

Ecclesiastes 10:13

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

The beginning of the words of his mouth is foolishness: and the end of his talk is mischievous madness.

Analysis

The beginning of the words of his mouth is foolishness: and the end of his talk is mischievous madness—this verse describes the progressive deterioration of the fool's speech. The Hebrew techilat divrei fihu siklut (תְּחִלַת דְּבָרֵי פִיהוּ סְקָלָת), the beginning of his mouth's words is folly) shows the fool starts badly. But it gets worse: ve-acharit pihu holelut ra'ah (וְאַחֲרֵית פִיהוּ הַוְלֵלָת רָאָה), and the end of his mouth is evil madness/raving).

The progression from siklut (folly) to holelut ra'ah (wicked madness) shows how foolish speech escalates. What begins as mere stupidity devolves into harmful, destructive raving. The fool doesn't recognize when to stop talking—each word compounds the damage until communication becomes incoherent and malicious. This anticipates verse 14's observation that fools multiply words despite ignorance. Proverbs 15:2 contrasts this: "The tongue of the wise useth knowledge aright: but the mouth of fools poureth out foolishness."

Historical Context

Ancient Israelite culture valued verbal restraint and measured speech. The fool who couldn't control his tongue faced social consequences—loss of credibility, exclusion from councils, and forfeited influence. Proverbs repeatedly warns against the fool's uncontrolled speech (Proverbs 10:19, 17:28, 29:20). The New Testament echoes this theme: James warns that the unbridled tongue defiles the whole person (James 3:6). Jesus identified speech as revealing heart-condition

—"out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh" (Matthew 12:34). Church history records tragic examples of theological disputes that began with legitimate questions but escalated into destructive heresy and schism through uncontrolled, escalating rhetoric.

Related Passages

Psalm 19:1 — Heavens declare God's glory

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Study Questions

1. Can you identify conversations where your speech has escalated from foolish to harmful, and what triggers this progression in your communication?
2. How can you develop habits of restraint that stop foolish speech before it escalates to mischievous madness?

Interlinear Text

תֹּחַל						
תֹּחַל						
תֹּחַל						

בָּעֵה:						
בָּעֵה:						
בָּעֵה:						

Additional Cross-References

Proverbs 29:9 (Parallel theme): If a wise man contendeth with a foolish man, whether he rage or laugh, there is no rest.