

He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the hearts of men; yet they cannot fathom what God has done from beginning to end. Eccles. 3:11.¹

We now come to the place in Ecclesiastes where Solomon has been struggling – how to reconcile the polarizing experiences of life - the good with the calamitous in view of the fact that there is a God. The age old question is this: if there is a God of love, how could he allow this (referring to a calamitous event) to happen? It seems that man can take from the hand of God the good things that He provides but when it comes to the bad things man accuses God of taking a vacation from His sovereignty and has allow the bad things in the world to happen.

This is especially in light of the horrible calamity of 9/11. I cannot even begin to imagine reconciling this event in light of the popular view that the world has of a god who really doesn't have complete sovereignty over the events that surround us all.

Ecclesiastes 3:11 is a wonderful statement set in the midst of the chaos of the sovereignty of man. We'll get to this verse later on.

Seasons of Events Often Are Polarized.

There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven: Eccles. 3:1

We live in a world of the consequences of sin. That is especially evident now. Men would rule with their own agenda - hidden or obvious motives – given these sinful actions it is not surprising that there are bad - even tragic events that dog the tracks of all men – both the victims and the perpetrators of evil actions. Then there are the tragedies that make no sense at all – so-called acts of God are an example of this – lives lost in violent weather such as tornados, hurricanes. All of these "times²" when viewed by the sovereignty of man are is a burden of work - much as a donkey would labor hard all day because of the will of his master – so man outside of Christ would incorrectly view these "times" as polarizing periods of events that many times make no sense to them.

Birth / Death	Planting / uprooting	Killing / Healing	Tearing down / building up	Weeping / Laughing	Mourning / dancing	Scatter- ing / gathering up
Embrac- ing / refraining	Search- ing / giving up	Keeping / trashing	Tearing / mending	Silence / speaking up	Loving / hating	War / peace

¹ All passages are NIV unless otherwise noted.

² *Heb* = eth (pron.. ayth) used in Gen 50:20 when Joseph referred to his brothers evil actions resulting in good that is brought to pass (KJV), accomplish (NIV), bring about (NAS) by the sovereign plan of God.

Notice that these contrasts cover much of the life of a man. Although some of these make sense others when we have to experience them ourselves really chafe. I'm really having a problem with the idea of growing old. There is so much left for me to do yet I know that time is running out for me – at 65 I really cannot think of myself as being old – yet some of the diseases of age are beginning to knock on my door. I still have a problem with a child having cancer, for example. A whole lifetime head of the child and yet here is this debilitating disease that is going to rob the child of what we consider a "normal" life.

This whole concept of frustration is echoed by Solomon where he makes refers to the "toil" of man when going through life with these "seasons" of polarizing events.

What does the worker gain from his toil? [10] I have seen the burden God has laid on men. Eccles. 3:9-10.

This passage isn't referring to a man who hates his job (although that's where Solomon is drawing his word-picture from - the job market) – this passage is connected to what preceded it – the cycles of living life "under the sun." When we view the "seasons" of living from our point of view we see frustration - a toilsome existence. When we view the "seasons" of living from God's point of view (make that from living our lives as believers in Christ) we see the sovereignty of God in view and can echo Joseph's commentary on his own life of travail and near death.

You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives. Genesis 50:20

From the viewpoint of man, Joseph should have been filled with hate toward his brothers but he was not. Why? Because Joseph understood the principle of God "symphonizing" his good "times" with the bad. Joseph certainly had cause for hatred but because he was in right relationship with his Lord he knew that all the good and bad had been brought together in agreement and now he was in a position to save not only the lives of the Egyptians over whom he had authority but now he could save his family. No wonder he wept loudly³ when he saw how things had come together for him and his family!

God's Sovereignty Makes a Symphony of Life.

What an absurd comment. Yet it is based on a passage found in chapter 7.

Consider the work of God: for who can make that straight, which he hath made crooked? [14] In the day of prosperity be joyful, but in the day of adversity consider: God also hath set the one over against the other, to the end that man should find nothing after him. Eccles. 7:13-14 (KJV).

Let's look at verse 13. Verse 13 refers to God's Eternal Decrees. Solomon states

³ Gen 45:1 - 3.

here that all of life's polar events are the "work" of God. So it isn't that some calamity took God by surprise or that He took His hand off the "steering wheel" of this world and *temporarily* things got out of control. No. It is all of the work of God. It might be good to review the doctrine of decrees that I have pulled out of my theology notes from days gone by. This time I have added some definitions – the bold text is the actual statement of God's Eternal Decrees. The italicized text were pulled out of my Random House Unabridged Electronic Dictionary. So here goes.

God's Eternal Decrees:

The decrees of God is His eternal, holy, wise and sovereign purpose, comprehending at once all things that ever were or will be –

in their causes, [*a person or thing that acts, happens, or exists in such a way that some specific thing happens as a result; the producer of an effect:*]

courses, [*the continuous passage or progress through time or a succession of stages:*]

conditions, [*a circumstance indispensable to some result; prerequisite; that on which something else is contingent: conditions of acceptance.]*

successions [*the coming of one person or thing after another in order, sequence, or in the course of events: many troubles in succession.*]

and **relations** – [*an existing connection; a significant association between or among things: the relation between cause and effect.*]

and *determining* their certain

futurition. [*persons or events that are to "happen" in the future*]

Actually I couldn't find "futurition" in my dictionary or, for that matter, *any* dictionary but when checking with Doctor John MacArthur and other theologians, they used the word in the sense that it is used in this definition.

Let's go back to verse 13. I would like to talk for a bit about the sovereignty of God. The sovereignty of God cannot be reversed "**...for who can make that straight, which he hath made crooked? ...**" I can remember many years ago I used to spend the weekends at my sister's place and had a girlfriend just a few miles down the road. Well, one day I was given the loan of my brother-in-law's '57 Pontiac – a really "hot" car. 0 to 60 in less than 6 seconds! Well, I was going to impress my girlfriend so upon picking her up I proceeded to "floor" it while going up a hill. To my horror at the top of this hill there was a dip *and* a sharp bend to the left! Well, I didn't keep it on the road, completely and caught a guy wire of a telephone pole on the rear bumper and it ended up at a crazy angle in mute - eloquent testimony of my foolish action. I didn't anticipate the bend in the road and paid the price in humiliation for my foolishness and having to report this whole event to my sister and her husband – not to mention that my girlfriend was definitely *not* impressed! Life is like that. There are times that God will put an bend in the road that we travel on and we end up in trouble – the whole point of my "confession" and Solomon's comment

here is that there *will* be sharp bends in our life's travel – we may go off the road and hit a guy wire, so to speak. It may not even be the result of our foolishness – God is still in control – it is *His work*. If I could have made that road straight I certainly would have but I couldn't and neither can we reverse the bad experiences in our own lives.

"...In the day of prosperity be joyful, but in the day of adversity consider: God also hath set the one over against the other, ..." (KJV).

The fact is that we only give half-hearted credit to God for His sovereign rule in our lives. If we are prosperous we give lip-service to God for His blessings – but when we fall on hard times or get really sick we won't blame God for "making" us sick but our knee-jerk response to whatever calamity has come into our lives is that somehow God has temporarily "lost control." Solomon states categorically that nothing can be further from the truth. Now let's get down to my absurd statement about the "symphony" of life. When the Septuagint translators were translating the Hebrew for our word "set" here in the text they used a form of the Greek word ***sumphOneo***. We get our word *symphony* from a related Greek word *symphOnia*. The whole sense of our text in Ecclesiastes is that our prosperous days are set over the evil days *in symphonic agreement*. It's up to us do adopt our life-view from God's point of view rather than ours.

God's Art Gallery of His Eternal Decrees.

He has made everything beautiful⁴ in its time. He has also set eternity in the hearts of men; yet they cannot fathom what God has done from beginning to end.
Eccles. 3:11.

Here is another word-picture to illustrate how God's Eternal Decrees mold life's prosperity and calamities into one. The word used here for "beautiful" is primarily used to describe the beauty or handsomeness of a person. Sarah was beautiful and Abraham feared that she would be taken by the pharaoh. Joseph was handsome as was Absalom, David's son. Jesus Christ, in a messianic passage (Psalm 45:2) is described as handsome. Maybe it's a stretch to apply the term "Art Gallery" to God's Eternal Decrees but I think it helps us understand how that from man's point of view the polar experiences of life can be frustrating but that when viewed from God's sovereignty everything that comes into our lives including the bad things can be a part of a beautiful tapestry that describes our life in Christ.

⁴ *Heb* = *yapheh* meaning to be beautiful, goodly, pleasant, well, fair, comely.