

Ecclesiastes 9: 18b – 10: 3; “Guarding the Perfumer’s Ointment”,
Message # 67 in the series – “Remember Your Creator”, A Bible
Study conducted on the evening of January 11th, 2012,
by Pastor Paul Rendall at the Rendall home.

The words at the end of verse 18 appear to me to be linked to verse 1 of Chapter 10. Realizing that there were no chapter divisions in the original, you can see that they should not really be separated from each other. “One sinner destroys much good.” “Dead flies putrefy the perfumer’s ointment and cause it to give off a foul odor.” They are linked in this way. The one sinner who destroys much good; although it may refer to an unbeliever who falls into sin and destroys much good that others are trying to do; it may also be referring to a true Christian who has allowed “dead flies” to putrefy his, the perfumer’s ointment. So this evening, we want first of all to look at the problem stated; “one sinner destroys much good.” Then we want to look at the problem compounded; “dead flies in the ointment.” And then lastly we will look at the remedy for this problem; “the wise man’s heart is at his right hand.” May the Lord give us grace to see how we might live to glorify Him.

1st of all – The Problem Stated: One sinner destroys much good.

“Wisdom is better than weapons of war; but one sinner destroys much good.” We saw in our last 2 studies how Christ’s wisdom; the wisdom of the one poor man, delivered the besieged city of the Church. He by his wisdom delivered the souls of believing men and women from eternal harm and death. Our souls were being besieged by Satan and sin. His wisdom was to “take upon Himself the form of a servant”, and to live in such a righteous way that He humbled Himself to the point of death, even the death of the cross for our sakes. By this one act He delivered the city. He defeated Satan, the great prince of this world that had come up to besiege the city, and to ensnare and entrap in by his schemes. By Christ’s wisdom we are delivered from the snare of the trapper (Satan), and the deadly pestilence of sin and death. He suffered that we might be free. He suffered so that we might be safe. Psalm 91: 1 – “He who dwells in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty.” “I will say of the Lord, ‘He is my refuge and my fortress; My God, in Him I will trust.’” “Surely He shall deliver you from the snare of the fowler and from the perilous pestilence.” “He shall cover you with His feathers, and under His wings you shall take refuge; His truth shall be your shield and buckler.” “You shall not be afraid of the terror by night, nor the arrow that flies by day, nor of the pestilence that walks in darkness, nor of the destruction that lays waste at noon-day. Christ’s wisdom was not only better than weapons of war. But trusting in Him actually brings to us the spiritual weapons of war; the shield, the buckler of His truth, that we might live by it.

Why did our Lord Jesus Christ have to do all of this? It is because one sinner destroyed much good in the beginning. Turn with me over to Romans Chapter 5,

verse 17. “For if by the one man’s offense death reigned through the one, much more those who receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ.” Therefore, as through one man’s offense judgment came to all men, resulting in condemnation, even so through one Man’s righteous act the free gift came to all men, resulting in justification of life.” “For as by one man’s disobedience, many were made sinners, so also by one Man’s obedience many will be made righteous.” Here we have described for us, the one sinner who destroyed much good. Adam, in the beginning, was given every good thing that he needed for life and godliness. He was righteous and God set before him, by way of the Covenant of Works, the good path of personal obedience, based upon his “keeping himself” from the sin of eating the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Adam was our Federal Head. He stood in the place of all of his descendants in his keeping this commandment. But he did not keep it and so this disobedience; this one man’s “offense”, resulted in “death reigning” in every man who came after him, except one. That One was Christ. But one man’s sin destroyed much good, and brought sin into the world and death to every descendant of Adam. Christ’s wisdom is that He, being the Son of God, and righteous in everything that He said and did; also stood in our place. Because of the one Man’s righteous act, “the free gift of salvation came to all men resulting in justification of life.” (verse 18) God is now justified in giving the believer in Christ the gift of eternal life and the grace which will transform his soul so that he or she will become a righteous person.

Many people (even Christians) do not understand that they need this grace which will transform their soul, and give them the power to lead a godly life. They do not understand that they need Christ’s grace (that is God’s helping them to be holy) every day. And, they do not understand their own responsibility to guard their heart. They do not realize that one sinner, even themselves, can destroy much good. But turn with me to Joshua Chapter 7. Joshua has just finished leading Israel in battle against the city of Jericho, and they defeated it by following God’s exact instructions. Joshua had told them in Chapter 6, verse 18 that they, “by all means should abstain from the accursed things, lest they take of the accursed things, and make the camp of Israel a curse, and trouble it.” They won the battle of Jericho, and the Lord was with Joshua it says in verse 27 of Chapter 6 and his fame spread throughout all the country. “But the children of Israel committed a trespass regarding the accursed things, for Achan the son of Carmi, the son of Zabdi, the son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, took of the accursed things; so the anger of the Lord burned against the children of Israel”. Nobody knew of his sin except he himself, and God, until they went into battle against Ai and they were defeated. Look at verse 8. Joshua prays and he says, “O Lord, what shall I say when Israel turns its back before its enemies?” “For the Canaanites and all the inhabitants of the land will hear it, and surround us, and cut of our name from the earth.” “Then what will You do for Your great name?” “So the Lord said

to Joshua: ‘Get up!’ “Why do you lie thus on your face?” “Israel has sinned, and they have also transgressed My covenant which I commanded them.” “For they have even taken some of the accursed things, and have both stolen and deceived; and they also put it among their own stuff.” “Therefore the children of Israel could not stand before their enemies, but turned their back before their enemies, because they have become doomed to destruction.” “Neither will I be with you any more, unless you destroy the accursed from among you.” “Get up, sanctify the people, and say, ‘Sanctify yourselves for tomorrow, because thus say the Lord God of Israel: ‘There is an accursed thing in your midst, O Israel; you cannot stand before your enemies until you take away the accursed thing from among you.’” Then God showed them how they could discover the one sinner who had destroyed much good in Israel. They would be brought before the Lord tribe by tribe and family by family until it was discovered who had done this awful thing. They discovered that it was the sin of covetousness in one man; Achan, who, it says in verse 18 saw among the spoils a beautiful Babylonian garment, two hundred shekels of silver, and a wedge of gold, he coveted them and took them and hid them in the earth in the midst of his tent. This was the reason for Israel’s defeat; this one man’s sin. The wisdom of God is better than weapons of war because God will be with us in whatever we do in accordance with His Word. But He cannot be with us establishing advances of His glorious kingdom if we are going to live in sin or hide our sin.

Then 2ndly, We want to look at the problem compounded; “Dead flies in the ointment.”

“Dead flies putrefy the perfumer’s ointment, and cause it to give off a foul odor.” “So does a little folly to one respected for wisdom and honor.” We need to see that the problem of sin is compounded by what it does to our good reputation as a Christian when we allow “dead flies” to land in the perfumer’s ointment. The perfumer’s ointment was kept in a box in those days. If there was not a cover over it, flies could get into it; they would invariably die in it, and thus the smell of their dead little bodies would ruin the whole box of perfume. Matthew Henry says, “True wisdom is true honor, and will gain a man a reputation, which is like a box of precious ointment, pleasing and very valuable.” I believe that the flies in the precious ointment of a man’s reputation are those little sins that are not guarded against, well enough, in the life of the Christian. The text explains them being “a little folly” engaged in. We know that it is a Christian who is being spoken of, because the “little folly” is being tolerated by a person who is respected for their wisdom and honor. Fools are not respected for their wisdom and honor. Sometimes we who are Christians may feel justified in engaging in a little folly. But the text is saying that we will regret it later. Folly according to the dictionary is 1. A lack of good sense, understanding, or foresight. 2. Criminally or tragically foolish actions or conduct. Obsolete usage : (this is not obsolete to the Bible), evil, wickedness; especially: lewd behavior. 3. A foolish act or idea. 4. An excessively

costly or unprofitable undertaking. All of these encompass the term – Folly. Let's look at a few verses which would help us to understand.

Turn with me to Psalm 85: 8. "I will hear what God the Lord will speak, for He will speak peace to His people and to His saints; but let them not turn back to folly." "Surely His salvation is near to those who fear Him, that glory may dwell in our land." These words teach us that the essence of wisdom is when God's people, His saints, "hear what the Lord will speak". For us, this is found in our receiving and acting upon God's written word the Bible. Folly would be disobedience to God's revealed will. Instead we ought to be those who are cultivating the new life of Christ within us in our thoughts, words, and deeds. Turn with me over to Ephesians 5: 1. "Therefore be imitators of God as dear children." "And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet smelling aroma." "But fornication and all uncleanness or covetousness, let it not even be named among you as is fitting for saints; neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks." You see, the cultivation of good thoughts in our mind and our heart is that which will help preserve us from the flies landing in the ointment and spoiling our good reputation as a Christian. Unclean thoughts, covetousness, filthiness, foolish talking and coarse jesting are flies which will land in mind, and if they stay there, they will bring dishonor to God and to ourselves.

A Christian is supposed to be guarding himself or herself from these sinful and vain thoughts, and to have the good sense not to allow them into their heart; there to breed death. James 1: 13 – "Let no one say when he is tempted, 'I am tempted by God'; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone." "But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed." "Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death." This is like the flies landing in the perfumer's ointment. You must attempt to prevent the flies from landing there, and dying there. Look at Jeremiah 4: 14. "O Jerusalem, wash your heart from wickedness, that you may be saved." "How long shall your evil thoughts lodge within you?" You see, this is the usual way of the unbeliever; to allow evil thoughts to lodge within him. But in the life of a wise Christian person, it is never so. He knows that a little folly is "enough to produce immense mischief", as Charles Bridges says in his commentary. "The unguarded moment—the hasty word—the irritable temper—the rudeness of manner—the occasional slip—the supposed harmless eccentricities—all tend to spoil the fragrance of the ointment." "The minor morals of the Christian code require strict attention." "Take care that the Christian life is Christianized in outward points." "The neglect of serving the Lord in little things excites revolt." "The smallest extremities of the system—no less than its more important parts—should be kept sacred for God." "Let every corner of the field be cultivated for Him." "It is not enough that we be "sincere". "We must be "without offense."

And then Lastly - We will look at the remedy for this problem; “The wise man’s heart is at his right hand”. (verses 2 and 3)

“A wise man’s heart is at his right hand, but a fool’s heart is at his left.” “Even when a fool walks along the way, He lacks wisdom and he shows everyone that he is a fool.” The wise man’s heart being at his right is a very pictorial way of saying that when a righteous man needs wisdom, it is right there for him; right by him. It is natural to him as it is in his using his right hand to do things with, if he is right handed. In the case of the fool, his heart is at his left. Everything that he does shows that he lacks the wisdom that he needs to do things which would be right and true; good for himself and others. To close this message, what is the remedy for the righteous man when he would prevent the flies (the little sins) from landing in the perfumer’s ointment? I think that it is found in Philippians 4: 8. “Finally, my brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things.” Pray each day and ask the Lord to help you to keep your mind on these things. Pray also remembering that when you believe in Jesus you can come at all times to Him and ask Him for the wisdom that you need. Psalm 16, verses 7 and 8 say: “I will bless the Lord who has given me counsel; my heart also instructs me in the night seasons.” “I have set the Lord always before me; because He is at my right hand I shall not be moved.”