

# Ecclesiastes 10:12-15

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/eccl/eccl-10/ecclesiastes-1012-15/>

*No one knows the future, no matter what they might think. The foolish avoid industry, think they can control circumstances, and fill the air with many words—all of which leads to madness and weariness.*

Solomon continues his comparison of wisdom and folly. *The words from the mouth of a wise man are gracious*—the word translated *gracious* is “chen,” which means *favor*. The *wise man* makes statements that favor those whom he is around. This might mean he is making positive statements. It could include constructive advice, seeking to help others. In either case it is outward focused, seeking the best for others.

By contrast, *the lips of the fool consume him*. The word translated *consume* could also be translated “devour.” The *words from the mouth of the wise man* builds others up but the words from the fool are self-destructive. The fool’s intention is likely to tear down those around him. But the outcome is his own destruction.

The words from the *lips of a fool* begin with *folly* and end in *wicked madness*. *Wicked madness* likely refers to the adverse consequences that come from the pursuit of sin. We seek freedom from constraints to pursue our own appetites and end up enslaved in addiction. We seek fame by trying to gain approval from others, that we might be their superior, and end up performing as their jester or slave.

The fool tries to make up for the folly of his words with volume, as he *multiplies words*. The *wise man* only says what is needed. The fool just keeps talking, regurgitating the same falsities, never learning or growing. The fool could be expected to pronounce with certainty things about which he knows little to nothing.

Solomon previously emphasized the importance of properly planning and preparing in order to gain maximum profit or benefit. But it is also important to embrace the reality that *no man knows what will happen* in the future. The fool might pretend he knows. But a wise planner will recognize that his plan is just a plan, which will need to change when it meets the reality of what transpires.

Solomon asks rhetorically: *and who can tell him what will come after him?* The implied answer is “No one.”

The New Testament book of James says something similar. [James 4:13-16](#) says:

“Come now, you who say, “Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, and spend a year there and engage in business and make a profit.” Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow. You are just a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away. Instead, you ought to say, “If the Lord wills, we will live and also do this or that.” But as it is, you boast in your arrogance; all such boasting is evil.”

Perhaps James learned this principle from Solomon. It is wise to plan, but arrogant to think we know the future. The appropriate thing to do is to plan but hold our plans with an open hand, recognizing that God knows the future but we do not.

The *wise man* plans properly and acts with industry. But the *toil of a fool* so *wearies him that he does not even know how to go to a city*. The word translated *toil* is “amal,” which is troublesome labor. Toil makes everyone weary. But it especially *wearies* the fool. Solomon uses an illustration to tell us how *toil wears* the *fool*. It *wearies* him so much that *he does not even know how to go to a city*.

It seems plain that the illustration is meant to show the exceeding weariness *toil* has brought to the *fool*. But to us the illustration might be more difficult to discern than the plain statement. Perhaps the fact that the fool *does not even know how to go to a city* means the *fool* is so weary that he has become disoriented. Dizzy. He can't tell his direction.

The foolish don't plan properly. They either don't prepare at all or prepare as if they actually know the future. The foolish fail to honor industry. The foolish are allergic to industry. They can't work hard without losing their bearing. However, the one thing the foolish don't tire of is filling the air with words.

### **Biblical Text:**

<sup>12</sup> **Words from the mouth of a wise man are gracious, while the lips of a fool consume him;** <sup>13</sup> **the beginning of his talking is folly and the end of it is wicked madness.** <sup>14</sup> **Yet the fool multiplies words. No man knows what**

will happen, and who can tell him what will come after him?<sup>15</sup> The toil of a fool so wearies him that he does not even know how to go to a city.