

The Portrait of a Fool (Ecclesiastes 10) 17 May '15

A very good morning to all of you. Welcome to Gospel Light and our second English worship service this morning. We are continuing our journey through the book of Ecclesiastes and we now come to Ecclesiastes chapter 10. If you have your Bibles, please turn with me to this chapter as we pursue this series on "Life Under the Sun".

Now if you have not been able to join us for the past weeks, it's fine. Really, the summary of it all so far is that Solomon is urging his readers, urging the listeners to pursue wisdom because life is tough and you need wisdom from God in order to have a meaningful, significant and fruitful life. He says in all your getting, get wisdom and we have been looking at how this wisdom comes from above. In other words, in order to live life under the sun, you need wisdom from above the sun; you need the wisdom from God.

Timestamp 0:01:09.1

Now, in chapter 10, however, we're going to look at the flip side of things. We're going to look at the lack of wisdom. We're going to look at what it means to be living in folly. See, in chapter 10, there are nine occurrences of the word "fool" or "folly". The theme here is to show us what a fool is really like. And you really need to know about the fool because a fool will destroy himself and God's Word is graciously given to you so that you will avoid the way of folly and walk in the way of wisdom.

Now, it is John Wayne, famous actor in time past, who said, "Life is tough, but it's tougher when you're stupid." Life is difficult and if you're a fool in this life, it's far worse. Now the question is: Who is a fool and who is a wise man? What does it mean to be foolish? What does it mean to be wise? Is this a matter of IQ, intelligence quotient? Is this a matter of your academic achievements? Is it a matter of which school you studied in? Well, you realize that it has nothing to do with IQ, it has everything to do with GQ. You say, "What is GQ?" Well, it's God quotient. It has nothing to do with your intelligence. It is all to do with your relationship with God. You see, the Bible tells us:

The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight.

(Proverbs 9:10 ESV)

What is a wise man? A wise man is someone who fears God and knows God. Then who is a fool? Correspondingly, the Bible says:

The fool says in his heart, "There is no God."
(Psalm 14:1 ESV)

So, wisdom and folly has... or rather, it hinges entirely on GQ – your God quotient, your relationship with God. So, all that is a preamble as we look at chapter 10 because here, Solomon is going to tell us what a fool looks like. So we're going to study today the portrait of a fool.

By the way, I tried to Google images of a fool and I don't know why, but Mister T comes up and a clown comes up, a jester comes up, pictures like this comes up, but no one really could give a good portrait of a fool in Google. So today, we're going to hear the words of Solomon as he paints for you a picture with his words. Let's begin in verse 1. He says:

Dead flies make the perfumer's ointment give off a stench; so a little folly outweighs wisdom and honor.
(Ecclesiastes 10:1 ESV)

Very interesting verse, absolutely poetic, grabs your attention right away. But what is he talking about? Well, suppose today you go to an Italian restaurant and you order a bowl of minestrone soup and you happily enjoy it. You drink it, it tastes wonderful and you scoop and you scoop and you scoop and to your horror, now on your scoop is a... fly, no lah, a cockroach. Suppose, you find a cockroach. Well, that would ruin your entire meal, isn't it?

I tried to find pictures of food or pests found in food and the best one I could see in the internet is this popular one. You remember that? It was all over the news a few months ago and someone must be enjoying the "kiam chye" (salted vegetable in the Hokkien dialect), such beautiful dish of "kiam chye" and then you scoop and you scoop and you scoop and you find this... not the chilli ah... you find the rat. The rat in the "kiam chye" spoils the "kiam chye". Agree? It doesn't matter how big your pot of "kiam chye" is, doesn't matter. As long as you have one rat, it spoils the whole dish. Now, this is the modern parable to what Solomon says. Dead flies make the perfumer's ointment give off a stench.

Timestamp 0:05:25.9

The idea here is that this ointment is used... this is precious ointment. We've always laboured the point that the ointments, the perfumes in those days are very expensive. They're very precious, they're important because they help... sometimes used to

prevent the smell of a corpse from being too excessive. But the irony of it is, all it takes is a few flies dying in the ointment, let it stay long enough, and this thing that is supposed to be aromatic now becomes full of odour, it's full of stench. Solomon's point is a very graphic one. A little folly is all it takes to destroy all the reputation of wisdom and honour you've accumulated in your life. That's all it takes.

Suppose today, I ask you to think about Bill Clinton. What would you think about? I hear "he he he he he" – little sniggers here and there. Why? You think about... Why you all think that? I think president (laughter in congregation). No, no, no, I know it is a leading question.

Now, Bill Clinton, I'm told, is an extremely charismatic speaker. In fact, yesterday or the day before, I read that he earned \$25 million in speaking engagements since January last year. One year, just by talking, \$25 million. Quite a speaker, quite well sought-after, don't you think? I'm also told that he's very capable, he's very hardworking and during his time, the United States actually did quite well in their economies and so on and so forth. But today, none of you remember that. All of you remember Monica Lewinsky because all it takes is a little folly to outweigh the wisdom and the honour.

I ask you to think about David and what do you think about? The first word? Bathsheba. Never think about Goliath, never think about king of Israel, never think about man after God's own heart. Bathsheba – one dead fly spoils his entire wisdom and honour.

Think about Peter, what do you think about? Denial, you see. We never think about Peter as the apostle, we didn't think about Peter as the spokesman for the group but the Peter who denied his Lord three times. One black stain is enough to ruin that whole cloth or that whole shirt as it were.

Timestamp 0:08:18.7

So, the point here in modern terms is this: A small mistake makes the smell of his folly greater than the fragrance of his wisdom; or in even simpler terms, an ounce of folly can destroy a ton of wisdom. So Solomon begins by saying, look at the fool, look at the destructiveness of folly. A bad decision here, a wrong purchase, a little fling, a little compromise, it's all it takes to destroy your life. Run from folly like a plague. Then he goes on, he says:

A wise man's heart inclines him to the right, but a fool's heart to the left.
(Ecclesiastes 10:2 ESV)

You say, "What is this right, left thing? What is this all about?" Well, to the Jews, the right side represents the place of honour and blessing. Remember how Jacob blessed Ephraim with his right hand, cross hands by the way? It's intentional because the right hand is an indication of blessing and the left hand of course, a place of less blessing, or even dishonour.

Remember how Jesus said that he will separate people into 2 groups? The sheep will be on the right side and the goats will be on the left side. So the right refers to the place of blessing, privilege, honour; the left side is not. So a wise man's heart will lean him to that side. It is a wonderful thing to have wisdom. It's a wonderful thing to fear God. You will be going to the place of honour and blessing in a consistent way. And if you do not know God, if your heart is darkened because you reject him, you say there is no God, then you lean to the path that is on the left of dishonour, of even judgment. So this is what Solomon is saying.

Solomon is saying that wisdom and folly is not just one thought, one action. It's generally a matter of the heart and that inclines you. That's the consistent manner of life you will live. So, the emphasis here is heart – the heart of the matter is that this is a matter of the heart. This is regularly found in Scripture. Why do people sin? Why do people say the wrong things? Is it the problem with the mouth? No, the problem is always the heart. Jesus tells us:

The good person out of the good treasure of his heart produces good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure produces evil, for out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks.
(Luke 6:45 ESV)

"For out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks." You say something because that's how your heart is inclining you to say. Jesus tells us:

For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander.
(Matthew 15:18-19 ESV)

Not only our words but our works are a manifestation of our hearts, "for out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality". The problem is not

in your eyes, the problem is in your heart. Your eyes merely captured the bait, but it is the heart that desires to sin. Folly resides in the heart.

Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life.
(Proverbs 4:23 ESV)

And so, it is appropriate for us to recognize that then, the fool is someone who has determined in his heart. It's a deep-seated conviction and decision: There is no God (Psalm 14:1). I won't acknowledge him as God; I will not surrender nor submit to the God of the Bible; there is no God. So his heart is now darkened and that means his life's direction and inclination will be towards the left, towards judgment and dishonour. So that's what Solomon is saying in these verses, in verse 2.

Timestamp 0:12:22.1

Now, when you have a heart that inclines to the left, you have a heart that is against God, it will show itself. And so, in the next verse, Solomon says:

Even when the fool walks on the road, he lacks sense, and he says to everyone that he is a fool.

(Ecclesiastes 10:3 ESV)

This fool will be very obvious. Even when he walks on the road, he lacks sense and he says to everyone that he is a fool. So his folly is going to be obvious, it's visible, it's loud. He's going to ruin his life and everybody could see it. You say, "How?" Three ways. Number 1: He's going to show it in his works.

He who digs a pit will fall into it, and a serpent will bite him who breaks through a wall. He who quarries stones is hurt by them, and he who splits logs is endangered by them. If the iron is blunt, and one does not sharpen the edge, he must use more strength, but wisdom helps one to succeed. If the serpent bites before it is charmed, there is no advantage to the charmer.

(Ecclesiastes 10:8-11 ESV)

He who digs a pit will fall into it. A serpent will bite him who breaks through a wall. He who quarries stones is hurt by them. He who splits logs is endangered by them. Now if the iron is blunt, you do not sharpen it, you must use more strength. But if you have wisdom, it will help you to succeed. Then he also tells us about the snake charmer. If the serpent bites before it is charmed, there is no advantage to the charmer.

Now, he is listing out various things people do in life, probably part of their work. And Solomon is saying, in the daily work that a person is doing, his folly from the heart is so obvious it will ooze out in everything he does. And he's going to reap the consequences of his folly. He digs the pit but he doesn't take precautions, he falls into it. He breaks the wall and there are serpents in the walls, in the crevices and it comes to bite him. He carries rocks and he's hurt by them. You see, folly will be seen in your dailyness of life and it will come back to haunt you. That's his point.

And the modern (again) equivalents may be as such: In your daily surfing on the internet, your folly will come to haunt you. You may see things you're not supposed to see, you should not see, and because you have seen it, because your folly leads you to it, it has destroyed your marriage, destroyed your family. It may be purchases you make that are way beyond what you could handle and what is wise. It could be the grudges that you keep in your heart. It may be your interactions with people. It may be jealousy that you have been harbouring. And all these things are what you experience in your daily life. Folly oozes out. It will be obvious not just with your works, but also with your words. He says here:

The words of a wise man's mouth win him favor, but the lips of a fool consume him. The beginning of the words of his mouth is foolishness, and the end of his talk is evil madness.

(Ecclesiastes 10:12-13 ESV)

So Solomon here is talking about a man whose heart is foolish. It will come up in his mouth and this folly, like a venom coming out of the mouth, will then eat him up. It's like a venom, it's like an acidic thing, I picture, just destroying his own life. That's a fool. He says things he's not supposed to say, he hurts people he's not supposed to hurt and this fool not only does that, but he talks a lot. By the way, this is one principle I learn from the book of Proverbs, the wisdom literature: Don't talk too much. Ah, preaching can be longer lah, but talking, don't talk so much. He says:

A fool multiplies words, though no man knows what is to be, and who can tell him what will be after him?

(Ecclesiastes 10:14)

You see, this fool is so proud and so arrogant. He says, "I will be this, I will be that, I can accomplish this." But God says, "You're a fool, you do not know what you're talking about, you do not know what's going to happen after this." But the fool makes big boasts. He's arrogant and this is a manifestation of his heart. So his works are

seen, his words will be obvious. And then he brings woes to both himself and to people around.

Okay, well, let's look at this little statement. I thought it's cute. "It is better to keep your mouth shut and let everyone think that you are a fool than to open it and remove all doubt." (Laughter in congregation) Most of the time, we want to prove we are clever but it works the other way – shows our folly.

Timestamp 0:16:52.8

Well, let's look at the woes. The woes here are this:

The toil of a fool wearies him, for he does not know the way to the city. Woe to you, O land, when your king is a child, and your princes feast in the morning!

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!

(Ecclesiastes 10:15-17 ESV)

"The toil of a fool wearies him." He works very hard. He tries his very best. He tries to eke out a meaningful life, but he actually does not know the direction to life. He does not even know the way to the city – can't even do simple things, meaningful things. He can't.

And he goes on to say: "Woe to you, O land, when your king is a child, and your princes feast in the morning!" It's a sad state when your leader is a fool. Now, it is a sad thing when the father in a family is a fool. It is a sad thing when the husband is a fool. It is a sad thing when the mother is a fool, because you bring tragedy and ruin and pain to not just yourself but to your family.

So Solomon, with these words, gives us a portrait, a picture. He draws for us a fool. He draws for us what cartoonists and illustrators cannot draw, because the problem with the fool is about the heart – a heart that chooses to reject God. So now, he's plunged into darkness, into his own devices and he will manifest his darkness, his blindness with the things he does. In everyday life, it oozes out. It will manifest in the things he says, primarily about himself and about the future; and he is such a burden to himself and to people around. That's a fool.

Now again, this is given lovingly, I think, by God – not that he wants to condemn fools to let us stay that way but so that he may show us a graphic description of what

life under the sun without God will be like, so that we may then turn from our folly, repent of our rejection of God and come to him for salvation, for life, for wisdom.

But let me end with a few concluding applications. Number 1: Be careful of flies in your life. Got flies in your life? You see, a Christian, according to the New Testament, is supposed to be a sweet-smelling savour, isn't it? 2 Corinthians tells us we're supposed to be like that aroma, we're supposed to draw people by the sweetness of our lives. Christians are to live out the beautiful holy life of the Lord Jesus Christ that when others see it, they are drawn to our Saviour.

But, how sad that the perfume of our life is often stinking because there are flies – little flies of sin, little flies of compromise, little flies of bad habits, little flies such as a little chat with your colleague when you shouldn't have, a colleague of an opposite gender, a little flirtation, a little changing of accounts, false changing of accounts, a little lie, a little envy, a little jealousy, just a little bit of neglect, a little bit of slothfulness, a little bit of unforgiveness, a little bit of a grudge, a little bit of loving the things of this world. All it takes is a little fly. Small...

Most of us think there's nothing wrong with surfing a little bit of these websites. Most of us think there's nothing wrong having a meal with my colleague who's a lady or a guy. Most of us may think there's nothing wrong with just being unhappy about someone in church; it's fine, nobody knows. Who's going to be hurt anyway, you say. Well, dead flies cause the perfumer's ointment to stink and it can lead to dangerous circumstances, consequences.

Timestamp 0:21:00.2

There's this little... I'm not sure whether you call this poem or proverb. It says:

For want of a nail the shoe was lost;
For want of a shoe the horse was lost;
For want of a horse the battle was lost;
For the failure of battle the kingdom was lost
All for the want of a horse-shoe nail.

For want of a nail (a horseshoe nail), the shoe of the horse is lost. For want of a shoe, the horse was lost. For want of a horse, the battle was lost. For the failure of the battle, the kingdom was lost – all for the want of a horseshoe nail. Something really small can have big consequences.

David Jeremiah, a pastor, worked on this and he had his own version. His own version is that of Jesus – how He resisted the temptation of turning stones to bread in the wilderness, and he said:

For want of abstaining from a crust of bread, a fast would be lost

For want of a fast, a prayer would be lost

For want of a prayer, a vision would be lost

For want of a vision, a mission would be lost

For want of a mission, a sacrifice would be lost

For want of a sacrifice, an eternal kingdom would be lost

- David Jeremiah

David Jeremiah is saying, hanging in the balance, when Jesus was tempted with this stone to bread suggestion, is the future of all eternity. Small thing, you say, just stone to bread. But on it hangs the destiny of all the souls that have lived on this world. Small things can have big consequences.

The Bible talks about little foxes that spoil the vine. The Bible talks about a little leaven leavens the whole lump. The Bible talks about little compromises that lead us to the deep end of sin. Remember Lot – Abraham and Lot? You know what happened to Lot?

Well, Abraham is honoured today as the father of faith. Now Lot, by the way, is a Christian, no doubt about it. The Bible calls him in 2 Peter "righteous Lot". But Lot had a very unhappy life because he was vexed with the sinful living of Sodom and Gomorrah. Now, how did that righteous man come to live in Sodom and Gomorrah? The Bible tells us, he begins by facing Sodom and Gomorrah.

Abraham, being the generous guy, says: "Alright, you go choose first," and Lot decided to face Sodom and Gomorrah. And because he faced Sodom and Gomorrah long enough, he wanted and he went to stay inside Sodom and Gomorrah. And after he lived in Sodom and Gomorrah, even though he's vexed by it, after a period of time, the Bible tells us, he now sits at the gates of Sodom and Gomorrah, which means he's one of the elders, one of the leaders in Sodom and Gomorrah. It doesn't take a lot to lead us to the deep end, a few flies and you'll stink up the whole place.

Timestamp 0:24:06.2

Think about David. David – you think about Bathsheba. How did David get into this mess with Bathsheba. "Oh," we all said, "it was just a moment of folly." "The

temptation was too strong. Who asked Bathsheba to bathe in the open, open-air toilet? Shouldn't do that, bad architecture," you say. Well, did David crash just overnight like that?

Well, if you really look at David's life (we have actually covered this in our sermon series on David the last time), David did not crash overnight. This is a disintegrating, a decaying process that has begun some time ago, because after David had success, he began to multiply wives to himself, he began to multiply horses to himself. God had already said that the king of Israel cannot do these things. By the way, it's a great leadership principle. But he multiplies wives and horses to himself. He's full of pride, I believe, full of arrogance and complacency. His armies are out there fighting in war and he stays in his summer palace enjoying a sun-bathing time, probably.

So there are already cracks in his life, cracks that are running through his whole being. So when Bathsheba comes along, it was not something that was unexpected, really. It was the trigger, the straw that broke the camel's back. You see, it begins with little bits of compromise. That's how sin is, that's how folly is, that's how we ruin ourselves. The Bible gives us an anatomy, a description of collapse. In Psalm 1, it is a beautiful first verse:

Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers;
(Psalm 1:1 ESV)

Most of us read Psalm 1 verse 1 and say, "Okay, this is about bad people. Let's move on to the verse 2: 'but his delight is in the law of the Lord'. Ah, that's what I want to learn." No, no, verse 1 is crucial for you to learn. Verse 1 tells you about a slow fade, about the slippery path sin brings you on.

Notice that the writer is very precise. He says, first of all, he starts with walking, then he stands with them, and he sits finally with them. I mean it's like you meet some 猪朋狗友(zhu1 peng2 gou3 you3, a Chinese idiom which means dissolute companions or disreputable comrades) - some bad company. What do you do? You just walk with them – nothing very much, but just walk with them, journey along with them, keep them company. But this will lead you to the next step. You will now stand with them; you will fight with them, together with them. And when you stay long enough like Lot, you will be seated in the same seat, which refers to a place of rulership with them. You're part of that leaders' gang. But how did it all begin? It started here: walking.

Timestamp 0:27:35.0

Then think about it, this man who listens to the words, to the counsel. Now, he is fully in their philosophy, their way and then you rule with them, you're on the seat with them. This man who is wicked, now becomes a sinner and he ultimately becomes a scoffer. He mocks God and laughs at God. There are three levels of degradation, but it all begins with a little fox, with a little leaven, with a little folly, with a few flies. There's this song called "Slow Fade" by this band, a Christian Band called Casting Crowns. I've actually mentioned this before, but let me show you the words again.

Be careful little eyes what you see
It's the second glance that ties your hands
as darkness pulls the strings
Be careful little feet where you go
For it's the little feet behind you that are sure to follow

Be careful little ears what you hear
When flattery leads to compromise,
the end is always near
Be careful little lips what you say
For empty words and promises lead broken hearts astray

It's a slow fade when you give yourself away
It's a slow fade when black and white have turned to gray
Thoughts invade, choices are made, a price will be paid
When you give yourself away
People never crumble in a day
Daddies never crumble in a day
Families never crumble in a day

It's a slow fade when you give yourself away
It's a slow fade when black and white have turned to gray
Thoughts invade, choices are made, a price will be paid
When you give yourself away
People never crumble in a day
It's a slow fade, it's a slow fade

It says, "Be careful little eyes what you see. Be careful little feet where you go." Just small little things, may not be a lot. It goes on to say, "Be careful little ears what you

hear," and then, "Be careful little lips what you say." The little, little things, be careful about it.

But what I really want to get at is the chorus. "It's a slow fade when you give yourself away. It's a slow fade when black and white have turned to gray. Thoughts invade (added by pastor: 'you justify, you reason things out, you excuse yourself'), choices are made, a price will be paid when you give yourself away. People never crumble in a day. Daddies never crumble in a day. Families never crumble in a day. It's a slow fade, it's a slow fade."

Just a few clicks, your phone on the internet, a few meetings with someone, a few bad choices in your business dealings, that's all it takes and you can crash like a David. It's not beyond us. So, a little folly destroys honour and wisdom. A few flies will spoil the ointment. So I say to you, if you are to live out the aroma of Jesus (God has saved you to be the salt, the light, the sweet-smelling savour), be very careful about dead flies. This morning, identify the dead flies of your life and bring out the swat, smack it away. You've got to whack the flies otherwise you stink up your life.

Let me move on to the second application I think of, as we look at chapter 10. I've laboured this point a lot because I think this is so crucial. A fool is not a fool just because of one or two bad decisions. A fool is a fool because his heart is darkened and foolish. The heart of the matter is a matter of the heart. You see, this is not just what Solomon has to say. This is also what Paul has to say. I think about a fool when he describes here, in Romans 1, someone who did not honour Him as God:

For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools,
(Romans 1:21-22 ESV)

It's very consistent in the Bible. Psalm 14 says the fool has said in his heart, "There is no God." Paul says, "Who are fools? Fools are people who did not honour God as God nor give thanks to Him." A fool is someone who looks at the world around him and says, "Ah, this must come by chance – Big Bang theory." No, it is very obvious from the creation of the world there is a great Creator; he's God.

Timestamp 0:31:38.8

The Bible tells us, we are without excuse. Do you know that every single day, God is having his billboard of saying: "There is God in the heavens, in the flowers, in people,

in animals, in nature all around us." Every day, it cries out, screams out to you, "There is God!" and your heart knows it. But the fool is someone who chose to say, "There is no God." They don't want to be accountable to Him, they do not want to honour Him, they do not want to give thanks. I was one like this – I am a fool. Actually, I tell you all of us are fools.

So, we become fools, and what happens to fools? Well, God is angry with fools.

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.
(Romans 1:18 ESV)

The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men because we suppress the truth. We know it in our hearts there is God but we choose to suppress it. We don't want to acknowledge it, and God's wrath is revealed on a daily basis and ultimately on the final judgment. You can be sure about that. So a fool ignores God, rejects Him, will not accept Him or acknowledge Him.

Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.
(Romans 1:22-23 ESV)

And we become fools and now we exchange the glory of the immortal God for images resembling man, birds, animals, creeping things. So when man refuses to acknowledge the God of the Bible, we now substitute other things for God. We substitute inferior things. We substitute created things for the Creator and how ridiculous that is. We worship men, we worship beasts, we worship elephants and monkeys and insects, and we say that is God. Now, that is unacceptable, that is preposterous if you really think about it. No wonder God's wrath is kindled to exchange His glory for corruptible things. Now, when that happens, the man's heart is darkened and God gives us over to our sins.

Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen.

(Romans 1:24-25 ESV)

You refuse to acknowledge me? Well, you're left to darkness and to your own devices. So what happens is that we now indulge in the hearts, the lusts of the hearts of impurity; they're sexual sins. Sex and sins in sex is going to get worse and worse, as people reject God more and more. It's an inevitable consequence, according to Romans 1. And when sexual sins grow, the Bible tells us it goes on to the next stage. You say, "What's the next stage?" The next stage here, it says:

... God gave them up to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error.

(Romans 1:26-27 ESV)

In other words, after sexual sins, you go on to homosexuality. Now, there's always this debate: same-sex attraction and homosexuality. Well, same-sex attraction, to be precise, refers to a certain desire that people have for someone of the same gender. Now, that can be real for many people, even for Christians; it's attraction. But the Christian man says, even though I have that desire, I would deny that desire for the cause of Christ because I know that when I indulge in that desire, that is sin. But men give themselves over to such desires, not just because of needs or desires but because their hearts are darkened. It is a sin, it is not genetics.

Timestamp 0:35:57.7

Living a homosexual lifestyle is a sin because the hearts are darkened. But that is not all because after sexual sins, after homosexuality, then the gates are in a sense open, the floodgates open. And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done and they were filled with all kinds of horrible things.

And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done. They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless.

(Romans 1:28-31 ESV)

Why is a murderer a murderer? Why is an adulterer an adulterer? Why is a homosexual practitioner a homosexual practitioner? Why? Fundamentally, the heart of the matter is a matter of the heart. Now, what can cure this heart? The only thing that can cure this heart is the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and that's why Paul began in Romans 1 by saying:

For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.
(Romans 1:16 ESV)

I'm here to tell you about the Gospel because the Gospel – the good news of Jesus dying and rising to save us from our sins – is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes. The cure to your heart is faith in Jesus Christ, the good news of Jesus Christ. And you realize that the cure of humanity is not moral education; it's not just mere reformation training because that's only on the outside. The real problem is on the inside and the only way to get to the inside is the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

We looked at Andrew Chan the last time. Remember... part of the Bali Nine, one of the ringleaders in the drug ring? What can change this man's life? Reformation? No, the Gospel of Jesus Christ and praise God, he came to Christ whilst he's in prison.

What can change a homosexual's life? What can change an adulterer's life? What can change a covetous man's life? What can change our lives? Only the Gospel. That's the mission of our church, by the way – to be leading generations into a life-changing relationship with Jesus Christ, because only Jesus changes lives. I say to you, this is so important not just for us but for your children.

Timestamp 0:38:44.7

Seven, eight years ago, before we had our kids, Winnie and myself, we were preparing for children and how to bring them up. Of course, we had to learn how to bathe and all this stuff, went for classes. But more than anything else is learning how to bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, isn't it?

So my wife, of course she does all the research here, she discovered a book, she read about a book called "Shepherding a Child's Heart". It is a gem; it is a beautiful book. If you're having kids today, or you're going to have kids, I recommend at least read this. There are a lot of other good books, I'm sure, but this is one book I read and it has helped me a lot.

You see, from this book, I realized that the key to parenting is not behaviour change. You know how it is. He screams, he yells and you say, "Don't scream, don't yell, it's wrong." You know what a child learns? The child learns it is wrong to scream and yell, but what is the problem there? The problem there is that he learns not to scream and yell in front of you, but his heart is still not changed. In his heart, he wants to scream and yell – no difference. You've only taught him how to adjust his behaviour on the outside, but you've not helped him on the inside. So a lot of our parenting is telling them what to do and what not to do, but it doesn't arrive at the core of the person.

The author, Tedd Tripp, tells us that parenting is like shepherding. Shepherding where? Shepherding a child's heart, pointing the child to Jesus Christ. Parenting is about gospelising your children. You say, "How?" Well, I have 2 kids now, I've tried to do this for several years, Shawn and Matthias. And so when they're naughty, if I didn't know about the need to gospelise my kids, I would probably just say, "You're wrong, I'm to give you a few spanks. Say sorry and move on. Next time, don't do it again." Right? That's what we say.

But nowadays, it's a bit different after I read this book. I say to my son, "You know why I've to cane you? Because you have done wrong. And the reason why you do wrong is because your heart is sinful." Of course, I use a term that my sons could remember: "Your heart is naughty." Now, at night, I'll pray with my kids and I'll say, "Lord, please help Shawn and Matthias know that they are naughty." This small one (referring to the younger Matthias) will say, "No, no, I'm not naughty." He still hasn't come to terms with the reality that he is a sinner, alright? He thinks he is a Superman, so "I'm not naughty".

But you see, it's so important in the point of discipline not just to say, "Don't do this again." but "Recognise you did that because your heart is darkened, you're sinful." Of course, I don't give all these "darkened" – "chim chim" terms ("chim" in Hokkien is used to describe something that is hard to understand), but "You've a naughty heart and you need to be saved from your sins. Jesus died for your sins, Shawn. You've got to ask him to save you and change your heart. Daddy still have to spank you." And after that, I say, "Shawn, daddy love you. I've to do this because God wants me to point you to Jesus."

Timestamp 0:42:23.7

You know, today, all the psychologists say caning is no good. The child becomes what... Now, of course you can excessively cane or abuse it, and that is so possible. But, if done in love, if done in pointing them back to the love of God, you're shepherding and pointing your children to the only one who can change their lives. I tell you, your children are naughty beasts, animals, they are really. Mine is, mine are, and I'm sure yours are too. We're all born in sin, we're sinners.

So let's be clear: the problem is not in the behaviour, the problem is in the heart and only the Gospel can change the heart. Now, that's why I say, please support brother Simon as he leads our children ministry. (Referring to a picture of brother Simon, pastor went on.) Now, this is not his usual attire but... I believe this is a sermon on the Tower of Babel, about constructing edifices that try to pitch ourselves against God. Pastor Chee Keen, myself, we have been working with brother Simon all these months, even a year, just to really emphasize the need for the Gospel in our children ministry.

One thing I realize about children ministry across the world is that we like to give moral lessons. I'm not saying it's bad, I'm not saying it isn't good to tell people what is love, what is joy, what is peace. But do you know something, if you just give them moral values – what to do, be punctual, be blah-blah-blah-blah-blah, all these habits of life, the child would know these are the ideals but he never has the ability to do it because his heart is a foolish heart – doesn't love God, doesn't have a desire to obey. He has no power of God to do what he's told to do.

So rather than moral education, the key is to bring them to Jesus, the Gospel of Jesus Christ. By the way, that's what I do every Sunday here. I hope you see Jesus because there's no point in me giving you pep talks (how do you do this, do that better), because you have no power to do it apart from the love of Jesus Christ in the Gospel. So that's our aim in our children ministry – not to just raise moral kids but we want saved kids, children who follow Jesus and love Jesus because they have the power of God to save them.

Timothy is told by Paul that:

... from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

(2 Timothy 3:15 ESV)

I pray this will be the philosophy in your homes and in our children ministry, that together we'll be pointing our children through Scripture to see Jesus, so that they

may be wise unto salvation and what a blessing Timothy is when his heart is truly changed.

So today, don't measure kids by how well they behave. It's not always accurate. It's about their heart. And may you be wise parents. All Sunday school or children ministry workers, may you be wise to point them to Jesus, be Gospel-centred. Well, it's a matter of the heart.

Timestamp 0:45:59.4

Final question: you know, pastor, you said that in Romans 1, God's wrath is revealed against folly. Now, how can we just get saved like that? You mean, if I repent of my sins and believe in Jesus, I will have eternal life? Yes. But all the foolish things I've done, all the sins, all the adultery, all the anger, all the malice, all the selfishness, who's going to pay for it? How is God's wrath appeased?

You know, this is a fundamental question that has to be addressed and it is wonderfully addressed in the Bible. Who is to pay for it? Is God still serious about judging sin? Is God still holy and will make sure these injustices will be rectified and paid for? Yes, He does. You say, "Where?" Well, you got to look to the cross. That's where all the wrath that is due to folly has to be judged, for those who would believe in Him.

You say, "How serious is God in judging sin?" This is how serious it is (pastor showed a picture of Jesus being crucified). You say, "How much does God love me?" I say, this is how much God loves you. See, on the cross is the beautiful meeting of the wrath and the love of God. God hates sins so much He has to punish it all on His Son. And God loves you so much He gave His Son to die for you.

I know something about the cross, or I pondered something about the cross as I prepared Ecclesiastes 10 and it's this. Do you know that Jesus was treated like the greatest fool on the cross, not just the greatest, but the accumulation of all the folly that we who have believed in Him have ever done in our lives? He accumulated it all on Himself and all the wrath of God upon fools are poured out on Jesus Christ, God's Son. He became, in a sense, a fool for you. He suffered for you, so that through Him you might be saved, and so Paul gives us a tremendous verse:

And because of him (added by pastor: "because of God the Father") you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and

redemption,
(1 Corinthians 1:30 ESV)

Jesus is the wisdom of God. My friends, the choice is yours. Do you realize all this is a choice? The fool hath said in his heart, "There is no God." What does your heart say today? Let's bow for a word of prayer together.

Timestamp 0:49:16.2

I'm sure the Lord must be speaking to you this morning, because whether you are a child of God or whether you are a seeker today, there is something for you. I want to say a few words to my brothers and sisters in Christ first. Dead flies spoil the perfumer's ointment. All it takes is a little compromise, a little hatred, a little jealousy, a little pride, a little covetousness. It is all it takes.

My friends, would you come to God today and ask him for cleansing? You might have run from your family, you might have run from people, you might have run from church, but I say to you, you don't have to run from God. Run to Him and He will swat the flies, cleanse the traces and restore the beauty in your life.

You see, the Bible tells us that if we come confessing our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. The reason why He will forgive you when you come humbly, is not because you are worthy or because you deserved it, but because Jesus deserved it for you on the cross and He will not judge you if you have trusted in Him. So my friends, my brothers, my sisters, would you come to God today examining the flies in your life, and asking Him for grace to purify your heart? Some relationship issues, some habits, money problems, business dealings, what would God say to you?

My friends, if you're here today, you do not know Jesus, you have been trying to be a good person, behaviour change to sort of look good enough, so that God will be in a sense obliged to save you and bring you to heaven. You don't understand that He sees far deeper than your surface actions and words. He sees right to your heart. He sees a heart of a fool.

But my friends, He doesn't despise you. If you humble yourself today, I tell you something, Jesus became the fool for you, as it were. He bore the judgment of fools upon Himself. May you be wise unto salvation. May you receive this wisdom from God – Jesus Christ. The world never could have come up with this salvation plan that God's Son would die and pay for our sins, but this is what He did. Would you today

be wise? Stop trusting in yourself and start trusting in Jesus and His finished work on the cross to save you, to forgive you and to change you from the inside-out. May God work in your hearts today.

Father, we thank you today for the power of the cross where the dearest and best went to the cruel cross for us. Lord, it is amazing that Jesus would be treated like the biggest fool, when He's the Holy God. Oh, how we love you and we thank you for this amazing grace. May these realities heal your children of our sins. And may these realities bring lost people to yourself this morning. Bless Your Word. Grant us wisdom from above the sun that we may live the real life under the sun. We pray all this now in Jesus' name. Amen.