

Bible Commentary on the Book of Ecclesiastes

Ecclesiastes 1

1The words of the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem.

2"Vanity of vanities," says the Preacher,
"Vanity of vanities! All is vanity."

3What advantage does man have in all his work
Which he does under the sun?

4A generation goes and a generation comes,
But the earth remains forever.

5Also, the sun rises and the sun sets;
And hastening to its place it rises there again.

6Blowing toward the south,
Then turning toward the north,
The wind continues swirling along;
And on its circular courses the wind returns.

7All the rivers flow into the sea,
Yet the sea is not full.
To the place where the rivers flow,
There they flow again.

8All things are wearisome;
Man is not able to tell it.
The eye is not satisfied with seeing,
Nor is the ear filled with hearing.

9That which has been is that which will be,
And that which has been done is that which will be done.
So there is nothing new under the sun.

10Is there anything of which one might say,
"See this, it is new"?
Already it has existed for ages
Which were before us.

11There is no remembrance of earlier things;
And also of the later things which will occur,
There will be for them no remembrance
Among those who will come later still.

Solomon's point as he opens this book is that, apart from God and the reality of life after death, life has absolutely no meaning whatsoever. People are born, people live, and then people die. The sun comes up, and the sun goes down. Life plods on day after day after day. The wind blows and round the earth it goes, swirling along its circular courses (very impressive and scientifically accurate observation about the wind patterns). Rivers flow into the sea, but the sea does not fill up. The rivers are replenished and flow yet again. Cycles go on and on and on the same way that they have for a long time. Nothing of the world satisfies. The eye is not satiated by what it sees, nor the ear by what it hears. All things are wearisome and tiresome, not providing what the soul ultimately longs for.

There is nothing new “under the sun” (phrase that is best understood as the opposite of life under God), for all that is being done has already been done. This is not to say that man doesn’t invent new things, but that man always is left trying to come up with new things. The same tasks befall man as they always have, only in slightly altered ways. Work is work is work, though the specifics might differ. The greatest achievements on the earth are forgotten as time passes on. Famous people no longer come to mind after they are dead and buried. As for those who are alive now, the same thing will happen to them years from now. All will be lost and deemed meaningless as time marches on under the sun.

As depressing as this discourse might at first seem, it is actually very true and full of wisdom. Many in the world are deceived into thinking that they have the latest and greatest thing or experience. But the irony is that they must keep chasing the latest and greatest, and their children do so also until both are forgotten. There is nothing new; man keeps living out his weary life under the sun. That we understand the futility and meaninglessness of a mere seventy or eighty years on the earth struggling to find satisfaction apart from God is highly valuable. Solomon learned the hard way as he is about to describe. He had the means to try all that the world promised would satisfy and found it meaningless, empty, and vain.

12I, the Preacher, have been king over Israel in Jerusalem.

13And I set my mind to seek and explore by wisdom concerning all that has been done under heaven It is a grievous task which God has given to the sons of men to be afflicted with.

14I have seen all the works which have been done under the sun, and behold, all is vanity and striving after wind.

15What is crooked cannot be straightened and what is lacking cannot be counted.

Solomon, as King over Israel during a very prosperous time, had the luxury of taking the time to explore by wisdom the meaning of life. He looked at all that man does and what God has given them to do. His conclusion is that man is afflicted with his work under the sun and that all his work is vain and a striving after the wind, never to receive the deluding and deceiving promise of the gratification of sin and self. Man is never able to overcome his imperfections and limitations, and there are always things that he lacks. He is never able to “arrive,” but he is always in a state of vanity apart from God. He is always in a state of emptiness and striving.

16I said to myself, "Behold, I have magnified and increased wisdom more than all who were over Jerusalem before me; and my mind has observed a wealth of wisdom and knowledge."

17And I set my mind to know wisdom and to know madness and folly; I realized that this also is striving after wind.

18Because in much wisdom there is much grief, and increasing knowledge results in increasing pain.

Solomon was given wisdom by God in measure that none before him or after him ever had (2 Chronicles 1:12). He set his purpose (i.e. his striving) to know wisdom, being able to distinguish it from insanity and stupidity. Yet even this pursuit of wisdom as a means of trying to find satisfaction apart from God was meaningless. Wisdom itself doesn't satisfy; in fact, it is accompanied by much grief and increasing pain. The more one recognizes his limitations and the troubles and wearisome nature of life, the more depressed and discouraged he can become. Wisdom for wisdom's sake and knowledge for knowledge's sake are not the answers.

Ecclesiastes 2

1I said to myself, "Come now, I will test you with pleasure. So enjoy yourself." And behold, it too was futility.

2I said of laughter, "It is madness," and of pleasure, "What does it accomplish?"

Solomon, his heart having been turned away from God by his pagan wives and concubines, decided to seek out wisdom the hard way by trial and error. First he tried hedonism, the pursuit of pleasure for the sake of pleasure itself. This failed, and this speaks volumes, given that he had access to anything and everything he could have ever wanted. There was nothing on earth that could bring his soul satisfaction, not even the greatest pleasures he could find. Then he tried amusement, entertainment, and laughter. Yet these left him empty as well. Both pleasure and laughter for their own sake were folly and vain.

3I explored with my mind how to stimulate my body with wine while my mind was guiding me wisely, and how to take hold of folly, until I could see what good there is for the sons of men to do under heaven the few years of their lives.

He tried seeing how he could use wine to stimulate his body without totally incapacitating his mind. Total intoxication wouldn't be the answer because one wouldn't be aware enough to find satisfaction. Thus, he tried giving himself a "buzz" and still working on solving the meaning of life. He wanted to understand how to limit folly and what good there was for man to do under heaven in their short lifetimes. Obviously, the wine didn't help him any, and he had to move on to other things.

**4I enlarged my works: I built houses for myself, I planted vineyards for myself;
5I made gardens and parks for myself and I planted in them all kinds of fruit trees;
6I made ponds of water for myself from which to irrigate a forest of growing trees.
7I bought male and female slaves and I had homeborn slaves Also I possessed flocks and herds larger than all who preceded me in Jerusalem.
8Also, I collected for myself silver and gold and the treasure of kings and provinces I provided for myself male and female singers and the pleasures of men--many concubines.
9Then I became great and increased more than all who preceded me in Jerusalem. My wisdom also stood by me.**

10All that my eyes desired I did not refuse them I did not withhold my heart from any pleasure, for my heart was pleased because of all my labor and this was my reward for all my labor.

11Thus I considered all my activities which my hands had done and the labor which I had exerted, and behold all was vanity and striving after wind and there was no profit under the sun.

Getting more desperate, he tried exploit after exploit and possession after possession. He built houses, planted vineyards, planted fruit trees, built gardens and parks, made ponds, bought slaves, and had herds and flocks larger than all who were before him in Jerusalem. He collected silver and gold and king's treasure. He hired singers, male and female, to pleasure him with music and singing. He added more and more concubines to get the most sexual pleasure, or so he thought. He was "great" in terms of worldly standards of money, possessions, power, prestige, and pleasure. He had it all, and he had done it all "for himself." It is not wrong to build a house or make a pond, but Solomon found no joy or purpose in it because he simply did it for himself, trying to find some satisfaction in making himself look better, having accomplished more, or for the sake of the activities themselves. God wasn't in the picture at all, and his sin abounded in wasteful, lavish, and immoral living. He still had his wisdom; God had not taken it away. But his sin and selfishness prevented him from having joy despite his brainpower and understanding. All that his lusts craved, he fed them. He did not keep any pleasure from his heart. He is not saying that leisure and entertainment is inherently wrong, but, if pursued selfishly or in hope of meeting the soul's deepest needs, it is not going to satisfy. There is a sense of satisfaction that comes with seeing a job or project accomplished, and Solomon apparently experienced that. But that was the extent of his reward. His soul longings still were not met. He had done all this work, and there had been no profit whatsoever because it had been done "under the sun," with no seeking of God or gratitude toward Him in the process. No amount of work or achievements will satisfy ever, though they can be a temporary distraction from vanity. Once the job is done, however, futility sinks in at the deepest level.

12So I turned to consider wisdom, madness and folly; for what will the man do who will come after the king except what has already been done?

13And I saw that wisdom excels folly as light excels darkness.

14The wise man's eyes are in his head, but the fool walks in darkness And yet I know that one fate befalls them both.

15Then I said to myself, "As is the fate of the fool, it will also befall me Why then have I been extremely wise?" So I said to myself, "This too is vanity."

16For there is no lasting remembrance of the wise man as with the fool, inasmuch as in the coming days all will be forgotten And how the wise man and the fool alike die!

17So I hated life, for the work which had been done under the sun was grievous to me; because everything is futility and striving after wind.

Solomon wondered if he would have been better off not having wisdom and being a fool. He pitied the person who would come after him given that there was nothing more to do.

There were no distractions for this person to have. Perhaps he would be better off wandering in darkness like a fool so that he couldn't be as aware of the futility and meaninglessness of his earthly state and condition. This is the result of selfish, sinful pursuits. Loving God and enjoying Him does not lead one to such a sorry conclusion.

Wisdom gives understanding about the true state of life while folly blinds a person to their true condition. Apart from God, is one better than the other? Solomon's answer is not really. Light isn't really better than darkness, only different. Wisdom allows a person to see folly, while folly allows a person to be kept back from experiencing all of the pain that comes with recognizing things for what they really are according to wisdom. Solomon recognized that both the fool and the wise man will die, so in light of time and existence, there really is no value to wisdom if God is taken out of the picture. No one will remember the wise man any more than the foolish man. Both will die. This grieved Solomon's heart even more and caused him to hate life and the work which he had done under the sun. He wondered if he would have been better off wandering through life clueless. Yet either way, whether wise or foolish, life under the sun is a futile striving after the wind, a perpetual emptiness and hopelessness apart from God.

18 Thus I hated all the fruit of my labor for which I had labored under the sun, for I must leave it to the man who will come after me.

19 And who knows whether he will be a wise man or a fool? Yet he will have control over all the fruit of my labor for which I have labored by acting wisely under the sun This too is vanity.

20 Therefore I completely despaired of all the fruit of my labor for which I had labored under the sun.

21 When there is a man who has labored with wisdom, knowledge and skill, then he gives his legacy to one who has not labored with them. This too is vanity and a great evil.

22 For what does a man get in all his labor and in his striving with which he labors under the sun?

23 Because all his days his task is painful and grievous; even at night his mind does not rest. This too is vanity.

Solomon again contemplated all that he had accomplished and realized that one day it would be passed on to someone else. This made him hate these achievements more because they wouldn't even remain his. He would have to one day part with his fame, legacy, wealth, and achievements. His wisdom had built these things, and if the person after him was a fool, he could easily undo it all. Again, more despair entered into Solomon's heart. There is no reward for a person's labor because he cannot live forever to enjoy it. Even if he could, he wouldn't want to because it is a grievous task and painful. Even at night, Solomon couldn't put his mind to rest. He was not at peace at all but full of misery and pain. Sadly, there wasn't even any purpose in the pain and misery under the sun.

24 There is nothing better for a man than to eat and drink and tell himself that his labor is good This also I have seen that it is from the hand of God.

25For who can eat and who can have enjoyment without Him?

26For to a person who is good in His sight He has given wisdom and knowledge and joy, while to the sinner He has given the task of gathering and collecting so that he may give to one who is good in God's sight This too is vanity and striving after wind.

Solomon had enough wisdom to know the answer, but his heart has been hard to not receive it. Man is best off enjoying his food and his drink and believing that the work that he does is good. If he believes that there is a purpose in it, even though he realizes that it won't last, he can find joy. This Solomon knows is the truth from God. A person cannot even do the basic things of life with joy, i.e. eating and drinking, without thanking God and doing it for His honor and glory. There is no enjoyment whatsoever under the sun without God. God Himself is what is necessary for enjoyment. If we do our tasks and our work in and through Him and cognizant of His presence, there can be joy. He alone is our joy, and in His presence is fullness of joy (Psalm 16:11). The person who is good in God's sight will have wisdom, knowledge, and joy as he follows God's commands. The person who lives in sin will, as a general rule but by no means absolute, end up doing the difficult labor so that the good can profit even more. Yet even such profit is meaningless as is the labor of the wicked if it is not done under God. God is the One Who gives life meaning. Life must be viewed with an eternal perspective. If all we have is this short time, life really is futile. Death overcomes us all, and there is no way to find lasting satisfaction, apart from God.

Ecclesiastes 3

1There is an appointed time for everything. And there is a time for every event under heaven--

2A time to give birth and a time to die;

A time to plant and a time to uproot what is planted.

3A time to kill and a time to heal;

A time to tear down and a time to build up.

4A time to weep and a time to laugh;

A time to mourn and a time to dance.

5A time to throw stones and a time to gather stones;

A time to embrace and a time to shun embracing.

6A time to search and a time to give up as lost;

A time to keep and a time to throw away.

7A time to tear apart and a time to sew together;

A time to be silent and a time to speak.

8A time to love and a time to hate;

A time for war and a time for peace.

In the span of life, we will find ourselves doing a variety of tasks and experiencing a variety of emotions. God is over all circumstances, and we will inevitably see and/or experience birth and death, planting and harvesting, killing and healing, tearing down and building up, weeping and laughing, mourning and dancing, throwing stones and gathering stones, embracing and refraining from embracing, searching and giving up as lost, saving

and throwing away, tearing apart and sowing together, being silent and speaking, loving and hating, and warring and enjoying peace. The world is a place of difficulty and enjoyments, and we will have our share of both. Our emotions will go up and down, and as times change, the purposes of things will change while other things must go. New things will come, things will pass on, challenges will arise, and times of peace may be found. Such is the transient and changeable nature and reality of life on earth. Life in eternity won't have such ups and downs.

9What profit is there to the worker from that in which he toils?

10I have seen the task which God has given the sons of men with which to occupy themselves.

There is no ultimate soul satisfaction to be found in work in and of itself. Work must be done with all of our hearts in the name of Christ and for the glory of God in order for it to have meaning and allow us to experience the joy of the Lord (Colossians 3:17, 23).

11He has made everything appropriate in its time He has also set eternity in their heart, yet so that man will not find out the work which God has done from the beginning even to the end.

12I know that there is nothing better for them than to rejoice and to do good in one's lifetime;

13moreover, that every man who eats and drinks sees good in all his labor--it is the gift of God.

God is in control of all things, and certain things are appropriate at certain times while other things are inappropriate. Living life according to God's standards give meaning to life, and recognizing God's moral authority over all things makes everything fit in its proper place. Eternity is set in the heart of man in that something within us knows that this temporal life is not all there is (Romans 1:18-20, 32). What we are able to observe and understand in this life shows us how much we don't understand and how much more the God Who made all of these things must know. He must be eternal, and if joy is found in knowing Him, man must be made to live eternally as well. The best thing for man to do while he is on the earth is to rejoice in Christ (Philippians 4:4) and to do good, honoring God at all times and in all things. Evil, as Solomon found, does not satisfy. Work and achievements and sensual pleasures cannot bring what God can and what doing all things in the proper way can. However, there is a proper view of work. Work is not bad or evil, for Solomon says that work is actually a gift from God. There is satisfaction in a job well done for Christ. He has given us work to do on this earth of one kind or another, and when we see the results, we can have joy as we rest from our labors. Eating and drinking and the normal activities of life are a lot more enjoyable when work has been done and laziness has not been allowed to prevail. Man must be able to see good in his work, which is only possible if he does that which is morally right and to the glory of God.

14I know that everything God does will remain forever; there is nothing to add to it and there is nothing to take from it, for God has so worked that men should fear Him.

15That which is has been already and that which will be has already been, for God seeks what has passed by.

God is going to do what God is going to do, and man is helpless to stop Him. Man should bow in reverence, awe, and fear of the majesty and power of God. God knows all things, and there is nothing that man can add to His knowledge or understanding. God has made all things in the natural world, and man merely discovers the wisdom of God. We have nothing that we can add to what God has done. We can only harvest, cultivate, and use the resources in the universe. God has ordained things this way so that we would see our finiteness and His infinite wonder. Everything that He does will endure forever because it transcends time and space where moth and rust destroy. In God's mind, there is nothing new, for everything that is has already been. Everything that will be will also have been in the past. God sees all, and He exists outside of time. Thus, nothing will surprise God or take Him off guard. In God's mind, even the future has already been done, and He will judge all mankind on what He has seen. Rather than get carried away with lies that man will save himself or create some future paradise, man should remember that God wants us to remember His truth and live in a way pleasing to Him. We are to stay true to the past in this respect, for this is the basis on which we will be judged and/or rewarded.

16Furthermore, I have seen under the sun that in the place of justice there is wickedness and in the place of righteousness there is wickedness.

17I said to myself, "God will judge both the righteous man and the wicked man," for a time for every matter and for every deed is there.

Life on this side of eternity is unfair, and injustice happens. The righteous experience wrongs, and the evil prosper. Furthermore, those who act righteous can actually be very wicked, and those who one might think would be prone to choose wickedness might actually find salvation. Things don't operate always as they should and the neat dividing lines between good and evil people are not always clear to our eyes. But God sees all, and He will hold all to account for their deeds. There will be a time of reckoning for every matter. This realization of eternal judgment and accountability gives meaning and direction in life.

18I said to myself concerning the sons of men, "God has surely tested them in order for them to see that they are but beasts."

19For the fate of the sons of men and the fate of beasts is the same. As one dies so dies the other; indeed, they all have the same breath and there is no advantage for man over beast, for all is vanity.

20All go to the same place. All came from the dust and all return to the dust.

21Who knows that the breath of man ascends upward and the breath of the beast descends downward to the earth?

Difficulty is part of life on earth, and Solomon believes that God has allowed this as a test to show man that he has no more power to outwit pain, suffering, and death than an animal. All animals will die, and all people will die. All were made from dust, and all will return to dust. Thus, in terms of trying to live without God and eternal meaning, man has no more hope, worth, or purpose than an animal. The only difference is that man will be judged while the beast will just cease existing.

22I have seen that nothing is better than that man should be happy in his activities, for that is his lot For who will bring him to see what will occur after him?

Solomon believes that the best thing man can do is to simply rejoice in his life, which is only possible if he recognizes life as under God rather than under the sun. The activities that seem vain are not vain if they are understood as allotted to us by God to do to His glory. God is what gives life purpose. It makes no sense to put all of our hope and worth in this life. Some people live so that those who come after them will marvel at them. Yet the dead person cannot see this or glory in this, so this is futile. What is better is to enjoy what we do before God and to do it for God, knowing that once we die, eternity will be what counts, not what comes after us on the earth that brings glory to us.

Ecclesiastes 4

1Then I looked again at all the acts of oppression which were being done under the sun And behold I saw the tears of the oppressed and that they had no one to comfort them; and on the side of their oppressors was power, but they had no one to comfort them.

2So I congratulated the dead who are already dead more than the living who are still living.

3But better off than both of them is the one who has never existed, who has never seen the evil activity that is done under the sun.

There is great evil that occurs on the earth, and often times it seems as though the wicked get away with evil (c.f. Psalm 73:3, 17). The reality is that they will be judged, for God will render to each according to his deeds. Yet in the meantime, oppression, evil, violence, and injustice occur. Those who are oppressed suffer at the hands of their oppressors, and they are without comforters, though they can have comfort in Christ if they know Him (2 Corinthians 1:3-4). If God wasn't present in our suffering on earth (Colossians 1:24), it would be better off for a person to be dead than alive. In fact, as Solomon says, without God, a person is better off never having lived because of the evil and vanity of life. Life is utterly awful and meaningless if it is lived under the sun and without the Son of God.

4I have seen that every labor and every skill which is done is the result of rivalry between a man and his neighbor This too is vanity and striving after wind.

Solomon has great insight into the human condition. Not only is there significant evil activity (v. 3), but people live always to impress somebody else. They live measuring

themselves against what society says is successful or good, and they live for the approval of man rather than the approval of God. Rather than be content and pursue godliness, mankind without God runs the endless treadmill of trying to please people. Greed drives economies and societies rather than love, truth, and godliness. Solomon makes it plain that it is vanity and a chasing after wind to live constantly trying to impress others and gain their approval. It will never satisfy and never get a person to where they really need to be.

5The fool folds his hands and consumes his own flesh.

6One hand full of rest is better than two fists full of labor and striving after wind.

If a person decides just to sit around, not work, and be lazy, he will hunger and die. Only a fool is lazy while on the earth. So it is no better to sit and do nothing than it is to chase the approval of others. Both are vanity. Yet, all things considered, resting some and working some is a better bet than constantly laboring in vain. Of course, the best thing is to rest some and work some, doing each for the glory of God.

7Then I looked again at vanity under the sun.

8There was a certain man without a dependent, having neither a son nor a brother, yet there was no end to all his labor. Indeed, his eyes were not satisfied with riches and he never asked, "And for whom am I laboring and depriving myself of pleasure?" This too is vanity and it is a grievous task.

Solomon eyes a single individual who lives independently, has no children, and no brothers. He has all the time in the world to himself, and he chooses to spend it laboring, earning up wealth for himself. Solomon sees this as vanity because he was never satisfied with his labor or his money. He never even asked himself what the purpose was to all of his work. He wasn't doing it for the benefit of others, and he never even bothered to consider this. There are those who keep laboring to stay busy and occupied or to prove something to themselves or to others. Yet they miss out on pleasure, most importantly, the pleasure that comes from knowing God (Psalm 16:11). It is a real trap and grievous task to keep busy working for no purpose and for only selfish gain.

9Two are better than one because they have a good return for their labor.

10For if either of them falls, the one will lift up his companion. But woe to the one who falls when there is not another to lift him up.

11Furthermore, if two lie down together they keep warm, but how can one be warm alone?

12And if one can overpower him who is alone, two can resist him. A cord of three strands is not quickly torn apart.

Rather than be selfish and isolated, there is benefit to living life in fellowship with others. This is true in marriage, in church, and in family, even in society. When we live supporting each other, we can help each other in times of need. We can be there to encourage one another and to care for each other. There will be times when we will need help, and it is wise and beneficial to have others whom we can lean upon. It is a

dangerous, difficult, and sorrowful place to be when we have only ourselves to rely upon, especially if we don't rely upon God. Two is better than one because two has more strength, more flexibility, more security, and more comfort. It is easy to break a cord of one strand. Two strands are better because the extra strand makes the first strand stronger and harder to destroy. A cord of three strands is even stronger, and this speaks to the benefit of having others to support us in life. It is good to have one friend or spouse, but it is even greater to have even more than one person whom we can rely on. We can always rely upon God Who is always faithful (Lamentations 3:23).

13A poor yet wise lad is better than an old and foolish king who no longer knows how to receive instruction.

14For he has come out of prison to become king, even though he was born poor in his kingdom.

15I have seen all the living under the sun throned to the side of the second lad who replaces him.

16There is no end to all the people, to all who were before them, and even the ones who will come later will not be happy with him, for this too is vanity and striving after wind.

In terms of earthly power and prosperity, generally speaking, the person with wisdom is better off than the person with power who is a fool. The masses will tend to follow the person with wisdom, even if poor or of a humble background, rather than a foolish person of power, status, and wealth. The wise person will show the people that he can be trusted and that he has their best interests in mind, while the foolish person will communicate to the people that he has his own interests in mind. Thus, the people prefer the wise person. The NKJV translates verse 16 as, "There was no end of all the people over whom he was made king; yet those who come afterward will not rejoice in him. Surely this also is vanity and grasping for the wind." Solomon's point is that people continue to die and be born, and they are fickle. Just because one generation respected a wise king does not mean that the next generation will. So, even though it is generally true that people respect a wise leader, it is not always true, particularly as morals decay in a society. Thus, it makes no sense to put confidence or worth in what others think because their views can change over time. Living for the approval of men is a wasted life, and trusting in the opinion of the masses is not a reliable way to live.

Ecclesiastes 5

1Guard your steps as you go to the house of God and draw near to listen rather than to offer the sacrifice of fools; for they do not know they are doing evil.

2Do not be hasty in word or impulsive in thought to bring up a matter in the presence of God For God is in heaven and you are on the earth; therefore let your words be few.

3For the dream comes through much effort and the voice of a fool through many words.

Rather than living merely under the sun, Solomon now reflects upon living in light of the fear of God. A fool casually and without careful introspection approaches the house of God. He offers praise and sacrifices without first being diligent to assess the condition of his heart before God. God desires that we worship Him in spirit and in truth (John 4:24), and part of this implies that we approach Him with clean hands and a pure heart (Psalm 24:3-4). We should go in humility, seeking to listen, learn, and obey, rather than going presumptuously and arrogantly with a heart not sensitive to the Spirit's leading and working. God wants us to tremble before Him and His Word (Isaiah 66:2), and we must not be casual and careless about the worship of God. Those who approach God in worship casually and without self-examination typically do not realize the severity of what they are doing. They need to be instructed in the fear of the Lord (Proverbs 1:7) and in the splendor of His holiness. They need to know that He is a jealous God (Exodus 20:5) and that He disciplines those children whom He loves (Hebrews 12:6). Those who mock His table, communion, even risk death or sickness (1 Corinthians 11:30). Approaching God is a serious matter, and it is imperative that the church instructs people to this end.

When we pray, we should think about what we are saying, for it is not appropriate before God to speak carelessly or spuriously. God demands that we respect Him as we share our requests and heart with Him. God is in heaven, a place of perfection, power, and purity, whereas we are mere men on the created earth praying to the Creator of heaven and earth. We must remember just Who it is that we are speaking to lest we insult God with our casual, careless, heartless, and impulsive manner. We don't need to fill time with many words or meaningless phrases, but we need to simply speak with the Lord with a few but meaningful and well-thought through words. God doesn't need explanations because He already knows. He doesn't need lots of wonderful diction to be impressed to listen, for He hears the groanings of the Spirit in our hearts loudly and clearly (Romans 8:26). When we come before God, we come bare and naked in our soul, for God sees and knows all. Let's keep it simple, pure, and respectful, asking God what we need to ask Him and bringing our requests before Him in simplicity.

Some look to visions, dreams, and fanciful experiences in order to feel close to God. It is the work of fools to labor after an extraordinary mystical experience rather than simply approaching God in faith through prayer. God is within His children, and He doesn't have to be sought up through my travail and labor. He is right here, within us, and He is omnipresent. Fools labor to find God, and they waste their effort and energy in superfluous words in prayer. Rather than try to conjure up an experience with God, we should simply speak with Him. Rather than try to dream up some selfish ambition for God, we should ask Him for wisdom. Rather than wait for God to speak to us in a dream, we should look to His Word.

4When you make a vow to God, do not be late in paying it; for He takes no delight in fools Pay what you vow!

5It is better that you should not vow than that you should vow and not pay.

6Do not let your speech cause you to sin and do not say in the presence of the messenger of God that it was a mistake. Why should God be angry on account of your voice and destroy the work of your hands?

7For in many dreams and in many words there is emptiness. Rather, fear God.

Continuing in the same vein of thought about approaching God in worship, Solomon explains again that God must be feared, respected, and taken seriously. A person should not make a vow to God and then not pay it. Such is foolish. We would be better off not making a vow if we weren't going to follow through on it anyway. If we make a promise to God, we had better keep it so that we don't greatly dishonor God Who always keeps His promises to us. Jesus taught that we don't need to tack on any oath when we make a commitment as if swearing by something makes any difference. Rather, we should let our "yes" be "yes" and our "no" be "no" (Matthew 5:36-37). There is no reason to add in the oath when God hears us and takes us at our Word. We, too, should take Him at His Word, and keep things simple. If we do make a commitment to God, we had better be sure to keep it. When we approach God in worship, we need to be very careful as to what comes out of our mouths. We don't want to have to apologize to other believers that we made a mistake because, though they can forgive us, the foolish words have already done their damage and disrespected God. We need to learn not to make God angry in the first place so that we don't risk His discipline or divine judgment. If we can control our tongue before God and in the house of God, we likely can control the rest of our lives (James 3:2). God doesn't want superfluous, spurious speech or fanciful visions and dreams about experiences with Him or about what we want to do with our lives. He is not interested in our selfish ambitions, but He desires our hearts to approach Him humbly, respectfully, in fear, and in trembling. When we have a view of God as holy and authoritative, we will be careful as to what we speak, do, think, and desire. This is the place of wisdom and growth, and it is conducive to us being able to be used by God to accomplish His will in and through our lives.

8If you see oppression of the poor and denial of justice and righteousness in the province, do not be shocked at the sight; for one official watches over another official, and there are higher officials over them.

9After all, a king who cultivates the field is an advantage to the land.

The NKJV translates verse 9 as, "Moreover the profit of the land is for all; even the king is served from the field." Thus, the idea is that, since all people, including the king, the officials, and the higher officials, are served by eating of the fruit of the land, each, being selfish, will try to get their fair share and more, which results in corruption and oppression of the poor, needy, and less powerful in the land. Because of greed, it is typical for the powerful to abuse the less powerful and those who have to take advantage of those who have not. Such is not the way of Christ Who is impartial (Deuteronomy 10:17) and generous to those in need (Philippians 4:19).

10He who loves money will not be satisfied with money, nor he who loves abundance with its income. This too is vanity.

11When good things increase, those who consume them increase. So what is the advantage to their owners except to look on?

12The sleep of the working man is pleasant, whether he eats little or much; but the full stomach of the rich man does not allow him to sleep.

Solomon, who himself had great wealth, clearly teaches that money does not make a person happy. In fact, the love of money, wealth, gain, and income leads a person to a place of dissatisfaction rather than satisfaction. Jesus taught that a person could not serve God and money (Matthew 6:24). If a person serves God, He can be content, which is great gain (1 Timothy 6:6). However, contentment will elude the person who makes money his master. Furthermore, things rust and decay, so the only “profit” they can be to those who own them is to see them, which is not much profit at all. Goods decay or are consumed, and the more goods, the more decay and consumption there will be. Thus, man should put his hope and confidence in what cannot decay or be consumed, which is God (Exodus 3:14), His Word (1 Peter 1:25), and eternal rewards in heaven (Matthew 6:20).

Man will do better if he works hard and does not hoard goods, loving wealth. The working man sleeps well, generally speaking, as compared to the rich man who is consumed with his goods and possessions and gaining more. He is never satisfied or able to rest, though his stomach is full. He is never content, and thus his soul is not full or at rest. The poorer man can sleep well, whether he has eaten little or much, because he is not chasing wealth. If a person is content with what he has and his lot in life and if he serves God, he can have full joy (Psalm 16:11). Pleasure does not consist in the amount of things owned but in knowing God.

13There is a grievous evil which I have seen under the sun: riches being hoarded by their owner to his hurt.

14When those riches were lost through a bad investment and he had fathered a son, then there was nothing to support him.

15As he had come naked from his mother's womb, so will he return as he came He will take nothing from the fruit of his labor that he can carry in his hand.

16This also is a grievous evil--exactly as a man is born, thus will he die. So what is the advantage to him who toils for the wind?

When a rich person hoards his possessions, it hurts him and steals from those in need. God blesses so that people can be a blessing to others, not so that they can keep more than they need. Such is greatly offensive to God, and it is even harmful to the person doing it as they become addicted and attached to their material goods. God’s provision never runs out, but if man trusts in his own provision he might be gravely disappointed, particularly if he loses all that he has, say through a bad investment. His son will have nothing even though at one time he had an abundance. Thus, riches are not where our confidence should be placed, but our trust and hope is God. All people must remember that we come into this world with nothing, being naked from our mother’s womb, and we can take nothing out of it. Thus, we had better think about sending treasure on ahead,

rather than getting all that we can now. Those who live for the here and now at the expense of the life to come commit a grievous, vain, and empty evil.

17Throughout his life he also eats in darkness with great vexation, sickness and anger.

18Here is what I have seen to be good and fitting: to eat, to drink and enjoy oneself in all one's labor in which he toils under the sun during the few years of his life which God has given him; for this is his reward.

19Furthermore, as for every man to whom God has given riches and wealth, He has also empowered him to eat from them and to receive his reward and rejoice in his labor; this is the gift of God.

20For he will not often consider the years of his life, because God keeps him occupied with the gladness of his heart.

A person who puts his hope in his riches will end up with anger, bitterness, and resentment as death closes in because he will be recognizing that he can't take his possessions on with him. He might be convicted of his wasted life, and he might be angry against the God Whom he will shortly have to face. Even those who do fear God will have to deal with sickness and distress, but the difference is that they have hope and joy, even in the hard times. Thus, they don't need to isolate themselves in darkness and bitterness, but they can be encouraged with others who share their hope. The perspective man needs to have is a perspective driven by the fear of God. We are to live knowing that we only have so much time on earth as God allots our days. Thus, we should eat, drink, and work, enjoying each, which is only possible if we do it to the glory of God. Whenever eating, drinking, or working becomes about the activity itself rather than about worshipping God, it becomes meaningless, boring, and joyless. So what is good and fitting is to honor God and enjoy Him in all of life, recognizing that the best is yet to come. This is the only perspective that makes any sense or which makes this life possibly enjoyable. Riches don't make it enjoyable, so even those who have much in this life should honor God as the Giver of their possessions, enjoying Him which makes it possible to enjoy them. They should not become enslaved to their things, but they should worship God. Then they can enjoy His grace to them, and they should be generous toward those in need (1 Timothy 6:17-18). The paradigm which all people should seek to find is a life lived where God keeps them occupied in a state of gladness of heart rather than counting the years down in misery, bitterness, or hopelessness. There should be an eagerness to go and be with the Lord, but there should also be a joyful serving of Christ in this life, even if life is difficult (Philippians 1:21).

Ecclesiastes 6

1There is an evil which I have seen under the sun and it is prevalent among men--

2a man to whom God has given riches and wealth and honor so that his soul lacks nothing of all that he desires; yet God has not empowered him to eat from them, for a foreigner enjoys them. This is vanity and a severe affliction.

In these times, it was not uncommon for a nation to be conquered in war by another nation which would plunder it. So, a man who had been sovereignly blessed by God to have much in the way of material possessions could lose them all overnight. What was his in abundance ends up going to foreigners, causing him severe heartbreak, loss, and affliction. He had had everything that he had wanted and then lost it, which points to the infinite value of knowing God through Christ because it cannot be conquered, plundered, or taken away. Only in Christ can true satisfaction be found.

**3If a man fathers a hundred children and lives many years, however many they be, but his soul is not satisfied with good things and he does not even have a proper burial, then I say, "Better the miscarriage than he,
4for it comes in futility and goes into obscurity; and its name is covered in obscurity.
5"It never sees the sun and it never knows anything; it is better off than he.
6"Even if the other man lives a thousand years twice and does not enjoy good things--do not all go to one place?"**

A miscarriage is a life that never sees life outside of the womb. It never has to deal with frustration, pain, loss, and the difficulties of life. Yet it never gets to experience the good things of life either, for in God true satisfaction can be found. Solomon says that it is better to be miscarried than to live and not find satisfaction. Life under the sun is miserable, futile, and purposeless unless one learns to fear the Lord. Even if a man were to live hundreds of years and have many children, both assumed to be signs of blessing and prosperity, he still has not found what his heart longs for if he hasn't found God. A proper burial is a sign that a man had those who cared for him and that he was well-respected. If he didn't have a proper burial, it was a sign that his children didn't respect him. Thus, even if he were to hypothetically have a hundred children, if they didn't give him a proper burial, it was all vanity. When fathers fear the Lord and teach their sons to fear the Lord, the soul's longing is met, and a man can die with dignity. The Lord is Who makes unity possible and Who gives life meaning and joy. Yet suppose another man lived even longer, for thousands of years. If he still didn't enjoy his life before God, his life was in vain and for a great long time. He, like all men, will die and come to an end. The issue for man is where that end is spent, and that is dictated by whether or not one fears the Lord.

7All a man's labor is for his mouth and yet the appetite is not satisfied.

We work so that we can eat. If we don't work, we won't have money to buy food to eat. Even preparing food is work, and we do it all to feed our physical appetites. Our bodies need food in order to function and have energy. This is something that must go on as long as we live. If we stop eating, we stop having energy, thus we stop working, and consequently stop eating yet more. The appetite is never satisfied because our bodies need food, and as long as we are alive, we must work to keep feeding them. The point is that work doesn't satisfy the soul because its ultimate purpose is found in providing the resources to be able to stay alive by eating. The stomach is never satisfied so we must

keep working. It is an endless meaningless circle of events and labor under the sun, unless, of course, God is brought into the mix.

8For what advantage does the wise man have over the fool? What advantage does the poor man have, knowing how to walk before the living?

There is no objective reason or incentive to be wise rather than foolish if there is no God. There would be no advantage to having wisdom and pursuing it because the fool would be just as well off given that there is no transcendent standard for living. The same goes for the poor and rich. Nothing matters and none has an advantage because all die and lack meaning and satisfaction. Life without God is not helped in the ultimate spiritual sense by wealth or wisdom.

9What the eyes see is better than what the soul desires This too is futility and a striving after wind.

There is much in the world that looks promising, seductive, interesting, and potentially able to satisfy, but it cannot and does not. What is perceived by the eye is thus better than what it can actually deliver because it fails to satisfy the longings of the heart and soul. Only God satisfies, and life without Him is vanity.

10Whatever exists has already been named, and it is known what man is; for he cannot dispute with him who is stronger than he is.

11For there are many words which increase futility. What then is the advantage to a man?

The NKJV says more clearly, “Whatever one is, he has been named already, For it is known that he is man; And he cannot contend with Him who is mightier than he. Since there are many things that increase vanity, How is man the better?” In other words, man is man because God made him and called him man. Man cannot become God or change himself into something other than man. Man is man because he is. He can’t argue with God or change himself into God. He has his limitations, and he is smaller and weaker than the God Who made him. Given that all of man’s attempts continue to prove vain and meaningless when he tries to live life apart from God, why does he hope to make his life better by doing so? Man’s only hope for identity, dignity, purpose, and meaning is to worship the God Who made him rather than coming up with an alternative purpose and meaning which ultimately proves to be vain and futile. Thus, even the futility of trying to find happiness apart from God proves man’s dependence and subservience to God, whether man acknowledges it or not.

12For who knows what is good for a man during his lifetime, during the few years of his futile life? He will spend them like a shadow. For who can tell a man what will be after him under the sun?

If a man ignores God and tries to find meaning on his own, how can he possibly determine what is good and what could lead him to satisfaction? Man’s life is short and

finite on the earth, like a shadow is there and then gone with the setting of the sun. He can't find satisfaction and meaning without God, and neither can he do anything to prevent dying. While he is alive, he can't even control his life or future. He is a helpless, hopeless, feeble being left to himself.

Ecclesiastes 7

**1A good name is better than a good ointment,
And the day of one's death is better than the day of one's birth.
2It is better to go to a house of mourning
Than to go to a house of feasting,
Because that is the end of every man,
And the living takes it to heart.**

A bad name and reputation cannot be fixed overnight, and thus a good name is very valuable and hard-earned. An ointment can be bought and sold, but a good name is either true of a person or not. The day of death is better than the day of birth because man can go to a better place if he knows the Lord. There is value in going to a house of mourning because the living can recognize that they, too, will die and that life is short. Seeing the temporal nature of one's life should lead to wisely seeking out how to best use it. Constantly going to happy parties and not reflecting on the serious, short nature of life can be dangerous.

**3Sorrow is better than laughter,
For when a face is sad a heart may be happy.**

Solomon is not saying that it is always ideal for a person to be sad. What he is saying is that it is wise to feel sorrow when sorrow is in order rather than to suppress healthy and normal emotions by trying to distract oneself with laughter. Rather than amuse ourselves to death, there is value in learning how to have true joy even when life brings sorrow. A heart that can have joy even when life is sorrowful is better than mere shallow, empty laughter.

**4The mind of the wise is in the house of mourning,
While the mind of fools is in the house of pleasure.**

Those who are wise will reflect upon the short nature of life so as to determine how to best use their time on earth. The fools will pass all of their time in vain pleasure and likely miss out on the real purpose of life.

**5It is better to listen to the rebuke of a wise man
Than for one to listen to the song of fools.
6For as the crackling of thorn bushes under a pot,
So is the laughter of the fool;
And this too is futility.**

It is important to spend time with those who are wise and not be corrupted by the company of fools. Fools act carefree and happy, but their lives are hollow, empty, and without vision. The wise know that there are moral absolutes that govern the universe, and they will challenge us to pursue what is true, right, pure, and noble. The way of wisdom leads to true joy and songs of endless praise for Christ. The laughter of fools will be here and then gone like thorns burned up by the fire. Their thoughts and amusements are but temporal and mere distractions. The wise lead us to be diligent and to pursue meaning that has implications and rewards even after death.

**7For oppression makes a wise man mad,
And a bribe corrupts the heart.**

Those who are wise because they fear God get angry when they see injustice and oppression because their hearts are aligned with the heart of God. A fool, on the other hand, will gladly take a bribe because of supposed temporary gain, caring nothing about morality or the will of God. Their song of victory is a sign of corruption because their hearts have been sold out to do evil.

**8The end of a matter is better than its beginning;
Patience of spirit is better than haughtiness of spirit.**

Time has a way of revealing who a person really is, and thus character is proven in the end. A person might be arrogant at the beginning that they are strong, but in the end they may be proven to be weak. The end is thus better than the beginning because it reveals truth. Those who are patient and persevering until the end are those who are wise.

**9Do not be eager in your heart to be angry,
For anger resides in the bosom of fools.**

Anger doesn't lead to good things, but it is characteristic of fools and those who do foolish things. Anger can lead to bad judgment, stress, destruction, and disappointment. We cannot let anger move us to hate another person or take revenge. Zeal for righteousness is fine, but anger must not persist. We are not allowed to let the sun set on our anger because it festers and leads to hate (Ephesians 4:6). We must harness our feelings of anger and let God deal with the situation, taking justice into His hands. Giving in to anger solves no problems, and thus we are told to put away all anger, wrath, clamor, and slander (Ephesians 4:31). We are to be children of peace and to be peacemakers (Matthew 5:9). Anger doesn't lead to righteous acts, but zeal does (see John 2:17). We should be passionate for truth and to defend truth, but we should never be angry at those who oppose our cause. God will deal with them because vengeance is His. He can be righteously angry because it is His job to avenge wrong and pour out wrath and judgment. Our job is not to act out in anger because God will vindicate the righteous, but we are to be zealous for good (Titus 2:14). Our zeal should motivate act righteously and peacefully, seeking conciliation, restoration, and forgiveness, not elevated conflict. Anger can turn into a power trip where we play God, and we must not let that happen. We should be slow to anger (Proverbs 14:29, 15:18, 16:23, 19:11, 19,

22:24), and we should remove it from our bodies (Ecclesiastes 11:10). Man's anger does not achieve the righteousness of God, so we must get rid of it (James 1:19-20). God can be angry because God isn't controlled by anger as if He is going to get led away into unrighteous acts. God acts justly, and it is His prerogative to execute vengeance, not ours (Romans 12:19).

**10 Do not say, "Why is it that the former days were better than these?"
For it is not from wisdom that you ask about this.**

There is no wisdom in wondering why things used to be better. When we go through tough times, sometimes we are tempted to wish for the good old days when things were "easy." The reality is that we can't go back to the former days. Secondly, if we went back, we probably wouldn't like those days any more than the present days because sin is ever present. Thirdly, wisdom focuses on making the most of the present. Thus, rather than wishing for the past, we need to focus on how to make kingdom priorities a priority in the present. We are to live in the present, forgetting what is behind (Philippians 3:13) and not worrying about what is to come (Matthew 6:31).

**11 Wisdom along with an inheritance is good
And an advantage to those who see the sun.**

**12 For wisdom is protection just as money is protection,
But the advantage of knowledge is that wisdom preserves the lives of its
possessors.**

Those who are yet alive on the earth benefit from wisdom with or without an inheritance. Yet an inheritance is a good thing in that it can provide protection as it provides for needs. But more important is wisdom because wisdom is also protection, guarding the soul from damnation.

**13 Consider the work of God,
For who is able to straighten what He has bent?**

**14 In the day of prosperity be happy,
But in the day of adversity consider--
God has made the one as well as the other
So that man will not discover anything that will be after him.**

Solomon's point here is that God will do what God will do, and no man can tell Him what He should do. When God blesses and things are well, we should not feel guilty but rather enjoy what God has given and praise Him with it. But God also appoints adversity for man, and man needs to accept it as from His hand. The reason for this is that man can become arrogant when all things go well. He can start to think that he controls his destiny. Adversity reminds us that we are dependent beings on the hand of God and that we need Him. God gives and takes away. The important thing is that we bless Him in both good and bad times (Job 1:21).

15I have seen everything during my lifetime of futility; there is a righteous man who perishes in his righteousness and there is a wicked man who prolongs his life in his wickedness.

16Do not be excessively righteous and do not be overly wise. Why should you ruin yourself?

17Do not be excessively wicked and do not be a fool. Why should you die before your time?

18It is good that you grasp one thing and also not let go of the other; for the one who fears God comes forth with both of them.

Solomon's life was futile in that he lived much of it in rebellion against God, ignoring the source of meaning, joy, and purpose. This section is best understood in light of v. 18 which is better translated in the NKJV: "It is good that you grasp this, and also not remove your hand from the other; for he who fears God will escape them all." Solomon examines those who are excessively righteous, that is, self-righteous and judgmental and those who are wicked, pursuing evil and being foolish. The conclusion is that neither is a good option. Self-righteousness can lead to ruin because it is filled with pride and the scorn of others. Those who are wicked will also find ruin because sin is dangerous and harmful. Thus, neither route is the right way to live. The way to live is to fear the Lord and keep His commandments (Ecclesiastes 12:13), not in pride and self-righteousness but in a holy reverence and humility before God. No other way satisfies, and all other roads lead to destruction. It is important that we understand this and not let go of these realities so that we live wisely and escape the dangers that we otherwise would certainly face.

19Wisdom strengthens a wise man more than ten rulers who are in a city.

Wisdom is more desirable than ten rulers to protect, govern, lead, and direct a city. Wisdom has far more assurances and securities with it than mere numbers of mortal man. One wise man is better to be trusted to do good for the welfare of a city than ten who lack wisdom. Wisdom can only be found in fearing God (Proverbs 1:7).

20Indeed, there is not a righteous man on earth who continually does good and who never sins.

This squares with the New Testament teaching in Romans 3:23 that all have sinned and fall short of the holy and glorious standards of God. All of us are lawbreakers and guilty of eternal punishment (Romans 6:23). We need to be forgiven through Jesus Christ, the only Person to ever walk this earth and do good continually, never sinning.

21Also, do not take seriously all words which are spoken, so that you will not hear your servant cursing you.

22For you also have realized that you likewise have many times cursed others.

We need to be merciful toward others because others might say offensive things about us, yet we may have said offensive things about them in the past. Thus, we need mercy, and we need to show mercy. Sometimes we say things in the heat of the moment or which

we don't really mean or intend. Thus, we need to be longsuffering toward others and gentle in our response toward them.

**23I tested all this with wisdom, and I said, "I will be wise," but it was far from me.
24What has been is remote and exceedingly mysterious Who can discover it?**

Solomon sought to add wisdom to his wisdom, but he found that there are many things which the human mind just can't know or comprehend. There are unknowable things, things which God calls "secret" (Deuteronomy 29:29). Thus, even the wisest among us cannot have insight into what God has not revealed.

25I directed my mind to know, to investigate and to seek wisdom and an explanation, and to know the evil of folly and the foolishness of madness.

26And I discovered more bitter than death the woman whose heart is snares and nets, whose hands are chains One who is pleasing to God will escape from her, but the sinner will be captured by her.

Solomon began a very purposeful and measured inquiry into the nature of wisdom and that of foolishness and evil. What he found was that one of the most destructive follies that a man can commit on earth is to fall for the seductress. Her heart is a trap, like a spider seeking its victim and prey to feast upon. Beauty is the bait, but destruction awaits. Immorality can become an addictive chain and a very destructive force, pulling the mind into thoughts and feelings that remove one's ability to think, function, and live normally and healthily. The one who escapes her trap is the one who seeks to fear God. Those who desire in their hearts to do right will not succumb to the lies. They will be able to escape temptation and live in victory. God gives freedom from deception and/or rebellion if we humbly seek His help and wisdom. The sinner, however, has no divine intervention to help him, and he foolishly allows himself to be destroyed by folly and what is a mere farce.

27"Behold, I have discovered this," says the Preacher, "adding one thing to another to find an explanation,

28which I am still seeking but have not found. I have found one man among a thousand, but I have not found a woman among all these.

29"Behold, I have found only this, that God made men upright, but they have sought out many devices."

Solomon did some empirical research in seeking out wisdom, and what he realized, adding one thing to another, was that very, very few are righteous. Solomon says he happened upon one man in a thousand who was righteous, but of the thousand women he observed, he didn't find any righteous. The Bible is clear that both men and women are equally prone to sin, and thus the point is not that there was one more man righteous than there was women but that there are very few righteous. Whether zero out of a thousand or one out of a thousand, mankind is in a very bad state. God created mankind upright as Genesis teaches, but man fell into sin. Their hearts are corrupt (Jeremiah 17:9), and they seek out the fulfillment of their evil desires. Solomon does not have an explanation for

why so many stay in this corrupted state and why they don't choose to seek after wisdom. Why do a very select few have their eyes opened and hearts changed while the vast majority do not? This is a question the Bible does not answer this side of eternity, but God knows what He is doing. We do know that those who do repent are vessels of mercy which God showcases to the world as an example of His merciful nature (Romans 9:23).

Ecclesiastes 8

1Who is like the wise man and who knows the interpretation of a matter? A man's wisdom illumines him and causes his stern face to beam.

The end of wisdom is great joy because of the insight that a man has into the true reality of the state of the world around him and to the state of his own heart. He no longer has to wallow in uncertainty and confusion, but the wisdom of God enlightens his mind to see the world as God sees and to have no doubt about what is true and what is not. It leads him to freedom of the fullest and most purest sense. His life can be purposeful, meaningful, and filled with joy.

2I say, "Keep the command of the king because of the oath before God.

3"Do not be in a hurry to leave him. Do not join in an evil matter, for he will do whatever he pleases."

4Since the word of the king is authoritative, who will say to him, "What are you doing?"

5He who keeps a royal command experiences no trouble, for a wise heart knows the proper time and procedure.

6For there is a proper time and procedure for every delight, though a man's trouble is heavy upon him.

Solomon exhorts his listeners to obey those in authority, particularly the king, i.e. government officials. The Christian should be subject to them unless they force him to do something against Christ and the mandates of the Scripture. God's authority always trumps that of the earthly authority. Yet, generally speaking, the king should be respected, and this should motivate a citizen not to abandon him (e.g. treason) and join forces with someone else. Doing evil will lead the king to pursue such a person in punishment. It doesn't make sense to challenge the king by doing wickedly, but a king should be obeyed and respected. If a king persecutes his people, there is a time and place for rebellion, but it must be done wisely and rightly. It cannot be evil in intent or vengeful, but it must be for the sake of truth, freedom, and righteousness. Just because a situation is horrible doesn't give the suffering citizen the right to act in evil. Righteousness must guide his every decision and action.

7If no one knows what will happen, who can tell him when it will happen?

8No man has authority to restrain the wind with the wind, or authority over the day of death; and there is no discharge in the time of war, and evil will not deliver those who practice it.

Not only does man not know the future, but he cannot predict the future. This should lead him to live in wisdom, discretion, and with good stewardship. It should also motivate him to trust the Lord Who does know what will happen and when because He is sovereign over all things. Man cannot control the wind and tell it which way to blow, but God can. Man can do nothing to keep himself from dying should God ordain it. The NKJV has a clearer translation of v. 8 saying, “No one has power over the spirit to retain the spirit, And no one has power in the day of death. There is no release from that war, And wickedness will not deliver those who are given to it.” Some may choose to live in wickedness, not fearing the Lord, in which case they may want to put off meeting the Lord in judgment. Yet there is nothing that they can do. Fighting death is a hopeless fight, and there is no escape from the war which death will wage, physically and spiritually. Thus, rather than being concerned about prolonging our earthly lives, we should accept the days which God ordains for us, and purpose to glorify Him in each of them one at a time.

9All this I have seen and applied my mind to every deed that has been done under the sun wherein a man has exercised authority over another man to his hurt.

10So then, I have seen the wicked buried, those who used to go in and out from the holy place, and they are soon forgotten in the city where they did thus. This too is futility.

11Because the sentence against an evil deed is not executed quickly, therefore the hearts of the sons of men among them are given fully to do evil.

12Although a sinner does evil a hundred times and may lengthen his life, still I know that it will be well for those who fear God, who fear Him openly.

13But it will not be well for the evil man and he will not lengthen his days like a shadow, because he does not fear God.

Solomon has observed that there are those who do wickedly to others, taking advantage of them and exercising authority over them to their detriment. Yet these wicked men also die, for they cannot put off death when it comes for them. They get buried, and to the watching world, there seems to be no justice. They seem to have gotten away with their evil deeds, and this motivates others to continue in evil as well. Yet just because the consequences aren't immediately visible does not mean that the wicked get away with their wickedness. (As a side note, in this narrative, the wicked used to be very religious, doing the religious rituals of entering the holy place. Yet their hearts were evil and bent on doing wrong. Thus, their religion was empty and futile.) God is not fooled by empty religion, but He knows the heart and will judge accordingly. Some may sin and sin again, even living longer because of it, but it will not be well for them in eternity. God will judge them, and they will have to face His wrath. Those who are righteous and who stand for truth even openly even if it costs them their lives have assurance that it will be well with them in eternity. Generally, living in righteousness prolongs life more than wickedness anyway (Ephesians 6:1-3), so there is no point in living wickedly and dying sooner and going to hell forever. Righteousness is always better.

14There is futility which is done on the earth, that is, there are righteous men to whom it happens according to the deeds of the wicked On the other hand, there are

evil men to whom it happens according to the deeds of the righteous. I say that this too is futility.

15So I commended pleasure, for there is nothing good for a man under the sun except to eat and to drink and to be merry, and this will stand by him in his toils throughout the days of his life which God has given him under the sun.

The rain falls on the just and the unjust (Matthew 5:45). Man cannot assume that just because he lives righteously that all will go well for him. Generally, he will be better off, but still he might have hardship, and sometimes it might be worse than that which the wicked experience. Sometimes the wicked prosper, but in the long run, they will be destroyed (Psalm 1). Thus, a man shouldn't live righteously for the sake of demanding earthly prosperity of God, for God never guaranteed this. He should, however, fear the Lord because He is the Lord. Solomon's advice to the righteous man is to eat, drink, and be merry, all within the confines of Biblical morality, to the best of his ability such as to enjoy life with the Lord. Things may not always go smoothly, but he should have joy in the Lord and in the good things God has given him to enjoy. He should enjoy his labor, his food, his drink, his wife (Ecclesiastes 9:9), his family, and all good things from the hand of God, the giver of all good and perfect gifts (James 1:17).

16When I gave my heart to know wisdom and to see the task which has been done on the earth (even though one should never sleep day or night),

17and I saw every work of God, I concluded that man cannot discover the work which has been done under the sun Even though man should seek laboriously, he will not discover; and though the wise man should say, "I know," he cannot discover.

Again, Solomon explains that even though he, the wisest man on earth, has set his heart to grow in wisdom, he has realized his limitations. There are some things that lack explanation and are unknowable on this side of eternity. Even if he never slept, still he wouldn't have enough time or insight to figure all things out. God has done so much, and man's lifetime is too short and his mind too weak to be able to understand even all that is before us in the created world, let alone the philosophy and wisdom behind it all. Some may say that they know and have all the answers, but none can discover the secret things of the Lord. As David says in Psalm 139:6, "Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; It is high, I cannot attain it." (see also Isaiah 40:28, Romans 11:33)

Ecclesiastes 9

1For I have taken all this to my heart and explain it that righteous men, wise men, and their deeds are in the hand of God Man does not know whether it will be love or hatred; anything awaits him.

The righteous must put the hope and trust in God that God will reward them according to their faith in Him and resultant good deeds. In this life, both good and bad will be experienced, and man does not know what will come or when. But the believer in Christ can rest knowing that God loves Him and is in charge of all that He will experience in

life. God will cause all to work for his good (Romans 8:28). Despite the chaotic nature of life on earth, this gives the believer hope, rest, and security.

2It is the same for all There is one fate for the righteous and for the wicked; for the good, for the clean and for the unclean; for the man who offers a sacrifice and for the one who does not sacrifice. As the good man is, so is the sinner; as the swearer is, so is the one who is afraid to swear.

3This is an evil in all that is done under the sun, that there is one fate for all men Furthermore, the hearts of the sons of men are full of evil and insanity is in their hearts throughout their lives. Afterwards they go to the dead.

No matter who a person is, what they have done, how wealthy they are, what nation they are from, whether they sacrifice or don't sacrifice, they will all one day die. All humanity eventually will meet the same fate of death; the issue is what will happen to them after they die. Such, of course, depends on their faith in God to save them and forgive them. They need this because man is born into sin, his heart is full of evil (Jeremiah 17:9), and he is incapable apart from divine grace to even reason his way to wisdom and salvation. In this sense, his decisions, being irrational and against the revelation given to him through the creation (see Romans 1:18-20), are nothing less than pure madness.

4For whoever is joined with all the living, there is hope; surely a live dog is better than a dead lion.

5For the living know they will die; but the dead do not know anything, nor have they any longer a reward, for their memory is forgotten.

6Indeed their love, their hate and their zeal have already perished, and they will no longer have a share in all that is done under the sun.

All men will die, and once dead, they have no hope left and no chance at redemption. While they are alive, there is hope for change and repentance. Even a person of lowliness and rendered with difficulties in life is better off than a dead rich, prosperous person because he is still alive. The living understand that they will one day die; wisdom chooses to live wisely and obediently in light of that fact. Once a person is dead, they have no chance to find God or enjoy His good gifts in this life. Those who merely lived for themselves have lost everything because, once dead, they are forgotten, and they have no opportunity for sinful pleasure.

7Go then, eat your bread in happiness and drink your wine with a cheerful heart; for God has already approved your works.

8Let your clothes be white all the time, and let not oil be lacking on your head.

9Enjoy life with the woman whom you love all the days of your fleeting life which He has given to you under the sun; for this is your reward in life and in your toil in which you have labored under the sun.

10Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might; for there is no activity or planning or knowledge or wisdom in Sheol where you are going.

Solomon's advice is that we enjoy life to the fullest, being obedient to God all the while. This God approves of, whereas sin He condemns. God desires that we be joyful, enjoying His presence (Psalm 16:11) and His good and perfect gifts (James 1:17). Rather than live life in a state of depression and sorrow, we should live as those who are innocent, pure, joy-filled, and celebratory because of the goodness of the Lord. As Hebrews 1:9 says, "YOU HAVE LOVED RIGHTEOUSNESS AND HATED LAWLESSNESS; THEREFORE GOD, YOUR GOD, HAS ANOINTED YOU WITH THE OIL OF GLADNESS ABOVE YOUR COMPANIONS." There can be great enjoyment in lifelong marital faithfulness to the woman God has given as a man's wife. He loves this woman, and knowing that life is short, he enjoys life with her to the fullest. Life is laborious and difficult being that we live in a fallen world, but God has graced us in this life with the idea of marriage and family. We should enjoy the married life to the full should God call us into that role. We should also work hard and do things to the best of our ability. We should not be those who live careless, purposeless lives, but we should be focused, diligent, driven, and committed to the call of Christ on our lives according to the Great Commission. Even in things that seem monotonous and insignificant, we should do faithfully and heartily unto the Lord rather than for men (Colossians 3:23). Once we die, we have no more opportunity to go back and do this life over again. How we live this life will dictate the next (2 Corinthians 5:10, 1 Corinthians 3:10-15). Wisdom takes advantage of this opportunity now while we are as of yet under the sun.

11I again saw under the sun that the race is not to the swift and the battle is not to the warriors, and neither is bread to the wise nor wealth to the discerning nor favor to men of ability; for time and chance overtake them all.

12Moreover, man does not know his time: like fish caught in a treacherous net and birds trapped in a snare, so the sons of men are ensnared at an evil time when it suddenly falls on them.

Trusting in human strength has no guarantees. Time and chance overtake us all, for we all die. Even those who think they are the most secure can die unexpectedly. Sometimes even the strongest do not survive. Life is also unfair in that sometimes those who are discerning and wise suffer and lack basic needs. Life has circumstances that even the strongest of humans cannot predict or survive. This is why the safest place to be is trusting and resting in the arms of God Who promises to meet the needs of His church (Philippians 1:19). No man knows the time of his death, but suddenly it happens. Thus, we need to be prepared beforehand lest we be taken when we are not ready to meet the Lord in judgment.

13Also this I came to see as wisdom under the sun, and it impressed me.

14There was a small city with few men in it and a great king came to it, surrounded it and constructed large siegeworks against it.

15But there was found in it a poor wise man and he delivered the city by his wisdom Yet no one remembered that poor man.

16So I said, "Wisdom is better than strength." But the wisdom of the poor man is despised and his words are not heeded.

17The words of the wise heard in quietness are better than the shouting of a ruler among fools.

18Wisdom is better than weapons of war, but one sinner destroys much good.

Solomon observed that a great king with a mighty army was defeated because of one poor unknown man who had wisdom. Through his wisdom he delivered the city, yet he was quickly forgotten. The world appreciates those who are rich and powerful even if they are fools. They like the appearance of success rather than true wisdom. Wisdom has great value and the capability of saving an entire nation. Yet few listen to wisdom except in the hour of need. Then, they go on to forget wisdom and the source of it.

Wisdom is more valuable in the time of war than weapons, but because of the sin of even one man, wisdom is forgotten. The bottom line is that Solomon wishes that people would listen to wisdom, but sometimes even shouting doesn't matter because the truth is being shouted at fools. Wisdom is the answer, but few find it and most scorn it.

Ecclesiastes 10

1Dead flies make a perfumer's oil stink, so a little foolishness is weightier than wisdom and honor.

A little leaven leavens the entire lump. Just a little sin, deceit, error, and corruption can undermine an entire life, marriage, family, and nation. Even if much wisdom has built the house or empire, it only takes a small "fly in the ointment" to undo the entire enterprise.

2A wise man's heart directs him toward the right, but the foolish man's heart directs him toward the left.

There is a way to go that is right and a way that is wrong. The wise go the right way according to the desires of their hearts, which are repentant, while the fool follows the desires of his heart, which are deviant. We live according to who we are on the inside.

3Even when the fool walks along the road, his sense is lacking and he demonstrates to everyone that he is a fool.

Our outward actions demonstrate what is truly in our hearts such that a fool can be recognized just as he walks along the road because of his lack of sense. He demonstrates to everyone that he is a fool, lacking wisdom, discretion, humility, honor, and truth. As Matthew 7:16 says, "You will know them by their fruits."

4If the ruler's temper rises against you, do not abandon your position, because composure allays great offenses.

There are times when it becomes necessary for a person to take a stance in opposition to one in authority over him. This might make the superior angry, but the best thing a

person can do is to stand firm for truth. To waffle makes the person seem self-interested and only desiring to cause trouble. To stand for principle proves one's character and that he has no selfish, usurping agenda. This can restore confidence to the king in the person and cause him to reflect on why a person would take such a risk to stand on principle.

5There is an evil I have seen under the sun, like an error which goes forth from the ruler--

6folly is set in many exalted places while rich men sit in humble places.

7I have seen slaves riding on horses and princes walking like slaves on the land.

Solomon's point is that one of the evil injustices that is common on the earth is that those who are wise and have the makeup of a prince or ruler do not rule but are instead subjected by someone who is a fool. Often times a person who lacks wisdom but is only interested in power is able to manipulate the masses and gain power for himself. The deserving are not ruling as they should, but the undeserving are. Such is an evil common under the sun, and it is dangerous just as evil going forth from a ruler.

8He who digs a pit may fall into it, and a serpent may bite him who breaks through a wall.

9He who quarries stones may be hurt by them, and he who splits logs may be endangered by them.

Those who try to plot evil for others might just fall prey to their own evil devices. Those who try to steal might get injured in the process. Then again, there are those who do honest labor such as quarrying stone or splitting logs, and they, too, could be injured. Thus, both the wicked and the righteous could be injured in life. Things aren't fair always, but this is the way it is under the sun.

10If the axe is dull and he does not sharpen its edge, then he must exert more strength. Wisdom has the advantage of giving success.

A dull axe requires that the laborer chop harder and more frequently. A sharp axe makes the job simpler and faster. Wisdom has the effect of making those who possess it much more efficient and effective in living their lives in light of the fear of the Lord and true, eternal priorities. Wisdom brings success in the truest, ultimate sense so that a person can be the best possible steward of the resources which God has entrusted him in this life under the sun. Wisdom doesn't guarantee health, wealth, and prosperity, but it does bring with it eternal rewards, true joy, and life to the full.

11If the serpent bites before being charmed, there is no profit for the charmer.

The NKJV is more clear here saying, "A serpent may bite when it is not charmed; The babler is no different." One who is quick to speak before evaluating his words with wisdom can bite others and be bit himself by his own foolish speech. It is important to think about what we are going to say before we say it.

12Words from the mouth of a wise man are gracious, while the lips of a fool consume him;

13the beginning of his talking is folly and the end of it is wicked madness.

14Yet the fool multiplies words No man knows what will happen, and who can tell him what will come after him?

The wise speak gracious things which bring peace, healing, and comfort, while the fools let their words speak to their own destruction. Their tongues run unbridled and fail to speak that which is edifying rather than evil and hurtful (Ephesians 4:29). The words of the fool cause conflict and harm, leading to wickedness, yet he continues to speak even more. The fool doesn't know how or when to shut his mouth, but he keeps rambling on nonsense, folly, madness, and error. His words don't bring comfort or hope for the future, for he puts his hope in man rather than God Who alone knows what will happen in the future.

15The toil of a fool so wearies him that he does not even know how to go to a city.

The fool wears himself out just being foolish that he can't even figure out how to do the basic things of life like go to the city to buy and sell or have a conversation. He can't think rightly such that he cannot act rightly. He drowns in his own ignorance and sin, and his laziness and sin consumes him.

16Woe to you, O land, whose king is a lad and whose princes feast in the morning.

17Blessed are you, O land, whose king is of nobility and whose princes eat at the appropriate time--for strength and not for drunkenness.

It takes some life experience to learn wisdom and to be able to have discernment which is suitable to leading others, particularly as a king over an entire nation. It is risky for a young person to be king, unless, of course, he fears the Lord and trusts the Lord for wisdom. God can do the impossible, and He will honor the youth who looks to him as He did with King Josiah. Those who feast in the morning before doing their labor demonstrate their laziness, lack of wisdom, and irresponsibility. A country is better if a king has wisdom, part of which involves directing those in leadership to work hard and then eat for strength. Those who party in the morning and get drunk early in the day, or drunk at all for that matter, are not wisely leading the nation but leaving it open to destruction and attack. Wise leadership is sober and diligent.

18Through indolence the rafters sag, and through slackness the house leaks.

If a person is lazy, things go from order to disorder. This is the natural way of things on this earth. It takes work and labor just to keep things in good working order. The lazy person puts himself in trouble very quickly.

19Men prepare a meal for enjoyment, and wine makes life merry, and money is the answer to everything.

God is the answer to everything. Men in foolishness turn to food for comfort, wine for escape, and money to make them happy and fix their problems. This is not wisdom but the way of man.

20Furthermore, in your bedchamber do not curse a king, and in your sleeping rooms do not curse a rich man, for a bird of the heavens will carry the sound and the winged creature will make the matter known.

It is important not to speak ill of others because one never knows who hears and will take that news to the one spoken ill of. There could be revenge to deal with at that point. It is best to pray for enemies and love those who persecute (Matthew 5:44).

Ecclesiastes 11

1Cast your bread on the surface of the waters, for you will find it after many days.

The fool doesn't think about the future at all, but he lives for today. Solomon's advice is to save and invest such that there are some resources left for times of need.

2Divide your portion to seven, or even to eight, for you do not know what misfortune may occur on the earth.

Solomon here is speaking of the principle of diversification of resources. If a tragedy happens to one area, a family or nation can still be preserved if they have invested elsewhere.

3If the clouds are full, they pour out rain upon the earth; and whether a tree falls toward the south or toward the north, wherever the tree falls, there it lies.

God has created natural laws which govern this universe such as gravity, which causes a tree to fall to the ground and rain to fall from a cloud. There are things which cannot be changed, for they are as they are. Rain falls and trees fall, and God is in control of it all. It is important for man to remember his limitations and finite nature in light of the awesome God we serve and His created order.

4He who watches the wind will not sow and he who looks at the clouds will not reap.

Those who merely watch in laziness or distraction or who fail to labor because of fear, worry, or any other unbiblical reason will fail to sow and reap. They won't invest in the future or in eternity, and they won't have anything to show for their lives. Labor is required in order to reap. Man must understand that God didn't create him to be lazy but to work and worship.

5Just as you do not know the path of the wind and how bones are formed in the womb of the pregnant woman, so you do not know the activity of God who makes all things.

God is in control, He is totally sovereign, and He is powerful, able to tell the wind where to blow and to make a baby in the womb of the mother. These are things so mysterious, wonderful, and amazing that it should cause us to worship God and acknowledge that His wisdom is higher and above anything man has to offer.

6Sow your seed in the morning and do not be idle in the evening, for you do not know whether morning or evening sowing will succeed, or whether both of them alike will be good.

Man needs to work in the morning, and he shouldn't be idle in the evening either. He should walk circumspectly (Ephesians 5:15), viewing his life as a time to serve God. This involves balance with family, work, leisure, ministry, and so on, but laziness is not part of the equation. As we serve God faithfully, we can trust that He will bring forth growth and a harvest from our labors, whether we see it or not or can trace it precisely or not (Colossians 3:24, 2 Corinthians 5:10).

7The light is pleasant, and it is good for the eyes to see the sun.

Being in darkness all the time is not healthy, for the light is delightful and enjoyable. In the light we see God's creation and are moved to worship. Light has a certain healthy, uplifting effect to it.

8Indeed, if a man should live many years, let him rejoice in them all, and let him remember the days of darkness, for they will be many. Everything that is to come will be futility.

Whether a man lives a short life or a long life, he should do what he can within the fear of the Lord to enjoy his life. Life is hard enough as it is to not have a joyful attitude through it all. He should also be mindful as he lives of what is yet to come. Being aware that one day we will die should inspire us to live joyfully and faithfully in this time. Also, we should remember to invest in things that reap eternal rewards, storing up treasure in heaven (Matthew 6:20), because we can't take the things of this world with us.

9Rejoice, young man, during your childhood, and let your heart be pleasant during the days of young manhood. And follow the impulses of your heart and the desires of your eyes Yet know that God will bring you to judgment for all these things.

10So, remove grief and anger from your heart and put away pain from your body, because childhood and the prime of life are fleeting.

Children should be allowed to enjoy themselves within the instruction and discipline of the Lord (Ephesians 6:4). They should be able to explore their world, play, and have fun, being kids who aren't forced to grow up and skip over this stage of life. As they grow

into young adults, they still should enjoy life, though exercising wisdom, not being lazy, and being mindful that God will hold them to account for all that they do. God is not a killjoy Who says not to do what we want to do. He just says that we need to reign in our desires if they are becoming destructive or uncontrolled because of sin. Delighting in God will give us His desires (Psalm 37:4), and these will fulfill our ultimate desires. Thus, God's principles help us desire things that are truly good for us, and these we should joyfully and freely pursue. There is nothing wrong with following the impulses of our hearts as long as Christ is on the throne of our hearts. We should be diligent to get rid of grief and anger because it destroys our joy and has destructive effects in life, even leading sometimes to bodily pain. We shouldn't create unnecessary bodily pain for ourselves, particularly in youth, given that old age brings with it enough physical challenges as it is. Childhood and the prime of life go by quickly, and they must be enjoyed and lived under the fear of the Lord. We shouldn't run from our desires if they are godly, we shouldn't live cowering in fear, and we shouldn't be afraid to enjoy life and have fun as long as we keep the principles of Scripture.

Ecclesiastes 12

1Remember also your Creator in the days of your youth, before the evil days come and the years draw near when you will say, "I have no delight in them";

2before the sun and the light, the moon and the stars are darkened, and clouds return after the rain;

3in the day that the watchmen of the house tremble, and mighty men stoop, the grinding ones stand idle because they are few, and those who look through windows grow dim;

4and the doors on the street are shut as the sound of the grinding mill is low, and one will arise at the sound of the bird, and all the daughters of song will sing softly.

5Furthermore, men are afraid of a high place and of terrors on the road; the almond tree blossoms, the grasshopper drags himself along, and the caperberry is ineffective. For man goes to his eternal home while mourners go about in the street.

6Remember Him before the silver cord is broken and the golden bowl is crushed, the pitcher by the well is shattered and the wheel at the cistern is crushed;

7then the dust will return to the earth as it was, and the spirit will return to God who gave it.

8"Vanity of vanities," says the Preacher, "all is vanity!"

In this section, Solomon uses various analogies and figures of speech to describe the nature of aging with the purpose of reminding us that this life is temporary. We are told to remember our Creator in our youth, knowing that life is short and that we will be accountable for our choices. Old age can be particularly delightful if we know we have lived in the fear of the Lord in our youth. Doing things God's way always leads to more joy in the long run. As we age, we tend to stoop, we get tired, our eyesight diminishes, we don't sleep as well, we get physically weaker and less agile, we tend to be afraid more, and we become sexually impotent. Man walks this earth but a short time until he must go to his eternal home. He will be mourned, and then life will go on for the rest. In light of the temporal nature of life, man must remember the Lord. His body will return to

the dust from which it was made (Genesis 3:19), and his spirit will go to be with the Lord Who first breathed life into him (Genesis 2:7). If life is lived for self and in sin, it is meaningless and will render the soul in hell. This is why the fear of the Lord must dictate how we live and how we make our choices. God alone gives life direction and meaning. He alone can fill the soul with joy in childhood, youth, adulthood, and old age, even into eternity.

9In addition to being a wise man, the Preacher also taught the people knowledge; and he pondered, searched out and arranged many proverbs.

10The Preacher sought to find delightful words and to write words of truth correctly.

Solomon, though he didn't make wise choices for the duration of his life, was a wise man who sought to teach his people knowledge. He wanted to pass on wisdom to them and to warn them of the error of sin as he had learned firsthand. He wrote many proverbs, many of which are recorded in the Book of Proverbs, and he did much thinking about life, its meaning, and its purpose. Some people say that the Book of Ecclesiastes is depressing, but Solomon says that the purpose of his writing was to bring delight and to teach true things accurately. Thus, in order to have joy, we must accept the truth and live accordingly. If we don't, we will end up living for ourselves and experience the meaninglessness of "under the sun" living. If we fear the Lord and do things His way, we can have joy. This is the purpose of Solomon writing this book.

11The words of wise men are like goads, and masters of these collections are like well-driven nails; they are given by one Shepherd.

Wisdom is given to guide us and keep us on the right track. Just as a goad is used to prod an animal on in the proper direction and to continue to labor, so wisdom does for man. Just as a nail firmly holds a structure, truth supports a life and a nation. The Lord, the One True Shepherd, is the giver of all that is true. Wise men are merely stewards of God's truth, and it is their call to shepherd, protect, and instruct those under their care in righteousness.

12But beyond this, my son, be warned: the writing of many books is endless, and excessive devotion to books is wearying to the body.

The pursuit of knowledge for prideful reasons or for the sake of knowledge itself is tiring and meaningless. Reading, pondering, studying, and thinking too much is wearying on the body. The point is to have delight, and there can be delight in thinking and reasoning if it is done for the purpose of edification of others and for the worship of God. But life must have balance. It is not healthy to spend the whole of one's life studying and writing books. We have people to love, a world to enjoy, a God to praise, people to share the gospel with, and a life to live enjoying God. Studying and reflection is important, but it cannot become an idol.

13The conclusion, when all has been heard, is: fear God and keep His commandments, because this applies to every person.

14For God will bring every act to judgment, everything which is hidden, whether it is good or evil.

Solomon's desire is that those who hear his teaching have joy and know the truth (Ecclesiastes 12:10). Thus, the only sensible and true way to live is in the fear of the Lord which leads to obedience and a trust in His Word. Those who keep the commands of God by faith can have true joy because the truth will set them free as they enjoy a relationship with their Creator. The fear of the Lord causes one to be mindful of the judgment to come, understanding that life isn't just about the here and now but about eternal things. Thus, this life is best lived if lived serving the Lord and pursuing eternal rewards. Only such a mindset can enable one to enjoy life which can be unfair, difficult, and strenuous under the sun. And, more importantly, living in the fear of the Lord leads to an eternal inheritance and many good rewards. Man will be held to account for his time on earth, and God is the Judge. To neglect Him is to miss the meaning, purpose, and joy of life. To love Him and worship Him is to find all of these things.

By Brent Barnett of www.relevantbibleteaching.com