

Ecclesiastes 10:3

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Yea also, when he that is a fool walketh by the way, his wisdom faileth him, and he saith to every one that he is a fool.

Analysis

Yea also, when he that is a fool walketh by the way, his wisdom faileth him (וְגַם-בְּדֶרֶךְ הַשֶּׁסֶכֶל הָלֵךְ לְבוֹ חָסֵר)—the phrase "walketh by the way" (ba-derekh holekh, בְּדֶרֶךְ הָלֵךְ) means ordinary daily activity. Even in routine matters, the fool's lev (לב, heart/mind) is chaser (חָסֵר, lacking/deficient). Folly isn't occasional lapse but consistent pattern revealing deficient understanding. **And he saith to every one that he is a fool** (וְאָמַר לְכָל סָכֵל הוּא)—the fool's behavior broadcasts his folly to all observers. This could mean:

1. the fool declares himself foolish through actions, or
2. the fool calls everyone else fools, revealing his own foolishness.

Both interpretations fit: fools reveal their folly through behavior and through judging others foolish.

Proverbs warns, "even a fool, when he holdeth his peace, is counted wise" (Proverbs 17:28)—but fools seldom remain silent. Their deficient judgment manifests constantly in speech and deed. Jesus condemned Pharisees who said "Thou fool" to brothers (Matthew 5:22), yet they were the actual fools, missing God's Messiah. The verse warns that folly cannot be hidden—it inevitably reveals itself to everyone except the fool himself.

Historical Context

Ancient Israelite society was predominantly communal—individuals lived, worked, and traveled in constant proximity to others. "Walking by the way" involved continuous social interaction on village streets, market squares, and common roads. In this setting, personal character couldn't be concealed—daily interaction revealed whether someone possessed wisdom or folly. Proverbs and Ecclesiastes assume this transparent social context where reputation reflected actual character. The fool's self-revelation served as community warning: avoid this person's counsel, don't partner in business, exclude from leadership. In modern atomized society, fools can hide longer behind professional credentials or social media personas. Yet the principle remains: given sufficient time and observation, folly reveals itself through cumulative small choices and statements that betray deficient judgment. The Reformers emphasized that true faith produces works visible to the community—James 2:14-26—while hypocrisy eventually exposes itself.

Related Passages

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Study Questions

1. What patterns in your speech and daily choices are broadcasting to others about the wisdom or folly governing your heart?
2. How can you develop sufficient self-awareness to recognize and correct foolish patterns before they become public testimony against you?

Interlinear Text

וְגַם	בַּדֶּךְ הַכֶּנֶף	סָכַל	הֵלֵךְ	לִבּוֹ	חָסֵר
H1571	by the way	Yea also when he that is a fool	walketh	his wisdom	faileth
	H1870	H5530	H1980	H3820	H2638
	וְאָמַר	לֹכַל	סָכַל	הוּא:	
him and he saith	H3605	Yea also when he that is a fool	H1931		
H559		H5530			

Additional Cross-References

Proverbs 18:2 (Parallel theme): A fool hath no delight in understanding, but that his heart may discover itself.

Proverbs 13:16 (Parallel theme): Every prudent man dealeth with knowledge: but a fool layeth open his folly.