassed beauty in appearance, sound, and qualities we perhaps have yet to comprehend. Jesus spoke of His glory and desired that we should experience it (John 17:26). We see some of that beauty displayed in the nature of our glorious universe, but only when we shed this imperfect body and know as we are known shall we fully understand what He meant.

He is perfect in moral rightness. The lines He has drawn between right and wrong are unarguably correct. Simple observation tells us that love vastly exceeds hate. Patience is much more successful than impatience. Forgiveness is light; offense is darkness. Obedience is peaceful; rebellion is tumultuous. Marital love and fidelity are rich and satisfying, while the opposite is endlessly empty. Many more examples could be given of the profound wisdom of God's truths.

Compared to God's perfection, our limitations are extreme. Need we speak of the limitations of our knowledge, wisdom, and memory? Our physical strength is overshadowed even by that of many animals. Man's physical life is, at most, but a hundred years or so. And while humanity instinctively knows what is morally right and wrong, they are shamefully prone to choose wrong.

Jesus said that in the last days, men's hearts would fail them for fear (Luke 21:26). They fear because their hope is based on their own resources. When Christians fear, it shows they are not secure in our almighty God.

Our weak faith fails to grasp the reality of His promises which repeatedly

affirm His watchfulness, benevolence, provision, and plan for us. We must give room for our human emotions in the face of disappointing or threatening circumstances, yet it is always the saints' privilege to rest securely on the everlasting arms (Deuteronomy 33:27).

We see and hear of weaknesses in the church of God. Beloved brethren, challenges have always existed. The Corinthian church had at least seven serious errors, including matters so grave as tolerating moral sins (chapter 5), litigation between brethren (chapter 6), and false doctrine to the extent of teaching that Christ had not really arisen. Despite these critical weaknesses, Paul was able to say, "I thank my God always on your behalf, for the grace of God which is given you by Jesus Christ; That in everything ye are enriched by him, in all utterance, and in all knowledge; Even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you: So that ye come behind in no gift; waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall also confirm you unto the end, that ye may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Corinthians 1:4-8).

We marvel that the Apostle could have confidence in such a weak church. Had he not known and believed that God could and would work with his weak brethren, he could not have made such a positive statement. He had the faith that, despite their weaknesses, the Corinthian church knew the Lord and had chosen to follow Him. Moreover, he knew how much Jesus loves His children and how patiently He works with them. With that faith, he could confidently put his hand to the spiritual plow.

Furthermore, Paul very clearly knew who was in charge of his Corinthian brethren. He told them, "For we are labourers together with God: ye are God's husbandry, ye are God's building" (1 Corinthians 3:9). He saw himself as a helper to a master builder. Solid faith that God is at the helm allows His children to sleep well at night, even in the face of difficulties. It relieves them of the burden of feeling they need to be in control. After doing their best, parents can trust their children to God. Pastors can be courageous, patient, and understanding of their flock. Godly teachers realize that even though they are responsible to prepare their materials and give themselves wholeheartedly to their classes, God is very much involved in their classrooms. Trust in God makes them secure in administering discipline when necessary.

Life's story contains many chapters. Some chapters are bright, and some are dark. When hope burns bright, the reading is easy, but what of the dark ones?

How shall one cope with failure when he feels he has tried his best to be an overcomer?

When we feel we do not fill much of a place in the kingdom and our talents do not measure up to those of others, what are we to think? Then there are times when our heartfelt prayers seem to go unanswered. Some have chapters of doubts whether the church is really Christ's bride and reflects the glory described in the Scriptures. Others even have chapters of doubting God's very existence.

We may never find satisfactory intellectual conclusions to all of our questions. We can rest, however, in the confidence that His ways are as far above our comprehension as the heavens are above the earth. Through faith in Him, each chapter can conclude with a paragraph of assurance that God's perfect plan is one of peace and is the best solution to our dilemmas. This is true, because He understands all dimensions of life and their effects on all involved. He knows how all matters relate to the unseen future. How wrong for us to stand up and challenge such a One with our impatience, blame, and frustration.

Those who have caught the vision of God's infinite greatness, love, and power can trust Him with their petitions without being shaken when He answers differently from what they wish. They can labor patiently knowing He holds the plan. Although the world is in decline, God's children need not fear. Like the wise man, they have dug deep and built on the rock. Their house will not crumble.

Solid faith in a sovereign God is the power that energizes the fainting traveler. As in the late Min. Reuben Koehn's oft quoted allegory, the ship, that is the church, is on the high seas of time. God has always been at the helm. Everything on board is under His most capable control; our life and present age is included. So minute is His interest that not even the number of the hairs of our heads has escaped His all-seeing notice. All hands are needed in these perilous times, but the journey is secure.

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