

# Ecclesiastes 10:2

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

A wise man's heart is at his right hand; but a fool's heart at his left.

## Analysis

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**A wise man's heart is at his right hand; but a fool's heart at his left** (לב חכם לְבָב חָכָם)—this proverbial saying uses spatial metaphor for moral orientation. In ancient cultures, the right hand symbolized strength, honor, and correctness (Psalm 16:11; Matthew 25:33), while the left suggested weakness or awkwardness. The lev (לב, heart) in Hebrew thought represents the center of intellect, will, and moral decision-making. The wise person's heart "at the right hand" indicates moral orientation toward what is proper, skillful, and beneficial. The fool's (kesil, כְּסִיל) heart "at the left" suggests natural inclination toward what is wrong, clumsy, and destructive.

This isn't about physical handedness but dispositional orientation—the wise instinctively lean toward right choices, while fools gravitate toward foolishness. Proverbs develops this theme extensively: "The way of a fool is right in his own eyes" (Proverbs 12:15), yet objectively wrong. Jesus later uses right/left imagery for judgment: sheep at the right hand, goats at the left (Matthew 25:31-46). The verse teaches that wisdom and folly aren't merely intellectual categories but fundamental orientations of the heart that shape all choices.

## Historical Context

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Ancient Near Eastern cultures universally associated the right side with favor and the left with disfavor. Egyptian art depicted the blessed dead approaching Osiris from the right. Mesopotamian omens considered right-side occurrences favorable.

Biblical law required taking oaths with the right hand (Genesis 48:13-20). Latin languages preserve this: "dexter" (right) became "dexterous" (skillful), while "sinister" (left) means ominous. The Preacher uses this cultural convention to teach moral truth: wisdom and folly represent opposite fundamental orientations. The New Testament affirms this spatial moral metaphor in eschatological judgment. The Reformers emphasized that this natural orientation stems from the heart's condition—regenerate hearts incline toward righteousness (though imperfectly), unregenerate hearts toward sin. Sanctification progressively aligns the believer's "heart" with God's right ways.

## Related Passages

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**John 15:13** — Greatest form of love

**1 Corinthians 13:4** — Characteristics of love

## Study Questions

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1. What does your instinctive orientation—your default choices when not carefully deliberating—reveal about your heart's condition?
2. How can you cultivate wisdom so deeply that right choices become natural orientation rather than constant struggle?

## Interlinear Text

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וְלִב	חָכָם	לִימִינוֹ	וְלִב	כֶּסֶל	לְשִׁמְאֻלוֹ:
heart	A wise man's	is at his right hand	heart	but a fool's	at his left
H3820	H2450	H3225	H3820	H3684	H8040

## Additional Cross-References

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**Ecclesiastes 10:14** (Parallel theme): A fool also is full of words: a man cannot tell what shall be; and what shall be after him, who can tell him?

**Ecclesiastes 10:10** (Parallel theme): If the iron be blunt, and he do not whet the edge, then must he put to more strength: but wisdom is profitable to direct.

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