

The Pursuit of Achievement and Possessions Is Futile Without Christ

Please read acknowledgement note below.¹

**The words of the Teacher, son of David, king in Jerusalem:[2]
"Meaningless! Meaningless!" says the Teacher. "Utterly meaningless!
Everything is meaningless." [3] What does man gain from all his labor at
which he toils under the sun? Eccles. 1:1-3²**

This passage was written by a man who had it all. King Solomon. Yet we know that Solomon had turned his face from the face of God and followed after an idolatrous life. It looks like Solomon had a real passion for life (that's an understatement!). God had not told him to stifle his capacity for life - his ability to enjoy what God had given in his graciousness rather, the Lord had promised him that he would give more wealth and honor than any other king would ever have.³

Solomon's problem was that he presumed upon the gracious provisions of God. Key to understanding God's promise to Solomon was that there was a condition to his provisions of grace:

[10] The Lord was pleased that Solomon had asked for this. [11] So God said to him, "Since you have asked for this and not for long life or wealth for yourself, nor have asked for the death of your enemies but for discernment in administering justice, [12] I will do what you have asked. I will give you a wise and discerning heart, so that there will never have been anyone like you, nor will there ever be. [13] Moreover, I will give you what you have not asked for--both riches and honor--so that in your lifetime you will have no equal among kings. [14] And if you walk in my ways and obey my statutes and commands as David your father did, I will give you a long life." I Kings 3:10 - 14.

God not only made Solomon the wisest man on earth - ever - but he promised to make his life long. This might require a bit of explanation. The original means, of course, a long life - but the testimony of Abraham varied greatly from that of Jacob. Abraham died having lived a full and long life⁴ - Jacob at the age of 130 years said of his age that his days were "...few and evil... ." ⁵ We really need to grasp the theme of Ecclesiastes - that life without Christ is futile no matter how long one lives are but I anticipate the lesson.

¹ The basic outline, with some changes by me, is derived from the following internet site: <http://www.bible.org> from an outline by David Malick.

² All Passages are NIV unless otherwise noted.

³ Read I Kings 3:5 - 14.

⁴ Gen 25:8.

⁵ Compare Genesis 47:8-9 with Genesis 49:33.

A Great Vocation Is a Gift of God but Without Him it Is an Empty Pursuit.

What does man gain from all his labor at which he toils under the sun?
Eccles. 1:3

TWOT⁶ calls the usage of the original here (amal - pronounced aw-maw) the "dark side" of labor. Hard labor - intense labor for us engineers - is good and rewarding. From the perspective of a man who has turned his face from the face of God - it is empty. Compare this man with the man in Eccles. 3:12-13:

"I know that there is nothing better for men than to be happy and do good while they live. [13] That everyone may eat and drink, and find satisfaction in all his toil--this is the gift of God."

Same Hebrew word - it's just that now this man's vocation is associated as a gift of God. What a difference. It really behooves us to inspect our lives with regard to our vocation. Consider these points in light of Ecclesiastes:

- Every vocation we might embark on is a gift of (from) God.
- If we leave God out of our lives that job can easily become drudgery - we then face the "dark side of labor."
- We are to enter into our vocation asking the Lord for wisdom - as did Solomon.⁷
- We are to enter into our vocation with a "can-do" attitude - heartily as though the Lord was our supervisor and logistical support.⁸

We know that Solomon viewed labor differently in his life before his falling away for he said than that **"All hard work brings a profit, but mere talk leads only to poverty."**
Proverbs 14:23

We need to look at the phrase "under the sun." This concept is referred to in other passages in Ecclesiastes. It refers to this life in the "here and now" as compared to our

⁶ Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament. Vol II, Pg. 675.

⁷ 1 Kings 3:7-8 "Now, O LORD my God, you have made your servant king in place of my father David. But I am only a little child and do not know how to carry out my duties. [8] Your servant is here among the people you have chosen, a great people, too numerous to count or number. (NIV) Compare with Proverbs 16:3 "Commit thy works unto the LORD, and thy thoughts shall be established." (KJV)

⁸ Col. 3:23 Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men,

eternal existence with the Lord. Later on we will compare this phrase with the thought that the Lord is "above." But for now, consider that the phrase "under the sun" is life in the here and now and *may not* include acknowledgment that the Lord is sovereign now as well in eternity. I want to work on this idea later.

Life Can Be Monotonous Without the Lord.

What has been will be again, what has been done will be done again; there is nothing new under the sun. Eccles. 1:9

I am really tempted, especially Monday mornings to quote this verse. There are really times that I just do not want to go to work especially now that I am at so-called "retirement age." But that really is a fleshly attitude and I must confess it before my Lord. This whole section of Ecclesiastes - verses 4 through 11 tells another perspective that of a jaundiced or bitter heart. Lets look at the different categories of what I want to call cycles of living and learn an important lesson from it:

- Cycles of Generations - verse 4.
- Sunrise and Sunset - 5.
- The winds of the world that affect seasonal changes - 6.
- The cycle of river flowing into the ocean and evaporation and rain returning the water to the river - 7.

When viewed from the pure monotony of these cycles of life on earth one could, I suppose, ask "why must we have all this happening over and over again?" Of course, that would be a very silly and naive question. We know what the consequence would be if, say, the sun would stop rising and falling in its daily cycle. Yet we ask the question "why must I get up and go to work? I am so bored with my job." The fact is that without the Lord as master of our lives the most interesting and challenging of jobs can become drudgery. Any job with the Lord as its superintendent can be a vehicle of service to Him.

The Folly of Seeking Wisdom Without the Lord.

I devoted myself to study and to explore by wisdom all that is done under heaven. What a heavy burden God has laid on men! [14] I have seen all the things that are done under the sun; all of them are meaningless, a chasing after the wind. Eccles. 1:13-14

There is a contrast between the way Adam learned in Eden and how we in our sinful nature learn today. Adam was mankind's first scientist. The Lord would bring different animals to him and see what Adam's response would be.⁹ In Hebrews 2:5 - 8 the original for man's role to put all things under subjection has the connotation of putting things in order (not merely to "conquer"). This is *still* the role of man - even in his sinful state. Seeking

⁹ Read Gen 1:28; 2:15, 19, 20; Heb 2:5 - 8.

wisdom of natural things is still to be the role of man. The problem is that when this role is performed *without* the Lord it can become "chasing after the wind" as Solomon had learned in his folly. The empirical method that is referred to in 1:8 does not satisfy either the eyes nor the ears. David Malak's web-based outline says that there is no fulfillment in seeking wisdom from earth's perspective. Later on we will discover that it is only when we acknowledge the Lord in our quest for knowledge will we be fulfilled.¹⁰

The Folly of Preoccupation Without the Lord.

What follows is a list of preoccupations that Solomon tried without the Lord. We'll see his conclusions after the list.

- The preoccupation of worldly or frivolous enjoyment: the pursuit of pleasure. Eccles. 2:1-3
- The preoccupation accomplishment, projects,
- power,
- possessions,
- property. Eccles. 2: 4 - 8

All these wonderful preoccupations made for a very successful man. Listen to his commentary on his life:

I became greater by far than anyone in Jerusalem before me. In all this my wisdom stayed with me. Eccles. 2:9.

At no time did Solomon lose his keenness of mind - yet this man was able to abandon the Lord and faced the consequences of a life without the Lord - a life of folly and emptiness. His summation of his life without the Lord? Again, notice the phrase "under the sun."

Yet when I surveyed all that my hands had done and what I had toiled to achieve, everything was meaningless, a chasing after the wind; nothing was gained under the sun. Eccles. 2:11.

The challenge to us is this: can we say at the end of our lives that beyond the cyclical monotony of making a living and raising a family that we have brought honor to the Lord - that He has used us for His glory and that we will hear Him say "well done good and faithful servant."

¹⁰ See 2:26.