

Present Truth

The *Bible alone* as the only rule of faith and practice; *faith alone* as the only means of acceptance with God; and *Christ alone* as the only mediator between God and men.

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Present Truth is a magazine dedicated to the restoration of New Testament Christianity in this generation. It is especially committed to upholding the truth of justification by faith in this time when it is being threatened by humanism, emotionalism, and ecumenism. Our publication is based on the principle of sola Scriptura – the Bible and the Bible only as a rule of faith and practice (2 Tim. 3:15-17). We desire to give the gospel trumpet a certain sound (1 Cor. 14:7-9), that through words easy to be understood (Hab. 2:2) people may “be established in the present truth” (2 Pet. 1:12) and like Noah be proclaimers of the righteousness of Christ (2 Pet. 2:5).

Editor: Richard A. Marin

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Editorial Introduction: An Old Shepherd

In this issue we turn to the Old Testament book of Ecclesiastes.

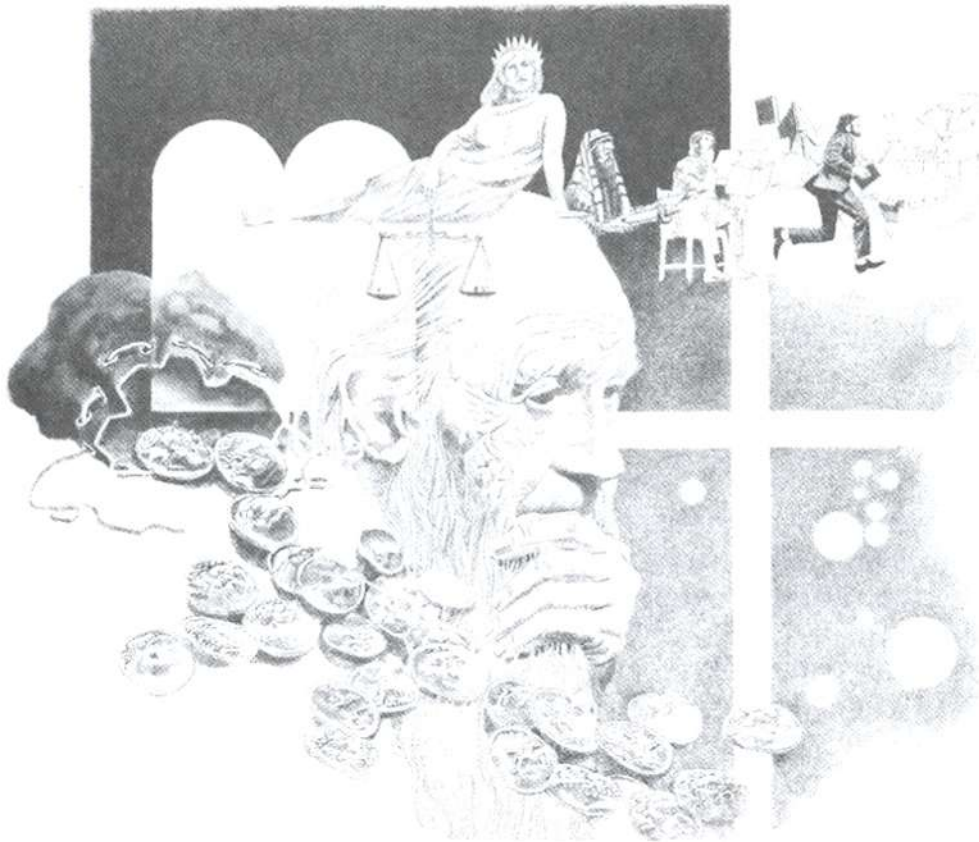
Don't expect to find a preacher there. Solomon comes to us as an old shepherd who knows a lot more about sheep (people) and the Great Shepherd than any of us do. As he tells his tale I can imagine sparks flying upward from a campfire kindled with thornbush branches.

His story won't take long and the Spirit will stoke the fire along the way. As you lean back in the desert sand and dig your toes in close to the fire, let the cool night breeze carry you along with the storyteller. His story is meant to pull you gently to one of life's greatest lessons. Listen carefully as the Shepherd bings you towards Wisdom's final decision.

John Williams first takes us on an overview of Ecclesiastes and then this editor attempts to fill in a few of the details.

Let's search the Scriptures together.

RAM



STRIVING AFTER THE WIND

by John L. Williams*

“Striving after the wind” is an expression that implies *futility*. A casual reading of Ecclesiastes might give one the impression that King Solomon in his old age reflects on his life and concludes that it was all meaningless; like chasing after the wind. However, if as the Bible tells us, “all scripture is inspired by God and is profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God might be complete, equipped to for every good work,” then we must conclude that there is more to the book than first meets the eye, and it behooves us to try to gain a clearer understanding of the message God intended for us, and to find the relevance to our own lives today.

* John Williams is a retired businessman living in southern California. Since understanding the substitutionary righteousness of Christ he has enjoyed studying the Bible and here takes up his pen to share some of what he has learned. Scripture quotations are from the New International Version.

The renowned French Philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre once said: “No finite point (that would include man), has any meaning unless it has an infinite reference point ”. He was not a Christian, but he understood man’s dilemma in trying to find meaning to his existence. The Creator-God is that Infinite Reference Point for man. Nothing else is sufficient; not power; not fame; not popularity; not good looks. The fact that we are the sons and daughters of an Infinite, personal Creator, is the sole basis of man’s dignity, and it is the only thing that gives meaning and purpose to life. Our purpose is to know God; to reveal His glory (goodness), to those around us by the way we live our lives.

Solomon knew the purpose for which God had anointed him King of Israel, as evidenced by this passage from his prayer of dedication of the temple : “I have prayed before the Lord, be near to the Lord our God every day and night, that He may uphold the cause of His servant and the cause of His people Israel according to each day’s need, so that all the people of the earth may know that the Lord is God and there is no other. But your hearts must be fully committed to the Lord our God, to live by His decrees and obey His commands as at this time.”

It seems clear from the accounts in scripture (1 Kings 2-6) that for the first seven years of his reign, when the temple was being built, that Solomon tried to be faithful to his calling, to glorify the God of Israel. He knew from his father David’s experience that he could trust in God’s promises, yet right from the beginning he began to compromise his devotion to God by taking a pagan princess as his wife. His marriage to the daughter of Pharaoh, King of Egypt, was intended to secure his political, economic and military security, but it clearly indicates a lack of trust in God’s promises to protect him, in spite of ample evidence of His faithfulness to Israel during the 500 years since their deliverance from bondage in Egypt.

The sin of unbelief has plagued mankind since the very beginning. It was the basis of Adam and Eve’s sin and since then is at the core of man’s natural being. It lies at the heart of every conflict in the life of every

believer. The question that each of us must face each and every day is: Can we trust God to deliver on his promises? Can we trust him when he said “never will I leave you, never will I forsake you” (Heb.13:5)? Solomon faced the same question



and demonstrated his distrust by depending on his own strength and wisdom for his security and the security of Israel.

As Solomon trusted more and more in his own power, he drifted farther and farther away from God, and ultimately into idolatry. He took his eyes off the Infinite Reference Point, and the result was that life lost its meaning. He allowed pagan worship to continue, and even went so far as to build twenty-three temples to accommodate their abominable practices; he had 700 wives of royal birth, no doubt to further enhance his power-base, and 300 concubines; he had a vast army, the most powerful in the world; he was surrounded by opulence beyond imagination; he had a personal annual income of 666 talents of gold (about \$800,000,000 in today's value); he built his own navy to transport gold, silver, precious stones and spices from all over the world; he built magnificent buildings such as the world had never seen; he received the praise and adulation of the world's rulers; yet at some point he came to the realization that it was all like "striving after the wind" (Eccl. 2:17).

God had anointed Solomon King of Israel to reveal His glory to an unbelieving, pagan world. By revealing to the surrounding nations God's goodness and faithfulness to His people they would be brought to a knowledge of the One true God and perhaps turn away from idol worship to worshipping Jehovah, the God of Israel. But his focus shifted from glorifying God to self-glorification, from the Kingdom of God to the kingdom of men. To get some sense of this transformation, it is instructive to compare two passages by Solomon himself; the first at the beginning of his reign, recorded in 1 Kings 3:6-9: "Now O Lord my God, you have made your servant king in place of my father David. But I am only a little child and do not know how to carry out my duties... So give your servant a discerning heart to govern your people and to distinguish between right and wrong. For who is able to govern this great people of yours?" The second is found in Ecclesiastes 2:4-12 when he is rehearsing



his own greatness and his many accomplishments: "I undertook great projects; I built houses for myself and planted vineyards. I made gardens and parks and planted all kinds of fruit trees in them. I made reservoirs to water groves of flourishing trees. I bought male and female slaves and had other slaves who were born in my house. I owned more herds and flocks than anyone in Jerusalem before me. I amassed silver and gold for myself... I acquired men and women singers, and a harem as well... I became greater by far than anyone in Jerusalem before me... I denied myself nothing my eyes desired; I refused my heart no pleasure."

Here we see a change from a humble young king, awed by the responsibility bestowed upon him by God, and praying for wisdom and understanding to rule wisely and justly, to a self-absorbed ruler in his declining years still trying to find the meaning of life. It is noteworthy that in the second passage the word "I" appears 11 times in just 7 verses.

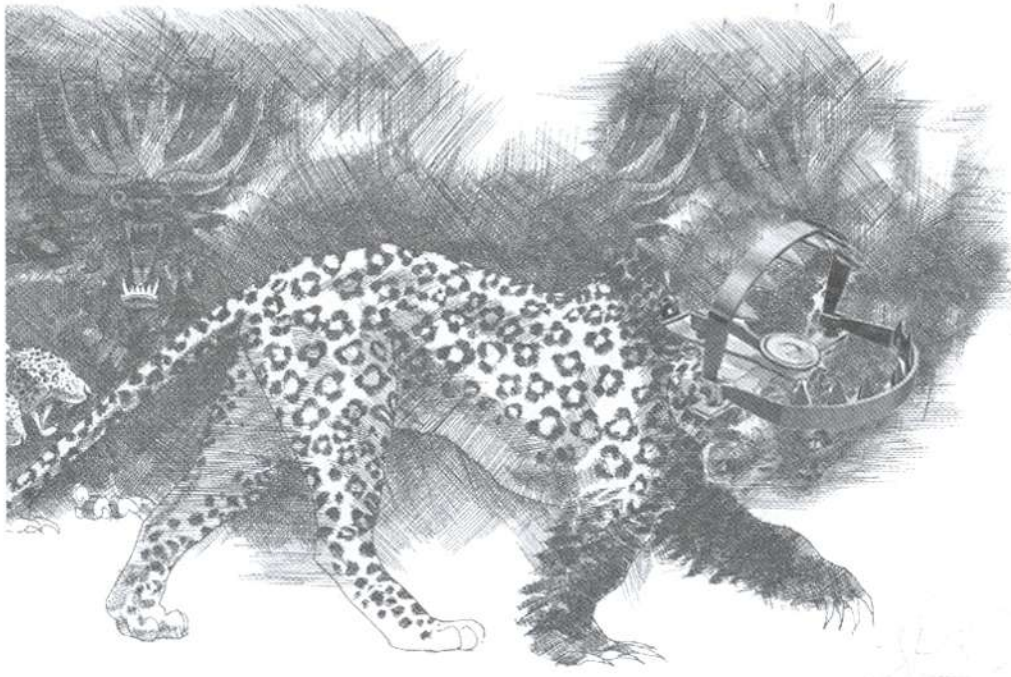
Much of Solomon's writings are directed at the youth. Young people today are searching more than ever for meaning and purpose to their existence. Perhaps Solomon was motivated by a desire to help future generations avoid the mistakes of his own youth when he became preoccupied with his power and wealth. He learned much too late in his life that it was "all vanity," which caused him to lose sight of the real meaning and purpose of his existence; to glorify the God of Israel. Scripture tells us that we glorify God by revealing His goodness (Rom. 2:4).

He urges the youth to "Remember your Creator in the days of your youth, before the days of trouble come."

Late in his life Solomon came to the conclusion that apart from God life is meaningless. This is in fact the central message of Ecclesiastes. He sums up his conclusions in Ecclesiastes 3:11-14: "He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the hearts of men; yet they can not fathom what God has done from beginning to end... I know that everything God does will endure forever; nothing can be added to it and nothing can be taken from it. God does it so that men will revere Him." This last quote also applies to God's work of salvation. His work of reconciliation is a complete work; it can not be added to, nor can anything be taken away from it. We need to reflect on this truth while we live in this world.

The Apostle Paul expresses Solomon's thought this way in 1 Corinthians 15:9: "if for this world only we have hope, we are above all men to be pitied." Whether we realize it or not, there is a yearning in the heart of every person for eternal life. We must keep our focus on the kingdom of God, and remember that, "eye has not seen, nor ear heard, neither has it entered the mind of man what God has in store for us." All else is like striving after the wind.

God had revealed to Solomon's father, David, through the prophet Nathan that "when your days are over... I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, who will come from your own body, and I will establish his kingdom. He is the one that will build a house [temple] for my Name... I will be his Father, and he will be my son." 2 Sam. 7:12-14. This is what gave meaning and purpose to Solomon's life. It is the same for every one of us who have God as our Father.



Life Without Meaning

by Richard A. Marin

Now your life may be full of meaning. Or you may be one of those not sure what to make of life. Either way life as we know it comes to an end. Then what? Does life have any meaning if it ends?

There was a man who had everything one could want in life. He was king over a glorious empire. His subjects loved him and considered his decisions to be very wise. He could afford any project or luxury he desired. He built a temple for his God like no other on earth. And he accumulated more wives than there are days in a year. It was then he sought for the meaning to life. In his search he pursued science, entertainment, alcohol, construction, landscaping, horticulture, and animal husbandry. He increased his staff; collected precious metals and gemstones; gathered musical ensembles for all kinds of music yet after all this he ended in despair. His conclusion: "So I hated life, because the work that is done under the sun was grievous to me. All of it is meaningless, a chasing after the wind. I hated all the things I had toiled for under the sun, because I must leave them..." Eccl. 2:17-18 NIV.

This wise king recorded his pursuits and his conclusions in a book titled *Ecclesiastes*. He wrote especially for his son but all of us would do well if we could understand his counsel.

In the book of Ecclesiastes King Solomon comes to us like a trap on the prowl. It's not right to come to this book with your mind filled with

religious platitudes. This is literature written for everyone – pagans and non-pagans. Let the author bait his trap how he wishes. The reader must get a good fill of the bait before springing the trap. Solomon is not writing as a pessimistic, sour, old man. Rather he is a holy man of God writing as he is moved by God's Holy Spirit of Wisdom (2 Pet. 1:21). If we let him, he will so catch us with the truth about time, death, and judgment that no wind of false doctrine will be able to remove us from his holy trap.

1: THE PROMISED SEED

When King David thought to build God a house God responded by telling David that he was going to build David a house. In that covenant promise God also says: "I will set up thy seed after thee... and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build an house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom for ever." 2 Sam. 7:12, 13. "Behold, a son shall be born to thee, who shall be a man of rest: and I will give him rest from all his enemies round about: for his name shall be Solomon, and I will give peace and quietness unto Israel in his days." 1 Chron. 22:9.

David and Bathsheba were mourning the death of their illegitimate child when Solomon was conceived. Before this time Nathan, the prophet, had already brought conviction and repentance to David. So it was to a mourning mother and a forgiven father that Solomon, the peace child, was born. And Nathan called him Jedidiah, beloved of God (2 Sam. 12:24, 25).

Some twenty years later Nathan again appears with crucial timing. Solomon's half-brother, Adonijah, has proclaimed himself king in place of his father David. Certain death is all that Bathsheba and Solomon can expect from this bold move. But although David is old and feeble his word has power. And in obedience to his word Solomon is installed as rightful king over all Israel with the blessing of the prophet, the priest, and the king (1 Kings 1:1-31).

Walking in the footsteps of his father his first act is an act of worship. After offering sacrifices at Gibeon God appears to him in a dream and offers him his wish (1 Kings 3 :3-14). It is of supreme importance to understand Solomon's request and God's response. Today what he asked for and what he got are often regarded as something bad. You say: "What's wrong with 'wisdom'?" Look closely at the text: "Give thy servant an understanding heart to judge thy people, that I may discern between good and bad: for who is able to judge this thy so great a people."

Solomon asked for discernment and God gave him "understanding to discern judgment." That is *discrimination*. It once was considered a positive character trait to be discriminating. But our society has made it a bad word. To call some things good and other things bad is what the Ninevites couldn't do (Jonah 4:11). Yet this is the very thing the author of Hebrews equates with spiritual maturity (Heb. 5:14). This is what Solomon received of God and the verses that follow Solomon's dream in 1 Kings 3 give an example of Solomon discriminating between two women. He gave the disputed baby to one and left the other with nothing.

All Israel saw that the wisdom of God was in Solomon. This wisdom forms the basis of the book of Ecclesiastes. If there is no judge at the end of life's road then life is meaningless. If God doesn't plan to discriminate in considering the lives of his creation then nothing matters. What great confidence we can gather from Christ, the Son of David. He will judge the people in righteousness and none will miss his assize.

Truly David's promised son must be more than a Palestinian monarch. Solomon has no lasting throne in Israel today. To David, God was promising "Jesus Christ," his beloved Son, who would bring peace on earth and build God's house against which the gates of hell could not prevail. All judgment has been committed unto the Son. The hour of his judgment is come. Life has meaning because Jesus will judge his people. And if judgment begin with us, "what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God?" (John 5:22; Rev. 14:7; 2 Cor. 5:9; 1 Pet. 4:17).

Jesus the son of David, the Beloved of God, the Good Shepherd comes calling us in the words of Ecclesiastes.

Ecclesiastes 1 & 2

1:1 The words of the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem. 2Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, vanity of vanities; all is vanity. 3What profit hath a man of all his labour which he taketh under the sun? 4One generation passeth away, and another generation cometh: but the earth abideth for ever. 5The sun also ariseth, and the sun goeth down, and hasteth to his place where he arose. 6The wind goeth toward the south, and turneth about unto the north; it whirleth about continually, and the wind returneth again according to his circuits. 7All the rivers run into the sea; yet the sea is not full; unto the place from whence the rivers come, thither they return again.

8All things are full of labour; man cannot utter it: the eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing. 9The thing that hath been, it is that which shall be; and that which is done is that which shall be done: and there is no new thing under the sun. 10Is there any thing whereof it may be said, See, this is new? it hath been already of old time, which was before us.

11There is no remembrance of former things; neither shall there be any remembrance of things that are to come with those that shall come after.

12I the Preacher was king over Israel in Jerusalem. 13And I gave my heart to seek and search out by wisdom concerning all things

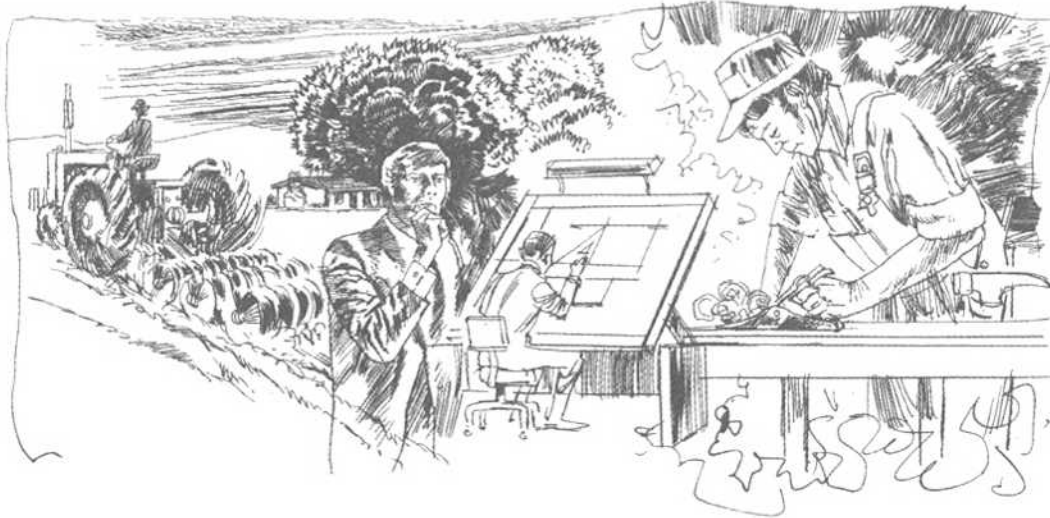


that are done under heaven: this sore travail hath God given to the sons of man to be exercised therewith. 14I have seen all the works that are done under the sun; and, behold, all is vanity and vexation of spirit. 15That which is crooked cannot be made straight: and that which is wanting cannot be numbered. 16I communed with mine own heart, saying, Lo, I am come to great estate, and have gotten more wisdom than all they that have been before me in Jerusalem: yea, my heart had great experience of wisdom and knowledge. 17And I gave my heart to know wisdom, and to know madness and folly: I perceived that this also is vexation of spirit. 18For in much wisdom is much grief: and he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow.

Chapter 2

2:1 I said in mine heart, Go to now, I will prove thee with mirth, therefore enjoy pleasure: and, behold, this also is vanity. 2I said of laughter, It is mad: and of mirth, What doeth it? 3I sought in mine heart to give myself unto wine, yet acquainting mine heart with wisdom; and to lay hold on folly, till I might see what was that good for the sons of men, which they should do under the heaven all the days of their life. 4I made me great works; I builded me houses; I planted me vineyards: 5I made me gardens and orchards, and I planted trees in them of all kind of fruits: 6I made me pools of water, to water therewith the wood that bringeth forth trees: 7I got me servants and maidens, and had servants born in my house; also I had great possessions of great and small cattle above all that were in Jerusalem before me: 8I gathered me also silver and gold, and the peculiar treasure of kings and of the provinces: I gat me men singers and women singers, and the delights of the sons of men, as musical instruments, and that of all sorts. 9So I was great, and increased more than all that were before me in Jerusalem: also my wisdom remained with me. 10And whatsoever mine eyes desired I kept not from them, I withheld not my heart from any joy; for my heart rejoiced in all my labour: and this was my portion of all my labour.

11Then I looked on all the works that my hands had wrought, and on the labour that I had laboured to do: and, behold, all was vanity and vexation of spirit, and there was no profit under the sun. 12And I turned myself to behold wisdom, and madness, and folly: for what can the man do that cometh after the king? even that which hath been already done. 13Then I saw that wisdom excelleth folly, as far as light excelleth darkness. 14The wise man's eyes are in his head; but the fool walketh in darkness: and I myself perceived also that one event happeneth to them all. 15Then said I in my heart, As it happeneth to the fool, so it happeneth even to me; and why was I then more wise? Then I said in my heart, that this also is vanity. 16For there is no remembrance of the wise more than of the fool for ever; seeing that which now is in the days to come shall all be forgotten. And how dieth the wise man? as the fool. 17Therefore I hated life; because the work that is wrought under the sun is grievous unto me: for all is vanity and vexation of spirit. 18Yea, I hated all my labour which I had taken under the sun: because I should leave it unto



the man that shall be after me. 19And who knoweth whether he shall be a wise man or a fool? yet shall he have rule over all my labour wherein I have laboured, and wherein I have showed myself wise under the sun. This is also vanity. 20Therefore I went about to cause my heart to despair of all the labour which I took under the sun. 21For there is a man whose labour is in wisdom, and in knowledge, and in equity; yet to a man that hath not laboured therein shall he leave it for his portion. This also is vanity and a great evil. 22For what hath man of all his labour, and of the vexation of his heart, wherein he hath laboured under the sun? 23For all his days are sorrows, and his travail grief; yea, his heart taketh not rest in the night. This is also vanity.

24There is nothing better for a man, than that he should eat and drink, and that he should make his soul enjoy good in his labour. This also I saw, that it was from the hand of God. 25For who can eat, or who else can hasten hereunto, more than I? 26For God giveth to a man that is good in his sight wisdom, and knowledge, and joy: but to the sinner he giveth travail, to gather and to heap up, that he may give to him that is good before God. This also is vanity and vexation of spirit.

2: ACTIVE FOR NOTHING

The first two chapters of Ecclesiastes are a unit. One theme pervades them both. And its conclusion comes in the last verse of the second chapter.

Consider the question that introduces this section: "What profit hath a man of all his labor which he taketh under the sun?" Eccl. 1:3. If you count the times "labor," "work," "doing," etc. is used in these two chapters you will come up with more than two dozen references. Human activity is the theme of the first two chapters of Ecclesiastes.

Solomon captures the thinking of every person. Even the secular mind can easily agree that life is meaningless because of death, repetition, and forgetfulness. What we do doesn't matter because we all die. There is nothing unique in our actions, they have been done before by others.

No one remembers what we do anyway. To all appearances this is human experience and in the light of appearances human activity is meaningless. This is the conclusion that Solomon wants us to arrive at. Only when we agree with this world view in which nothing is new, nothing is remembered, and everyone dies anyway (1:11; 2:16) are we prepared to cry out: "That's not fair!"

And, Solomon replies: "But God is there!" We must open our eyes to reality. Reality is that there is a discriminating Judge. In his sight some men are considered good and others are called sinners. For those who are good in his sight, "God gives wisdom, knowledge, and happiness, but to the sinner he gives the task of gathering and storing up wealth to hand it over to the one that pleases God." Eccl. 2:26 NIV.

Ecclesiastes begins by telling about all the things Solomon tried and yet he remained unfulfilled. There must be something more he thought. Everyone can relate to this. What we do with our time has no meaning if there is no record kept – if there is no weighing of them in some scale of value. There must be an investigation of our life record – a weighing of the evidence.

Even the first verse of Ecclesiastes points to the great final gathering before God's throne for the author calls himself the *qoheleth* or "gatherer." Rather than writing as a "Preacher" Solomon is writing as a true shepherd who at the end of the day gathers his flock and counts them (Eze. 34:11-31; Micah 2:12; Matt. 25:32).

Ecclesiastes 3

3:1 To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven: 2 A time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up that which is planted; 3 A time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up; 4 A time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance; 5 A time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together; a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing; 6 A time to get, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to cast away; 7 A time to rend, and a time to sew; a time to keep silence, and a time to speak; 8 A time to love, and a time to hate; a time of war, and a time of peace.

9 What profit hath he that worketh in that wherein he laboureth? 10 I have seen the travail, which God hath given to the sons of men to be exercised in it. 11 He hath made every thing beautiful in his time: also he hath set the world in their heart, so that no man can find out the work that God maketh from the beginning to the end. 12 I know that there is no good in them, but for a man to rejoice, and to do good in his life. 13 And also that every man should eat and drink, and enjoy the good of all his labour; it is the gift of God.

14 I know that, whatsoever God doeth, it shall be for ever: nothing can be put to it, nor any thing taken from it: and God doeth it, that men should fear before him. 15 That which hath been is now; and that which is to be hath already been; and God requireth that which is past.

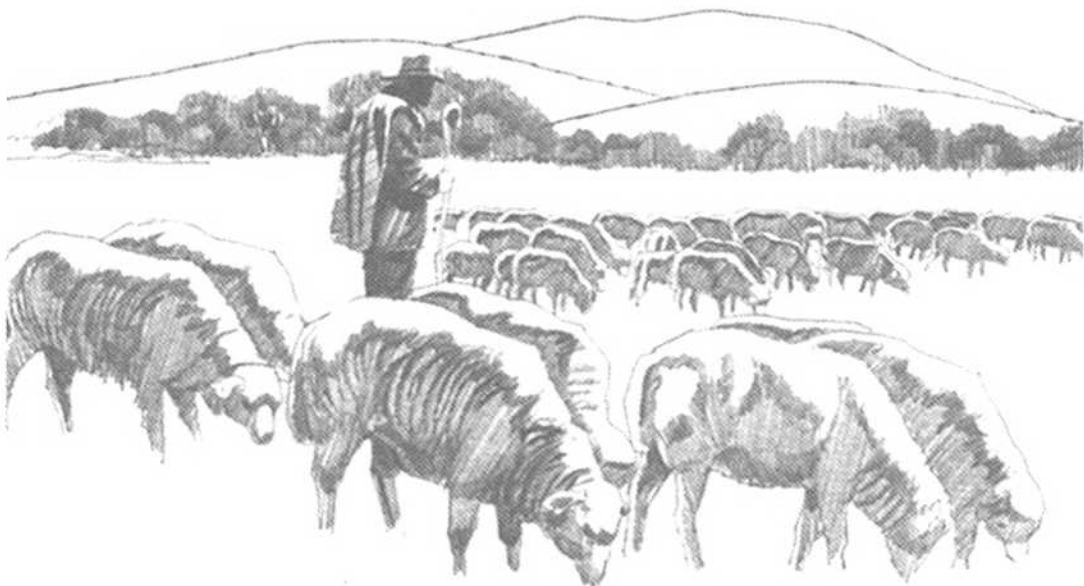
16And moreover I saw under the sun the place of judgment, that wickedness was there; and the place of righteousness, that iniquity was there. 17I said in mine heart, God shall judge the righteous and the wicked: for there is a time there for every purpose and for every work.

18I said in mine heart concerning the estate of the sons of men, that God might manifest them, and that they might see that they themselves are beasts. 19For that which befalleth the sons of men befalleth beasts; even one thing befalleth them: as the one dieth, so dieth the other; yea, they have all one breath; so that a man hath no preeminence above a beast: for all is vanity. 20All go unto one place; all are of the dust, and all turn to dust again. 21Who knoweth the spirit of man that goeth upward, and the spirit of the beast that goeth downward to the earth? 22Wherefore I perceive that there is nothing better; than that a man should rejoice in his own works; for that is his portion: for who shall bring him to see what shall be after him?

3: A TIME TO HUG

In chapter three Solomon argues: "If there is a time for everything, even a time to hug, then surely there is a time for God's judgment. We all know that here under the sun there is a time for everything; a time to plant and a time to mourn, a time to gather and a time to scatter, etc. And if that is true – even a time to hug – then surely there is a time for a final day of giving accounts. Many of Jesus' parables make the same point. The Apostle Paul on Mars Hill said: "God has appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness." Acts 17:31. And John, the revelator, places that day just prior to Christ's second coming (Rev. 14:6-14).

Solomon saw that here, under the sun, even in our courts of justice there is wickedness (v. 16). So he lifted his eyes to heaven and



said in his heart, *"God shall judge the righteous and the wicked: for there is a time there for every purpose and for every work."* Eccl. 3:17.

If God doesn't plan to examine the record of our lives then the death of your father is no different than the death of a toad. Unless God reveal it to you, you won't know the difference between a toad soul and a human soul. But Solomon asks if you know the difference.

So far in Ecclesiastes we have learned that the Good Shepherd will gather his sheep and separate the sheep from the goats. Only this truth gives meaning to human life. God has put eternity in our hearts and we desire everything to come out fair in the end (Eccl. 3:14-15).

While it is true that God's wrath was poured out at Calvary that is not the judgment to which Solomon points here. He writes from a world surrounded with injustice and looks for a day when justice will prevail. The book of Hebrews reminds us of this judgment: "...as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment: So Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation." Heb. 9:27-28. The cross has already happened and yet we can still look forward to a day of judgment that will vindicate the righteous and condemn the wicked: "God... now commandeth all men every where to repent: because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained..." Acts 17:30, 31. *"Who knoweth the spirit of man that goeth upward, and the spirit of the beast that goeth downward to the earth? Wherefore I perceive that there is nothing better, than that a man should rejoice in his own works; for that is his portion: for who shall bring him to see what shall be after him?"*

Ecclesiastes 4

4:1 So I returned, and considered all the oppressions that are done under the sun: and behold the tears of such as were oppressed, and they had no comforter; and on the side of their oppressors there was power; but they had no comforter. 2Wherefore I praised the dead which are already dead more than the living which are yet alive. 3Yea, better is he than both they, which hath not yet been, who hath not seen the evil work that is done under the sun.

4Again, I considered all travail, and every right work, that for this a man is envied of his neighbour. This is also vanity and vexation of spirit. 5The fool foldeth his hands together, and eateth his own flesh. 6Better is an handful with quietness, than both the hands full with travail and vexation of spirit.

7Then I returned, and I saw vanity under the sun. 8There is one alone, and there is not a second; yea, he hath neither child nor brother: yet is there no end of all his labour; neither is his eye satisfied with riches; neither saith he, For whom do I labour, and bereave my soul of good? This is also vanity, yea, it is a sore travail. 9Two are better than one; because they have a good reward for their labour. 10For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow: but woe to him that is alone when he falleth; for

he hath not another to help him up. 11Again, if two lie together, then they have heat: but how can one be warm alone? 12And if one prevail against him, two shall withstand him; and a threefold cord is not quickly broken.

13Better is a poor and a wise child than an old and foolish king, who will no more be admonished. 14For out of prison he cometh to reign; whereas also he that is born in his kingdom becometh poor. 15I considered all the living which walk under the sun, with the second child that shall stand up in his stead. 16There is no end of all the people, even of all that have been before them: they also that come after shall not rejoice in him. Surely this also is vanity and vexation of spirit.

4: NOT ONE, BUT TWO



This theme runs throughout Chapter 4 of Ecclesiastes – “two are better than one.” A life lived only for self is a waste. Only the person who has the companionship of God’s Spirit can live a life of value. Solomon isn’t saying the Holy Spirit will replace our need to do the living. Its purpose is not to be our substitute. Rather the Holy Spirit comes along side of us to inspire, empower, and guide us in living. It’s better never to be born that to live life apart from God’s Spirit.

Solomon has moved from the emptiness of life without God the Father, in whose sight some men are good and some evil (Chaps. 1-2), to the fact that gives meaning to life – a future judgment by Christ according to works (Chap. 3). Now (in Chap. 4) he points to the key for meaningful living – the Holy Spirit Comforter. Without the Spirit’s encouragement, life will get you down. “Woe to the one who falls when there is not another to lift him up.” v. 10.

In this violent world in which we live we need a companion as we encounter the pitfalls, wolves, and snakes. God's Spirit instructs a person in the right way. She is wisdom personified. This life is only misery if we live it without the companionship of God's Holy Spirit. A poor wise lad is better off than an old foolish king who no longer knows how to receive the Spirit's instruction (v. 13). Human works will be rewarded if done in cooperation with the Holy Spirit. Being filled with the Holy Spirit is our only hope.

Ecclesiastes 5

5: I Keep thy foot when thou goest to the house of God, and be more ready to hear, than to give the sacrifice of fools: for they consider not that they do evil. 2 Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thine heart be hasty to utter any thing before God: for God is in heaven, and thou upon earth: therefore let thy words be few. 3 For a dream cometh through the multitude of business; and a fool's voice is known by multitude of words. 4 When thou vowest a vow unto God, defer not to pay it; for he hath no pleasure in fools: pay that which thou hast vowed. 5 Better is it that thou shouldest not vow, than that thou shouldest vow and not pay. 6 Suffer not thy mouth to cause thy flesh to sin; neither say thou before the angel, that it was an error: wherefore should God be angry at thy voice, and destroy the work of thine hands? 7 For in the multitude of dreams and many words there are also divers vanities: but fear thou God.

8 If thou seest the oppression of the poor, and violent perverting of judgment and justice in a province, marvel not at the matter: for he that is higher than the highest regardeth; and there be higher than they. 9 Moreover the profit of the earth is for all: the king himself is served by the field.

10 He that loveth silver shall not be satisfied with silver; nor he that loveth abundance with increase: this is also vanity. 11 When goods increase, they are increased that eat them: and what good is there to the owners thereof, saving the beholding of them with their eyes? 12 The sleep of a labouring man is sweet, whether he eat little or much: but the abundance of the rich will not suffer him to sleep. 13 There is a sore evil which I have seen under the sun, namely, riches kept for the owners thereof to their hurt. 14 But those riches perish by evil travail: and he begetteth a son, and there is nothing in his hand. 15 As he came forth of his mother's womb, naked shall he return to go as he came, and shall take nothing of his labour; which he may carry away in his hand. 16 And this also is a sore evil, that in all points as he came, so shall he go: and what profit hath he that hath laboured for the wind? 17 All his days also he eateth in darkness, and he hath much sorrow and wrath with his sickness.

18 Behold that which I have seen: it is good and comely for one to eat and to drink, and to enjoy the good of all his labour that he taketh under the sun all the days of his life, which God giveth him: for it is his portion. 19 Every man also to whom God hath given riches and wealth, and hath given him power to eat thereof, and to take his portion, and to rejoice in his labour; this is the gift of God. 20 For he shall not much remember the days of his life; because God answereth him in the joy of his heart.



5: THREATS TO NEW LIFE

Something happens for the first time in chapter 5 of Ecclesiastes. The Good Shepherd talks to his sheep. Do you hear his voice? Up until now Solomon has not addressed us personally. Now he addresses us as wise children of God – people who recognize God as their gracious Father, Christ as their compassionate Judge, and the Holy Spirit as their accompanying Encourager.

As a child of God, a sheep of his pasture, there are three things that threaten godly living. We should beware of seeking prestige, power, or possessions. Verses 1-3 point out that we need to beware that we are not like the Pharisee who by listing his good qualities sought prestige when he went to pray (Lk. 18:10-14). And verses 4-7 add that we need to beware that we fulfill our promises to God and not seek prestige by making unfulfilled pledges like Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-11). Verses 8 and 9 warn us to beware of seeking political power for ultimate power lies with God and it is he that gives to all. Verses 10-17 warn us not to trust in money nor possessions for self worth.

God is not looking for talk, political power, nor possessions as marks of true believers. Do we think he will be impressed by our many words or promises? Maybe those around us will think we are somebody. But God has no use for hypocrites. True godly living is not God-talk, nor church management, nor financial success. If we say we love God then we should show it in our actions – by keeping his commandments. As children of God we must understand God's authority, majesty, and all-seeing nature. He is not someone to be teased or humored with nice words or empty promises. He is in heaven and we on earth.

Maybe we used to seek satisfaction in prestige, power, or possessions but the more we got the more there were that took them away. Seeing these things as they flew past was the only satisfaction they gave.

All they brought us was God's frown, subjugation to others, and personal insomnia. In the end we go down naked to the tomb just like we came from the womb. Only the true child of God has contentment. If God has given you something in this life then use it for his kingdom and rejoice in his daily provision of forgiveness, food, and fellowship. This is the joy of life. It is God who gives one the power to enjoy one's labors (whether he sees the fruit or not). Just the joy of doing good can be enough of a reward.

Better joy in the heart with the blessings of forgiveness, food, and fellowship than prestige, power, or possessions without God's approval.

Ecclesiastes 6

6:1 There is an evil which I have seen under the sun, and it is common among men: 6:2 A man to whom God hath given riches, wealth, and honour; so that he wanteth nothing for his soul of all that he desireth, yet God giveth him not power to eat thereof, but a stranger eateth it: this is vanity, and it is an evil disease. 6:3 If a man beget an hundred children, and live many years, so that the days of his years be many, and his soul be not filled with good, and also that he have no burial; I say, that an untimely birth is better than he. 4 For he cometh in with vanity, and departeth in darkness, and his name shall be covered with darkness. 5 Moreover he hath not seen the sun, nor known any thing: this hath more rest than the other. 6 Yea, though he live a thousand years twice told, yet hath he seen no good: do not all go to one place? 7 All the labour of man is for his mouth, and yet the appetite is not filled. 8 For what hath the wise more than the fool? what hath the poor, that knoweth to walk before the living? 9 Better is the sight of the eyes than the wandering of the desire: this is also vanity and vexation of spirit. 10 That which hath been is named already, and it is known that it is man: neither may he contend with him that is mightier than he. 11 Seeing there be many things that increase vanity, what is man the better? 12 For who knoweth what is good for man in this life, all the days of his vain life which he spendeth as a shadow? for who can tell a man what shall be after him under the sun?

6: AN EVIL DISEASE

In Ecclesiastes 5 Solomon turned his attention towards true believers, children of God. There he warned of three threats to godly living. Now in chapter 6 he continues to warn us, the sheep of God's pasture. Even if we aren't tempted to find satisfaction in prestige, political power, or possessions there is an evil disease that could plague us throughout life.

"Money in the bank and nothing on the table" is the way Solomon describes it. And while it is true that some people live this way physically it is even more true spiritually. People who are reckoned as having all the riches of eternity placed to their account live without enjoying the benefits they have in Christ. Accepted by God, lacking nothing, and given

God's Holy Spirit as our guide, we should live rejoicing. The disease of joyless Christianity can become chronic in a true Christian making their life almost as empty as those of unbelievers.

Solomon said a miscarriage has more rest than one of these (v. 5). If you live life without enjoying what God gives you you are no more happy than if you had died at birth. This also is vanity. To be a child of God and not enjoy what he gives you in this life is a bummer! To forfeit the good that we could enjoy in the Christian life is a sickly pilgrim existence.

Do you want to live life in the shadows? Solomon asks at the end of the chapter: "Who knows what is good for a man to do in this life? Who will teach him this?" Eccl. 6:12. We are expected to jump to the conclusion "God knows, and I'll look to him so as to walk this life in the sunshine and not in the shadows. By the end of the book the answer to this question will be spelled out in detail. The Shepherd will give us the answer in black and white. Before then there are some more things we need to understand. Chapter seven will make one of these vividly clear.

But as for this present chapter we need to learn that living like an unbeliever when you have the righteousness of Christ put to your account is vanity, an evil disease.

Ecclesiastes 7

7:1 A good name is better than precious ointment; and the day of death than the day of one's birth. 2 It is better to go to the house of mourning, than to go to the house of feasting: for that is the end of all men; and the living will lay it to his heart. 3 Sorrow is better than laughter: for by the sadness of the countenance the heart is made better. 4 The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning; but the heart of fools is in the house of mirth. 5 It is better to hear the rebuke of the wise, than for a man to hear the song of fools. 6 For as the crackling of thorns under a pot, so is the laughter of the fool: this also is vanity. 7 Surely oppression maketh a wise man mad; and a gift destroyeth the heart. 8 Better is the end of a thing than the beginning thereof: and the patient in spirit is better than the proud in spirit. 9 Be not hasty in thy spirit to be angry: for anger resteth in the bosom of fools. 10 Say not thou, What is the cause that the former days were better than these? for thou dost not inquire wisely concerning this.

11 Wisdom is good with an inheritance: and by it there is profit to them that see the sun. 12 For wisdom is a defence, and money is a defence: but the excellency of knowledge is, that wisdom giveth life to them that have it.

13 Consider the work of God: for who can make that straight, which he hath made crooked? 14 In the day of prosperity be joyful, but in the day of adversity consider: God also hath set the one over against the other, to the end that man should find nothing after him. 15 All things have I seen in the days of my vanity: there is a just man that perisheth in his righteousness, and there is a wicked man that prolongeth his life in his wickedness. 16 Be not righteous over much; neither make thyself over

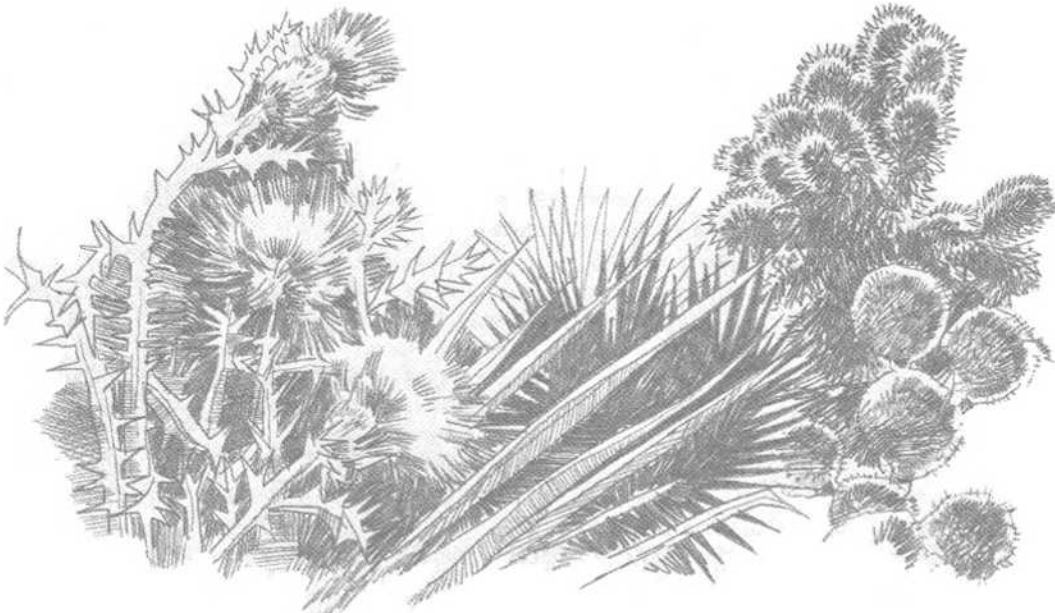
wise: why shouldest thou destroy thyself? 17Be not over much wicked, neither be thou foolish: why shouldest thou die before thy time? 18It is good that thou shouldest take hold of this; yea, also from this withdraw not thine hand: for he that feareth God shall come forth of them all. 19Wisdom strengtheneth the wise more than ten mighty men which are in the city. 20For there is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not.

21Also take no heed unto all words that are spoken; lest thou hear thy servant curse thee: 22For oftentimes also thine own heart knoweth that thou thyself likewise hast cursed others. 23All this have I proved by wisdom: I said, I will be wise; but it was far from me. 24That which is far off, and exceeding deep, who can find it out? 25I applied mine heart to know, and to search, and to seek out wisdom, and the reason of things, and to know the wickedness of folly, even of foolishness and madness: 26And I find more bitter than death the woman, whose heart is snares and nets, and her hands as bands: whoso pleaseth God shall escape from her; but the sinner shall be taken by her.

27Behold, this have I found, saith the preacher; counting one by one, to find out the account: 28Which yet my soul seeketh, but I find not: one man among a thousand have I found; but a woman among all those have I not found. 29Lo, this only have I found, that God hath made man upright; but they have sought out many inventions.

7: NOT ONE WOMAN

In Ecclesiastes 5 Solomon pointed out pitfalls to true believers. In chapter 6 he warned of the evil disease of joyless living that God's people might catch. Now we might think we're past the problems and



godly living will be a synch. Then chapter 7 comes to point out that our hearts are “deceitful above all things and desperately wicked.” Jer. 17:9. Mankind was made upright but something happened since then.

Solomon discovered that spiritual wisdom wasn't enough to eradicate the sinful nature and that even we, true believers, too often are seduced by her snares. There was only one man (and not one woman – not even Mary) free from her wiles. That was Jesus Christ. Adam, our first federal head, chose this for us and God enjoined it in the curse. The ground is a picture of the human heart. It has been cursed and naturally brings forth thorns and thistles (Gen. 3:16-18). Who can make straight what God has made crooked (Eccl. 7:13; Rom. 8:20)? “There is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not.” Eccl. 7:20.

But that's not where the chapter begins. First of all Solomon states that maintaining a reputation for righteousness is a very valuable thing. Such a reputation is only established with time. No one has it at birth. Blessed is that man that patiently keeps it till the end. But to maintain such a reputation will require a continual putting down of one's natural selfishness. From within our hearts come pride, avarice, anger, and complaining. These expressions of the natural heart need to be controlled. For that we have been given God's Holy Spirit, called Wisdom (Gal. 5:17; Eccl. 7:12). Good days and bad days both will come. They are to teach us that there is no fulfillment in this life. Don't be a psychotic thinking you are perfect before judgment day (v. 16). Neither be a neurotic giving up, thinking you will never attain (v. 17). At glorification the sinful nature will be removed (Rom. 8:21; Eccl. 7:18).

The one who fears God confesses two things: his actions are blessed by God's cooperating Spirit, but his heart is still sinful by nature, hindering sinlessness.

Ecclesiastes 8

8:1 Who is as the wise man? and who knoweth the interpretation of a thing? a man's wisdom maketh his face to shine, and the boldness of his face shall be changed. 2 I counsel thee to keep the king's commandment, and that in regard of the oath of God. 3 Be not hasty to go out of his sight: stand not in an evil thing; for he doeth whatsoever pleaseth him. 4 Where the word of a king is, there is power: and who may say unto him, What doest thou? 5 Whoso keepeth the commandment shall feel no evil thing: and a wise man's heart discerneth both time and judgment. 6 Because to every purpose there is time and judgment, therefore the misery of man is great upon him. 7 For he knoweth not that which shall be: for who can tell him when it shall be?

8 There is no man that hath power over the spirit to retain the spirit; neither hath he power in the day of death: and there is no discharge in that war; neither shall wickedness deliver those that are given to it. 9 All this have I seen, and applied my heart unto every work that is done under the sun: there is a time wherein one man ruleth over another to his own hurt.

10And so I saw the wicked buried, who had come and gone from the place of the holy, and they were forgotten in the city where they had so done: this is also vanity. 11Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil.

12Though a sinner do evil an hundred times, and his days be prolonged, yet surely I know that it shall be well with them that fear God, which fear before him: 13But it shall not be well with the wicked, neither shall he prolong his days, which are as a shadow; because he feareth not before God. 14There is a vanity which is done upon the earth; that there be just men, unto whom it happeneth according to the work of the wicked; again, there be wicked men, to whom it happeneth according to the work of the righteous: I said that this also is vanity. 15Then I commended mirth, because a man hath no better thing under the sun, than to eat, and to drink, and to be merry: for that shall abide with him of his labour the days of his life, which God giveth him under the sun.

16When I applied mine heart to know wisdom, and to see the business that is done upon the earth: (for also there is that neither day nor night seeth sleep with his eyes:) 17Then I beheld all the work of God, that a man cannot find out the work that is done under the sun: because though a man labour to seek it out, yet he shall not find it; yea farther; though a wise man think to know it, yet shall he not be able to find it.

8: LOOK OUT

Obey your government, pay your taxes, and respect those in authority over you. Is that the message of Ecclesiastes 8? It may be implicit in it but if we have rightly understood the preceding chapters there must be something deeper than this. Look at verse 3. Is Solomon saying you should stay a long time at your president's house. We think not.

We saw that God the Father, Jesus the Son, and the Holy Spirit are what give significance to this life (Chaps. 1-4). Having become God's children we were warned of threats and dangers to living the good life (Chaps. 5-7). Now the wise man counsels: "Be not hasty to go out of his sight." He says it is a vanity to have once walked in paths of righteousness and then to depart from them (v. 10). "Though a sinner do evil an hundred times, and his days be prolonged, yet surely I know that it shall be well with them that fear God." v. 12.

We already know, and the idea is repeated in verses 12-14, that while living under the sun the righteous don't always win and the wicked don't always loose. But Solomon assures us here: "it shall be well with them that fear God," and "it shall not be well with the wicked." The future tense of the verbs reminds us that he is speaking about that future reckoning day when the final decision will be made concerning our lives. And in the light of that judgment Solomon counsels believers to persevere in God's presence, in his covenant, until the end of life. Wise men discern both probationary time and future judgment (v. 5). But none knows when

his number will come up (v. 7). And when it does he has no power to stop it (v. 8).

What makes keeping a right perspective difficult in this life is that final, just rewards aren't given out here and now (v. 11). Only those who believe in a future, just verdict can endure unto the end.

So don't expect ultimate fulfillment in this life. The best thing to do here is to be happy that you have food and fellowship (v. 15). This is God's gift until the day of final rewards. When Christ returns his reward is with him "to give everyone according to what he has done." Rev. 22:12 NIV. For the time being we must trust God even though we don't understand all his ways (v. 17). But don't think you'll be able to separate the wheat from the tares – only God sees that deeply (v. 16, 17). Until that day enjoy the rewards of eating, drinking, and being merry (v. 15).

Ecclesiastes 9

9:1 For all this I considered in my heart even to declare all this, that the righteous, and the wise, and their works, are in the hand of God: no man knoweth either love or hatred by all that is before them. 2All things come alike to all: there is one event to the righteous, and to the wicked; to the good and to the clean, and to the unclean; to him that sacrificeth, and to him that sacrificeth not: as is the good, so is the sinner; and he that sweareth, as he that feareth an oath. 3This is an evil among all things that are done under the sun, that there is one event unto all: yea, also the heart of the sons of men is full of evil, and madness is in their heart while they live, and after that they go to the dead.

4For to him that is joined to all the living there is hope: for a living dog is better than a dead lion. 5For the living know that they shall die: but the dead know not any thing, neither have they any more a reward; for the memory of them is forgotten. 6Also their love, and their hatred, and their envy, is now perished; neither have they any more a portion for ever in any thing that is done under the sun. 7Go thy way, eat thy bread with joy, and drink thy wine with a merry heart; for God now accepteth thy works. 8Let thy garments be always white; and let thy head lack no ointment. 9Live joyfully with the wife whom thou lovest all the days of the life of thy vanity, which he hath given thee under the sun, all the days of thy vanity: for that is thy portion in this life, and in thy labour which thou takest under the sun. 10Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest.

11I returned, and saw under the sun, that the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, neither yet bread to the wise, nor yet riches to men of understanding, nor yet favour to men of skill; but time and chance happeneth to them all. 12For man also knoweth not his time: as the fishes that are taken in an evil net, and as the birds that are caught in the snare; so are the sons of men snared in an evil time, when it falleth suddenly upon them.

13This wisdom have I seen also under the sun, and it seemed great unto me: 14There was a little city, and few men within it; and there came a great king against it, and besieged it, and built great bulwarks against it: 15Now there was found in it a poor wise man, and he by his wisdom delivered the city; yet no man remembered that same poor man. 16Then said I, Wisdom is better than strength: nevertheless the poor man's wisdom is despised, and his words are not heard. 17The words of wise men are heard in quiet more than the cry of him that ruleth among fools. 18Wisdom is better than weapons of war: but one sinner destroyeth much good.

9: ONE EVENT

That chapter 9 is about death no one can refute. But before mentioning death the Good Shepherd assures us “that the righteous and the wise and their works are in the hand of God.” v. 1. Death doesn't rob God of his records. He is the God of the living and to him death is but a sleep from which we are to awake to our own record which he has safely kept.

Verses 2 and 3 paint the sure end of life for all, both good and bad. This sinful life ends and with it any hope of change or redress also ends. In the grave, in death, there is no conscience existence. Life's record is sealed. Next comes judgment (Heb. 9:27).

We who are believers can live life now with joy knowing God graciously accepts our works (v. 7). Covered in the white robes of a substitute righteousness and anointed with God's Holy Spirit we are making a record worth meeting in judgment. And we can enjoy the pleasure God gives us as we travel along.

But where did this robe of substitutionary righteousness come from? We have seen in chapter 7 that Solomon found only one man in a thousand that had no sinful nature. That man is called a “poor wise man” in this chapter (v. 15). But it is by his wisdom (his knowledge, his experience:



Isa. 53:12) that humanity (the city) is delivered. You won't believe unto this righteousness unless in quietness you hear the voice of God. For "faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the Word of God." Rom. 10:17. All around us we hear the cry of foolish rulers pointing to some other way rather than the wisdom of God. But God's wisdom is "not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us;" "not of works lest any man should boast." Tit. 3:5; Eph.2:9. That one man tasted the second death for all and that in him death is swallowed up in victory is the message of wisdom.

Ecclesiastes 10

10:1 Dead flies cause the ointment of the apothecary to send forth a stinking savour: so doth a little folly him that is in reputation for wisdom and honour. 2A wise man's heart is at his right hand; but a fool's heart at his left. 3Yea 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.

4If the spirit of the ruler rise up against thee, leave not thy place; for yielding pacifieth great offences. 5There is an evil which I have seen under the sun, as an error which proceedeth from the ruler: 6Folly is set in great dignity, and the rich sit in low place. 7I have seen servants upon horses, and princes walking as servants upon the earth.

8He that diggeth a pit shall fall into it; and whoso breaketh an hedge, a serpent shall bite him. 9Whoso removeth stones shall be hurt therewith; and he that cleaveth wood shall be endangered thereby. 10If the iron be blunt, and he do not whet the edge, then must he put to more strength: but wisdom is profitable to direct. 11Surely the serpent will bite without enchantment; and a babbler is no better. 12The words of a wise man's mouth are gracious; but the lips of a fool will swallow up himself. 13The beginning of the words of his mouth is foolishness: and the end of his talk is mischievous madness. 14A fool also is full of words: a man cannot tell what shall be; and what shall be after him, who can tell him? 15The labour of the foolish wearieth every one of them, because he knoweth not how to go to the city.

16Woe to thee, O land, when thy king is a child, and thy princes eat in the morning! 17Blessed art thou, O land, when thy king is the son of nobles, and thy princes eat in due season, for strength, and not for drunkenness!

18By much slothfulness the building decayeth; and through idleness of the hands the house droppeth through.

19A feast is made for laughter, and wine maketh merry: but money answereth all things.

20Curse not the king, no not in thy thought; and curse not the rich in thy bedchamber: for a bird of the air shall carry the voice, and that which hath wings shall tell the matter.

10: COME UP HIGHER

Solomon first pointed men to God as the sole source of meaning in life. He then turned to those who believe in God and pointed out what they will have to deal with in this life. Now in chapter 10 Solomon tightens his count: he calls the righteous to come up higher.

The true servant of God always calls God's people to perfection – to higher ground. And the True Shepherd says even a little folly in one of God's children is a shame. Like dead flies in a perfume bottle there is something wrong with falling short of perfection. God wants us involved in the work of perfecting character.

In verses 2 and 3 Solomon makes clear that folly and wisdom are like night and day. They are not hard to distinguish – only hard to divorce.

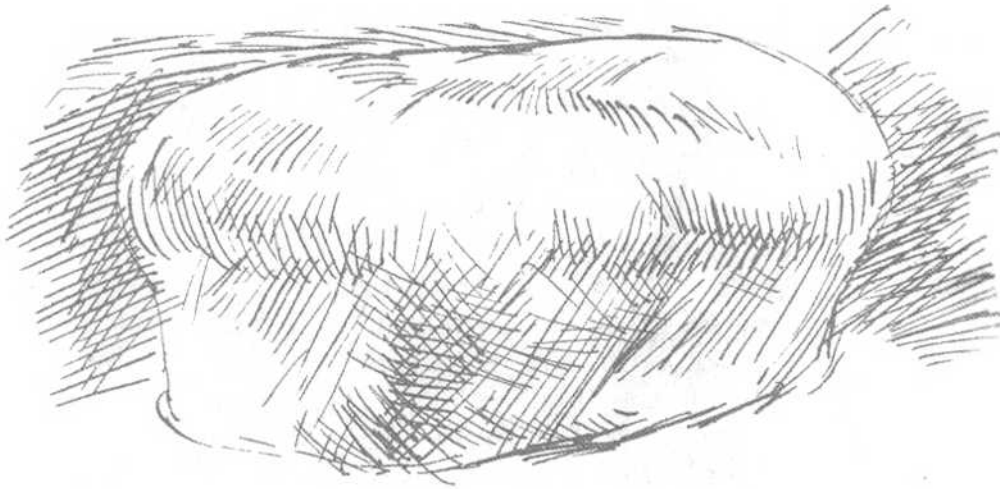
In our effort to sharpen up we may find that our leaders often get things messed up (v. 4-7). They don't always honor upright men. The stink in their reputation need not be our own nor should we bad-mouth them. In all of life's activities there are risks. One has to pay attention to what he is doing or things will turn out less than perfect. We always need God's Spirit to direct us so as not to make foolish mistakes (v. 10). Like a snake charmer God's Spirit has ways to keep Satan from tripping us up if we don't run ahead of the Spirit's prompting. This will be manifest in our gracious words. Those without God's Spirit do a lot of talking but don't have any idea of how to reach heaven (v. 12-15). Only the righteous listen to the advice of God's Spirit.

Wisdom and self control must work together in order to rightly direct ones life (v. 16, 17). Even our eating habits affect our reputation. If we don't continually strive to perfect holiness in the fear of the Lord our house of character will come tumbling down (v. 18). So it is that how we use our money and where we let our thoughts wander all influence the perfume of our lives (v. 19, 20).

The true Christian is never satisfied with his performance in this life.

Ecclesiastes 11

11:1 Cast thy bread upon the waters: for thou shalt find it after many days. 2 Give a portion to seven, and also to eight; for thou knowest not what evil shall be upon the earth. 3 If the clouds be full of rain, they empty themselves upon the earth: and if the tree fall toward the south, or toward the north, in the place where the tree falleth, there it shall be. 4 He that observeth the wind shall not sow; and he that regardeth the clouds shall not reap. 5 As thou knowest not what is the way of the spirit, nor how the bones do grow in the womb of her that is with child: even so thou knowest not the works of God who maketh all. 6 In the morning sow thy seed, and in the evening withhold not thine hand: for thou knowest not whether shall prosper, either this or that, or whether they both shall be alike good.



7Truly the light is sweet, and a pleasant thing it is for the eyes to behold the sun: 8But if a man live many years, and rejoice in them all; yet let him remember the days of darkness; for they shall be many. All that cometh is vanity. 9Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth; and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thine heart, and in the sight of thine eyes: but know thou, that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment. 10Therefore remove sorrow from thy heart, and put away evil from thy flesh: for childhood and youth are vanity.

11: A STORM IS COMING

Now that you know God and are living for his glory anticipating his righteous judgment where should your activity be directed? Ecclesiastes 11 tells us. Our work is to spread the good news about God. We are to throw the bread of his Word that has become precious to us, out on the water of humanity. How is this done? Verses 2-6 give us a guide to missionary effort.

Above all spread God's Word to everyone. Don't be stingy. A storm is coming. Don't let probabilities dampen your enthusiasm or keep you from doing this. You don't know if God will bless this outreach or that, so sow the gospel seed by all waters wherever you go.

Consider what Ecclesiastes 11 is saying:

- V. 1-2 **Evangelism is our work** – we, not angels, are to give God's Word to everyone.
- V. 3-4 **Evangelism is risky work** – we shouldn't withdraw because of threats to success.

- V. 5 **Evangelism is God's work** – his Spirit moves upon the hearts of those with whom we share his Word.
- V. 6 **Evangelism is today's work** – morning, noon, and night; "in season and out of season" sow the seed.
- V. 7-8 **Evangelism is joyful work** – Jesus, the sun of righteousness, is our message to all who see the light of day.
- V. 7-8 **Evangelism is a limited work** – both evangelist and evangelized are limited by death.
- V. 9 **Evangelism is eternal work** – eternal destinies are determined by how our message is received.
- V. 9 **Evangelism is judgment-related work** – the gospel we preach is the only hope for passing God's judgment.
- V. 10 **Evangelism is an applied work** – it will bring change in the lives of those who believe our message.

Evangelism is WORK!

Ecclesiastes 12

12:1 Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them; 2 While the sun, or the light, or the moon, or the stars, be not darkened, nor the clouds return after the rain: 3 In the day when the keepers of the house shall tremble, and the strong men shall bow themselves, and the grinders cease because they are few, and those that look out of the windows be darkened, 4 And the doors shall be shut in the streets, when the sound of the grinding is low, and he shall rise up at the voice of the bird, and all the daughters of music shall be brought low; 5 Also when they shall be afraid of that which is high, and fears shall be in the way, and the almond tree shall flourish, and the grasshopper shall be a burden, and desire shall fail: because man goeth to his long home, and the mourners go about the streets: 6 Or ever the silver cord be loosed, or the golden bowl be broken, or the pitcher be broken at the fountain, or the wheel broken at the cistern. 7 Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it.

8 Vanity of vanities, saith the preacher; all is vanity. 9 And moreover; because the preacher was wise, he still taught the people knowledge; yea, he gave good heed, and sought out, and set in order many proverbs. 10 The preacher sought to find out acceptable words: and that which was written was upright, even words of truth. 11 The words of the wise are as goads, and as nails fastened by the masters of assemblies, which are given from one shepherd. 12 And further, by these, my son, be admonished: of making many books there is no end; and much study is a weariness of the flesh. 13 Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the

whole duty of man. 14 For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil.

12: EVIL DAYS

You can't accept salvation after you die. But we already learned that in chapter 9. Now in chapter 12, Solomon warns us of something that nearly happened to him.

He says: "Remember now!" Why now? While you are still impressionable. Because your heart could harden against truth. "Now is the day of salvation." "Today if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts" "while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say I have no pleasure in" God the Father, Son, nor Holy Spirit (2 Cor. 6:2; Heb. 3:15; Eccl 12:1). We are called to repent while the Sun of Righteousness, the light of God's Word, and the witness of his church and its messengers still has influence; before permanent depression sets in (v. 2). It could happen to us that our conscience is seared, our will power weakened, our ability to seriously examine evidence deteriorated, and the eye of faith darkened (v. 3). The entrance of truth could be stopped, our ears be closed to hearing. The rumors told by little birds would scare us, and even music would not be able to reach our hearts (2 Sam. 19:35; v. 4). We could become afraid of God on high and of everything we meet in life. With every promise there would come devastation and we loose all desire to seek God. This is the death of responsiveness toward God – a sad, sad condition (v. 5). Solomon himself nearly died this death. If God hadn't jolted him from his downward course (1 Kings 11:9-11) the darkness of permanent depression would have been his.

Before God withdraws his Spirit, or the silver cord of truth is let go, or the golden sanctuary bowl for the drink offering fails, or access to the water of life is broken, people must accept God – wayward Christians must turn around. The consequences of hardened hearts are the same as physical death – ones life record is eternally fixed. To have a hardened heart is a crying shame. To loose an interest in God is a most pitiful vanity. (v. 6-8). We are only dust and when we no longer responds to light the permanent results are just like when our spirit returns to God – our life record is closed.

In his own experience Solomon was still a believer (wise) yet almost hardened to the point of no return. From that pit he was rescued. God shook him out of his downward course by telling him that the kingdom would be taken from him. He woke up and turned around. Once again he taught people of the righteousness of God. This he did through diligent effort and study. As a "gatherer" he compiled the books of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes, carefully selecting his words to convey God's truth. These very words are like goads or prods to move the flock towards judgment. In that day God will open the books for final accounting – the books of life, of good deeds, and of bad deeds. May our record not be filled with vanities.

We need not weary ourselves with studying many books. In this brief look at life the wise man has made clear how time, death, and judgment are related. If you haven't gotten his point yet, this is it: Fear

God and keep his commandments... for God shall bring every one of your activities into judgment! This means to respect, hold high, and believe in God and do what he asks. A final judgment is not vanity, it's reality. This is what gives meaning to life. Without a future discrimination all human activity is emptiness – just chasing after the wind.

To the church in every age the True Witness testifies: "I know thy works." Rev. 2-3. Human activity has meaning because God will open the records and make his decision according to our works (Rev. 2:23).

Many in our day make fun of heavenly books and a judgment according to works but Solomon shows the plight of those who want no final accounting. For them life and all its activities are meaningless.



Trapped?

Were you captured by the wise man's trap? As we ate the bait we may have been tempted to think that all human activity was meaningless. But just then the trap sprung and the inescapable truths of time, death, and judgment caught us. Time is what we have now and there is a time for everything that needs to be done. Death threatens to make meaningless what we do with our time. But God has a record of our lives and will in final judgment examine each one in detail. All life's injustices will then be made right. All acts of kindness will be rewarded. The Shepherd will gather his flock and separate the sheep from the goats. Everlasting joy will be lavished on all who fear God and give glory to him, for this is the whole duty of man. For God shall bring every work into judgment and every secret thing whether it be good or evil." Eccl. 12:13-14.

Life has meaning because our deeds are not forgotten nor considered irrelevant. So worship the Creator and enjoy the food and fellowship he gives and find satisfaction in all your work while here under the sun.

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What does man gain from all his labor? For the wise man like the fool, will not long be remembered. Like the fool, the wise man too must die! A man can do nothing better than to eat and drink and find satisfaction in his work. This is from the hand of God, for without him, who can eat or find enjoyment? To the man who pleases him, God gives wisdom, knowledge and happiness, but to the sinner he gives the task of gathering and storing up wealth to hand it over to the one who pleases God. God will bring to judgment both the righteous and the wicked, for there will be a time for every activity, a time for every deed. (1:3; 2:16, 24, 26; 3:17)

Whoever obeys his command will come to no harm. Although a wicked man commits a hundred crimes and still lives a long time, I know that it will go better with God-fearing men. All share a common destiny – they live, and afterward they join the dead. Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might, for in the grave where you are going, there is neither working nor planning nor knowledge nor wisdom. (8:5, 12; 9:2, 3, 10)

Remember your Creator before the days of trouble come and the years approach when you will say, "I find no pleasure in them" – and the dust returns to the ground it came from, and the spirit returns to God who gave it. (12:1, 7)

Here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil. (12:13-14)

Ecclesiastes 1-12 NIV (ellipses not included)