



## **Study of ECCLESIASTES**

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## ECCLESIASTES 1:1—3:22

Please remember, Solomon's evaluation of every facet of life is "under the sun"—i.e., "on the earth," or "under heaven." Life without God and without the hope of immortality in heaven is "the pits." YES! Even the NT tells us that "life under the sun" without God and Christ is meaningless, vain, empty, void! Just two examples will be sufficient. Paul wrote in Romans 8:18-25 that this world "under the sun" has been subjected to "futility" and is in "bondage to decay" from the hand of its Creator, and awaits its redemption with "groaning and travail." Then Paul wrote in 1 Cor. 15:58 that Christians should be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord their labor is not in vain. The obverse would be that any labor that is not in some way "for the Lord" is vain, empty, meaningless. Solomon had it all! In spades! Nothing was there to restrain him, except his own knowledge of God's word and his conscience, from doing anything his heart and head desired! But every experiment and gratification he made of "life under the sun" left him deflated, depressed, and disillusioned. The end result of all his indulgence in life "on the earth" (without God) is vanity, meaninglessness, empty, void—a wisp of vapor, a puff of wind, a hollow, empty ring, zero, ZILCH! Nothing on earth satisfied him. There was nothing that he saw, discovered, attempted, produced, initiated, or concluded as a result of his lengthy search that resulted in lasting significance or personal satisfaction.

Charles Swindoll, in *Living on the Ragged Edge*, p. 16: "Because he seldom looks 'above the sun' to find reassurance, life seems drab and depressing, hopelessly meaningless. In spite of the extent to which he went to find happiness, because he left God out of the picture, nothing satisfied. It never will. Satisfaction in life under the sun will never occur until there is a meaningful connection with the living Lord above the sun. Nevertheless, we, like Solomon, continue to try to find meaning in life, only to wind up on a dead-end road called Emptiness."

The philosophies of humanism and hedonism have always ended in futility and meaninglessness! The biographies of so many movie-stars, entertainment celebrities, famous athletes, and Fortune 500 CEOs, no matter how famous and how rich, end in inescapable desperation. Everything produces dissatisfaction if it is limited to "life under the sun."

"The good life—the one that truly satisfies—exists only when we stop wanting a better one. It is the condition of savoring what is rather than longing for what might be. The itch for things, the lust for more—so brilliantly injected by those who peddle them—is a virus draining our souls of happy contentment. Have you noticed? A man never earns enough. A woman is never beautiful enough. Clothes are never fashionable enough. Cars are never nice enough. Gadgets are never modern enough. Houses are never furnished enough. Food is never fancy enough. Relationships are never romantic enough. Life is never full enough. The human psyche will never be happy until it finally realizes 'I have enough. What I have will do. The only way I'll be satisfied is to get my life in sync with God's will revealed to me in the Bible.'"

Swindoll, op.cit., p. 21

NO! There's nothing "new" "under the sun." All the humanistic philosophies can be clearly traced back to the Garden of Eden and the devils' lie—"You will be as gods." There's not a new philosophy since Eden! There may be "new" technologies every generation, but that's not what Solomon is talking about! There's not a "new" physical indulgence ever invented "under the sun" since creation (Adam's, Noah's, Abraham's, David's or Solomon's day).

"As little children, we were told to keep looking and keep discovering, because there are things out there we have never seen before. There is beauty to be found, there's wonder out there. And it's true—to a point. But as we get older, we get more sophisticated and start wanting telescopes and microscopes so we can look into the depths of our natural world. Yet we cannot seem to get telescopes large enough or microscopes with lenses thick enough to see completely enough. Our curiosity is aroused—but frustrated." Swindoll, op.cit., p. 30.

Rudyard Kipling expressed this idea poetically when he wrote, "The craft that we call modern; The crimes that we call 'new' John Bunyan had them typed and filed, In 1682." The sad news is this: THERE IS NOTHING NEW OUT THERE IN THE UNIVERSE—AND ANYONE WHO THINKS THEY HAVE FOUND SOMETHING "NEW" "UNDER THE SUN" WILL STILL FIND IT UNSATISFYING! Ecclesiastes is the record of a king preaching at us, "I stopped at nothing when I explored life 'under the sun.'" There was no limit to his comprehension, wisdom, and riches—no limitations, to experimentation and gratification of the physical life. And what was his conclusion: "It is a grievous task which God has given to the sons of men to be afflicted with—I'd like to forget it!" (1:11-13). So what's a person to do? Swindoll suggests two practical solutions: (a) If there is nothing, but nothing, under the sun, our only hope must be above it...Most people have their heads so firmly riveted to the here and now that they virtually ignore any other dimension in life. It's not that they consciously intend to block God out of their lives (most people would be shocked to think of themselves as atheists), it's just that they seldom mentally catapult themselves "above the sun." But that is where hope shines eternal; (b) If a man who had everything, investigated everything visible, and found it void, then the one thing needed must be invisible. Do you realize how few people really hear the inaudible? How few really see the invisible?

NO! The Bible is not "anti-education" or anti-learning or anti-intellect! Over and over and over the Bible appeals to readers to use their minds, be logical, think, learn, do the will of God as revealed in the Bible. Deut. 29:29 says the "secret things belong to the Lord our God; but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law." What Solomon refers to in 1:12-18, is learning or education or using the intellect only for "under the sun" things—never using the mind to think on God's creation (e.g., Rom. 1:18-23) or applying the mind to the Bible to know Jesus Christ. Anyone pursuing learning for self-centered reasons is going to find at the end it is all in vain!

Swindoll, op.cit., p. 34: "if intellectualism were the major key to purpose and

fulfillment, our campuses would be ‘Camelots’ of peace. People would gravitate to those campuses, finding there the fulfillment of their dreams. But what do you find on the campuses around the country? Boiling pots of controversy—political activism, try-harder humanism and no-God communism at work, all kinds of weird ideas, dissatisfied and disillusioned faculty members, along with a pile of ‘professional students’ who do not find lasting satisfaction under the sun. There are exceptions, I realize, but they are rather rare. Instead of feeling enlightened, most find themselves increasingly more confused in the morass of endless, pointless philosophies. The answer isn’t just studying more. Can you name one secular scientist who is genuinely happy with life? I can’t. Can you think of one authority who lives in this heady, high-minded world of intellectualism-without-God who finds himself (or herself) fully satisfied, rather than in a maddening pursuit for something else? I can’t think of one!”

When Jesus Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge (Col. 2:3), is removed from intellectual pursuit, those who are Christ-less will find ultimate despair, despondency and meaninglessness! IT IS INEVITABLE! Listen to Solomon! When God is ignored, educational and intellectual pursuit of any kind, on any level, makes human beings “futile in their thinking and their senseless minds become darkened, while claiming to be wise they will be fools” (Rom. 1:21-23) and eventually they will be nothing more than animals in their thinking and behaving! The Bible is more cerebral than all the human philosophies put together. It deals with the most significant and profound issues of human existence (i.e., creation, redemption, salvation, heaven, hell, right, wrong, goodness, righteousness, evil, immortality, justice, judgement, the end of this world, truth falsehood, life, death, health and wealth).

All pleasure and laughter are meaningless if life “under the sun” is all the life there is. Notice, Solomon didn’t consult with anyone else in this experience of life “under the sun.” He “said to himself” he would put pleasure and laughter to the test. He didn’t even consider what his mother and father, Bathsheba and David, might have learned about the issue. He just plunged headlong into trying every physical pleasure he could muster, and he could “muster” any kind on earth. Solomon would try the “If it feels good, do it” prescription for the doldrums “under the sun.” Solomon would engage in every physical gratification the body (the flesh) craves; eat every delicacy, taste every kind of wine, dress in every luxurious kind of cloth and design, cool himself when he was warm, warm himself when he was cold, and bathe his body in every kind of perfumed bath-oil available. He sent to the ends of civilization for everything that the flesh hungers for to be brought to his palace—for his indulgence. He had a limitless supply of finances, and no one besides himself (and God) to whom to be accountable (he was “king” of all Israel). He walked the road of “flesh-pampering” as far as was humanly possible. AND WHEN IT WAS ALL SAID AND DONE, HE SAYS, “WHAT AN EMPTY, FUTILE TRIP!” Well, that didn’t work, so he tried hilarity, amusement, fun and games. He ordered, “Bring on the clowns, the comedians, the funny people—let’s laugh ourselves silly at all the slap-stick court-jesters, and ‘wild-and-crazy’ actors and story-tellers!” He would not let a “discouraging word” be heard. He would be merry and giggling watching others play the “fool” and “fall-guy.” There would be acrobats, jugglers, “magicians,” comedic-short-plays, jokesters, “pie-in-the-face” comedies. Anything that could induce laughter

was at Solomon's beck and call—all day if he wished! Entertainment—that will take the human mind off the futility and meaninglessness of “life under the sun.” SORRY! BUT IT DOESN'T WORK! Solomon's honest and blunt conclusion was, “I said of laughter, ‘It is madness,’ and of pleasure, ‘What does it accomplish.’” (2:2). The Hugh Hefner “play-boy” hedonism of our times is nothing new “under the sun.” It is as old as, or actually older than, Solomon. BUT THE MAJORITY OF THE HUMAN RACE NEVER SEEMS TO LEARN WHAT SOLOMON LEARNED! The majority of mankind continues to plunge headlong into seeking pleasure, laughter, and entertainment. But deep in the human psyche is that “still-small-voice” (called conscience) that cries out, “meaningless, meaningless, utterly meaningless.” AND SATAN AND HIS “HELPERS” (OTHER EVIL HUMANS) KEEP WHISPERING THE ULTIMATE LIE—DISREGARD YOUR CONSCIENCE, DISREGARD ANY EVIDENCE IN CREATION THAT THERE IS A GOD AND A JUDGMENT TO COME...“HAS GOD SAID....I SAY YOU WILL NOT SURELY DIE....YOU WILL BE AS GODS...GO ON, PURSUE THE FLESH AND “LIFE UNDER THE SUN”—PLEASURE AND ENTERTAINMENT WILL MAKE ALL THAT “GOD” NONSENSE GO AWAY!

No! There really isn't any meaning to all the work “under the sun” (i.e., earth-bound). Jesus said essentially the same thing in John 6:27. John used a present- imperative-middle-verb, *ergazestha* (pronounced, ur-godz-ess-thah) in John 6:27 to begin the sentence. If it is an imperative verb it is a command. It literally means, “Do not be expending your energy for the food which is continually perishing of itself (*apollumenen* another present-middle verb), but for the food which is enduring (*menousan*, present active participle) for eternal life.” The only “work” done on earth that has any meaning is that which fulfills the word of God and, in its last analysis, contributes to the ongoing of God's redemptive work among mankind. Of course, we have to work to eat (1 Thess. 4: 9-12; 2 Thess. 3:6-15; 1 Tim. 5:8) and take care of our families physical needs (not necessarily “wants”). We must not make anything essential but what we need to do our work for the Lord (1 Tim. 6:6-10). Whatever we “need” to carry our portion of the ministry of the Gospel to the world the Lord expects us to obtain by work. THAT WORK THEN BECOMES MEANINGFUL—whether it be in the factory or on the farm or in the office. Jesus never condemned honest labor to sustain the necessities of life. He even sent some of his 12 disciples “home” to fish to supply their needs. That said, however, we must remember that all the “works” of humankind, no matter how beautiful or seemingly “eternal” (e.g., the Grand Coulee Dam, the Golden Gate Bridge, the works of Michelangelo, Mozart, and Da Vinci—even the Panama Canal) are someday going to be destroyed “with a loud noise, and the elements of the earth and the works that are upon it will be burned up.” (2 Pet. 3:8-10). Only the impact those things have had toward forwarding the “food which is enduring for eternal life” (i.e. the Bread of Life) has any meaning at all! Isn't it tragic to think of the billions of people struggling through the years of labor on earth only to find that in the end they were working for the food which is perishing of itself!!!

Remember—Solomon is looking at life “under the sun.” First he says, “I saw that wisdom excels folly as light excels darkness” (2:13). The person who possesses true wisdom has the “eyes” of his heart enlightened to know God and his Word. This same author, Solomon, exalted wisdom in his “Proverbs.” And the “sweet singer of Israel,” David, exalted wisdom in his Psalms. David graphically equated “wisdom”

with knowing the word of God (Psa. 119). The fool says in his heart “there is no God.” And thus the fool lives his life contrary to the “laws of nature” (e.g. Rom. 1:18-32) and “suffers in his own person the due penalty of his errors” (Rom. 1:27). A person cannot be a “fool” about his health, about his work, about his relationships without suffering for breaking God’s “laws of nature and sociality.” So, Solomon is right about the relative value of “wisdom and foolishness” under the sun. The wise man dies just like the fool! Those whose ultimate goal is the “wisdom of this world” are to be pitied and certainly not emulated (cf. 1 Cor. 1:18-31; 15:1-58). Education and political power is not the formula for a meaningful life any more than wealth and pleasure. The great philosophers and statesmen have died just like the ignoramuses and “behavioral-morons” among humanity! But that does not mean a person should become cynical or depressed about living life to the fullest in the will of God. “For a living dog is better than a dead lion” (Eccl. 9:4). The need to live a life in search of wisdom in God’s word (in spite of life’s caprices) is to live it like the apostle Paul did (read 2 Timothy again). God did not give us a “spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power and love and self-control.” The need to treasure up the “wisdom” of God through his word is that we may say with the apostle Paul, “I consider that the sufferings of this present time (even physical death) is not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us” (Rom. 8:18).

Most of us never accumulate huge fortunes and rule nations. Those who do, like Solomon (whether kings, senators, presidents or business tycoons), usually try to make legal stipulations as to how their wealth and power is to be preserved and distributed after their death. But, try as they might, by two or three generations later their heirs have lost through bad management or by deliberately “squandering it in riotous living.” Even those of us who have accumulated “a little stuff” often go to great lengths to try to make sure that when we leave this earthly life, someone who will “take care of it” will inherit it! It is a natural, fleshly reaction to facing one’s mortality. Most of us have worked hard for the “little stuff” we have accumulated and we hate to think it will all one day be sold at a “garage-sale,” given away, or taken to the “dump.” That was Solomon’s predicament. He had spent all his energies accumulating wealth and power and he began to fret and worry about what was going to happen to it all after his death (“under the sun”). “Under the sun” death terminates everything—life, wealth, power, control. Solomon’s conclusion, “under the sun,” was that to accumulate wealth and power was as meaningless as to be completely poor and powerless. Both the powerful and the powerless died alike and lost all control over whatever they might have accumulated. Today we put it this way, “No one takes it with them!” That’s what Paul wrote to Timothy (1 Tim. 6:6-10). Now the Lord (Father) has given us a spiritual heritage and all of us have, at one point in life, squandered it in riotous living (see the parable of the Prodigal Son). But that’s not the end of the story. We can regain that spiritual inheritance by repentance and returning to the Father’s household! Eternal life beyond “the sun” can be secured by returning to covenant relationship with the Father. The Heavenly Father wants to give back to us what we have squandered away (Rev. 14:13)! We “can’t take it with us,” but we can send it on ahead to the “bank” in heaven (Mt. 6:19-21).

Note well: This is the first time in Solomon’s book that he reaches above the “sun” and speaks of God! Finally, he says there is joy in one’s toil “under the sun” when one knows it has the blessing of God upon it. In other words, while all of life “under

the sun” is meaningless, meaning can be found because there is a God and human beings can have a faith-relationship with God, and there is a life “beyond the sun” which makes life “under the sun” have some meaning! The “man (person) who pleases God” and works in harmony with God’s laws (God’s will and word) will be given “wisdom and knowledge and joy.” This will be given from God to the person who acknowledges that everything “under the sun” is vain and void of meaning and acknowledges that God’s will must take priority in everything! Solomon minces no words in saying that it is the “sinner” to whom God gives the work of meaninglessness—because what the “sinner” does will eventually belong to the one who pleases God. That is precisely what the New Testament is saying in 1 Corinthians 3:10-23! God confounds the “wisdom” of the worldly-wise who think they are going to retain their “works” to their own glory. No! God has decreed that even the works of the sinner belong to his saints—“For all things are yours (the saint’s), whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future, all are yours; and you are Christ’s; and Christ is God’s.” The only cure for the “meaninglessness of life under the sun” is to please God! Solomon is not condoning drunkenness or inebriation of any degree in the following passages, 2:3; 2:24; 3:13; 5:18; 8:15; 9:7; 10:19. He speaks against drunkenness in numerous of his writings (Prov. 4:17; 9:5; 31:4-6). He does advise giving “strong drink” to “the one who is perishing” (Prov. 31:6-7) as a sedative.

God schedules all times! In this passage (3:1-8) Solomon is demonstrating that God, the Creator, is in control of his world and even the various activities which take place in the lifetime of one generation—from birth to death. Each generation may experience different events at varying times, but generally speaking each generation will experience all the events. Wisdom, wealth, success, happiness, etc., even physical life, are not in man’s hands. By his own efforts man can secure none of these priceless treasures; they are distributed at the will of God. The lesson is that God controls through orderly laws and principles. God schedules it all according to his determined “seasons” or times. “Man does not know his time” (Eccl. 9:12). Remember, “it was in the fulness of time (at the right time) when God brought forth his Son (Gal. 4:4). Man may run contrary to God’s appointed times and seasons, but if he does, he will experience “vanity,” frustration, and failure. Belshazzar found this out “the hard way” (Dan. 5:24-28). The “good man” (who pleases God, ch. 2:24-26) attempts to live in harmony with God’s order, while the “sinner” has little regard for it. Notice the interesting qualities of the comparisons: (a) the list is rather extended—this serves to demonstrate that the many sides of life are under God’s control; (b) nothing evil is included on the list—nothing needs to be placed in the category of immoral behavior—not even “war” for there are times when it is necessary to go to war to defend oneself and others; (c) some events are inevitable—these are beyond our control but God controls them and his laws are active in his world; (d) some events can be experienced at one’s own discretion—man controls such activities as loving and refraining from loving, deciding what to keep and throw away—but even these actions should be placed under the control of God’s guiding Word; (e) sometimes people work contrary to the “seasons”—the wise person interprets the “times” and adjusts his activities accordingly. Jeremiah stated this truth when he said, “I know, O Lord, that a man’s way is not in himself; nor is it in a man who walks to direct his steps” (Jer. 10:23; see also Jer. 17:9-10). “In him we live and move and have our being” (Acts 17:28; Job 12:10; Dan. 5:23).

The Hebrew word *yapeh* is translated “beautiful” in 3:11, but could be (and is in certain English versions) translated “appropriate, becoming, felicitous, fit.” There are even some things that are appropriate in life even though we may think of them as “ugly” (i.e., suffering, estrangement, punishment, death, etc.). The apostle Paul found this to be so in his “life under the sun” (2 Cor. 1:8-11; 12:7-10). In other words, God has made everything in his creation “appropriate” to prod mankind to explore the meaning of all the events of life (Eccl. 7:23,24,29; 8:7,17; 9:1; 11:5). In their labors human beings unwittingly carry forward the purposes of divine providence. God has placed “eternity” (Heb. *ha’olam*) in the hearts of human beings. They can look back to the distant past and forward to the distant future. They sense that God is not just a creature of time (Rom. 1:18-21). Human beings have a deep-seated sense of purpose and destiny. All our human poets, playwrights, musicians and artists have expressed this at times in their works. Yet this sense of eternity, in itself, does not solve all humanity’s problems nor answer all its questions. We are often at a loss to trace through in detail God’s power and purpose in daily events. Occasionally we may catch a glimpse of God’s lofty purposes. For the rest of the “picture” we must be content with his revealed will in the Bible and to wait and hope

To say God set “eternity” in the heart, is another way of saying that God has prodded humankind to occupy themselves to find what is “fitting” in life “under the sun” and to try to find the resolution to that hunger in the depths of their souls for eternal life. Not only is everything God has made appropriate (fitting and orderly) but all he does is perfect. God is a Complete Being, and therefore has complete order in all his creation. God has established order, not confusion (Isa. 45:18-19; 1 Cor. 14:33, etc.). When human beings realize this and look beyond Creation to the nature of the Creator, they stand in awe of him. But it is not within man to discover it on his own. He needs the guidance of the revealed word of God (the “law” of God) to sort out the meaning of life and the promise of life hereafter. Clearly, a certain awesome knowledge about the Creator (Rom. 1:18-23 ; 2:14-16; Psa. 19:1ff; Acts 14:16-18 .; 17:24-29) can be learned from “the things that have been made.” But this only condemns mankind in guilt for its sin against the Creator. All creation cries out that it has been “subjected to futility...and decay” (Rom. 8:10-23) and struggles to learn of its redemption. How and why God has provided this redemption is only learned by hearing and believing the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the promised Redeemer! And even in the Gospel we have only an earthly understanding that is has been accomplished (by the evidence of Christ’s resurrection, i.e., 1 Cor. 15:1-58)—we still await the consummation—the reality of it in the “new heavens and earth.”

## ECCLESIASTES 4:1—6:12

Suffering and oppression “under the sun” makes life seem meaningless. Some say it like this, “Life just isn’t worth living.” All those who are oppressed and suffering, and that at times includes everyone, cry out for justice and relief, and often there seems to be no one listening. No one seems to care about the oppressed or suffering individual. The world only gets stirred to action for these when it involves nations or large numbers of people, or their own “kith and kin.” In addition to oppression and suffering there is the seeming futility of life “under the sun.” August, 2003, in Joplin, Missouri, a gentleman of about 84 with serious physical debilities, shot and killed his 81-year-old wife who was in pain with physical maladies, then committed suicide. They left notes that this was what they intended to do because they could not continue to bear the suffering they were having. They had a nice home, lived in a nice neighborhood, had medical insurance, belonged to the First United Methodist Church in Joplin, but just couldn’t face continuing to bear the physical pain. As Solomon contemplated the prevalence of oppression he saw all about him “under the sun” (and he didn’t see it world-wide as we do today on our TV screens) he did not consider a life filled with this depressing view worth much. In the USA few people today experience any kind of political or social oppression—but many experience various kinds of physical pain and many suffer economic “recession.” Still, for most people in the USA life is precious. But go to many “third-world” countries and life is “cheap,” meaningless, and distressing because of extreme poverty and much political or cultural oppression. Yet while millions or billions of people endure suffering to an extent we can’t imagine, they still cling to life. Solomon is not talking about suicide here. He is saying that in light of a “futile” and “decaying” life “under the sun” it would be better to have never been born. But this is not so for the Christian! The Christian can glorify (“give proper ranking to”) God and Christ no matter into what circumstances he may be born or find himself in “life under the sun.” **THINK ABOUT THE HUMAN LIFE OF JESUS!** He came from the glories of heaven to be born in a manger, be persecuted all his adult life, falsely accused, illegally judged and condemned, and executed with the most horrible of deaths (crucifixion). Certainly, if ever there was a human (and he was perfect) who did not deserve what he had to endure, it was Jesus. But in it all he brought glory inexpressible to God the Father, and salvation and joy to countless billions through the ages who have put their trust in his redemptive work.

Another observation Solomon made about the “meaninglessness” of “life under the sun” concerned all the striving to excel human beings do to “get ahead.” Almost always this “get ahead” or “get one up on” drive stems from some kind of jealousy or envy. Ultimately, too, that is found to be “vanity” or meaningless. Once a person has accomplished his goal of getting ahead of his contemporaries, what does it mean in the grand scheme of life “under the sun.” The drive to excel often destroys social relationships. It often produces a guilty conscience. If the motive for excelling and getting ahead of others is tainted, how can that which results from the effort be satisfying? Success is no guarantee of happiness! The malice and ill-feeling brings only heartache and guilt and sometimes disaster to one’s home-life and depression in

the one over which a “victory” has been won. Some people have been driven to many hurtful behaviors, even murder or suicide, because others “excelled” and “got the promotion” over them. The hurtful consequences of “competition” and drive to excel often times “ripple” out into the society in waves like the ripples after a rock is thrown into a placid pool. Whole families and communities and even nations have suffered because envy or arrogance has driven people to accumulate more wealth, or more power, than someone else has. This kind of desire “to get ahead of others” created envy and discord among the select 12 apostles of Jesus (Matt. 20:20-28). JESUS SAID, “THIS SHALL NOT BE SO AMONG YOU!”—meaning any follower of Christ! The apostle Paul advised Christians that there was only one experience in life in which they should strive to “excel”—love for one another (1 Cor. 12:31—13:13) and in giving to those in need (2 Cor. 8:7). Jesus said our striving to excel should be in serving one another (Mark 10:35-45; Luke 22:24-27; John 13:1-38). When all is said and done, when life “under the sun” is over, what meaning is there in having “gotten ahead” of others? Does this mean we should then become apathetic and “fold our hands” and just give up? No! This is what the “fool” does. The fool folds his hands together in a gesture of laziness and disinterest in active labor (Prov. 6:10). The fool “eats his own flesh,” i.e., he destroys himself (Psa. 27:2; Micah 3:3). The sluggard commits, as it were, moral suicide. He makes no effort to provide for his daily needs and suffers extreme poverty. A compromise between the two extremes is more in harmony with either the vain drive to excel and the apathetic slide into poverty. Slothfulness and improperly motivated industry are both unrewarding and vain. “One hand full of rest” is saying, “Don’t get on the treadmill. Just take life day-by-day and rejoice and do good in your lifetime.” The New Testament Scriptures are filled with warnings about the desire to always have “more”—it is called “covetousness.” AND PAUL CALLS COVETOUSNESS, “IDOLATRY” (Col. 3:5; see also Matt. 6:19-34; 1 Tim. 6:6-10).

Solomon observed that “under the sun” life alone was depressing and meaningless. For what does a man strive in all his toil if he has no son or brother? For whom is he toiling? He will soon die and his life has been wasted in a lonely, unassisted struggle to obtain what he cannot take with him! Life “under the sun” is somewhat enjoyable when there are at least “two” in the struggle. If one falls, the other will lift him up; if one is cold, the other will give him some warmth; if one is attacked, the other will come to his defense. Yes! Human relationships (good ones) help life “under the sun” to have any meaning! THE THINGS THAT MEANT THE MOST TO JESUS IN HIS EARTHLY LIFE WERE “FRIENDS” (i.e., the 12 disciples, Mary & Martha, his mother Mary, others who invited him into their homes and by their faith and love toward him). Christians should make the giving of companionship to those “alone” in this life their first priority! One of the finest of Christian “works” is “visiting the widows and orphans, the sick and those in prison.” The Greek word in the N.T. translated “bishop” (elder) is episkopos, but it means, literally, “visited to care for.” That’s the primary job of an elder in the church—visiting the saints to care for them. But, as much as earthly human relationships mean—even spouses and children—in the final analysis when death comes there is only one relationship that brings peace and contentment that counts for anything in eternity—that is the personal, committed, relationship to Jesus our “elder brother”! Of course, I fully expect there will be personal relationships in heaven between the saints—one toward another—but again, one’s relationship to God and his Son is ultimately the relationship that gives life “under the sun” any

meaning at all! How many “saints” of history have found this to be true? (Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, David, Isaiah, Daniel, Jesus, Peter, Paul & John). It is said of the Messiah that he “visited” earth to (episkopos) to care for the sons of men (Heb. 2:5-18). Let all mankind invite him in to their lives through the “door” to their hearts (Rev. 3:20-22) for he is standing there “knocking.”

Absolutely! More meaning in life is a direct result of cultivating a personal awe of God! Incidentally, that word “awesome” has been so overused today until it has no meaning at all. To some today whose vocabulary is extremely small everything is “awesome.” Actually, only God and his works are “awesome.” Solomon’s admonition here for “life under the sun” is do not act the part of a fool in the worship of God and keeping covenant with him which is the most important of all activities! “To keep the foot” is the modern equivalent of “Watch your step!” Those who claim to worship and serve the Almighty God must be careful of their conduct in his presence (which is all the time—we are never out of the presence of the Almighty, even when we leave “the church-house”). It would be Solomon’s advice that everyone should reverence and respect any building dedicated to the service of God! But, then, that is also true of one’s private home—for God dwells there. It is also true of one’s physical body, for it, too, is a “temple of the Holy Spirit” (1 Cor. 6:19-20). Solomon warns, “Be not rash with your mouth, nor let your heart be hasty to utter a word before God, for God is in heaven, and you upon earth; therefore let your words be few.” One should “go to church” to hear—for it is better to listen than to offer the sacrifice of fools. All the rituals of “church services” should be focused so that the worshiper may “hear” the Word of the Lord—in the reading and teaching of Scripture, in the sermon, in the music, in the Lord’s Supper, in the offering, in the prayers, in the “visiting.” IT SHOULD ALL BE DONE WITH AWESOME REVERENCE! Worship services in the church would be much more profitable if there was not so much “visiting” and “talking” and lots more silence in order to hear! What “meaning” for life would a visitor to a modern church service get from all the “gabbing, gossiping, greeting, and opinion-ating?” LET THERE BE THE “SILENCE OF HEARING” IN MODERN WORSHIP SERVICES! Solomon also warns that being in awe of God will keep the wise person from making vows and then not keeping them (see Deut. 23:21-23). In fact, Solomon advises that it is “better that you should not vow than that you should vow and not pay.” Don’t try to blame your inability to keep a vow because you claim you “made a mistake” when you vowed. Excuses will not get it! Vows were never a major component of Israelite worship. They were never commanded. Once made, a vow becomes an oath and it is a sin and a sacrilege to break one’s oath! Failing to keep a vow is as much a sin as “false-swearing” (i.e., perjury). Trifling with vows angers God (Eccl. 5:6). People “dream grandiose dreams” about what they are going to do for God and his kingdom—they often make their dreams in the form of vows. A God-fearing person relies on written revelation from God about his service, rather than dreams and imaginations! (2 Cor. 10:3-5). BE CAREFUL TO KEEP YOUR VOW! Are “Faith-Promise” programs dangerous? Personally, I think so! When we “promise” remember with WHOM we have to do! This goes especially for marriage vows! Marriage vows are as much an act of worship and service to the Lord as any other thing we may do in a “church service.” We “have to do with” One who is higher!

“Now,” you say, “Solomon is wrong, wrong, wrong!” “Life would have much more

meaning if I were as rich as Bill Gates (Micro-Soft's multi-billionaire)." No! Both the revelation of God (the Bible) and human experience unerringly teach us that riches cannot satisfy! The only way riches could give meaning to life is if one gave away his riches to help others! Wealth, just for the sake of accumulating and hoarding, is not only meaningless, it can cause great hurt and suffering. "When goods increase, they are increased that eat them." The more riches a person possesses, the greater are the claims upon him. He increases his household, servants, and dependents and is really none the better off for all his wealth. The Rockefellers, the Vanderbilts, the Gettys and Howard Hughes all found this to be true—and I'm sure Bill Gates finds it true also. The only pleasure amassed wealth affords the owner is that of gazing upon it! All Bill Gates could do with all the "things" he could buy for himself would be to "look" at them—he could never in his life time spend his billions on "stuff" he could use up personally! Not only do riches not satisfy the spiritual essence of human beings, riches can be harmful! Even Solomon, probably proportionally richer than Bill Gates, says the hoarding of riches is a "grievous evil"(5:13). Riches often perish through misfortune—bad business investments, natural disasters, robbery or litigation. Everyone wants to "sue" the rich—"tax" the rich—defraud the rich—or violently rob the rich. Better never to have had wealth than once having had it to lose it, for the loss of it brings much distress and disappointment, and sometimes even bodily harm, which otherwise would never have been experienced! Riches can never be a permanent possession. In one sense all rich people die poor for they must leave their wealth behind (Job 1:21; 1 Tim. 6-10; Prov. 15:27; 23:4; 28:20). The Christian is to be content "having food and clothing" (1 Tim. 6:8; Prov. 30:8-9). The rich tend to deny God's sovereignty in their lives and that "plunges" them into ruin and destruction. Life is never "easier" because of the increase and accumulation of "things" (wealth)—it only gets more complicated!

Yes! God wants us to enjoy the "good" things of life—but not to trust "things" (no matter how good or how many) to provide the spiritual nourishment needed to develop our souls. "Take heed, and beware of all covetousness; for a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions."(Luke 12:13-21). So what is the counsel of Solomon about human beings accumulating "things"? He urges people to "eat and drink," i.e., to enjoy life, to use the common blessings which God bestows on mankind with thankfulness and contentment. People should make the best of life "under the sun" and enjoy all the good things that God gives them (Acts 14:17). There are "down-sides" to toiling and spending one's energies and life to accumulate, but there is an "up-side" to earthly toil. In labor we find satisfaction and rewards, and especially when we see labor as part of a God-ordained scheme for cultivating the spiritual essence of life. Man engages in labor but it is the Lord who gives the increase. Both the labor itself and that which is produced by that labor are gifts of God. Physical "things" should never be "taken for granted" as if they were totally the result of human endeavor. Enjoyment of life and "things" is granted to people by God (5:18). Whatever one has, one must learn therewith to be content, for that is his "lot" by the providence of God—so long as one has "worked with his hands" to command the respect of those around him and so that he will not be dependent on any one (Eph. 6:8; Col. 3:23; 1 Thess. 4:10-12; 2 Thess. 3:6-15). The believer should expect no more than God has granted him through his moderate (not "work-a-holic") toil. One should not attempt to squeeze out of labor and wealth more than either is capable of delivering. One should not expect the accumulation of things to make him

a better person in his soul, or to satisfy the longing of his soul for eternal matters (2 Cor. 4:16-18; Col. 3:1-4). “Renouncing all one has” (Luke 14:33) does not mean throwing away every physical necessity of life and becoming a “ward of society” (1 Tim. 5:8; 1 Thess. 4:10-12). It means simply to deny “things” first priority in one’s search for meaning! The meaning of life is not in things—no matter how many things or how costly they are! The joy of life is using whatever one has (by honest and moderate toil) to the glory of God and the building of his kingdom.

Solomon observes a rich (6:3-5) man who has a large family—but he “has no burial” (or tomb). To be left unburied after death was considered the worst fate which could befall a person. The corpse of the once rich man would be left for birds and beasts to devour (1 Sam. 17:46). In Solomon’s opinion a fetus dying in miscarriage was better off than one who was so despised and dishonored as to “have no burial.” Such a horrible end to life could only mean that even the wealthy man’s own family considered his life to be meaningless! This is the impression one gets when observing the carnage of the battlefield where mangled, bloated, or blown-to-bits corpses are left unburied in the haste of war. Life appears to be totally meaningless. The old films of the Nazi concentration camps with thousands and thousands of naked, emaciated dead corpses stacked in piles like cord-wood are ghastly. But even more ghastly is the contemplation of how utterly animalistic, cruel, amoral and unmerciful the Nazis must have been to view the life of the victims without any meaning at all! But wouldn’t a long life for a wealthy man be more desired than the non-existence of the miscarried fetus? No! What Solomon says about the rich man would still be true even if he were to live to be 2000 years old. In the end “all go to one place,”—Sheol, the abode of the dead. The point is that in Sheol no one has anything of this world’s goods. No one there can make up for missed opportunities (Lk. 16:19-31). The wealthy dead man’s life is, ultimately, as vain as the dead “still-born” fetus. **THAT’S WHAT SOLOMON OBSERVED “UNDER THE SUN.”** But, praise God, Jesus Christ has “abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel” (2 Tim. 1:10). Life has meaning for eternity now!

The Hebrew text has the word *davar* which almost always means “words.” All the philosophizing, orating, debating, psycho-babble, and talking-it-through in the world “under the sun” trying to find meaning in life is vain! As a matter of fact, says Solomon, “the more words, the less the meaning.” William Shakespeare said in Hamlet, “Brevity is the soul of wit (wisdom).” And isn’t it true! Have you ever watched or listened to “talk-shows” on TV and radio? It seems like there are hundreds of them! And they all jabber and fill the air-waves with their humanistic philosophies about how to find meaning in life—but none of them really satisfy when one contemplates the end of man—death! And what does Solomon’s observation here have to say about modern psycho-therapy???? All the sweet, cheerful, optimistic, well-meaning words of human beings to one another are vain without the precious word of God! The final question in this text is: “For who can tell a man what will be after him under the sun?” No human being knows what tomorrow, or the day after that, or the year after that will bring! No man knows! So all the talking, all the “words of wisdom” of the psychologists and philosophers are void, vain, useless—and the more they talk the more useless they are. **BUT THERE IS ONE WHO NOT ONLY KNOWS THE FUTURE—HE IS IN CONTROL OF THE FUTURE—GOD!** Since God is in control of

his world and the One who permits man to enjoy living, then man should cease fretting about what might happen and live each day with simple trust and enjoyment. Solomon observed that the wise, rich, but yet unhappy man (himself included) concerned himself with many problems that pertain to tomorrow: Who will come after him? To whom will he really leave all that he has accumulated? What if he has no son to carry on? Will he receive proper burial? What will people think of him when he has died? These and many other questions continually troubled his mind (and the minds of millions more). He concluded that he should submit to the power of God and enjoy with moderation the goods of life which God has permitted him to accumulate and now potentially, at least, offer him the ability to enjoy.

## ECCLESIASTES 7:1—8:17

Life as we live it “under the sun” (i.e., on the earth) is a very serious matter. It is short and often filled with troubles. We should engage in ambitions and actions which keep us sober and serious—not frivolous and silly! First, for most people their most cherished ambition is to leave a good reputation after they have “passed on” (i.e., died) and to hand down to future generations an honorable remembrance. For a person who has so lived that he has gained for himself a good name, the day of death is more desirable than the day of birth. Moral purity in one’s life should have the highest priority. For such a person, death means the victorious end of the adventure on earth. He is in a better state than at the time of his birth when he started out on his adventure not knowing what would be in store for him. At birth this person had nothing before him but labor, trouble and uncertainty. In death, however, the anxieties are past, the storms are all over. As far as earthly values are concerned, death confers a benefit on those who suffer by releasing them from their misery. When a believer dies all should rejoice that he has reached his eternal “home” with a good name and in peace (cf. Phil. 1:21-23; 2 Tim. 4:6-8). Second, we should go often to “the house of mourning.” We should seek out the places where people are ill and where there is tragedy. Wiser, more enduring lessons for life “under the sun” can be learned where grief reigns than in the empty and momentary excitement of mirth and frivolity. In the “house of feasting and drinking” all that is serious is put aside and indulgence in selfishness, heartlessness, and thoughtlessness reigns. But how many people do this, today?! There is a mania in our society for entertainment, “good-times,” excitement, comedy, and laughter all the time! No one seems to want to think about or be exposed to “bad” things. We try to shelter everyone away from anything that is serious, sober and difficult. Yes, even young people should be exposed to the realities of suffering, death and destruction—of grief. “Sorrow is better than laughter, for by sadness of countenance the heart is made glad.” That is paradoxical and enigmatic to unbelievers! BUT IT IS TRUE! “Teach us to number our days” (Psa. 90:9-12). Confronting death helps shape one’s character. “The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning” and their thoughts are upon the day of death—their mind is attuned to the seriousness which is natural in a house of bereavement and it influences their way of living. On the other hand, “the heart of fools is in the house of mirth.” The fool is one who thinks only of the present; he lives for the hour. He shuns places of sadness and death because they contradict his lifestyle. Third, we should put the proper value on being rebuked and corrected! No human life (except one, Jesus) is perfect. While solemn rebuke, even that given in the right spirit and tone of voice, is not pleasant, “it is better to hear the rebuke of the wise than for a man to hear the song of fools” (7:5-7). A wise person is one who allows God’s revealed word to rebuke him for his wayward ways! The O.T. prophets are classic examples of godly men trying to bring Israel to her senses through rebuke, often severe rebuke! Solomon’s Proverbs give numerous serious admonitions to accept correction and rebuke (e.g., Prov. 13:1; 17:10; 20:23-25; 27:5-6). Some would prefer to hear the “songs of fools.” Isaiah’s contemporaries told him “speak to us smooth things” (Isa. 30:9-11). Ungodly music is void of any significance to the realities of life within the will of God (Amos 6:5). The mirth of fools comes to a speedy end, and is spent to no

good purpose—it is vanity! Jesus never avoided severe rebuke to those who needed it (i.e., the Pharisees and Sadducees, and even his own 12 apostles and the 7 churches of Asia Minor).

If we must live life “under the sun” (in this futile and decaying physical world), then we need patience (i.e., endurance) because: (a) patience keeps us from saying and doing irrational and unrealistic things while impatience will cause us to be irrational, unrealistic, rash and ridiculous, and may cause us to lose our health, wealth, friends, families, and perhaps even our lives. Patience gives us the opportunity with circumstances and people to view them with a more objective and rational perspective. We should “not go off half-cocked,” or “fly off the handle” in impatience. Modern day drivers of automobiles in heavy traffic often do irrational things out of impatience that endanger their own lives and the lives of others (7:7-8); (b) patience keeps us from harboring the wrong kind of anger in our hearts which will eat away at us both physically (ulcers, heart attacks, and many other maladies) and spiritually. “Quick-tempered” people are not good company—they are often an embarrassment to those near and dear to them and may even cause them to commit crimes they would not have committed had they shown self-control. Self-control is part of the “fruit of the Holy Spirit” (Gal. 5:22) and is repeatedly held forth as a Christian virtue in the New Testament (7:9); (c) patience keeps us from undue wishful thinking about how “good the ‘good-old-days’” were! It keeps us from trying to keep from facing reality by longing for the past. Everyone must admit that it is not “wisdom” that makes us long for the past. Who among us would really want to go back and go through all those troubles of life again? The Christian must realize that “the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to” him (Rom. 8:18)—“an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison” (2 Cor. 4:16-18). For the Christian to die and go to be with Christ is “very far better” (Phil. 1:21-23)(7:10); (d) patience (“wisdom”) gives us protection because it gives us security and the power to overcome our emotions. Those with patience (“endurance”) have many advantages over those who do not have it. Patience is as good as, and often better than, “money in the bank.” God-believers have the patience that it takes to gain knowledge. Godly knowledge is power—even more so than money (7:11-12); (e) above all (7:13-14) patience makes us take time to reflect that God is in control and it is he alone who can “make straight what we have made crooked!” Those with patience know that “the God of all the earth will, ultimately, do right” (Gen. 18:25)—that’s the kind of “patience” Abraham had to have toward those terribly wicked, perverse “neighbors” of his among whom his nephew Lot lived (Sodom and Gomorrah). We look around us today and see injustice, suffering, war, poverty, hunger, starvation, terrible diseases, death and were it not for our belief (patience) in God to “straighten it all out by-and-by” we would “come unglued” mentally and physically! It does no good to be impatient! Impatience never “straightened” anything out! Human beings cannot perfectly “straighten out” the messes they’ve made in life under the sun. This does not mean human beings should not repent and make changes in their attitudes and behavior. It simply means that ultimately only God can turn the “bad days” into “good.” Only God works all things together for good for those who love him and are called according to his purposes (Rom. 8:28). Only God can take the “bad” times of our lives and use them to conform us to the image of his Son, Jesus (Rom. 8:29). “Be patient, therefore, brethren, until the coming of the Lord....as an example of suffering and patience, brethren, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord....You have heard of the steadfastness

(endurance) of Job and you have seen the purpose of the Lord, how the Lord is compassionate and merciful" (James 5:7-11). SO, LET US BE PATIENT! That doesn't mean we should be inert, indifferent, or cynical. It means doing what we can and leaving the rest to God. "Let go, and let God!"

Yes! There is a "righteousness" that is "overly righteous" IT IS SELF-RIGHTEOUSNESS—like that of the Pharisees of Jesus' day. It is the kind of "righteousness" that really does "not fear God" but challenges God's sovereignty and rule of life (Rom. 9:19-21). It is a self-righteousness that is "good" outwardly, but rebellious and arrogant inwardly. It is a "righteousness" that makes a person "overly wise." When a person thinks he is above sin, or has no need of God's grace and imputed righteousness, he puts himself in the position of self-destruction. God will not tolerate forever a rebellious and arrogant soul. Malachi 3:13-15 speaks to this issue. Self-righteousness is never justified before God (just read the parable of the Publican and the sinner, Lk. 18:9-14). The self-righteous person is never liked by his contemporaries in this "life under the sun." The self-righteous person is never trusted by others in this life. The self-righteous person never likes anyone and never trusts anyone else in this life. SO LET'S KEEP A CHECK ON HOW "GOOD" WE THINK WE ARE. Christians should never "think more highly of themselves than they ought—but to think sober judgment" (Rom. 12:3). Christians should never "do anything from selfishness or conceit, but in humility count others better than themselves...looking not only to their own interests but also to the interests of others" (Phil. 2:3-4). That is what Jesus did and Christians are to be like Jesus! Solomon also says, "Be not overly wicked...." Does that mean we can be a little wicked, so long as we don't overdo it? No! God forbid! (Rom. 6:1-2). Solomon is warning against deliberate, willful, headstrong plunging into a life of total depravity. He is warning against a wickedness that cares nothing for goodness or righteousness in the heart. The Bible knows that even Christians (including apostles) sometimes do things they "do not want to do" (Rom. 7:13-25). There are sins of omission as well as of commission. Solomon is talking about the O.T. "sin with a high hand"—the presumptuous sin that arrogantly defies God's commandments (Num. 14:40-44; 15:30-31; Deut. 1:43; 17:12-13). Those who blatantly defy God's laws of "nature" (life under the sun) almost always suffer in their own persons the due penalty of their errors (Rom. 1:27) and will most certainly suffer eternally should they not repent before they die!

Solomon isn't necessarily picking on women! He has already said in 7:20 "Surely there is not a righteous man on earth who does good and never sins." Solomon's search is for the source of all the human wickedness and foolishness in the world. But he hasn't found one "totally wise and righteous person"—neither male nor female! As he has investigated the foolishness of the human race, he has found its source in the seductions of "the woman." He's not condemning all women or womanhood in general. In fact, he urges men to find wives, love them, and enjoy them (Eccl. 9:9) as did Lemuel in Prov. 31:10-31). "The woman" undoubtedly refers to an "evil woman" (Prov. 2:18ff; 7:25ff) and/or the Lady of Folly (i.e., false philosophy and world viewpoint) (Prov. 9:1ff). Solomon personifies the source of human seduction into sin in "the woman" because of his past experience with 1000 wives and concubines (most of whom were idolaters and led him to his downfall)! Even Solomon's own mother conceived him illegitimately with David—and who was the "seducer" in that affair?

Was Bathsheba completely innocent in taking her bath out on the roof-top so the king might see her? Women are not “righteous” simply because they are women! There’s no virtue, necessarily, in femininity—in spite of what the National Women’s Organization (“NOW”) spouts. The male hormone has made him aggressive in his search for sexual dominance—and the female has been supplied by God with the right nature by which to “attract” (seduce) man to follow his “hormones.” That is as it should be—God made us that way. But he did not make us to come together outside his revealed will (illicitly)! This is why Solomon seems to think he has found the source of wickedness. Remember, he’s looking at things mostly from an “under the sun” viewpoint. And remember, he has already said the male species has only “wicked” persons in it!

The question of obedience to the king is answered in the whole context (8:1-9). The man who is wise will “keep the king’s command.” Think of “the king” as governing authorities. Human government is an absolute necessity in a fallen world. Governing authorities are God’s servants (God’s “ministers” the Greek language calls them in Rom. 13:1-7) to maintain peace and tranquility and order in a world where impenitent sinners roam the earth (i.e., murderers, rapists, robbers, war-mongers, etc.). God has ordained human governments for his purposes and all human beings are to be subject to them in so far as they carry out their divine mandates and do not overstep the powers God has relegated to them (see Matt. 22:21; Rom. 13:1-7; 1 Pet. 2:13-17). God uses human governments, sometimes even pagan and cruel ones, to bring relative law and order to society (Isa. 10:5-19; 13:1-22; 45:1-25; Jer. 21:8-14; 17:1-14; 29:1-9). God expected the Jews, taken as prisoners of war to Babylon, to be obedient and industrious toward the Babylonians who took them from their land of Israel down into Babylon (modern Iraq) (Jer. 29:1-9).

Alexander Campbell, in his essay entitled “Is Capital Punishment Sanctioned by Divine Authority?” wrote, “Though neither Caesar nor Napoleon, Nicholas nor Victoria were, ‘by the grace of God,’ king, emperor or queen; still the civil throne, the civil magistrate, and, therefore, civil government, are by the grace of God, bestowed upon the world. Neither the church nor the world could exist without it. God himself has, therefore, benevolently ordained magistrates and judges. Men may call them kings, emperors or presidents....but they are God’s ministers, executors of his will and of his vengeance, ordained to wait upon him and to execute his mandates. They are sort of viceroys—viceregens under law to God, and to govern according to his revealed will. The Bible is of right, and it ought to be, just as much a law to kings and governors and presidents, as it is to masters and servants, to husbands and wives, to parents and children. Those magistrates, therefore, who will not be governed and guided by it in the faithful execution of God’s laws, God himself, in his own proper person, will judge and punish.”

It is a Biblical commandment that “kings,” (i.e., governing authorities) should rule according to the revealed, written

(Biblical) laws of God for civil government (Deut. 17:14-20). That does not mean the governments need to be theocracies (i.e., ruled over by any church or group of churches). Civil governments should be secular and must be separate from any powers exercised by any churches. But civil governments must function according to what the Bible says is their sphere of action and influence. The Sunday School teacher who wishes to be thoroughly informed on this subject should read, *What The Bible Says About Civil Government*, by Paul T. Butler, 1990, College Press, Joplin, MO. The “wise” Christian will obey all the laws of the nation and locality in which he lives—whether he likes them or not—so long as those laws do not try to order him, or force him, to disobey SPECIFIC, CLEAR, commands of God in the Scriptures! A recent case in point in August, 2003, was the issue of the granite monument upon which was engraved the Ten Commandments and placed in a very conspicuous place in a government building in Alabama, by the Alabama Supreme Court Chief Justice. He was ordered by a Federal Circuit Court to remove them, but refused to do so. Finally, government workers came and removed them. I believe he should have obeyed the Circuit Court order since there is no specific, clear command in the Bible that would be violated by their removal. The Circuit Court was not ordering the Chief Justice to stop his personal worship of God, or to renounce his beliefs, or invading his home or his church building to stop his religious convictions. —Baker’s Dictionary of Theology, p. 319, states, “Scripture regards the laws of any community as binding on the people of God unless they command or imply disobedience to God’s revealed will (Dan. 1:6; Acts 4:18-20; 5:27-29; 1 Pet. 4:15-16). The validity of civil legislation in no way depends on the character of the legislator(s), but rather upon the providential ordering of society, in which all authority is ultimately of God (John 19:10-11; Rom. 13:1-7; 1 Pet. 2:13-17), despite the fact that the rulers of this world are generally spiritually unenlightened (1 Cor. 2:8).” Solomon gives 6 reasons for the “wise” man to obey the king: (a) “to every purpose there is time and judgment”—i.e., everything has its appointed time of duration and in due course, by the providence of God, it will be brought to judgment—God will eventually execute perfect justice; (b) “the evil of every man is heavy upon him”—i.e., citizens have enough troubles just making a living for themselves without deliberately adding to them by open revolt against the government; (c) man “does not know that which shall be”—i.e., political circumstances change—have patience—perhaps a new or different government will arise that will be better; (d) “who can tell him how it shall be”—i.e., political pundits can theorize and speculate all they want, God is in control and no human can predict what governments (especially a tyrannical one) will do; (e) “no man has the power to retain the spirit, or authority over the day of death”—i.e., governing authorities are unable, in the final analysis, to do anything to the “spirit” of those over whom they rule, and all will ultimately (including rulers) face death and judgment before God; (f) “there is no discharge from war, nor will wickedness deliver those who are given to it”—i.e., citizens must face the realities of government—they will be called upon to serve, one way or another, for the protections and privileges resulting from human governments—rebellion against law and order will be punished by “the king” (i.e., governing powers)!

In light of the context (i.e., discussion of despotic kings and the wicked who seem to “get by” with their wickedness, 8:1-10) the “swift justice” that is not being executed speedily is probably that which man wants instantly from God upon the wicked and oppressive. This is what the apostle Peter discusses in 2 Pet. 3:1-18. Peter says, in

effect, what Solomon is saying, when he writes, “First of all you must understand this, that scoffers will come in the last days with scoffing, following their own passions, and saying, ‘Where is the promise of his coming?’ For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things have continued as they were from the beginning of creation.” (2 Pet. 3:3-4). Peter also discusses this Christian desire for justice upon the oppressors in 1 Pet. 3:1—5:11. Because the Bible and Christians have been saying for 2000 years that God’s great day of judgment is certainly coming—BUT IT HASN’T COME YET—“the heart of the sons of men is fully set to do evil.” Unbelievers scoff at the idea of a final, miraculous, divine judgment and flaunt their wickedness in the face of God and his word. But this statement of Solomon (“Because sentence against an evil deed is not executed speedily, the heart of the sons of men is fully set to do evil”) is also true of human justice! The SIXTH AMENDMENT to the U.S. Constitution (a part of our “Bill of Rights”) begins, “In all criminal prosecutions, the accused shall enjoy the right to a speedy and public trial, by an impartial jury of the State and district wherein the crime shall have been committed;” (emphasis mine). SO WHAT IS “SPEEDY?” AND ISN’T IT IMPOSSIBLE TO EVER CONVENE A TOTALLY “IMPARTIAL” JURY? With the tremendous increase in our population (due in large part to immigration—both legal and illegal), comes crime and multitudinous litigation in divorce courts, civil rights suits, environmental suits, workers suing employers, employers suing workers, people even suing McDonald’s “because eating their hamburgers makes me obese.” AMERICA’S COURT-DOCKETS ARE SWAMPED UNDER MOUNTAINOUS HEAPS OF CASES YET TO BE TRIED. So what is “speedy?” Many criminals are jailed for a year (or more) before their cases ever come to trial. Many murderers are convicted and sentenced to execution and wait on “death row” for 10-15 years or more while they appeal over, and over, and over! Many “white-collar criminals” are freed on bail (if they are rich enough to raise the bail-money) and spend years of freedom before they are ever tried. It is also a well established matter that if you are rich enough to hire “big-time” defense lawyers, you can beat almost any crime (e.g., O. J. Simpson). Is it any wonder that because of the slowness and meagerness of justice in America, “the heart of the sons of men is fully set to do evil?”

No! Solomon wisely says, “Though a sinner does evil a hundred times and prolongs his life, yet I know that it will be well with those who fear God, because they fear before him; but it will not be well with the wicked, neither will he prolong his days like a shadow, because he does not fear before the Lord.” (8:12-13). Paul discusses the need for Christian faith and patience as we await the Divine justice that is coming (2 Thess. 1:5—2:17). Peter as well as James say the same thing in their epistles. Divine justice is coming—it is certain—as certain as the resurrection of Jesus Christ (Acts 17:30-31). Both the pagan Roman idolaters and the impenitent “Christian” churches ultimately received the judgments predicted upon ancient Rome (Revelation chs. 1-20)—it just took 400 years for God to get around to it! But we must not “ignore this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slow about his promise as some count slowness, but is forbearing toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.” (2 Pet. 3:8-9). THE OLD TESTAMENT IS FILLED WITH HISTORICAL ACCOUNTS OF GOD KEEPING HIS PROMISE TO JUDGE AND PUNISH THOSE WHO BLATANTLY AND IMPENITENTLY DISOBEY HIS WORD! The Jews themselves are “a case in point” of God keeping his word to punish those who reject his commandments! God fulfilled the warnings of the O.T. prophets

precisely and fully. While his grace and love made him hold back for 700 years (between Moses and the Assyrian captivity), he did exactly as he said he would because of their impenitent wickedness and apostasy! When the civil government will not fulfill its God-mandated “ministry” (Rom. 13:1-7) and “execute God’s wrath (speedily) on the wrongdoers” and make its “terror felt on bad conduct” the Christian must patiently endure injustice and oppression and wait for God’s divine justice to fall. Christians are not permitted to take the “law into their own hands” (1 Pet. 2:13-17). Solomon is not saying, “we ought to eat and drink and enjoy ourselves” just because we experience injustice (8:14-15). The statement of the apostle Paul “If the dead are not raised, ‘Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.’” (1 Cor. 15:32) is an ironic “suggestion” for anyone who does not have the hope of the resurrection! Solomon’s “suggestion” is that in light of man’s inability to understand why there often seems to be no justice and that when it comes the oppressed may not be around to see it, the best thing a godly person can do is have some enjoyment out of life in those “good” things with which God has blessed him. “This will go with him in his toil (frustration, futility, and decay) through the days of life which God gives him under the sun.” Solomon has advised enjoyment in moderation of all God’s blessings numerous times as a remedy for the frustrations, futilities and vanities of “life under the sun” (Eccl. 2:24; 3:12,22; 5:18). Christians are not to be “sour-pusses” and cynics about life on earth—they are to be filled with joy!

Solomon never advises against trying to learn “wisdom.” He never suggests a person should quit investigating God’s marvelous creation. His Proverbs are replete with urgency that the best part of life is to learn all one can about the world around him. What he is saying here is, that no matter how much time (sleepless hours) one devotes to trying to fathom all the “secrets” of God’s ways (even those “under the sun,” i.e., in this created universe) he will not “find them out.” Moses wrote in Deuteronomy, “The secret things belong to the Lord our God; but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law” (Deut. 29:29). Paul, the apostle, wrote, “O the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!” (Rom. 11:33). Paul wrote, “In whom (Christ) are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Col. 2:3). God has decided to keep some things “secret” from mankind. One of those “secret” things God alone knows is the time of Jesus’s second coming (Matt. 24:36)—not even Jesus was at liberty to reveal that when he was here on earth. There are many things discovered within this created universe which some human beings have used for evil. God is not pleased with that—but he has not withheld the possibility of their discovery. Undoubtedly there are some matters in the universe of God’s creation that man will never discover because God knows people do not need to know them. But that does not mean that mankind should cease all scientific investigation and experimentation. Solomon is simply saying, “It is vain for any human being to think mankind, given another million years on earth, will eventually discover all there is to know about God and his creation—NOPE! CAN’T BE DONE! So relax!

## ECCLESIASTES 9:1—10:20

Solomon says, “the righteous and the wise ...their deeds are in the hand of God. Yet, “one pattern of life” from “under the sun” appears to happen all people. Whether a person is godly or a sinner, he will experience the results of hatred and love. None escape the cycles of life “under the sun.” Remember, Solomon is viewing life’s futilities from only one view-point—“under the sun,” i.e., from this earthly life only! If this life on earth is the only life, then it doesn’t make much difference whether you are “good or evil,” “clean or unclean,” whether you “sacrifice or don’t sacrifice,” are a “good man or a sinner,” or one “who swears and keeps an oath or one who does not swear an oath,” i.e., is trustworthy or not trustworthy. Then, of course, physical death comes to all people regardless of what they do or what their character is! There are the wicked who become rich and the good people who become rich. The good and the evil both experience persecution as well as safety and the brevity of life. All people on earth will experience suffering in some form or another and all experience “good days” and “bad days.” The wise will remember “their deeds are in the hand of God.”. The wicked and sinners, because they prosper and their wicked deeds often go unpunished, are self-deceived and believe there will never be a day of reckoning before God. Viewing “life under the sun,” Solomon has come to the conclusion that as long as there is life, there is hope. Death closes the door permanently (as far as “life under the sun” tells us) to all human activity—even the memory of the dead is soon obliterated. The comparison of a dog with a lion was much different in Solomon’s day than it is with one who lives in American culture. The lion was the most noble of beasts (Prov. 30:30; Isa. 31:4). Even the Messiah is metaphorically spoken of as the “Lion of the Tribe of Judah.” Dogs, on the other hand, were not held as pets in those days—they were considered “unclean” scavengers of the streets (1 Sam. 17:43; 24:14; 2 Sam. 3:8; 16:4; Matt. 15:26; Lk. 26:22). The obvious meaning of Solomon’s statement, “...for a living dog is better than a dead lion,” is that the most despicable “sinner” (i.e., “dog”) who is still alive is better off than the most “honorable” (i.e., “lion”) who has already gone to the grave. But that is Solomon’s perspective from “under the sun.” The apostle Paul’s, Christian, perspective is that to “die and be with Christ is very far better” (Phil. 1:21-23; see also 2 Cor. 4:16-18; 5:1-10). Solomon did not have the advantage we have of looking back at the vicarious death and bodily resurrection of Christ brings to “life under the sun.” How grateful we should be!

The limited perspective of only observing of “life under the sun” has led Solomon to conclude that once you are dead there is no more “enjoyment” of what life offers, i.e., no one remembers the dead, their emotions have perished, they have forever no share in all that is done “under the sun.” So, he advises, “eat your bread with enjoyment, drink your wine with a merry heart (of course Solomon is not condoning drunkenness—he speaks against it in his Proverbs see answer to question #7 in notes on Eccl. 1-3)...be always holy (i.e., “let your garments always be white, ceremonially clean), and enjoy life with the wife whom you love, all the days of your vain life which he has given you under the sun, because that is your portion in life under the sun.” Furthermore, “whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might; for there is no work or thought or knowledge or wisdom in Sheol, to which you are

going.” Sheol, to the Old Testament believer, was the unknown, unknowable, realm of the dead (see Isa. 38:9-20)! This was true for all the O.T. faithful—they had no revelation from God as to the nature and quality of “life” after death. All they could say when a believer died was, “he/she was gathered to their fathers.” It is quite clear, however, that the true believer of the O.T. did not think of Sheol as total obliteration of the soul (Job 14:13; Amos 9:2-4; Psa. 16:10; Acts 2:27). The confusion of thought of the O.T. saints concerning Sheol arises from the invisibility of the soul. Since it is difficult to conceive of the idea of space in connection with invisible beings, Sheol often means the place or state of the soul between death and resurrection when the soul will be joined with a spiritual body (1 Cor. 15:42-49). The clearest indication of different conditions in Sheol is in our Lord’s parable of the rich man and Lazarus (Lk. 16:19-31), where the rich man is pictured as in torment, while Lazarus was in “Abraham’s bosom.” The book of Revelation clearly reveals that those who have died in the Lord are in heaven around the throne of God, conscious, aware of God and Christ, and involved in worshipful and fulfilling activities.

Life is not out of control nor in the control of “chance and fate.” Solomon has observed “under the sun,” i.e., “....the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, nor bread to the wise, nor riches to the intelligent, nor favor to the men of skill; but time and chance happen to them all. For man does not know his time.” Solomon was not dependent upon divine revelation to come to this conclusion—it is easily seen in common human experience “under the sun.” In a recent Time magazine editorial by James Poniewozik, Sept. 8, 2003, entitled “Why We’re So Obsessed With ‘Next’”, Mr. Poniewozik opined, “And there, perhaps, is the reason the next big thing holds such appeal for us. It distracts us from the fact that there is only one big thing—your life—that will culminate inexorably in the last big thing.” Mr. Poniewozik was referring, of course, to every one’s death! Solomon said it more succinctly—“For man does not know his time.” The Hebrew word *pega* translated, “chance” by all English versions would better be translated, “occurrence, incident” and is translated in 1 Kings 5:4 as “misfortune” in the RSV, “occurrent or occurrence” in KJV & ASV, and “disaster” in NIV. So the term, “chance” does not mean something gambled or that a person has “fallen down on his luck.” Solomon is saying that “incidents, occurrences, misfortunes, disasters” come to all people as they pursue their goals (in sports, wars, a living, riches, fame, etc.). Every human being “under the sun” experiences “down-days” and “set-backs” no matter who they are—and ultimately their “times” run out—they die—every one of them. As the Scottish poet Robert Burns (A.D. 1759-96) said, “The best laid schemes o’ mice an’ men Gang aft a-gley.” The reason for this is God has subjected this creation (all of it) to futility and bondage to decay (Rom. 8:18-23). No matter how “swift, strong, wise, intelligent or skillful a human being is—he does not know what shall befall him—something certainly will. Man’s life and daily activities are out of his own hand. So in the experience of “life under the sun” of love and hate, among sinners and the righteous, he will come to realize that there is no guarantee of the success of any of his ventures. The unbelieving world is seduced by the devil to be always looking for “the next big thing.” Perhaps science, psychology, philosophy, politics, etc. will solve all his “set-backs” tomorrow with the “next big thing.” Well none of it has since Solomon wrote Ecclesiastes over 3000 years ago! The apostle Paul wrote 2000 years ago, “So then it does not depend on the man who wills or the man who runs, but on God who has mercy” (Rom. 9:16). In the cycle of “life under the sun” many “incidents” “occur.” Man does not control the circumstances or “incidents.” God

directs the circumstances of human life and human beings make their choices for or against his truth. When they have made their choices God grants them either mercy or hardening of the heart.

Solomon uses a parable to muse about “wisdom.” His observations here about “wisdom” are all from the perspective of “under the sun” (i.e., on earth). He is trying to answer the previous observation that “incidents, occurrences, misfortunes” come to all people—wise or stupid! Is there any answer? Yes, about as well as one may do “under the sun” is to pursue “wisdom” and to practice it. One certainly does not want to pursue stupidity! Wisdom “under the sun” at least “delivers a besieged city,” i.e., fortifies a person against being overwhelmed, devastated and destroyed by the “occurrences and misfortunes” of life. Solomon filled his Proverbs with appeals to practice the wisdom of God’s word to keep from ruining one’s life, even though it may one day come to an end “under the sun.” Although a “poor man’s” wisdom which succeeded in “delivering the city” was soon forgotten, it is still best that the “poor man” by his wisdom gave victory to the city! A classic example is the “wisdom” Joseph (the “poor man”) revealed to the Chief Butler in prison in Egypt (Gen. 40:23). The Chief Butler soon forgot about Joseph after he was delivered from prison. Two whole years later (during which time Joseph languished in prison) the Chief Butler remembered the “wisdom” of Joseph and all Egypt was saved from the famine as a result. How easily we forget! The Corinthian church seemed to have forgotten the “wisdom” of the cross of Christ and Paul had to remind them of all it should mean to them (1 Cor. 1:4-31). The wisdom of God in his New Testament covenant Scriptures has been given to the church for its “warfare and deliverance.” Satan has besieged the church from its very beginning—we must not forget the wisdom of the “poor Man, Christ” (2 Cor. 8:9; Col. 1:28-29; 2:9), lest in our foolishness we fall prey to our Adversary!

The two sentences at the end of chapter 9,—“The words of the wise heard in quiet are better than the shouting of a ruler among fools” and —“Wisdom is better than weapons of war, but one sinner destroys much good”—need illustrating. Solomon illustrated them with the metaphorical picture in 10:1-2, “Dead flies (or “flies of death”) make the perfume’s ointment give off an evil odor; so does a little folly stink-up wisdom and honor,”(10:1). We would say it today, “One bad apple in a barrel will soon spoil the whole barrel.” The “flies of death” are poisonous, destructive insects of evil unbelief which can infect and kill. So, one who is great in wisdom and honor may be infected with “death” through the sting of folly and evil! All the good which the counsel of the wise man might accomplish may be quickly overthrown by the villainy and perversity of one bad man. It is common usage (probably since time began) to associate the “right” hand with honor and good fortune, and the “left” hand with dishonor and “bad” fortune (see Matt. 25:31,32,33,41; Luke 1:1; Acts 7:56). In philosophy, politics and religion, the “right” has always represented that which is conservative of commonly established and unchanging or absolute values while the “left” has always been representative of evolving or “progressive” values that must change “with the times.” There are many on the “left” in America which insist that our U.S. Constitution must “evolve” and “change” according to pragmatic or practical needs and wishes of America’s social “evolution.” Many in Christianity believe the same about the Bible—it must be “changed” in interpretation to suit the “ever evolving sense of human values.” That being said, it explains why Solomon used “right” and “left”

metaphorically to state that a wise man's heart inclines toward the right, but a fool's heart toward the left. Solomon certainly believed that God's word does not change—that its values are permanent and absolute (cf. Eccl. 12:12-13-14). So, dear Christian, do not be ashamed when the world of "left-leaning" evolutionists and moral-revisionists accuse you of being a "right-wing conservative." Those who believe God's word is absolute and unchangeable are the wise ones! It was Andrew Jackson who said, "I'd rather be right than be President of the United States." Too bad others have taken the approach they'd rather be President than be right! An "evil" leader can "spoil" the whole nation! When "folly is set in many high places and the successful ("rich") sit in low places—when slaves are on horses and princes are walking on foot like slaves" the social order is turned up-side-down! Foolishness must not be exalted and the successful ("rich") should not be humiliated—slaves should not rule over princes. When stupidity becomes the norm, wickedness and injustice "spoils the whole barrel" of society!

Yes. All the "proverbs" in 10:8-15 speak to the same point. That "point" is there is great benefit in caution and prudence, but there is great danger in rashness and folly. Solomon is especially directing his admonition here to those who foolishly take risks to alter the course of events or overthrow "establishments" when there is no moral imperative to do so. To rebel against an oppressive ruler, or to attempt to dismantle time-honored institutions or customs when they are not coercing one to disobey God is dangerous. Digging a "pit" (trap) to ambush someone else—tearing down "walls" (customs) when it isn't crucial to do so—occupying oneself in dangerous work" is throwing caution to the wind and almost always turns the evil intended back upon the one intending it for someone else. The Bible is full of historical incidents which illustrate this (Pharaoh, Miriam & Aaron, King Saul, Jezebel, Nebuchadnezzar, Haman, et al.). A wise man once said, "Great ability without discretion comes almost invariably to a tragic end." Another common proverb often quoted is, "Discretion is the better part of (rash) valor." "An ounce of discretion is worth a pound of learning." Solomon observed that in living life "under the sun," caution is the watchword. Only a fool would try to cut down a tree with a dull axe (10:10) or try to charm a snake without first learning how to do so! In 10:12-15 Solomon observes that there is too much verbosity (talking) by idiots "under the sun." When President Calvin Coolidge was asked once why he was so reticent about saying anything, replied, "I have never been hurt by anything I didn't say." Solomon observes "under the sun" a sharp contrast between the words and works of the wise, on the one hand, and the worthless babbling and inertia of the fool. Sir Walter Raleigh said, "Speaking much is a sign of vanity, for he that is lavish with words is a niggard (miser) in deed." Oliver Goldsmith said, "Every absurdity has a champion to defend it, for error is always talkative." Today we call such people, "blow-hards." Only a "fool" opens his mouth and spouts his ability to "know what is to be and what he will do." He babbles about things of which he knows nothing! No one can know the future—but that doesn't stop the fool—he arrogantly boasts about his abilities to "know" displaying his stupidity for all to hear! The babbler who knows everything and is not hesitant to blather on about it exhausts himself and everybody else, accomplishing nothing! Solomon must have had to constantly listen to "blithering-idiots" in his kingly-court advising him of things about which they knew nothing. He also had 1000 "wives" and "concubines" bending his ear every day about nonsensical matters of their harem gossip! Sir Francis Bacon said, "Discretion in speech is more than eloquence."

Solomon is not observing necessarily that youthfulness of age disqualifies a person to be a national leader. What Solomon warns against is the “play-boy” type of man (even if he is in his “mid-life”) becoming “king.” Rehoboam, son of Solomon, was the classic “play-boy” even though he was more than 40 years old (2 Chron. 13:7). His lack of self-control and maturity led to the devastating division of the kingdom of Israel and ultimately the captivity of the nation in foreign lands. Isaiah predicted this terrible curse upon the people of Judah (Isa. 3:1-12). America has had her share of “play-boys” and drunkards in the White House (Andrew Johnson and Ulysses S. Grant, Warren G. Harding, John F. Kennedy, Lyndon Baines Johnson, William Jefferson Clinton)! America has more than its share of such “play-boys” in Congress and the Judicial system. Such people have no sense of the seriousness of their position—their obsession is to “feast” (food, drink and sex) at times when they should be governing. A nation is blessed when it has leaders (presidents “kings” and legislators “princes”) who are mature, self-controlled, sober and serious about their awesome job of leading a nation. That some Americans act like fools about choosing political leadership is graphically illustrated by the clamoring the news-media did over the “campaigning” of prostitutes, environmental wackos, psychics, bounty-hunters, sports-stars, etal. for the governorship of California in 2003. Most of the citizens of any nation fail to rise above the moral level of their political leaders. If citizens observe their political leaders cheating, lying, living as if the end justifies the means, debasing the institution of marriage and family, lacking the courage to deal with injustice and threats to the country—the citizens will say, “What’s the use in our acting any differently than our leaders?” That’s what Israel said when Rehoboam gave himself over to childish, selfish, indifference toward the plight of his people. He was much like Louis XIV and Marie Antoinette when told the people of France had no bread—said, “Let them eat cake.”

R. J. Kidwell in his book on Ecclesiastes, pub. College Press, paraphrases 10:18-19 thus: “Because a man is lazy and concerned only with merriment, the rafters of his house sag and soon he will have a leaky house. His whole attitude toward life is colored by his slackness. He makes a feast for enjoyment, pours wine for enjoyment, and believes every problem he has can be resolved with money.” (Emphasis added). Solomon certainly has proved throughout his dissertation called Ecclesiastes that he doesn’t believe “money answers everything”! Solomon had more money than most people (comparatively speaking) will ever have in this life! And still he observed that thinking “money answers everything” was meaningless! And do we need to remind you that most modern politicians in America in positions of leadership whether executive, legislative or judicial, believe “every problem we have can be resolved with money?” You name it, poverty, education, foreign policy, crime, health-care, economic down-turn, racial injustice, environmental pollution—all can be solved with more money for the governments (local, state and nation) to re-distribute as the politicians see fit! They do not seem to understand that the root-cause of most of a society’s problems stem from the collapse of moral values, lack of self-control, indifference toward personal responsibility for one’s actions and greed. That was Rehoboam’s failure when he thought that Israel’s problems could be solved with increased taxation (1 Kings 12:1-20; 2 Chron. 10:1-19). What a rude awakening Rehoboam had! His kind of stupidity only instigated the ruination of all that David and Solomon had struggled to accomplish in Israel! Rehoboam should have given heed to the writings of his grandfather David in the Psalms and his father Solomon in the Proverbs! But,

no, he listened to the “young lions” who, in their immaturity and foolishness, decided they knew better than the “older and wiser men” of the nation! It doesn’t take those who grow old long to realize that “money” can’t buy back their health or their memories of “good times past.” It shouldn’t take young people long to realize that “money” can’t buy friends but it usually does. The Prodigal Son (Lk. 15) found that out! When his money ran out, his friends ran out—and he wound up eating with the hogs. Jesus said, “A man’s life does not consist in the things he possesses.” Money is not the answer for everything! “We brought nothing into this world and we shall take nothing out of this world—having food and clothing, let us be content” (1 Tim. 6:6-10).

## ECCLESIASTES 11:1—12:14

Expectation of immediate “getting-back” is not the motive here for “casting one’s bread upon the waters.” There are two possible contingencies behind the advice of “casting of one’s bread upon the waters.” (a) living during a time of spend-thrift and oppressive rulers which brings high taxation and economic distress on the common man; and, (b) the certainty that natural calamities will fall, sooner or later. When one lives “under the sun” these two circumstances are certain to occur, perhaps more than once, during one’s lifetime. People cannot control the acts of nature—they are under the control of God—nor can they control the caprices of profligate rulers (“kings & princes”). A person must simply do his best (“sowing and reaping”) and not give up simply because he cannot control circumstances. When “bad-times” come the best one can do is “go with the flow.” We are powerless to stop the rain from coming or the direction a tree falls. If a person does nothing because he is afraid of what the weather may be he will accomplish nothing but worrying! So, “In the morning sow your seed and at evening withhold not your hand; for you do not know which will prosper, this or that, or whether both alike will be good”(see 9:10). In the meantime, “cast your bread upon the waters, for you will find it after many days.” This is not to be interpreted literally. What dummy would throw good bread (especially when times are tough) into a lake or river? This is a metaphor! Solomon is recommending unlimited benevolence even in “tough” times as the next verse (11:2) plainly states. This was Paul’s plea to the Macedonians (2 Cor. 8:1ff). The motive for such giving is: “For you do not know what calamity shall be upon the earth.” “Freely you have received, freely give.” A time may come when the giver may need help; he may no longer be in a position to help others. The idea is to make friends now as insurance against the day the help of others will be needed (Luke 6:27-38; 16:9; 2 Cor. 8:1-24; 9:1-15). In the New Testament our Lord has promised that since he takes care of the needs of the sparrows and lilies of the field, he certainly can take care of us if we are willing to trust him and follow his lead in giving unlimitedly!

“Light” and “beholding the sun” refers to life on this earth. To remember that the days of darkness “will” be many does not refer to days of trouble on this earth—it refers to death (i.e., Sheol). Even though man may have to endure insensitive “rulers” and some troublesome circumstances without knowing when or why, “if a man lives many years let (“he ought to”) him rejoice in them all.” Solomon puts this suggestion as a duty—it is our duty to enjoy the few years we have on earth. The reason we should enjoy (see 9:8-9) is because they are relatively few. No matter how difficult life under the sun may be, or how sad the circumstances, our duty is still to enjoy just being alive, for the days come soon enough when we start toward the “sunset” of life on earth. When death comes all opportunities for joyful activities “under the sun” will cease. There are times, especially in the last years of life, when everything seems to be so useless, so helpless, so pointless and if we are not careful we will become cynical, depressed, and tired of living. That is when we need to remember the joys we’ve experienced in life—the satisfactions, the victories, the accomplishments. And those who are still young should heed Solomon’s admonition here (and in 9:8-9) that life is brief (two score and ten or by reason of strength perhaps 80+) and the

opportunities to enjoy what “enjoyments” life has to offer will cease. How can one “rejoice” in “all” his days? The best answer Solomon can give is: “Let your clothes be white all the time (be “clean” before God), and let not oil be lacking on your head. Enjoy life with the woman whom you love all the days of your fleeting life which he (God) 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.” (9:8-9). Most certainly, the Christian has much more motive for enjoying (in the Lord) the life given him “under the sun.” The Christian “rejoices” that God has allowed him to live and serve Christ who gives him a discipleship that counts for far more than any other thing on earth. The Christian labors and serves Christ for eternal purposes—whatever he does for Christ will last beyond this “life under the sun.” And that “is very far better” (Phil. 1:21-23). Jesus rolled back the “lid,” or “parted the curtains” and gave all mankind a glimpse of the status of the departed dead in his lesson on the “Rich Man & Lazarus” (Luke 16:19-31). There, the rich man who was insensitive to any mercy or kindness toward those in need was in “torments” while the oppressed believer was safe in “Abraham’s bosom”—both of them conscious of their circumstances. That’s about as far as human beings are allowed to go—limited to divine revelation on the subject.

Solomon pronounces “meaninglessness” upon youthfulness because many young people are frivolous, inane and naive about life—especially about how fragile human life is! Most young people never give a thought to their own death—they just assume death happens to everyone else. I have observed that even Christian young people—as holy and pure and believing as they are—seldom talk about or think about the stark reality that they might die tomorrow and go to meet their Maker. They presume they will all live on earth until they are 80 or 90 years of age. That is “vanity.” (Eccl. 8:6-8; 9:11-12). “For man does not know his time.” Also, many young people are so intensely focused on making a career, making a “fortune,” and/or rearing a family, they burden their lives with so many fretful plans and worries and “running hither and thither,” they have no time to really enjoy “life under the sun.” When Solomon advises the youth to “walk in the ways of your heart” he is not suggesting that a young person should live frivolously or profligately in the indulgences of the flesh—he warns, “But know that for all these things God will bring you into judgment.” Therefore, the young person is to “enjoy” life within the revealed will of God for God will one day scrutinize his manner of life at the great judgment! What Solomon is suggesting is the young person should not become so burdened with the mundane, so enslaved to greed, so wrapped up in pursuing the material things of life, that he does not take time to enjoy the more spiritual, more satisfying, fulfilling and character-building matters of life under the sun. Young people should especially pursue those matters which build character, integrity, usefulness, service for the Lord, and helpfulness to others while life lasts here—“for it is appointed for men to die once, and after that comes judgment” (Heb. 9:27). Young people should prepare in this life, while they are young, for the next life—this is not all the life there is—and no young person “has the power to retain the spirit, or authority over the day of death” (Eccl. 8:8). So, Solomon advises the young person to (a) “remove vexation (fretfulness); and (b) put away “evil from his flesh” (ASV). Solomon warns the youth that the era of “youthfulness” and “the dawn of life” soon pass away and that youthful capacity for enjoyment of the blessings of God are soon diminished with old age (or an untimely death). Therefore, the church today should make every effort to caution its young people to use their years of high-energy, great productiveness, and mental acuteness to godly-fulfilling and God-

serving ends. The years of youthful capabilities and opportunities fly past almost unobserved by one who is youthful—infirmary and incapacity comes suddenly and almost without warning!

I'm afraid Solomon is correct in 12:1-5! (I'm writing these lessons as an octogenarian, after quadruple by-pass heart surgery, emergency gall-bladder surgery, arthritis, fighting against diabetes, being treated for prostate cancer, debilitated with esophageal-reflux disease, and having had 34 heart-catheter procedures {balloon, roto-blade, 14 stents, and radio-active pellet treatments} during the years after my heart surgery. In addition, my wife and I, now retired, are on a "fixed-income" which is about half of what we formerly had available during working years—and every "senior citizen" knows that utilities, taxes, groceries, medicines and other "necessities" to exist keep increasing in price. Yes! Indeed! "Evil (hard, tough, trying—not wicked) days draw nigh when you (i.e., youth) will say, 'I have no pleasure in them.'" Young people must make every effort to enjoy godly capacities and opportunities during those years of health and vigor. But they must "remember their Creator in the days of their youth, before the "tough" times come. Above all else, young people must remember Who created them, why they were created, and to Whom they will one day answer at divine judgment! Graphically, Solomon uses the metaphor of a run-down, neglected house to illustrate the deterioration which comes upon the human body (and attitude) during old age. A catchy, religious song became popular some 50 years ago—entitled, "This Old House"—bemoaning this reality of life! "Trembling keepers" represent trembling hands and arms; "men of power, feeble and bent" represent the feeble and bent legs of old age; "the grinders which cease to grind" represent aged teeth which can no longer perform their proper function; "those that look out the windows to be darkened" represent the failing eye-sight of old age; "the doors to be shut in the streets" probably refer to the loss of hearing that comes with old age; "the old man rising to the bird's voice" represents the restless, light sleep and insomnia of old age; "the daughters of music brought low" refer to the organs of speech which wane and grow more and more inaudible with age. IT ALL GOES "DOWN HILL" AFTER 50!

The description of old age continues (12:5)—the aged are afraid of heights and cannot climb well, all sorts of "terrors" scare them wherever they go, the "almond tree blossoms in winter upon a leafless stem—its flowers, first pink, turn snowy white as they drop from the branches"—snowy, white hair is sometimes "becoming" but it also usually portends physical decay. The "grasshopper crawls along" describes the locust just hatched in early spring as yet has no wings, and makes its way clumsily and slowly. This crippled, dragging gait of the locust is an image of the stumbling, slow, painful walking of the aged and infirm. And the "caperberry shall fail." The "caperberry" was used as a stimulant of appetite in Solomon's day. It is used as a metaphor to describe the dying of physical and mental appetites as the human body ages. Bodily needs and mental functions are failing as life ebbs away. The aged no longer experience the desires and appetites of youth! James Smith states in his commentary on The Wisdom Literature & Psalms, concerning Eccl. 12:1: "Young people need to constantly remember who made them, and the purpose for which they were made. They were not put on this planet for self-gratification, not to gratify the passions of the flesh which are particularly strong in the time of youth. They were placed here to use their powers and enjoy in accordance with the laws of the Creator.

They are responsible to him for the use of the faculties and capacities with which they have been endowed. They need to acknowledge cheerfully that all they are and all they have come from God.” They also need to be admonished continually, by their elders, that what they now enjoy in youthfulness will soon “fall apart” like the dilapidated “house” in Solomon’s metaphor! It is difficult, if not almost impossible, to get youth to comprehend what Solomon is saying here, but the “senior citizens” (the aged) have it as an obligation to try to get them to comprehend what is ahead of them. Credit Harvey Bacus, one of my colleagues for many years at Ozark Christian College, for the following: “This conversation with God is attributed to an old Roman Catholic Mother Superior, A Prayer By One Getting Older: Lord, thou knowest better than I know myself that I am growing older, and will some day be old. Keep me from getting talkative, and particularly from the habit of thinking I must say something on every subject and on every occasion. Release me from craving to straighten out everybody’s affairs. Keep my mind free from the recital of endless details—give me the wings to get to the point. I ask for grace enough to listen to the tales of others’ pains. Help me to endure them with patience. But seal my lips on my own aches and pains—the are increasing and my love of rehearsing them is becoming sweeter as the years go by. Teach me the glorious lesson that occasionally it is possible that I may be mistaken. Keep me reasonably sweet: I don’t want to be a saint—some of them are so hard to live with—but a sour old woman is one of the crowning works of the devil. Make me thoughtful but not moody; helpful, but not bossy. With my vast store of wisdom, it seems a pity not to use it all—but thou knowest, Lord, that I want a few friends at the end. Amen.”

Man’s “eternal home” is with God in heaven (wherever that is). The Old Testament saints certainly did not have the bright “light”(revelation) about this “eternal home” we of the New Testament era have. Paul told Timothy that it was “Jesus Christ who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel” (2 Tim. 1:10). But the O.T. saints did have a “glimmer” of immortality with God. The statement made at the death of some of the patriarchs, “he breathed his last, and was gathered to his people” (Gen. 15:15; 25:8,17; 35:29; 49:29,33) clearly implies life beyond death. The O.T. saints were well aware of life in another dimension for they visited with, wrestled with, and talked with “angels” sent from the invisible God. The Hebrew words used in 12:5 are bayith olam which literally translated is, “home forever” signifying “a residence of unlimited time.” God spoke, audibly, to patriarchs (Adam and Eve, Noah, Abraham, Jacob, Moses) and prophets, as well as through angels. The O.T. saints knew there was a dimension of existence beyond this visible earth! They had the historical incident (passed down orally and in some form of writing to the patriarchs) of the “translation” of Enoch out of this existence into another (Gen. 5:21-24). The O.T. saints knew about “a resurrection” and “other existence.” The Sadducees (who didn’t believe in it) were informed by Jesus that they “knew neither the scriptures (O.T.) nor the power of God,” and that Jehovah was “not the God of the dead, but of the living” (Matt. 22:29-33). Clearly, Jesus said the “scriptures” (O.T.) taught life beyond this earthly existence and the Jews should have known it! Numerous prophets were given divine revelations (visions) of the life that exists beyond this world in what we call “theophanies” (visions of God on his throne sending angels to do his bidding) (see Isaiah ch. 6; Ezekiel chs. 1-3; Daniel ch. 7; Zechariah chs. 1-6, etc.). Even the “Gentiles” had inherited a concept of life beyond this earth. God manifested himself to numerous “Gentiles” (Nebuchadnezzar,

Belshazzar) and ancient Greek philosophers worshiped the “unknown God” (Acts 17). THEY KNEW! (See question 7 below). But how grateful Christians should be for the “life and immortality” brought to light through the Gospel (Phil. 1:21-23; 1 Cor. 15:1-58; 2 Cor. 5:1-21, etc.).

Solomon is repeating, for emphasis, the brevity and fragility of life “under the sun” because he is going to sum up the meaning of “life under the sun” in 12:7-14! The “silver cord” and “golden bowl” represent the lamp which hangs from the ceilings of Semitic (Hebrew) homes. They are metaphors illustrating that “life under the sun” is valuable and much to be desired—but fragile and subject to “snapped and broken.” The “light” of the bowl (lamp) will soon enough be extinguished because the “thread” by which it exists will “snap” and the “bowl (lamp) in which it is contained “under the sun” will be broken and the contents will vaporize into the air. The “pitcher” and the “wheel” broken at the cistern is the same metaphor. The rope is fastened to the “pitcher” and goes through the “wheel” at the well (cistern) and the life-sustaining water is drawn and consumed. But when the “wheel” breaks, the “pitcher” falls into the cistern and also breaks, and the necessities for life are unavailable. Life “under the sun” is extremely fragile and no one knows when the “cord will snap” or the “wheel will break.” They either “break” from wearing-out, or some flaw or accident causes them to be broken. Human life is at the mercy of its Creator (Eccl. 6:10-12). No matter how much he may apply his mind to know “wisdom” about life beyond that which is “under the sun” he cannot “find it out” (Eccl. 8:16-17). Even after 3000 years of “advancing” science, philosophy, psychology, education and humanly-constructed “religions,” man is still at a loss to know any more about life beyond this world than Solomon knew!!! So far as the “wisdom of this world” is able to discern (apart from the revelation of God in the Bible), “the fate of the sons of men and the fate of beasts is the same; as one dies, so dies the other...they all have the same breath, and man has no advantage over the beasts....all go to one place; all are from the dust, and all turn to dust again....who knows whether the spirit of man goes upward and the spirit of the beast goes down to the earth?” (Eccl. 3:16-22). No matter how swift, strong, wise, intelligent, or skillful, no human being knows his time (Eccl. 9:11-12). That is the perspective from “life under the sun.” THANK GOD, HE (GOD) CAME TO EARTH AS A HUMAN BEING, LIVED A PERFECT LIFE, DIED A VICARIOUS DEATH IN OUR PLACE, AND AROSE FROM THE DEAD IN A GLORIFIED BODY TO “BRING LIFE AND IMMORTALITY TO LIGHT THROUGH THE GOSPEL.” So, now we “ARE CONVINCED that one died for all, therefore all died...and he died for all, that those who live might live no longer for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised...for our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” (2 Cor. 5:14-21).

This is an important statement in the Old Testament. It unequivocally reveals that the O.T. is inspired from God and that God revealed, in a limited way, to the O.T. saints that although the “dust (body) returns to the earth as it was, the spirit returns to God who gave it.” Clearly, the O.T. believers had dim glimpses of eternal life in the spirit beyond this physical universe. Samuel recorded that “an evil spirit from the Lord tormented (King) Saul” (1 Sam. 16:14-15). King Saul was permitted to converse with Samuel after Samuel had died and gone to be with the Lord (1 Sam. 28:11-19). David believed he would be able after his death to “go to him” (his son born from the

illegitimate relationship he had with Bathsheba who had died at child-birth) but that the son could not come again to David (2 Sam. 12:23). Job believed he would see God (Job 19:25-27; 30:23). David believed the Lord would “redeem” the life of the believer “from the pit (grave)” (Psa. 103:4). There are many other such references in the Old Testament. As we stated earlier, even Nebuchadnezzar was convinced that he had seen an extra-terrestrial being (an angel) in the fiery furnace along with the three Hebrew young men he had thrown in to incinerate (Dan. 3:24-15). Isaiah saw angelic beings around the throne of God (Isa. 6) as did Ezekiel (Ezek. chs. 1-3) and Daniel saw one “like a son of man” (he saw the Messiah in human form) at the throne of God (Dan. 7:13-14). It wasn’t until the time of Jesus that God opened the heavens and allowed Peter, James and John (on the Mount of Transfiguration) see Moses and Elijah, in person, in the next dimension of existence (Matt. 17:1-8 and parallels, and 2 Pet. 1:16-21). **BUT THEY KNEW—THE O.T. BELIEVERS KNEW THAT GOD, SOMEHOW, TOOK BACK IN SPIRIT-FORM, THE LIFE OF EVERY PERSON DECEASED “UNDER THE SUN.”** R. C. Foster, the late and venerable president of Cincinnati Bible Seminary, once wrote an essay on everything the O.T. taught about life after death on earth. It was a masterpiece.

Solomon resolved his observations about the meaninglessness of “life under the sun” by (a) presenting his credentials to speak to the issue—he claims his words were “knowledge” which gave evidence of “wisdom”; (b) he claimed he had given public, practical proof of his abilities as a teacher of God’s word; (c) having gone to great lengths to research all his observations, taught and written them truthfully and in words that would be easy to understand. Solomon also resolved (a) to boldly claim divine inspiration the Shepherd (God) gave him when he prayed for it (1 Kings 3:3-15)—in other words he is claiming that what he has written in all his writings and what he has taught has been revealed from God by divine inspiration (2 Pet.1:19-21); (b) claiming his “wisdom” was to be accepted as “goads” (verbal prods to action) and “nails firmly fixed” (words that “nail” the hearer to something stationary as a “anchor” for the soul; (c) and warn against “studying” any of a multitude of “books” that go beyond (contrary to) the word of God as Solomon has taught. But the most important resolution made by Solomon about “life under the sun” is his statement: “The end of the matter; all has been heard. “Fear God and keep his commandments; for this is the whole (duty) of man.” We have put “duty” in parentheses because it is a word that is not in the original Hebrew text. Literally, the Hebrew text would read: “Fear God and keep his commandments for this is the whole of man.” That is precisely how the Septuagint (the Greek language version of the O.T.) translates the Hebrew text (it omits the word “duty”). What Solomon is saying in 12:13 is that keeping the commandment of God is much more than man’s “duty”—it is the essence of what constitutes man as God made him (or that for which God made man). Do the New Testament scriptures agree with this statement by Solomon? **INDEED, THEY DO!** Paul explains the doctrine succinctly in Romans 8:28-29. “God is working all things together for good for those who love him, who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he (Christ, the Son) might be the first-born among many brethren.” The “purpose” of God in Christ was to make it possible for sinful human beings to be “conformed to the image of God’s Son.” That was the “whole” predetermined (see Acts 2:23ff) plan of God—to make man “in his own image.” Since man listened to the deception of the devil and sinned against God, destroying the “purpose” for which

God made him, God sent his Son to redeem sinful man back to the purpose of making man “whole” by granting him the “divine nature” accomplished through the incarnated work of Christ (see Eph. 2:1-10; Titus 2:11-14; 2 Pet. 1:3-5). When Jesus was asked “What is the greatest commandment” he replied, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it, You shall love your neighbor as your self. On these two commandments depend all the law and the prophets.” (Matt. 22:37-40). Jesus also said, “If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. For what will it profit a man, if he gains the whole world and forfeits his life (i.e., himself)? Or what shall a man give in return for his life (i.e., himself)?” (Matt. 16:24-26). Paul wrote, “I appeal to you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your reasonable (logical) service. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind that you may prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.” (Rom. 12:1-2). SO, THE “WHOLE” OF MAN, i.e., THE QUINTESSENCE, THE CORE, EPITOME, NATURE, OR SUBSTANCE OF MAN IS TO KEEP GOD’S COMMANDMENTS—THAT IS WHAT HE WAS MADE FOR AND IN THAT HE EXISTS. John wrote, “For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments” (1 Jn. 5:3; see also John’s gospel, 14:15; 14:21; 14:23-24; 15:10). Apart from keeping God’s commandments, man does not exist—he is “dead” and will be “dead” forever unless he repents and begins to keep God’s commandments! Remember the parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15)? When he had left his father and went to the “far country” and wasted his inheritance and was living with the hogs, his father said he was “dead” and was not “alive” until he came to himself and came home in humble repentance and love for his father.

### Introduction to Paul T. Butler Th.D

Paul was born in Springfield Missouri and graduated from Conway High School prior to enlistment in the US Navy. He began serious bible study with correspondence courses from San Jose Bible College. He later enrolled in Ozark Bible College and acquired his Bachelor of Theology degree June of 1961. He received a Master of Biblical Literature degree from Ozark in May of 1973. He received a Doctorate of Theology from The Theological University of America in October of 1990.

Paul taught at Ozark Christian College from 1960 to 1997. He also served many years as registrar for the college.

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