

Ecclesiastes 10:16-20

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/eccl/eccl-10/ecclesiastes-1016-20/>

There is a time and place for pleasure, but when pleasure replaces industry, evil follows. Be judicious in what you say. Words have great impact and have a tendency to find their way to unintended audiences.

The closing passage of Chapter 10 contrasts good and bad *princes*. *Woe* is pronounced upon the *land whose king is a lad* and whose *princes feast* at inappropriate times (*in the morning*). Instead of working during the day, applying themselves to industry on behalf of their land, the *princes* in the *land whose king is a lad* consume the labor of others. They *feast* in the morning, to *enjoy* themselves and get *drunk*.

The word translated *lad* could be translated as “novice” or “apprentice.” Such a *ruler* allows those in authority in the *land* to extract wealth from others. This creates a disincentive for the people of the land to work hard. It suppresses industry. It will lead the land to poverty, which is a great *woe*. The *princes* should be a positive example, and provide incentive for industry. Instead they are like locusts, and consume the bounty of others. The novice ruler does not discipline the *princes* and lead them to rule wisely.

On the other hand, *blessed is the realm* that is ruled by a qualified *king (of nobility)*, whose administrators are motivated by the realm’s welfare (*they eat at the appropriate time, for strength*) rather than the pursuit of their own fleshly desires (*not for drunkenness*).

Verse 18 portrays the detriment these rulers inflict upon a kingdom. As a result of laziness (*indolence*) and irresponsible inactivity (*slackness*) the realm is weak and open to outside threats (*the rafters sag and the house leaks*). Solomon is talking about the consequences of rulers and the impact of public policies. When government suppresses and consumes, rather than elevating and encouraging, it leads its realm into poverty.

There are three things *men* (humankind) do to display their foolishness. First, they *prepare a meal for enjoyment*. The word translated *enjoyment* is most often translated *laughter*. It is frequently used negatively, like cackling or madness. Rather than preparing a meal *at the appropriate time* (after the work

is done) to gain *strength*, the foolish focus on pursuit of sensual pleasures such as *drunkenness*.

They look to wine for *gladness*. They perceive that *wine* is what *makes life merry*. Lastly, they think *money is the answer to everything*. The literal translation for this phrase is “money answers all.”

In all three cases, men display a false perspective of reality. They believe fulfillment in life comes from gaining sensual pleasures (such as food and drink) and the money to purchase such pleasures. Further, they believe anything else they might need is answered by having even more money.

Chapter 10 ends with an admonition for the wise to be careful what they say about powerful people who could harm them: *Furthermore, in your bedchamber do not curse a king and in your sleeping rooms do not curse a rich man, for a bird of the heavens will carry the sound and the winged creature will make the matter known.*

Words matter. The foolish fills the air with words. The wise need to be prudent what they speak, even in private. The principle here is that secrets always end up being known. If you want to criticize a *king* or a *rich man*, they will find out, and you will suffer the consequence. So better to only speak in private what you are willing to make known in public.

Jesus expands on this principle and applies it to our judgment before the Great King in [Matthew 12:36-37](#), which says:

“But I tell you that every careless word that people speak, they shall give an accounting for it in the day of judgment. For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.”

Biblical Text:

¹⁶ Woe to you, O land, whose king is a lad and whose princes feast in the morning.¹⁷ Blessed are you, O land, whose king is of nobility and whose princes eat at the appropriate time—for strength and not for drunkenness.¹⁸ Through indolence the rafters sag, and through slackness the house leaks.¹⁹ Men prepare a meal for enjoyment, and wine makes life merry, and money is the answer to everything.²⁰ Furthermore, in your bedchamber do not curse a king, and in your sleeping rooms do not curse a rich man, for a bird of the heavens will carry the sound and the winged creature will make the matter known.