

LESSONS IN ECCLESIASTES
There is no new thing under the sun
Gene Hawkins
INTRODUCTION

Solomon, the author of this book, was the second son born to David and Bathsheba. The first child, conceived out of wedlock while Uriah was still alive, was rejected by God and not permitted to live - II Samuel 11 and 12.

When Solomon was born, it is recorded that the Lord loved him and "called his name Jedidiah" - "the beloved of the Lord" - II Samuel 12:24, 25.

The Davidic Covenant of II Samuel seven, which promised the throne to the seed of David, was fulfilled primarily in Solomon. The beginning of his reign was ideal. God appeared unto him in Gibeon with the promise, "Ask what I shall give thee" - I Kings 3:5. Solomon referred to himself as "a little child" with no knowledge of "how to go out or come in," and requested wisdom to fulfill his responsibilities as king. God was so impressed that He not only gave him wisdom, but also gave him "riches, and honour: so that there shall not be any among the kings like unto thee all thy days" - I Kings 3:13.

Dark clouds began to hover over Solomon, after he became established, as we read of his love for "many strange women" - I Kings 11:1, 2. Nehemiah later used his actions as a warning to Israel. Though he was the most unique king in Israel, and loved by God, yet "outlandish women" (wanton of other nations) caused him to sin - Nehemiah 13:26.

Ecclesiastes is part of Solomon's own testimony; and with all his resources of wisdom, riches, and authority, he was able to prove by experience the futility of things which most men will never have the opportunity to try.

THE PREACHER'S WISDOM

Notes on Ecclesiastes

Gene Hawkins

"Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, vanity of vanities; all is vanity" Ecclesiastes 1:2.

So begins the partial autobiography of Solomon. "Vanity" is the overriding theme of this book, seeing that the word occurs thirty-eight times. It means to "chase after the wind." The key phrase is "under the sun." These expressions tell us the futility of natural man in the world.

Solomon was a man endowed with great riches and wisdom, yet all his experiences brought him to this one conclusion - "all is vanity and vexation of spirit" - 1:14.

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

These verses portray an unending circle of the laws of nature, and seemingly bring Solomon into a sense of monotony. Many today feel that they find God in the stars, or the trees, or the rocks of the mountains; but Solomon's observations did not seem to bring him any lasting fulfillment.

"All things are full of labour; man cannot utter it: the eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing. The thing that hath been, it is that which shall be; and that which is done is that which shall be done: and there is no new thing under the sun" - 1:8, 9.

We must bear in mind that Solomon is speaking from natural man's point of view. Herein we learn that man's desires are insatiable. In the last few years, man has reached out for all sorts of sensual literature, films, art, and music. The fact that these things have grown progressively worse is positive proof of Solomon's words, "The eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing" - 1:8. Not only so, but the above verses tell us that contrary to his teachings, the attitudes of men are not getting better. "There is no new thing under the sun" - 1:9. The fallen nature exhibited by Cain is still unchanged. Notice, too, that there is "no remembrance of former things" - 1:11. Man refuses to learn from the mistakes of those before, and the generation following will not be any wiser. The history of mankind is a proof of this.

The remainder of this chapter and chapter two relate how Solomon used his vast resources to see if he could find anything worthwhile. His first experiment was with natural wisdom. "And I gave my heart to seek and search out by wisdom concerning all things that are done under heaven: this sore travail hath God given to the sons of man to be exercised therewith" - 1:13.

Natural wisdom is termed "sore travail." The preacher further insists that God gave it to men to be exercised therewith. The word means "to afflict." So it has gone: man has been victimized by his own wisdom. He has succeeded in many of his dreams, but he has also added manifold problems to the world. His environment has become polluted by many inventions. He has made many breakthroughs in the field of medicine, only to find that various maladies with which he contends are the direct results of scientific developments. When death would provide a release, man has prolonged suffering by certain wonder drugs and machines. The problems have, undoubtedly, changed since Solomon's day; but the human race is still caught in the same whirlpool of despair. All his works are "vanity and vexation of spirit. That which is crooked cannot be made straight: and that which is wanting cannot be numbered" - 1:14, 15.

Solomon became so perplexed with his findings that he thought perhaps madness and folly should be weighed against wisdom. "And I gave my heart to know wisdom, and to know madness and folly" - 1:17. He concludes that this, too, is "vexation of spirit." Wisdom produces grief, and knowledge increases sorrow. There are many present-day examples which prove him to be correct.

"I said in mine heart, Go to now, I will prove thee with mirth, therefore enjoy pleasure: and, behold, this also is vanity" - 2:1.

Solomon's next avenue, in the pursuit of happiness, is that of pleasure. The wine, of verse three, he uses as a means to become "high" or to arrive at the peak of exhilaration without causing him to lose his senses. Today his "wine" has given way to drugs, but the purposes and results are the same. No matter how man tries to escape reality, he is dogged by heartache and misery.

As Solomon continued his search, he builded houses, planted vineyards, gardens, and orchards. He had pools of water and forests. He owned many servants and maidens. Among his possessions were "silver and gold, and the peculiar treasure of kings and of the provinces" - 2:8. He obtained singers and musical instruments of all sorts, and so realized that he was rather unique in his position. This man was able to do what the majority of men are not wealthy enough to do.

"So I was great, and increased more than all that were before me in Jerusalem: also my wisdom remained with me. And whatsoever mine eyes desired I kept not from them, I withheld not my heart from any joy; for my heart rejoiced in all my labour: and this was my portion of all my labour" - 2:9, 10. Notice further - "What can the man do that cometh after the king? Even that which hath been already done" - 2:12. Solomon tried it all, and he found that the results were "vanity and vexation of spirit, and there was no profit under the sun" - 2:11.

Let us point out that the gain of Solomon was not ill gotten. He did not have a guilty conscience to contend with. In I Kings twenty-one, we read how King Ahab coveted the possessions of Naboth, and finally murdered him in order to get what he wanted. He could not possibly have enjoyed his new found treasure because of the guilt which went with it. It was not so with Solomon. His riches were "the blessing of the Lord," which "maketh rich, and He addeth no sorrow with it" - Proverbs 10:22. If riches and wisdom in themselves could satisfy the longings of men, Solomon would have found complete fulfillment.

"And I turned myself to behold wisdom, and madness, and folly" - 2:12. Once again, Solomon contrasts wisdom and folly. "Madness" means "to boast, celebrate, or rage." "Folly" simply signifies "to be silly." In their quest to get away from the grind of the establishment, many young people have decided that they want no responsibility at all. Life should be one constant celebration, and should be spent in lighthearted fun and games. Imagine the chaos, if everyone felt this way. Solomon concedes that wisdom excels folly, as far as light excels darkness - 2:13.

"The wise man's eyes are in his head; but the fool walketh in darkness: and I myself perceived also that one event happeneth to them all" - 2:14. Perplexity continued to haunt Solomon, because he realized that death is no respecter of persons. He knew that his extraordinary wisdom was not going to keep him from that event - 2:15. Furthermore, he realized that neither he himself nor his wisdom would be remembered after his death. "There is no remembrance of the wise more than of the fool for ever" - 2:16. Therefore, he hated the natural life, because of the uncertainty of his accomplishments being remembered. He hated his labour because it would be left for another, and he was uncertain as to whether his successor would use it wisely or as a fool. Solomon knew human nature. History has borne out the truth of his words, even in our day. Former generations have made various discoveries and inventions which, rightly used, could be a boon to humanity. However, they have been misused, and man has paid the consequences.

The thought that all his labor might be in vain brought the king to despair - 2:20.

The next few verses of our chapter are Solomon's own testimony of a wise man increased with accomplishments. He is vexed by the fact that another is going to inherit these things. The king's days are filled with sorrow, travail, grief, and sleepless nights because of it.

His advice is that man should eat, drink, and enjoy his own labour while he can. At this point, he reaffirms the fact that he was in a better position to experiment along these lines than anyone - "Who can eat, or who else can hasten hereunto, more than I?" - 2:25.

Notice that Solomon emphasizes that the possessions of man are "from the hand of God" - 2:24.

All of the statements of 2:24-26 are connected, and apparently warrant the same conclusion:

"This also is vanity and vexation of spirit" - 2:26. This seems to be a very strange statement, because one would think that all that God gives to man would bring happiness. Israel learned this lesson. Compare Numbers 11:31-34. They insisted that God give them flesh to eat. He was entreated of them and sent quail. However, "while the flesh was yet between their teeth, ere it was chewed, the wrath of the Lord was kindled against the people, and the Lord smote the people with a very great plague" - Numbers 11:33. Even while they were enjoying the blessing of the answered prayer, they knew they would have been better off without it. There are times when the Lord gives in to our demands, but we find out by bitter experience that it is not the best way. Like Solomon, we realize such "blessings" can savor of "vanity and vexation of spirit," even though they are "from the hand of God."

Some of the gifts of God are recorded in 2:26. To the good man is given "wisdom, and knowledge, and joy." The sinner receives only travail, in that he is to gather and heap up for the righteous. In other words, God makes the flesh to serve those in whom He delights. The only reward of the sinner is "vanity and vexation of spirit."

"To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven" - 3:1.

By this we are informed of the varied times and seasons which befall all mankind. It seems that life is constantly changing, and men are unable to place their feet on solid ground.

There is "a time to be born, and a time to die" - 3:2. From the time one is born, death is inevitable. Men have tried to create life and to postpone death indefinitely. They have been unable to do so. God alone holds the secrets of life; and death marches on relentlessly, a most dreaded adversary.

The time of planting, and that of plucking up, follow. Although both of these seasons would appear to be very rewarding, such is not always the case. When the natural man plants, he invariably sows to his flesh. The harvest of corruption, agony, and heartache is anything but joyous. "Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting" - Galatians 6:7, 8.

The time of killing may seem strange to some; but it, too, has its place in God's overall program. Men have realized for a number of years that there must be a balance of nature. One animal preys on another, in order to sustain its own life. He, in turn, falls victim to another. This pattern continues in every species of life, in order that a balance may be obtained. One does not become completely extinct, neither does another dominate. Man himself has not been delivered from this cycle. We hate war; but we must admit that it has served to alleviate the world population explosion. Here the time of healing comes to the rescue to keep man from destroying himself. As futile as it may be, the nations today are acting as physicians trying to find the right prescription and avoid certain destruction.

The rest of Solomon's discourse follows the same pattern as the above examples. It is written in Hebrew poetry style, which rhymes thoughts rather than words. "A time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up; a time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance; a time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together; a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing; a time to get, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to cast away; a time to rend, and a time to sew; a time to keep silence, and a time to speak; a time to love, and a time to hate; a time of war, and a time of peace" - 3:3-8.

These verses show the adverse side of life contrasted with that of peace, prosperity, and accomplishment. Regardless of his attempts to preserve the good and abolish the bad, natural man is shut up to all these seasons and he must contend with Solomon's conclusion - "What profit hath he that worketh in that wherein he laboureth?" - 3:9.

We would like to note that all these happenings are applicable in our spiritual experience. There

is "a time to be born, and a time to die." This refers to our experience of the new birth. There comes a time, also, when we must realize that we have died to the world and its riches. We must also witness the death of our old nature. "But God forbid that I should glory, save in the Cross of the Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world" - Galatians 6:14.

There is "a time to plant, and a time to pluck up that which is planted" - 3:2. There is the day of the planting of God's Word in our hearts, and there is also the necessity of the harvest and plucking time. The parable of the sower, in Matthew thirteen, is not to be applied only to salvation. It refers to any truth in the Word of God. The heavenly Husbandman must prepare our hearts to receive of this good seed. Oftentimes, this means grievous crushing experiences in order to break up the clods of stubbornness and rebellion. When the good ground receives the Truth, there is always a bountiful harvest. God will not allow it to become dormant and rot. We would emphasize here that, without the planting of the seed, there can be no spiritual harvest.

Regardless of religious demonstration and pomp, only God's Word implanted and operating in our lives can produce the ninefold fruit of the Spirit.

The killing and breaking down, along with healing and building up, tell of God working in our hearts as the great Potter breaking our will and then constructing and moulding us as He sees fit. The times of weeping and mourning, as well as those of laughing and dancing, become very real to the Christian. We learn that both are very necessary to full development, and only by the adversity can we fully appreciate the glory.

There is "a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing" - 3:5. The statements of verses five and six are very closely related. They tell us of gathering and embracing, signifying acceptance and fellowship. We learn as we go on, that we cannot accept or gather every doctrine that comes along. Nor can we embrace or fellowship all who profess salvation. The fellowship of men is based on the truth they know. Even the newborn Christian finds fellowship with former friends and relatives of the world very limited, because they are on uncommon ground. There are varying degrees of fellowship among believers for exactly the same reason.

There is "a time to rend, and a time to sew" - 3:7. Oftentimes we would try to sew "new cloth on an old garment" - Mark 2:21. God's only alternative is to rend that which is of the flesh, and provide new creation garments which please Him.

The next season is profitable for all - "A time to keep silence, and a time to speak" - 3:7.

Sometimes, in our younger Christian experience, we were so zealous we did not have time to sit in silence and listen to the Voice of God. This is always a mistake. If we fail to keep silent at the right time, we will never have anything to give unto others.

There is "a time to love, and a time to hate" - 3:8. The word "love" is one of the most overused and misused words in modern society. In reality, those who do not know God do not know love, for "God is love." "Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love" - I John 4:7, 8. God also is a God who hates rebellion, sin, wickedness, and all traits of Satan and of the old creation. As men of God, we learn to look at things from His point of view; and, indeed, know the time to love and the time to hate.

The seasons of war and peace again express two necessary sides of our experience. We can only know the Lord as "a Man of war," as we follow Him into the hottest battle. Only then can the flag of peace and victory be raised. Hallelujah! All of these seasons are necessary to bring us to full growth and maturity. Had Solomon beheld these seasons from God's point of view, his conclusion would surely have been different. But, alas, let us notice more of his ponderings as he looked through eyes filled with perplexity.

The travail mentioned in verse ten refers back to 1:13, where we see that it is a product of the wisdom which God gave to man.

"He hath made every thing beautiful in His time" - 3:11. God created this world in all its beauty and perfection. Man has tried to search out the many mysteries of that creation. He has gone from the depths of the sea into the vast regions of outer space, but so far has only encountered more mystery. Solomon's opinion of man and his works is anything but complimentary. The doctor's prescription seems simple enough; but, though it has often been tried, it has never supplied man's deep need: "I know that there is no good in them, but for a man to rejoice, and to do good in his life. And also that every man should eat and drink, and enjoy the good of all his labour, it is the gift of God" - 3:12, 13.

"I know that, whatsoever God doeth, it shall be for ever: nothing can be put to it, nor any thing taken from it" - 3:14. Regardless of the searchings and rebellion of man, God is still God. He has all things under control. "That which hath been is now; and that which is to be hath already been" - 3:15. He will not be taken by surprise because of new developments.

As king, Solomon was not blind. He knew that wickedness prevailed in the high courts of judgment, and righteousness did not reign supreme in all verdicts. The only answer he had was that God will judge the righteous and the wicked. Ours also is a day of injustice; and, like Solomon, we must realize that God is the final Judge. During this age, the Candlestick Examiner is walking among the churches scrutinizing the lives of His saints. There is also coming the day of final judgment for the wicked.

"I said in mine heart concerning the estate of the sons of men, that God might manifest them, and that they might see that they themselves are beasts" - 3:18. In spirit, the preacher was a student of Paul who tells us that man without God is no better than an animal - Romans 1. Jude also agrees with this finding - Jude 10. According to Solomon, man and beast have the same breath. Both die and return to the dust. He hastens to point out that there is a difference in their spirits. That of the beast is synonymous with the life of its body, which "goeth downward to the earth" from whence it came - 3:21. The spirit of man "goeth upward" or "is ascending." In other words, the spirit of man is separated from his body in the day of death. Other Scripture tells us that the spirit of the believer goes to be with the Lord the moment it leaves the body. "To be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord" - II Corinthians 5:8. Wicked spirits are held captive awaiting the great white throne judgment.

In the last verse of this chapter, Solomon blasts a gaping hole in Satan's doctrine of reincarnation. The only portion man will enjoy on earth is now. He will not return "to see what shall be after him." "It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment" - Hebrews 9:27.

"So I returned, and considered all the oppressions that are done under the sun" - 4:1. The oppressor and the oppressed draw Solomon's attention here, and neither presents any advantage. The tears of the oppressed avail no comfort, and the power of the oppressor does not satisfy him. Solomon concludes that the dead are better off than the living - "Wherefore I praised the dead which are already dead more than the living which are yet alive. Yea, better is he than both they, which hath not yet been, who hath not seen the evil work that is done under the sun" - 4:2, 3.

Right works are next considered; and, though a Man is envied for his accomplishments, it only brings "vanity and vexation of spirit" - 4:4. The lazy fool, of verse five, is contrasted with the working man; and self-destruction is his end.

"Better is an handful with quietness, than both the hands full with travail and vexation of spirit" - 4:6. "Better is little with the fear of the Lord than great treasure and trouble therewith. Better is a dinner of herbs where love is, than a stalled ox and hatred therewith" - Proverbs 15:16, 17. In all these citations, Solomon insists that man is better off if he does not put too much emphasis on material possessions. Life in America is one of the greatest proofs of his statements here. Crime and unrest in our country are due in part to the lack of quietness in the home and family togetherness. Men have forsaken the fear of the Lord to trust in their own abilities. People have set their energies and ambitions on "getting ahead," and have thus sacrificed the real principles of love in family life.

The next four verses of our chapter point out the fact that man is a social creature and must have fellowship - 4:7-10. He cannot be satisfied alone. There is no end to his labor. Riches alone cannot fill the void within - 4:8. Solomon further tells us that even "two are better than one," and there is "reward for their labour" - 4:9. One can depend on the other if he falls; but woe to the one who tries to stand alone - 4:10. The warmth of fellowship is impossible for one person. Not only so, but he is wide open to the attack of enemies. "If one prevail against him, two shall withstand him" - 4:12. This verse takes away all hope of victory for the one who stands alone. There is strength in numbers. We must fear the Lord and be joined to Him. There can be no substitute for the bond of love and an atmosphere of peace in family life, plus the invaluable fellowship of the saints. We do well to pursue these principles of unity, even though it means sacrificing material wealth.

"Better is a poor and a wise child than an old and foolish king" - 4:13. Solomon terms himself "a little child" in I Kings 3:7. The "old and foolish king" is Solomon in his later years, after having

forsaken the Lord - I Kings 12:4. It seems his life was miserable; and, though a king, he was a prisoner. His kingdom also was affected, in that "he that is born in his kingdom becometh poor" - 4:14. "The second child," of 4:15, is undoubtedly Rehoboam who succeeded his father. Solomon apparently had no confidence in his ability to govern the people - "They also that come after shall not rejoice in him" - 4:16. History verified the hears of Solomon; for it was in the reign of Rehoboam that the nation of Israel was divided. Ten tribes followed Jeroboam, and only two remained in the camp of Judah - I Kings 12.

Go on sowing!

Though yet no life appears,

The seed is incorruptible;

'This working through the years.

Go on sowing!

Thou may'st not reaper be,

Yet with the reaper shall rejoice

Throughout eternity.

"Keep thy foot when thou goest to the house of God, and be more ready to hear, than to give the sacrifice of fools: for they consider not that they do evil" - 5:1.

What man was more qualified to write these words than Solomon! He had sidestepped the house of God in going to the temple of idols; and he knew the consequences. The exhortation - "be more ready to hear, than to give the sacrifice of fools (talking)" - does not mean that this man was an advocate of formality and absolute silence in the meetinghouse. In this chapter, Solomon instructs us concerning vows uttered before God; therefore, he says, "Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thine heart be hasty to utter any thing before God: for God is in heaven, and thou upon earth: therefore let thy words be few" - 5:2. Notice further, "When thou vowest a vow unto God, defer not to pay it; for He hath no pleasure in fools; pay that which thou hast vowed. Better is it that thou shouldst not now, than that thou shouldst vow and not pay. Suffer not thy mouth to cause thy flesh to sin" - 5:4-6. In all these statements, Solomon would have people to know the gravity and responsibility of making vows. Israel had been very rash with their mouths in the day that they put themselves under law. They positively asserted, "All that the Lord hath spoken we will do" - Exodus 19:8. They could in no wise pay that vow.

All of this is wonderfully instructive for us. Solomon declares, "A dream cometh through the multitude of business" - 5:3. If we purpose and make a commitment to God to yield to Him, we must realize that the fulfillment does not come through wishful thinking. There is a multitude of business that must be done before such dreams are fulfilled. Paul teaches this truth in all his writings. To obtain the dream of "rest," he says, "Let us labour therefore to enter into that rest" - Hebrews 4:11. The third chapter of Philippians lists more "dreams." To obtain "the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus," there is the business of counting all gain but refuse. To win Him, we must SUFFER "the loss of all things." To realize our dream of knowing Him, there is the business of fellowshiping His sufferings, "being made conformable unto His death." Further Paul says, "I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus. Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the Prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus" - Philippians 3:12-14. All of these words tell of the extreme and strenuous energy and the multitude of business required to obtain dreams of spiritual attainment. In other parts of the Scripture, we read of others: Joseph had a dream of reigning; but the business of suffering in prison must precede it. Jacob dreamed of the ladder which bridged the gulf between earth and heaven. That ladder was Christ, and signified that Jacob had access into all the heavenly riches of God. A multitude of business transpired in Jacob's life, before he learned to trust that ladder for his blessing rather than his own abilities. Such dreams are necessary to attainment; but Solomon issues caution as he says, "Neither say thou before the angel, that it was an error: wherefore should God be angry at thy voice, and destroy the work of thine hands?" - 5:6. Do not say, "I will yield my life to the Lord," and then declare it was an error when that vow is not kept. There is the possibility of premature physical death, when such a person vows a life of yieldedness to the Lord and then does not produce any fruit. "Every branch in Me that beareth not fruit He taketh away" - John 15:2.

"In the multitude of dreams and many words there are also divers vanities." Perhaps simple talk is not so cheap after all. Our best course of action is - "Fear thou God" - 5:7.

"If thou seest the oppression of the poor, and violent perverting of judgment and justice in a province, marvel not at the matter: for He that is higher than the highest regardeth; and there be higher than they" - 5:8.

This is a day of injustice, and often we are perplexed as to the happenings roundabout. Our attitude must be as Solomon instructs here that God is "higher than the highest," and He knows what is going on. Not only so but everyone, including the king, "is served by the field" regardless of who owns it. Man cannot eat his silver or all his abundance of goods. His only pleasure, outside of what he consumes, is looking at it - 5:11. In this day of fraud and shortages, God who is greater than all is able to bring forth the increase of the earth to sustain us, even though our goods may be violently taken away.

"The sleep of a labouring man is sweet, whether he eat little or much: but the abundance of the rich will not suffer him to sleep" - 5:12. This is a fact in our society. The rich are not content with their wealth, and much time is spent worrying about whether or not they are going to lose it. The sleep of the laborer is sweet, and he can rest with a good deal of satisfaction in his accomplishments. As Christians, our attitude is important. We must learn as Paul, "I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content" - Philippians 4:11.

Solomon continues his onslaught against riches, terming them "a sore evil" - 5:13. Such riches are kept; that is, hedged about with thorns or guarded to the hurt of the owners. Even though he begets a son who would be his heir, "those riches perish" and there is still "nothing in his hand." There are many cases in history, where the son "born with a silver spoon in his mouth" brought tremendous hurt to his parents. No wonder Solomon called great riches "a sore evil." He continues to insist that man can in no wise carry his wealth with him into eternity, and it is not going to comfort him in the day of sorrow and sickness - 5:17. He concludes that man's only reward is "to eat and to drink, and to enjoy the good of all his labour"; but he must realize that it "is the gift of God." Furthermore the preacher says that the only genuine reward of life is the joyous heart that only God can give. Man is not sustained by fond memories of the days of his natural life.

"There is an evil which I have seen under the sun, and it is common among men" - 6:1.

The richest man the world has ever known knew that all his "riches, wealth, and honour" came from God. He also knew that, though a man possessed all of this, it did not mean that he found pleasure in it - "God giveth him not power to eat thereof, but a stranger eateth it: this is vanity, and it is an evil disease" - 6:2. The description of the miseries of Solomon continue in verses four to six, as he asserts that long life is not the formula for finding satisfaction. He preaches that "an untimely birth" would be better than a long life. Though he has "not seen the sun, nor known any thing," yet he has "more rest" than the man who has lived two thousand years. Finally, Solomon reaffirms that ultimately "all go to one place"; namely, the grave.

"All the labour of man is for his mouth, and yet the appetite is not filled" - 6:7. Regardless of what provision is made for him, man is never satisfied with earthly goods. The wise is no better off than the fool. The poor or beggar, of verse eight, knows only "to walk before the living"; and, undoubtedly, signifies one who has the ability to help. But, as we noted, it is to no avail.

"Better is the sight of the eyes than the wandering of the desire" - 6:9. Advertisers have used this scheme for years. They have preyed upon man's imagination, or wandering desire, through the power of suggestion. They gain more by what they hide, than by what their victim's are able to see. Some firms have been accused of fraud, because they disclose only part of the facts.

Wicked men in every walk of life have used the principle outlined by Solomon to achieve their own desired results. By disclosing only a few choice morsels of a fact, they set off a chain reaction of imagination in the minds of men in order to discredit their enemy or to enhance their own image. The preacher labels this principle "vanity and vexation of spirit."

Verses ten through twelve of our chapter point out the futility of man. He cannot contend with God, and "many things that increase vanity" cannot better him. His life on earth is but "a shadow," and there is no guarantee of the future for those after him.

He erringly sought for banquets,
For feasting with meat and wine.

Nor reckoned, as did his father -

"Son, all that I have is thine. "

We, too, for the "things " go begging -

For "them " we so plead and pine.

How sweet - if this stayed our longing -
"Son, all that I have is thine. "
"Our " friends and "our" feasts would vanish
Those limits of "me" and "mine.
Instead - the sufficient Presence -
And, "All that I have is thine.

He waits, it may be, to bless us,
With wealth and with joys Divine -
To Say, "Thou art ever with Me,
And all that I have is thine. "
J. D. Smith

CHAPTER 7

"A good name is better than precious ointment" - 7:1. Today, as in Solomon's day, men strive for a good name. Many are very proud of their heritage, and have traced their family trees back for a number of generations. Others go to great lengths in order to make their name one of remembrance which will go down in history. Such things reflect the self-righteous pride and desires of men who refuse to acknowledge the total depravity of all flesh in the sight of God. The king's next statement, however, emphasizes the vanity of life even though a good name might be obtained.

"The day of death than the day of one's birth" - 7:1. If we stopped here we, like Solomon, would be most miserable; but this verse has a glorious spiritual application which opens the door into the inexhaustible riches of God's grace and hope. The good name for us to bear is that of "Christ" or "Christian." We can obtain this valued name, because we realize the day of death with Christ is better than the day of our natural birth. "Now if we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him" - Romans 6:8. No longer are we concerned with endless genealogies and living in the shadow of those gone before us. Rather, a new day has dawned; and we realize that there are living experiences and victories which we have in Him. We can shout with renewed hope and understanding: "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new. And all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to Himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation" - II Cor. 5:17, 18. Because of such positive statements as these, Christians realize that even physical death for them is not to be viewed as defeat and hopelessness. Like Paul, we understand that "to depart, and to be with Christ ... is far better" - Philippians 1:23.

The following eye-opening statements contain more Divine principles which are profitable for all mankind.

"It is better to go to the house of mourning, than to go to the house of feasting ... Sorrow is better than laughter ... The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning ... It is better to hear the rebuke of the wise, than for a man to hear the song of fools" - 7:2-5. The preacher here instructs us to be alert to reality, rather than trying to hide genuine problems behind empty laughter and lighthearted songs. Unrepentant men have deceived themselves into thinking that God is not concerned; but there is to be a day of reckoning. It is time to go into the house of mourning in true humility and repentance, recognizing their deep need, in order that God might pour grace out of His storehouse to make the heart better - 7:3. It is time "to hear the rebuke of the wise," or the one who gives forth the Truth of the Scriptures. Though it is painful to the flesh, it will produce eternal good within the heart which we could never have through "the song of fools" - 7:5. The emptiness of man's veil of laughter and mirth is "as the crackling of thorns under a pot ... this also is vanity" - 7:6.

"Surely oppression maketh a wise man mad; and a gift destroyeth the heart" - 7:7. The king was incensed at the oppression of his day, and if that oppression was caused by gifts or bribes it was even more devastating to his heart" - 7:7.

At this point he outlines a four-point plan of attitude that we are to maintain when we are oppressed:

1. "Better is the end of a thing than the beginning thereof" - 7:8. Regardless of the adversity, faith must reach beyond present conditions and lay hold of the positive assurance that the end will come. Job cried out in the midst of affliction, "He knoweth the way that I take: when He hath tried

me, I shall come forth as gold" - Job 23:10.

2. "The patient in spirit is better than the proud in spirit" - 7:8. Patience is an attitude of faith. Impatience always demands self-effort wherein man might glory in his own flesh. Faith rests quietly, knowing that patience must have her perfect work, "that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing" - James 1:4.

3. "Be not hasty in thy spirit to be angry" - 7:9. Solomon knew that the natural reaction to oppression is anger, but it solves nothing. "The wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God" - James 1:20. It is very important to us that we take all things from the hand of our Father rather than become angry with the instruments He is using in our behalf.

4. "Say not thou, What is the cause that the former days were better than these? for thou dost not enquire wisely concerning this" - 7:10. In the midst of calamity and oppression, due in part to his miserable comforters, Job cried out, "Oh that I were as in months past, as in the days when God preserved me" - Job 29:2. How he longed to return to the better days before his trial. Regardless of the adversity, we are admonished in various parts of the Scripture not to look back. Sometimes Christians bemoan the fact that we are not living in the "good old days." We do not see the miracles we once did, people are becoming more and more wicked in all walks of life, and there is not the response to the Word of God that was once manifest. As far as the eye can see, these things are perhaps so; but as with Job, God is doing an inward work in the lives of His saints, preparing them for something greater than man has ever seen. He is using manifold temptations, adversities, and oppressions to accomplish His purposes. His ways and times of deliverance do not always coincide with our ideas. We do well to forget those things which are behind, and try not to live on yesterday's experience. Let us look wisely with anticipation to those things which are before, and "press toward the mark for the Prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus" - Philippians 3:14.

"Wisdom is good with an inheritance: and by it there is profit to them that see the sun" - 7:11.

Wisdom now occupies the center of the stage, and Solomon's remarks concerning it reflect what our attitude should be in various situations of life.

The wisdom mentioned in our text is, undoubtedly, the same that is enlarged upon throughout Proverbs since it is defined as being profitable to those on the earth or "that see the sun."

Proverbs eight gives a detailed description of such wisdom, and it can apply to none other than Christ Himself. The wisdom of verse twelve in our present chapter is put on the same plane as money, both of which are defined as "a defense" or shadow - that which shall soon pass. This is true of natural wisdom, and is not to be confused with "the excellency of knowledge" or wisdom that "giveth life to them that have it." God intends that we should have such life-giving wisdom; but notice some instruction which goes with it. "Consider the work of God: for who can make that straight, which He hath made crooked? In the day of prosperity be joyful, but in the day of adversity consider: God also hath set the one over against the other, to the end that man should find nothing after him" - 7:13, 14. God ordains prosperity, but He is also responsible for the crooked paths of adversity. According to Solomon both are necessary, "that man should find nothing after him"; that is, God would have us to learn all the lessons of overcoming, that we should "come behind in no gift" - I Corinthians 1:7.

The following verses are filled with more outstanding lessons from the lips of wisdom: "All things have I seen in the days of my vanity: there is a just man that perisheth in his righteousness, and there is a wicked man that prolongeth his life in his wickedness" - 7:15. The preacher here simply states a fact of life. It seems from the natural point of view that the wicked are rewarded with long life, the righteous are not. Job complains of this apparent injustice, only to conclude that "the wicked is reserved to the day of destruction" - Job 21:7, 30. From statements like this we know that, regardless of what seems to be, wickedness is not more profitable than righteousness. Notice another pitfall though, which may not be so obvious to the casual observer. "Be not righteous over much." Jesus had the same message for the Pharisee of His day. Self-righteousness deprives men of the blessings of God. If a man is so self-righteous that he will not accept Christ as Savior, he will surely perish. If the believer maintains a self-righteous attitude, he is going to reap corruption insofar as spiritual increase is concerned. Solomon's query, "Why shouldst thou die before thy time?" is well taken. To again insure against the opposite extreme, our preacher exhorts, "Be not over much wicked, neither be thou foolish." The result of such conduct is premature death, and many have experienced violent untimely death because of excessive wickedness. Solomon stresses that men should take hold of this truth and fear God,

for this is the only way of deliverance from the tentacles of destruction - 7:18.

"Wisdom strengtheneth the wise more than ten mighty men which are in the city. For there is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not" - 7:19, 20. The life-giving wisdom of verse twelve is seen here supplying strength to the wise. This is to be contrasted with the mighty men within the city. Since Adam and Eve, men have tried to live by their own power and might. Upon finding themselves naked, this first couple turned to their own efforts to supply fig leaf aprons which expressed their futile attempt to obtain their own righteousness. Cain brought of the fruit of his labors and strength, but God refused it. Since then, men have trusted the power of morals, works, money, education, and various philosophies of positive thinking. They have tried to find solace inside the walls of organized religion; but Solomon is very emphatic as to why wisdom supplies the strength that the rest of these cannot. "For there is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not." Paul agrees by saying, "There is none righteous, no, not one. For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" - Romans 3:10, 23. Divine wisdom alone supplies needed strength to the wise, because he realizes his condition and knows that the grace of God is the only answer.

Consider another bit of wisdom which is very useful to the Christian. "Take no heed unto all words that are spoken; lest thou hear thy servant curse thee" - 7:21. We cannot heed all the fleshly criticism which we receive, lest we harbor ill feelings and jeopardize our own victory. Some criticism is constructive, but then it is not termed a curse. We all know the weakness of the flesh by our own experience, as "thou thyself likewise hast cursed others" - 7:22. It is more profitable for us if we consider the source of such fleshly outbursts against us and forget them. "All this have I proved by wisdom: I said, I will be wise; but it was far from me" - 7:23. Solomon had proven many things by wisdom, but the rest of our chapter describes some secrets which still eluded him. They were far off and exceeding deep. He wanted to know the reasons for certain things among which were the wickedness of folly, foolishness, and madness. In his search, he found a "woman, whose heart is snares and nets, and her hands as bands" - 7:26. Such a woman and her methods are described in Proverbs five and seven. This harlot is also revealed in Revelation seventeen and eighteen, as "Babylon, the Great," where she is judged and destroyed. There is but one escape from her, as Solomon testifies, and that is to please God. From the Proverbs we know this is done by staying close to Divine wisdom - Proverbs 7:4, 5. Paul teaches the same truth stating, "But without faith it is impossible to please Him" - Hebrews 11:6. Such faith "cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God" - Romans 10:17. Jesus said, "Ye shall know the Truth, and the Truth shall make you free" - John 8:32.

The rest of Solomon's searchings reveal very little that would be gratifying to him. According to 7:28, the "one man among a thousand" which he finds is apparently a treasure; but he cannot find one woman who manifests such desirable qualities. The king's multiple experiences with "outlandish women," undoubtedly, produced the prejudice which manifests itself here. Man's fall is considered next, for though "God hath made man upright" or straight as Adam was, "they have sought out many inventions" which means he has maliciously contrived warlike machines.

CHAPTER 8

"Who is as the wise man? and who knoweth the interpretation of a thing? A man's wisdom maketh his face to shine, and the boldness of his face shall be changed" - 8:1. This chapter is a continuation of the previous one, and Solomon points out the benefits and instruction of wisdom. In this verse we note that even a man's countenance reflects the wisdom and comprehension that are within. He does not wear a downcast expression, but the light of true wisdom shines out to others.

The king's next instruction concerns attitudes and actions that must be maintained toward the powers that be. "I counsel thee to keep the king's commandment, and that in regard of the oath of God" - 8:2. Regardless of whether or not we agree with his policies, we must be in subjection to the king as we would unto the oath of God; for "the powers that be are ordained of God" - Romans 13:1. Solomon insists that men are not to be "hasty to go out of his sight: stand not in an evil thing" - 8:3. Do not try to get out from under Divinely-appointed authority. Verse four goes so far as to say that men must not question the authority of the king. Our consolation is found in the next verse. "Whoso keepeth the commandment shall feel no evil thing." Men sometimes imagine that the laws are too stringent and deprive them of their rights. This is especially true today when we are faced with more and more government controls. However, we are admonished to realize

that God Himself controls these powers and will not let us suffer any evil thing; that is, God will let nothing deter our spiritual growth.

The following statements here are very important in view of the last days in which we live. "A wise man's heart discerneth both time and judgment" - 8:5. The word "judgment" means verdict, sentence, decree. Paul gives us the truth of this verse in I Thessalonians 5:1, 2 - "But of the times and the seasons, brethren, ye have no need that I write unto you. For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night." We know the times and seasons because of God's verdict or sentence or decree found in the Scriptures. The happenings of our day, whether they be the inequities of government, the outward wickedness of men, or the upheaval of the elements, are all given as signs. The full overcomers should be aware of these and conduct themselves accordingly.

Ignorance of these times and seasons is considered next by the preacher, and he tells us that great misery is come upon man because he does not understand the purposes which have been decreed. Not only so, but "who can tell him when it shall be?" - 8:7. We need not be perplexed nor discouraged when men refuse to heed the message of coming judgments.

By their actions, many wicked dictators have challenged Solomon's declaration - "Neither shall wickedness deliver those that are given to it" - 8:8. Adolf Hitler, acclaimed by some to be the "most evil man of all time," had this philosophy. "The idea of struggle is as old as life itself, for life is only preserved because other living things perish through struggle ... In this struggle the stronger, the more able win; while the less able, the weak, lose. Struggle is the father of all things ... It is not by the principles of humanity that man lives or is able to preserve himself above the animal world, but solely by means of the most brutal struggle ... If you do not fight for life, then life will never be won ... Whatever goal man has reached is due to his originality and brutality." (These words were taken from some of Hitler's speeches, and related by Alan Bullock in his book "Hitler - a Study in Tyranny").

Frank Gervasi says that Hitler despised democracy, and substituted for it the ideal of a master race. He envisaged a hierarchical class society with a godlike leader at the top, an aristocracy composed of the Nazi party leadership, a middle class formed by the Nazi rank and file, and a working class composed mainly of the subject peoples of conquered countries born to serve forever. In this new order, Christianity was to be eradicated as a Jewish racket designed to create weaklings. As found in Solomon's observations and borne out by history, such satanic ideas and actions can only lead to destruction - "There is a time wherein one man ruleth over another to his own hurt. And so I saw the wicked buried, who had come and gone from the place of the holy, and they were forgotten in the city where they had so done: this is also vanity" - 8:9, 10.

"Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil" - 8:11. A good part of the crime problem across America is due to the fact that men have not followed the advice of a very wise ruler. One recent report projected that seventeen murders would be prevented by one execution. Men's hearts are fully set in them to do evil because they have no fear of the consequences. Reduced sentences are often obtained on grounds of temporary insanity or by plea bargaining. Mistrials are declared because of some technicality which violated the defendants constitutional rights. The more time spent in court proceedings, the greater the chance that a sentence will never be delivered - let alone executed.

What should our attitude be? "Though a sinner do evil an hundred times, and his days be prolonged, yet surely I know that it shall be well with them that fear God, which fear before Him" - 8:12. We cannot change the entire system here on the earth, but we can continue to believe God for our own spiritual well-being. We can also rest assured that - "It shall not be well with the wicked, neither shall he prolong his days, which are as a shadow; because he feareth not before God" - 8:13. Though the wicked seem to have a long life, multiple years on earth are but a shadow as far as God is concerned.

"There is a vanity which is done upon the earth; that there be just men, unto whom it happeneth according to the work of the wicked; again, there be wicked men, to whom it happeneth according to the work of the righteous: I said that this also is vanity" - 8:14.

Solomon continues his exposition concerning the lives of the wicked and the righteous, and asserts that each receives the reward of the other. We, too, must realize that the things that happen to us or to those around us do not necessarily reflect the inward spiritual condition. Job emphatically and rightfully insisted that he had done nothing amiss when he was accused of

deserving his calamities because of wickedness on his part. When we view all this in the natural, these apparent injustices are vanity. Because of it, Solomon advises that man has "no better thing under the sun, than to eat, and to drink, and to be merry: for that shall abide with him of his labour all the days of his life, which God giveth him under the sun" - 8:15.

This chapter closes with the positive affirmation that man does not rest by day or night because of the business upon the earth. He is continually trying to ascertain the work of God, "yet he shall not find it; yea farther; though a wise man think to know it, yet shall he not be able to find it."

CHAPTER 9

"For all this I considered in my heart even to declare all this, that the righteous, and the wise, and their works, are in the hand of God" - 9:1.

This has always been true. Regardless of man's attempt at being righteous or accomplishing such works, only God can produce them. Paul declares, "We are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them" - Ephesians 2:10. By being in the hand of God, we can be molded according to His plan and accomplish that which He has purposed for us. We would like to notice at this point, however, that God does not necessarily need a godly vessel in order to accomplish His purposes and good works. Balaam was a false prophet, yet God overruled his attempts to curse, and made him speak marvelous truths concerning Israel and God - Numbers 23, 24.

Paul tells us in I Corinthians thirteen, that certain honorable works may be done; but, if the doer thereof is not motivated by Divine love, he is profited nothing. Let us be in the hand of the Potter that we might be profitable to Him and to others also.

The rest of our text contains more instruction for those who would walk by faith. "No man knoweth either love or hatred by all that is before them." Experiences, either good or bad, do not necessarily reflect God's love or hate for certain individuals. Job was a man who was perfect by God's own admission. His works of righteousness are also manifest, yet he suffered terrible calamities. His comforters instructed him time and again to mend his ways; and even Job called on God to name his transgressions and sins, and to declare why he was being counted as an enemy of God - Job 13:23-28.

Paul informs us of those who would preach Christ because of envy, strife, contention, or even to add to his afflictions. We do not read that God stopped these preachers, nor do we read of them being rewarded. Paul said only, "Christ is preached; and I therein do rejoice, yea, and will rejoice" - Philippians 1:15-18.

To the casual observer it would seem that Job was unrighteous and that God hated him. We might also think that judgment would fall on those preachers whose ministry was not motivated by love; but such is not the case. Solomon insists that "all things come alike to all: there is one event to the righteous, and to the wicked" - 9:2. The preacher agrees with many statements in the book of Job. The wicked are not judged, and the righteous are not always gifted with prosperity. Inevitably that one event, death, will happen to all. Bear in mind that Solomon's observations are from the natural point of view. Faith goes beyond and emphatically declares that "all things work together for good to them that love God." Like Job, we need never suffer in vain but rather realize that "whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth" or instructs - Hebrews 12:6. As Job learned experimental lessons in the "school of hard knocks," so also we may be instructed by the things which we suffer. There will be a day when God's love for the saints and His hatred of unrighteousness will be shown forth; but that time has not yet arrived. Until then, we are shut up to faith.

"There is an evil among all things that are done under the sun, that there is one event unto all" - 9:3. Until death comes, the preacher asserts that the heart of man is full of evil and madness.

The instruction is that, while one is alive, "there is hope"; after that there is nothing. His reward is gone and his memory is forgotten. "Also their love, and their hatred, and their envy, is now perished; neither have they any more a portion for ever in any thing that is done under the sun" - 9:4-6. This is a black picture to one without hope in Christ; but notice a glorious truth couched in verse four which outlines another principle of faith. "For to him that is joined to all the living there is hope: for a living dog is better than a dead lion." If we are joined to Christ, there is hope, for we are alive forevermore. But what does it mean that "a living dog is better than a dead lion"?

Matthew 15:21-28 interprets this riddle. This is the story of a woman of Canaan whose daughter was vexed with a devil. As the mother cried out to the "Son of David," her request was denied. However, hope was not gone. Jesus said, "It is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast

it to dogs." She said, "Truth, Lord: yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters' table." Jesus commended her great faith and granted her request. Notice, though, the place of humility she took. The "living dog," who realizes his weakness and his extreme need for grace, is far better than the self-sufficient lion who will perish because he does not learn the lesson - "When I am weak, then am I strong" - II Cor. 12:10. Without fail, Jesus always helped those who were needy dependent "dogs." For those strong open-mouth lions who need no physician, He could do nothing.

"Go thy way, eat thy bread with joy, and drink thy wine with a merry heart; for God now accepteth thy works" - 9:7. "Eat, drink, and be merry" seems to be the order of the day; but let us consider these next few statements which cannot be true unless we view them spiritually. According to the Scripture, the works of the natural man are inadequate and cannot be accepted by God. Cain tried to bring of his works, but they were refused. God has not changed His mind. The only works that He accepts are those in Christ. The white garments of verse eight can only be obtained by being washed in the blood of the Lamb. Garments of self-righteous whiteness were long ago found to be nothing but filthy rags. The ointment of consecration and the wine which produces joy, of verses seven and eight, can only come from the power of the Holy Ghost. The wife of verse nine is, undoubtedly, the same as the one mentioned in Proverbs 5:18-20. Here "the wife of thy youth" is contrasted with the strange woman. The former represents Divine Truth and Wisdom which are able to supply all the needs of those joined unto her. The latter speaks of satanic error and deception which would destroy those who trust her. From our youth, that is from the time we are born again, we are to be joined unto the Truth as unto a wife. Only then can we find our joyous portion in life and in our labors under the sun

"Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest" - 9:10. These instructions are profitable for all Christians, and New Testament Scriptures confirm them. Compare Colossians 3:23; Eph. 5:14-16; II Corinthians 6:2; John 9:4. There is but one time to yield to God, and that is now. When one goes to the grave, all opportunities are past. We find also that halfheartedness is despised. God wants those who are fully dedicated to His purposes. Consider some of the Old Testament worthies of faith who manifest this character. Abraham left his homeland to go into a foreign place simply because God told him to do it. Jacob, a man despised by many and labeled a thief, showed his high esteem for the blessings of God even in his so-called criminal actions. We never read that he was reprimanded by God because of his zeal to obtain the very choicest of blessings. Jacob appreciated the meaningful things according to God's standards, and years later God declared, "Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated" - Malachi 1:2, 3; Romans 9:13. Caleb was a man whose name signifies "wholehearted" or "dedicated", and his actions bore it out. Though all Israel rebelled against God and refused to take His blessings in Canaan, this man along with Joshua declared, "We are well able to overcome it" - Numbers 13:30. Caleb valued the land which God had chosen and believed God for it. Forty years later, this eighty-five year old soldier realized the desire of his heart, though the rest of his generation were buried in the wilderness. God showed His appreciation for Caleb. Job is another one who was tried severely but declared emphatically, "I have esteemed the words of His mouth more than my necessary food" - Job 23:12. David says, "I delight to do Thy will, O my God" - Psalm 40:8.

All of these men were dedicated to the perfect will of God. They did it with might in full consecration to Him. Yielding to God is a full time life-giving job, not a halfhearted sideline. Therefore, even seemingly insignificant jobs are to be done wholeheartedly as though they were being done for Him.

"I returned, and saw under the sun, that the race is not to the swift" - 9:11. This verse also contains principles of grace and faith which are related throughout the Scriptures. God has set many upon a racecourse, but we must learn by experience that our own ambitions and zeal do not constitute winning ways. Successful running is obtained only as we follow Scriptural training which is a way of lowliness and dependence upon Divine grace. It often means being shut up in seclusion, in order that we might learn of Him. God has instructed many of His runners in this manner. Moses was running along at high speed, filled with visions of liberating Israel from the bondage of the Egyptians as he killed one of the oppressors and hid him in the sand. He was stopped immediately in this endeavor, and God sent him to the backside of the desert for forty years. Here Israel's future leader and deliverer learned God's way of racing, as he ambled along behind a flock of sheep.

II Samuel eighteen contrasts two more runners. At this time Absalom, a rebellious son of King David, was leading a successful revolt against his father. Cushi was sent on the run to give David a full report of the battle after Absalom had been slain. Another fleetfooted young reporter by the name of Ahimaaz insisted that he, too, be allowed to run with a message to the king. Joab was finally persuaded, and the young man "ran by the way of the plain, and overran Cushi" - II Sam. 18:23. Upon his arrival at David's stronghold, he had this message, "All is well" - 18:28. When questioned as to the fate of Absalom, he had neither the wisdom nor the courage to declare the truth which he knew. Cushi, though arriving later, brought a message of full disclosure. The truth of it hurt David deeply, but it answered his questions and dispelled his anxiety as to the fate of the enemy of the king and his kingdom.

These two men are representative of two classes of ministers today. Ahimaaz tells of the novice whose zeal is not tempered with knowledge, and whose ministry is really not effectual though he apparently covers more ground than another. Cushi represents the one who is exercised in important delicate matters, and others are benefited by his ministry though it is sometimes exceedingly hard on the flesh.

The Apostle Paul is another one who illustrated the principles of successful running. In Acts 21:10, 11 the prophet Agabus revealed that Paul would be bound by the Jews and delivered to the Gentiles if he went to Jerusalem. Some tried to deter Paul at this time, but the apostle would not be dissuaded. Agabus' prophecy was not a new revelation to him - Acts 20:23, 24. Whether or not Paul knew at this time, that his prison cell was to be used as an office from which to publish this revelation of grace and preserve it to this present generation, we cannot say. Nor do we know the exact reasons for the actions of those with him. Perhaps they sought only to protect him from physical harm, or perhaps they felt that if he were imprisoned the Gospel would be bound. In any case, we know now that Paul did some of his most effectual running behind bars. We know also that he was in perfect harmony with God as he wrote to Timothy - "Be not thou therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me His prisoner" - II Timothy 1:8. He refused to give Rome credit for what had happened to him. God had ordained the path of Paul; and once again proved "the race is not to the swift," it is rather to the faithful.

"Nor the battle to the strong" - 9:11. As good soldiers, we are exhorted to learn that we "wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers" - Eph. 6:12. We are to take the whole armour of God and believe that the battle is the Lord's. Like David of old who took a very foolish weapon to fight the giant, we realize that God must fight the battle if it is to be won. There is no way we can win by our own power.

"Neither yet bread to the wise, nor yet riches to men of understanding, nor yet favour to men of skill; but time and chance happeneth to them all" - 9:11. All of the statements of verse eleven point out the futility of men's efforts. We have noticed some of God's ways which are completely foreign to men. He delights in using foolish things to confound the wise, and the weak to master the mighty. Solomon now emphasized that "time and chance happeneth to them all."

"For man also knoweth not his time: as the fishes that are taken in an evil net, and as the birds that are caught in the snare; so are the sons of men snared in an evil time, when it falleth suddenly upon them" - 9:12. Regardless

of man's physical endowments - his strength, riches, or intelligence - he cannot chart his own course. Though many try, it is impossible to prepare for the future. In our own country, insurance is the name of the game; and such companies hold more of the nation's money, perhaps, than other corporations. Men try to insure against any pitfall which might occur. We know, however, that sizable "nest eggs" have been wiped out in a relatively short period of time. Long term illnesses have eaten up rather large insurance policies, and more than one person has died penniless. This is not meant as a crusade against insurance; but despite all his strength and planning, man is shut up to time and chance. Though Christians, we are still on the earth; and we are subject to the same laws of destruction as anyone else. There is one difference, and that is - "The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord" - Psalm 37:23. Let us not try to plan our own lives, but rather agree with James - "If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that" - James 4:15. Solomon's instruction in Proverbs is also applicable here - "Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct thy paths" - Proverbs 3:5, 6.

"This wisdom have I seen also under the sun, and it seemed great unto me" - 9:13. The remaining verses of this chapter are an evaluation of response to true wisdom. The illustration of

verses fourteen to sixteen happened many times in Israel's history, because they were so often besieged by the enemy. We find varied ways of deliverance, some of which fit the situation described here. Solomon's point is that, though the deed is great, men are not appreciative. His father, David, had delivered the city of Keilah from the hand of the Philistines. These people then were prepared to deliver their hero into the hand of Saul in order to save themselves - I Samuel 23.

Paul and Barnabas had a similar experience in Acts fourteen. They had preached the Gospel, and the impotent man was healed. Some of the people there sought to worship the apostles as though they were gods. Paul and Barnabas barely restrained them; but a short time later these same people drew Paul out of the city and stoned him. From these accounts, we know that the flesh is never to be trusted. It always seeks its own, and does not care who suffers as a result. We need not be surprised at the attitude of men toward Divine wisdom. As the preacher says, "Wisdom is better than strength: nevertheless the poor man's wisdom is despised, and his words are not heard" - 9:16. The truth of this verse should surely be a comfort to us. The poor of our day are those who are weak in themselves and must find strength in Christ. They have learned by experience the statement: "Without Me ye can do nothing" - John 15:5. Paul wrote, "Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given" - Eph. 3:8. All of these Scriptures portray God's poor man; but, consider this, these are the men who possess Divine wisdom. In many cases as here noted, such wisdom may be despised and unheard; but Solomon quickly points out that all do not turn deaf ears to the Truth.

"The words of wise men are heard in quiet more than the cry of him that ruleth among fools" - 9:17. We need not make a fleshly spectacle of ourselves and try to create our own opportunities. "A man's gift maketh room for him" - Proverbs 18:16. Sometimes, in our zeal to defend the Truth and set all situations and all people right, we manifest anything but a quiet spirit. We must not take too much responsibility upon ourselves. "I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase" - I Cor. 3:6. When our attitudes show such quiet trust in the Word of God to be effective, our words of wisdom will be heard by those desiring the Truth. Such words in quiet are truly more valuable and effectual than the fleshly "cry of him that ruleth among fools."

"Wisdom is better than weapons of war: but one sinner destroyeth much good" - 9:18. Again Solomon rates wisdom higher or more valuable than anything he had experienced. Here such wisdom calls for diplomacy rather than war. The nations are convinced of this bit of wisdom but are also confronted with the latter statement of our text. Treaties are broken and peace agreements violated time and again, because of the sinful nature of men. The goodness of a peaceful coexistence is destroyed by the sinner, and the nations fear to trust one another. Only Jesus can bring about a Utopia, for only He has the wisdom and power to deal with wicked men. "Dead flies cause the ointment of the apothecary to send forth a stinking savour: so doth a little folly him that is in reputation for wisdom and honour" - 10:1.

Wisdom and folly are contrasted in much of this chapter, as Solomon points out the benefits of the one and the consequences of the other. The folly which is so detrimental to one's reputation is, undoubtedly, Solomon's own testimony. As the richest of the kings of Israel, he was in a place of honour; but his experiences with idolatrous women led him astray, and the latter years of his reign were in sharp contrast to the beginning of it. As we note from his writings throughout this book, Solomon was a very unhappy man. He had also lost the admiration and respect of his subjects - I Kings 12:4, 10, 11.

"A wise man's heart is at his right hand; but a fool's heart at his left" - 10:2. The right hand is symbolic of strength, while the left hand speaks of weakness. Solomon insists that a man's strength lies in a wise heart, which agrees with other like statements in his writings. On the other hand, the fool's heart will eventually manifest weakness and will fail him.

Furthermore, "He saith to every one that he is a fool" - 10:3. He declares this by his actions. We may wonder at times, how some so-called brilliant men could make such huge blunders; but such can happen to unregenerate men who have not the wisdom of God. Eventually their hearts will prove to be on their left hand, and they will fail and expose their foolish condition to everyone. The nations who reject the authority of God and try to solve their problems by their own ingenuity will ultimately reveal their foolish ways and will plunge the whole world into destruction.

"If the spirit of the ruler rise up against thee, leave not thy place; for yielding pacifieth great offences" - 10:4. The offense or fault spoken of here is apparently on the part of the ruler. Solomon, however, sets forth the principle of yielding to a ruler even though we may disagree

with certain of his policies. Today this principle is terribly violated. Men are seemingly convinced that rebellion is the only way to solve anything, and such rebellion is manifest at every level of authority.

In the last few years we have witnessed riots, labor strikes, war protests, and revolts against all levels of government, because men take things into their own hands and challenge those in authority. Demonstration is the order of the day; and if you do not like something then march in a parade, set up a picket line, or sit on the White House lawn until certain demands are met. While such tactics have apparently forced lawmakers to pass some legislation, they have also resulted in property damage and loss of human life; and we still have unrest and discontent. Striking labor unions have stifled entire cities for lengthy periods of time, only to discover that with higher wages and more "benefits" come higher prices for all consumers and fewer hours of working time. Some lose their jobs altogether, and assume that their only recourse is to stand in long welfare lines. This "right to dissent" has also been accompanied by violence and, in some areas, even terrorist activities.

Rebellion is not the answer to the ills of mankind, but the saints must contend with such things because we are IN the world. We do not, however, have to possess the rebellious attitudes OF the world. Praise God! We can put our affairs into His hand and trust Him to fight our battles and give us such things as are necessary. The Scriptures prove that He makes a way of escape where there is none. We will do well to follow Solomon's instruction to yield to those in authority which will pacify great offenses, and leave all our defense to our heavenly Father.

"There is an evil which I have seen under the sun, as an error which proceedeth from the ruler: Folly is set in great dignity, and the rich sit in low place" - 10:5, 6. The following verses set forth some of the "offenses" of verse four, which cause the possible rebellion. The ruler makes some unwise decisions and things are very much out of order. Folly is given a place of dignity or authority, and the rich or the qualified must take secondary places.

Solomon continues by saying, "I have seen servants upon horses, and princes walking as servants upon the earth" - 10:7. This is a very undesirable condition from the standpoint of governing people. The princes in authority should be those riding the horses of leadership. Instead, they have only the voice of a servant. Regardless of this situation, we do not read that Solomon gives license to rebel. His instruction of verse four still must be heeded.

The next few statements of our chapter connect closely with this situation and are profitable for us to consider, not only in the realm of government but in all areas of our lives. "He that diggeth a pit shall fall into it" - 10:8. This "pit" is simply a trap set for someone else. We have seen those who have been victimized by their own traps. Concerning those who are in authority but seek only their own welfare, we can rest assured that they will receive their just due. Likewise, to those who would unrighteously seek our hurt, God is in command. A good example of this is found in the book of Esther. Haman built a gallows on which to hang Mordecai the Jew; but that gallows was finally used for its builder, Haman.

"Whoso breaketh an hedge, a serpent shall bite him" - 10:8. The modern day term for breaking a hedge is "breaking and entering." The king would not have us to be ignorant. Though men may think they can "get away with it," the serpent will bite. Sin always has its consequence.

"Whoso removeth stones shall be hurt therewith" - 10:9. This perhaps refers to Deuteronomy 19:14 where Israel is forbidden to remove landmarks. Each tribe and family had a certain inheritance given by God, and it was not to be transferred to another. In the time of Elijah, Ahab the king of Israel insisted on having Naboth's vineyard and took necessary steps to obtain it. Though Naboth was killed and ownership was transferred to Ahab, this wicked king was indeed hurt therewith - I Kings 21:16-25.

"He that cleaveth wood shall be endangered thereby. If the iron be blunt, and he do not whet the edge, then must he put to more strength" - 10:9, 10. By experience, we can appreciate Solomon's illustration here. Chopping wood with a dull axe not only requires more power to do the job, but the danger of being injured by a flying stick is greatly increased. The king's illustration surely cannot be reduced to a mere lesson in chopping wood though. He actually sets forth a principle to guard against waste and extravagance. Whether or not he faced the problem of government waste, we do not know; but, undoubtedly, some type of problem caused Solomon to write as he does in this entire chapter which deals for the most part with rulers. We can apply this principle to our own government. We have been bombarded recently with editorials explaining the tremendous waste of taxpayers' dollars on programs which are completely outdated and have no

bearing on the welfare of the country. Some politicians are trying to stop such things, but we know that these problems can be traced to the greedy hearts of wicked men who seek only their own. We do want to point out that Solomon's sharp axe principle can have a very practical application in our personal experience. For example, certain unwise investments otherwise known as bargains can result in considerable waste, accompanied by severe headache and worry. Christians are sometimes caught in this trap because they are given more to their own ingenuity to make ends meet, than to believing God for their needs.

Contrariwise, there are those who feel they must have a lavish amount of financial power to get by. In their endeavors to increase such strength, men spend a good deal more than necessary to obtain a comfortable living. Not only so but, with more coming in, some have far overextended themselves and are deeper in debt now than when they made less money. It seems they have surely been endangered by chopping with a dull axe. Wise spending will reduce the demand for great financial strength. As the preacher states here, "Wisdom is profitable to direct." A good whetstone for both of these blunt axes is found in Philippians 4:19 - "But my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus." Bear in mind that Solomon's illustration here is a principle and can be applied not only to finance but to time, energy, physical strength, or any other "power shortage" which we may encounter.

"Surely the serpent will bite without enchantment; and a babbler is no better" - 10:11. The next few verses of our chapter contrast the words of the wise with that of the fool. In this verse, Solomon compares the words of the babbling to the unpredictable bite of the serpent. James also instructs us as to the devastating results of an unbridled tongue - James 3:6.

On the other hand, the words of the wise are grace. Such words will always be edifying to the hearers and profitable for ourselves, but notice that the lips of a fool will swallow up or destroy himself. The beginning of his words is foolishness. And, contrary to popular opinion, many words do not make things better. The end of his talk is "mischievous madness." The word "mischievous" means "evil, calamity, heavy, to spoil or to make good for nothing." The fool is the one who does not give forth truth but rather error, which always brings these results regardless of how innocent it seems to be. Such a man is always "full of words," but no one can learn anything from him. Furthermore, he cannot be instructed concerning "what shall be after him"; that is, eternal things - 10:14.

The next verse explores the labor of this same foolish one, and his works are no better than his words. Jesus described him thus, "If the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch" - Matthew 15:14. Solomon asserts that his followers are weary "because he knoweth not how to go to the city" - 10:15.

"Woe to thee, O land, when thy king is a child, and thy princes eat in the morning" - 10:16. Here again, Solomon blasts incompetence in government. Although men often criticize the rulers and feel they would be better off without them, some of the most despairing times in Israel's history came when "there was no king in Israel, but every man did that which was right in his own eyes" - Judges 17:6; 21:25. Government is necessary, but woe unto the subjects when the ruler is only a child in understanding rather than the son of a noble. The princes are a problem when they eat only in the morning. The inference here is that the rest of the time is spent in drunkenness and revelry, rather than eating in due season to obtain strength - 10:17. The results of such drunken leadership are slothfulness and, in turn, deterioration. Notice, also, that these same ills can happen in the spiritual realm. Paul says, "In malice be ye children, but in understanding be men" - I Cor. 14:20. In Ephesians 5:18 he says, "Be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit." We cannot fail to appropriate our place as mature sons of God if we want a strong spiritual house; nor can we be drunken on the wine of religion and the world, or our strength will fail. We will become dull and slothful, and our fleshly building will not stand the test.

"A feast is made for laughter, and wine maketh merry: but money answereth all things" - 10:19. This verse looks from a purely natural point of view and describes the response of natural man. His only satisfaction, which lasts but for a moment, comes from the feast or the wine which dulls his senses. The word "answereth" in the last phrase means "to eye, pay attention, respond."

"Money talks" is one modern day saying. Another is, "Everything has its price." But the Scripture says, "The love of money is the root of all evil" - I Timothy 6:10. Praise God! When our vision becomes filled with Christ, we respond to Him rather than to the temporal feasting, merrymaking, and monetary desires.

"Curse not the king, no not in thy thought; and curse not the rich in thy bedchamber: for a bird of

the air shall carry the voice, and that which hath wings shall tell the matter" - 10:20. Throughout this chapter, the king has acknowledged the incompetence of government; but here, he emphasizes again that we are not to curse the king or even think about doing it, because it will be known. From Paul's writings, we can understand why Solomon's exhortations must be heeded - "The powers that be are ordained of God" - Romans 13:1. In his first letter to Timothy, Paul declares that we are to pray "for kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty" - I Timothy 2:1-3. As Christians, we do well to refrain from the natural inclination of rebellion against those over us and realize that they are God's ministers for our benefit. "Cast thy bread upon the waters: for thou shalt find it after many days" - 11:1. Much more is expressed in this verse than the simple matter that, if we do good in our younger years, then when we are old we will be adequately rewarded. It combines with the next five verses to illustrate a beautiful sermon on faith. The bread portrays that which is frail and perishable. The natural conclusion is that, in the water, it would be quickly dissolved; or, at least, would be eaten by the fish. But faith soars far beyond that. Those who walk by faith reject these natural reasonings. We humans are very frail and perishable, and could in no wise survive on the waters of adversity in our own strength; but herein is the perfect basis for the manifestation of faith and the grace of God.

Our Father delights in doing those things which are contrary to the natural wisdom of men, in order that no flesh should glory in His Presence - I Cor. 1:27-29. Consider some Biblical examples of this. By faith the baby Moses was placed in the river, and we are amazed at the sovereignty of God in honoring that faith in preserving this fragile infant. Peter is another one who exemplifies such blind faith. Though often chided by some, because he ran out of faith and began to sink, Peter expressed more faith than the rest of the disciples by his willingness to step out of the boat. Not only so, but his faith in Jesus caused him to cry out unto the Master of the storm; and he knew the comfort and assurance of Jesus' strong arms which the others did not experience. He was indeed rewarded for casting his "bread upon the waters."

Solomon continues this sermon with the admonition to - "Give a portion to seven, and also to eight; for thou knowest not what evil shall be upon the earth" - 11:2. Such a principle is found throughout the Scriptures. The way to receive is to give: Proverbs 11:24, 25; II Cor. 9:6-10; Luke 6:38. Isaac proved these Scriptures in Genesis 26:19-33 as he dug a well and others insisted upon using it. Twice this happened, and twice he gave the well away. However, his reward was soon to follow. Not only did he receive another well, but the Lord appeared to him with promises to be coveted by any believer. Another well followed which Isaac called Beersheba - "The well of the oath." It represents the inexhaustible fathomless rivers of promised-blessings of God proceeding from the throne of grace.

The widow in Elijah's time also experienced the necessity of giving to sustain life - I Kings 17. She had only a handful of meal and a little oil. With that, she and her son would have their last bit of nourishment and die. Faith had a better plan - give what she had to Elijah. It worked. "The barrel of meal wasted not, neither did the cruse of oil fail" - 17:15, 16. We may have a parallel of this situation in our lives. We come to the point of utter frustration and despair, with no way out apparently. Satan would tell us that we are doomed. It is at such a time, however, that we are ready to accept the walk of faith rather than to walk by sight and circumstances.

Solomon's reason for the principle outlined in these verses is a simple one. "For thou knowest not what evil shall be upon the earth" - 11:2. As we have found before in these lessons, we cannot chart our own course. We do not know what experiences or pitfalls await us. The only safe way is to give everything to God and put the future in His hands. The walk of faith does not consist of one or two isolated experiences with God. Solomon's instruction is to be applied for an entire lifetime. The Macedonian saints portray this pattern as they first gave themselves unto God.

When this is done, He not only owns what we have but ourselves as well. We become His responsibility. We can rest with the assurance that He doeth "all things well" in our behalf.

"If the clouds be full of rain, they empty themselves upon the earth: and if the tree fall toward the south, or toward the north, in the place where the tree falleth, there it shall be" - 11:3. This verse tells us that faith does not dismiss the reality of genuine obstacles. It does not say, "The difficulty is all in the mind," or "Ignore it and it will go away." Faith realizes the gravity of men's needs and the adversity which he faces. If the clouds are full of rain, there is the certainty they will empty themselves upon the earth. If the wind blows, there is a very good chance a tree of calamity will fall across the path and remain there. Our next verse tells us though that, if faith does not lead,

nothing will be done.

"He that observeth the wind shall not sow; and he that regardeth the clouds shall not reap" - 11:4. If we view circumstances and wait for things to get better in order to yield to God, we will never yield. Sometimes people say, "When I get out of debt I will have enough money to start tithing," or "When I finish this job I will have time to be faithful to the meeting and yield my life to God." We must realize the urgency of yielding now. When the disciples were called we read, "Straightway they forsook their nets, and followed Him" - Mark 1:18. Some would-be followers were rebuked rather sharply, in Luke 9:59-62, because they did not follow this same pattern.

In I Kings 19:19, Elijah threw his mantle on Elisha, knowing that the young prophet was to be his successor. He also knew that Elisha must make his own decisions, thus the words, "Go back again: for what have I done to thee?" - 19:20. This young man had some things that he wanted to do before he gave his life to the Lord; but the next verse tells us that he put first things first. Not only did he make the decision to follow Elijah immediately; he also burned his bridges behind him, as he slew his oxen and "boiled their flesh with the instruments" - 19:21. He had made a total commitment to God. His days of plowing were finished. We, too, must learn that there is only one time to yield to the Lord and that is now, regardless of our personal desires and ambitions. Faith continues to preach in 11:5 - "As thou knowest not what is the way of the spirit, nor how the bones do grow in the womb of her that is with child: even so thou knowest not the works of God who maketh all." Who can explain the mysteries of the spirit world, or who can understand the miracle of a child as it is conceived and grows in its mother's womb? We know these things happen and we accept them, even though we cannot fully comprehend them. Just so operates faith. Ours is not always to know how or why, but simply to realize that "with God all things are possible" - Matthew 19:26. Instead of speculating on a future of adversity and calamity, faith says, "In the morning sow thy seed, and in the evening withhold not thine hand: for thou knowest not whether shall prosper, either this or that, or whether they both shall be alike good" - 11:6. When we have sown, even though we do not know the outcome, we may rest in hope. The results belong to God, and faith trusts Him to bring the prosperity.

"Truly the light is sweet, and a pleasant thing it is for the eyes to behold the sun: But if a man live many years, and rejoice in them all; yet let him remember the days of darkness; for they shall be many. All that cometh is vanity" - 11:7, 8. Natural man would love to have the sunshine of happiness and prosperity all his days, but this will never happen. Though he may rejoice in many things during his life on earth, Solomon says, "Let him remember the days of darkness; for they shall be many." In other words, let him remember that the darkness of gloom, despair, and grief will surely come upon him. Since the fall of Adam these results of sin have been in the world, and all earthlings must in a measure partake of them - Genesis 3:16-19. Solomon's conclusion of this state of affairs is again "vanity."

In view of these statements, he addresses his attention directly to the youth. The young person is instructed to enjoy life and let his heart be cheerful. The preacher also advises him of certain privileges as he says, "Walk in the ways of thine heart, and in the sight of thine eyes" - 11:9. This would seem to be the ideal situation for a young man; but Solomon issues a solemn warning in the remainder of this verse which tells us that, with the power of choice, goes responsibility also. Man was created to make a choice; but there is coming a day when he will be brought into judgment, or held accountable, for the decisions he makes.

The next verse is sound advice for anyone who desires a prosperous life. "Therefore remove sorrow (anger) from thy heart, and put away evil from thy flesh: for childhood and youth are vanity" - 11:10. Paul says, "He that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption" - Gal. 6:8. He also agrees with Solomon's advice to yield to the Lord while we are young. To Timothy the apostle wrote, "From a child thou hast known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus" - II Tim. 3:15. Again, "Let no man despise thy youth; but be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity" - I Tim. 4:12. The Scriptures record many others who, like Timothy, made godly decisions early in life.

Jacob was very insistent as a young man, that he have the best that God had to offer.

Moses refused Egypt's wealth and the throne when he was but a young man - "Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season" - Hebrews 11:25.

David experienced glorious times with the Lord, and won outstanding victories when he was still

a shepherd lad. Years later he wrote, "I have been young, and now am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread" - Psalm 37:25.

Samuel heard the Voice of God very early in life, and became one of the most outstanding leaders in Israel.

All of these examples prove the magnanimous profit of seeking the Lord early in life. We do not read that any of these men were disappointed. The preacher's statement, "Childhood and youth are vanity," can apply only to that one who rejects the wisdom expressed in these verses and persists in going his own way.

"Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them; while the sun, or the light, or the moon, or the stars, be not darkened, nor the clouds return after the rain" - 12:1, 2.

This chapter continues the thought of the previous one, wherein Solomon exhorts the youth. The young man is encouraged to remember his Creator now before the light and vibrant days of youth are clouded by the limitations and adversities of old age, wherein the aged find no pleasure in the things they once did.

The next five verses of our chapter define these golden age days, and they give a very poetic description of the aging physical body. "The keepers of the house" are the hands, which tremble with old age; while "the strong men" represent the back, which is bowed down and can no longer bear heavy burdens. "The grinders" which cease because they are few are the teeth, which can no longer operate as they once did. The dimness of the eyes is pictured by "those that look out" of the darkened windows. The "doors" shut in the streets speak of the mouth which refuses to open because the grinders are so few.

"He shall rise up at the voice of the bird" seems to indicate sleeplessness, which often accompanies old age. "The daughters of music" represent the vocal chords, which do not ring out the clear beautiful musical tones of yesteryear.

The fears which accompany these twilight years are many. There are fears of heights, because of the dangers of falling. The fears which "shall be in the way" tell us of the multitudinous anxieties which befall the aged, even in their routine ways.

Solomon continues this discourse by declaring that "the almond tree shall flourish." This is actually an indirect reference to death. We read in Numbers seventeen, that Aaron's rod budded and yielded almonds. This was a proof of God's choice for him to be the high priest. This rod which was "resurrected" is a type of the resurrection of Christ, which proved Divine acceptance of His offering and priesthood. So it is in the waning years of life. Man's thoughts turn to the flourishing almond tree of resurrection after death.

"The grasshopper shall be a burden." This tells of the declining strength of the frail human body, which cannot even bear the weight or the Activity of a grasshopper. Not only so, but "desire shall fail"; that is, there is no drive or motivation to accomplish anything. The reason is "because man goeth to his long home, and the mourners go about the streets." Here again his thoughts are filled with death, and it seems he is waiting for his time on earth to end.

Although many of these traits are true of humanity in general, the saints whose faith and confidence are in God look beyond natural circumstances. Instead of despair and perplexity, they have supernatural peace and contentment. In spirit they look beyond the shackles of mortality, and realize that it is "far better" to "depart, and to be with Christ" - Phil. 1:23. Fear and anxiety give way to hope, and they testify with Paul of final victory - II Timothy 4:6-8.

The preacher continues to point out the relentless march of death, as he considers "the silver cord" being loosed. This is the spinal cord which connects "the golden bowl," or the head, to the rest of the body. The pitcher "broken at the fountain" is the heart and associated arteries and veins, which distribute life to the various parts of the body.

The last item recorded in this catalog is "the wheel broken at the cistern." The word "Wheel" means "whirlwind," and thus speaks of all the various organs which combine to give breath to man. When all of these conditions come upon the human body and the last breath is taken, "then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it" - 12:7.

The natural conclusion of this is verse eight - "Vanity of vanities, saith the preacher; all is vanity."

"And moreover, because the preacher was wise, he still taught the people knowledge; yea, he gave good heed, and sought out, and set in order many proverbs. The preacher sought to find out acceptable words: and that which was written was upright, even words of truth" - 12:9, 10.

Solomon was a wise man, and taught the people what knowledge he had gained. He searched

out many instructions, and his writings are full of truth. We know that this man did not follow the example of all his teachings; nevertheless, truth is truth, and men are responsible when they hear it regardless of the channel through which it comes.

As stated here, "The words of the wise are as goads" - 12:11. Such words are meant to goad or provoke men to increase in spiritual things. Moreover, these words are "as nails fastened"; that is, they will establish us and give us a sure and solid foundation. Notice that such nails are "fastened by the masters of assemblies, which are given from one shepherd." The Shepherd is Christ, who has actually given both the nail and the masters or ministers of the assemblies. Solomon's next words are given as warnings or admonitions. "Of making many books there is no end; and much study is a weariness of the flesh" - 12:12. Both of these facts are a diversion to keep us from enjoying the instruction of verse eleven. There are countless books today, expressing the philosophies and theologies of men, which contradict the Scripture. At the same time, deep study of God's Word is hard on the flesh, as it takes a good deal of persistence and perseverance to reap its benefits.

So the preacher warns, it is not an easy road; but, if we fail to follow his advice, we will never reach the following conclusion - "Fear God, and keep His commandments" - 12:13. To fear God does not mean that we stand cringing before Him, but rather it is an attitude of reverence and submission. We bow to His complete authority, and agree with all of His working in our lives. This is the only way we will ever be able to "keep His commandments." "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them" - Eph. 2:10. "For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure" - Phil. 2:13. This Scriptural fear of God is our whole duty before God. When we are completely broken before Him and become like clay in the Potter's hand, our responsibility is ended. We are indeed His product or workmanship, and He can do whatsoever He will both in us and through us.

Lest we be deceived by outward appearances, the preacher writes, "For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil" - 12:14. Sometimes a good deal of emphasis is placed on works, but here we read that along with works the "secret" things are brought into judgment. Paul enlarges on this vital truth in Hebrews 4:12. The Word goes much deeper than the surface, and makes manifest the secret "thoughts and intents of the heart." According to I Corinthians thirteen, we can have a very right work and a very wrong motive. If we are not prompted by Divine Love, we are profited nothing. The Candlestick Examiner, who is constantly watching through the piercing eye of the Word, will reveal to us whether our works and motives be evil or whether they be good. When we have yielded to the operations of the Scriptures and have bowed completely to His will and judgment in our lives, we may look with anticipation to the time in which He will fulfill these words - "And, behold, I come quickly; and My reward is with Me, to give every man according as his work shall be" - Revelation 22:12.

Let us profit from Solomon's experiences, and take the advice of a man who knew whereof he spoke. It seems that God used Solomon, and his trial and error methods, to spare us a good deal of heartache. His advice will point us to the Source of a victorious Christian life.

TheEnd

MAKE ROOM IN ME

A longing fills my heart today,

A longing, Lord, for Thee.

My heart can find no resting place

Apart, dear Lord, from Thee.

If all the gifts that nature holds

Were poured into my life,

Still there would be an aching void

Filled only by Thy life.

Work deeply in this heart of mine;

The need I sorely feel.

Cleanse out all things unlike Thee, Lord,

Pour in Thy balm to heal

And by Thy Spirit's quickening power

Bring forth Thy life in me.

Subdue the efforts of my flesh
And give me victory.
O, let the new creation life
Be fully manifest
To triumph over nature's way
In every trying test.
Prepare the for Thy coming, Lord,
And by Thy fire refine,
Until my life shall daily show
The marks of grace Divine.
John Wright Follette

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