

Credit for basic outline for this series goes to David Malick, <http://www.bible.org>. I have been careful not to lift - even read much of his material because I wanted to convey my own thoughts on Ecclesiastes. However, every time I did read his material I noted that we both had the same idea about Solomon's basic theme in the book. However, I did lean heavily on his outline - and added some of mine to the following outline of today's lesson.

We have studied in earlier lessons that God has showered man with His goodness. This goodness is not to be an end unto itself as depicted in many of the shows in HGTV (although I do enjoy watching the program material) - rather the prosperity, health, spouse, family all come under the providential umbrella of God in order to provide an infrastructure for the *evangelism* of mankind.¹

I have emphasized much of the goodness of this life under the sun but in all fairness I should bring into focus the main theme of Ecclesiastes. Namely, that without the Lord Jesus Christ, all of these things are empty - futile. So in our next to last lesson in my on-going series of Old Testament survey, let me bring some of these negatives to the front of our thinking.

Preoccupation with one's Vocation is futile.

So I hated life, because the work that is done under the sun was grievous to me. All of it is meaningless, a chasing after the wind. Eccles. 2:17.²

What we have here is an unhealthy obsession with the job at the expense of family matters, and more importantly with the Lord. If we read the life of Solomon what stands out is his obsessive preoccupation with his job of being the greatest king on earth. Achievement is good - setting goals to be really good at our job is good - in fact it is recommended. What went wrong with Solomon was that he shoved his Lord in the background - he neglected his family through his adoption of the heathen practice of having a harem of wives and mistresses. All this was done under the guise of being a successful king. Is it any wonder that Solomon with all his greatness and preoccupation with being the greatest king on earth was detracted from the most important aspect of his job - including the Lord in his plans. This attitude was demonstrated when he married the Pharaoh's daughter.³ This was a common practice among the heathen to confirm and guarantee treaties between kingdoms - a practice strictly forbidden by the Lord.⁴ Notice Solomon's willingness to compromise in matters of idolatry also - not only did he sacrifice unto the Lord but he also burned incense in "high places" - a idolatrous practice that was prevalent in his kingdom. So we see in his own review of his life how his obsession with his job of being the greatest king in all the earth (1 King 10:23) really resulted in emptiness - futility.

¹ I infer this from Paul's message on Mars hill as found in Acts 17 and his comments in Romans 2.

² All passages are in NIV unless otherwise noted.

³ 1 King 3:1 - 3.

⁴ Exod 34:12 - 16. Although Egypt is not mentioned here it certainly applies, as Solomon surely knew.

Verse 18: Ultimately all the fruit of our labors go to someone else. Verse 19 looks at who will succeed the labors of our hands - our children, specifically. Not to invest time with the family in proper training of putting the Lord first in our lives can result in frustration. It was certainly true with Solomon for Rehoboam literally threw away the fruit of his dad's hands when he answered unwisely the people's request to "lighten up" on the taxes and conscription of their sons for work on the palace. Rehoboam took over control of Solomon's work and proceeded to completely mismanage it.

Preoccupation with one's wealth is futile.

The increase from the land is taken by all; the king himself profits from the fields. [10] Whoever loves money never has money enough; whoever loves wealth is never satisfied with his income. This too is meaningless. [11] As goods increase, so do those who consume them. And what benefit are they to the owner except to feast his eyes on them? [12] The sleep of a laborer is sweet, whether he eats little or much, but the abundance of a rich man permits him no sleep. Eccles. 5:9-12.

What we do with personal wealth is an important issue. Taken out of the context of the Lord's sovereignty, money or personal wealth becomes something that can take over the priorities of our lives. Interesting - did you catch the word "increase" (NIV) and "profit" (KJV)? Taxes! Boy, they had a problem with that issue back in Solomon's days - in fact that was one of the issues the people had with Rehoboam when he ascended the throne after Solomon's death.⁵ The problem comes when we become obsessed with our personal wealth. Remember the foolish farmer whose barns could not hold all the harvest?⁶ Wanting to have enough storage places (401K plans etc.) for one's wealth is not the issue - he had left God out of the picture - that was his folly.

We must remember that the issue is that we *not* forget the source of our personal wealth - God. So it was with Solomon and the rich farmer - they had forgotten the Lord in their pursuit of wealth and learned the hard way that the most valuable possession was the Lord rather than wealth He bestowed on them. Here is what the Lord said to the Hebrews:

When you have eaten and are satisfied, praise the LORD your God for the good land he has given you. [11] Be careful that you do not forget the LORD your God, failing to observe his commands, his laws and his decrees that I am giving you this day. [12] Otherwise, when you eat and are satisfied, when you build fine houses and settle down, [13] and when your herds and flocks grow large and your silver and gold increase and all you have is multiplied, [14] then your heart will become proud and you will forget the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. Deut. 8:10-14.

That was the issue then and still is the issue now - we must remember that we are stewards of *His* wealth. To ignore this principle is to head for certain futility.

⁵ 1 Kings 4:7; 12:1 - 4.

⁶ Luke 12:16 - 19.

Preoccupation with One's Education (Wisdom) If Futile.

For with much wisdom comes much sorrow; the more knowledge, the more grief. Eccles. 1:18.

Wisdom is better than weapons of war, but one sinner destroys much good.
Eccles. 9:18

Ok, I know - I am taking a little license with this point. But I think it is a worthwhile topic. Ever heard of the old New England term "Educated Fool?" There is a lot of truth in that term. The problem is that we can become so enamored with the pursuit of this world's knowledge that without Divine Viewpoint, we misapply what we think is superior knowledge to our own disadvantage. Along with wisdom comes the responsibility to manage it and to still - in spite of our wisdom - be able to interact with our peers and family. A good education does not make a successful man or woman. Much wisdom? Much sorrow. Much knowledge? Much grief. Well said, Solomon. Many Christian kids go off to college and become so involved with the education process that they forget the most important education process - that of gaining Divine Viewpoint and applying it to their lives.

The early church had a problem with Christians who abused their new-found knowledge of freedom from the Mosaic law claiming superior their knowledge allowed them to eat meat that had been offered to idols. Paul's comment about the misuse of knowledge applies here:

Now about food sacrificed to idols: We know that we all possess knowledge. Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up. [2] The man who thinks he knows something does not yet know as he ought to know. [3] But the man who loves God is known by God. 1 Cor. 8:1-3.

We need a little background here. The Corinthians *thought* they had the advantage of knowing that they were free from the regulations of the Mosaic law - which, indeed they were. However, the problem here was that the food involved in this issue had been sacrificed to idols - excellent food, by the way, but the practice of eating this meat which had not been properly bled was a real offense to some of the believers in the church. While it was permitted the issue was such a hot issue in the early church that the leaders in Jerusalem forbade the eating of this food.⁷ Paul brings in the important issue of knowledge that is misapplied in his coupling of knowledge with a proper relationship with the Lord - that of moderating knowledge with the Love of God, agape.

Preoccupation with Pleasure is Futile.

I thought in my heart, "Come now, I will test you with pleasure to find out what is good." But that also proved to be meaningless. Eccles. 2:1

We live in a hedonistic society. The Hedonism was taught by the Greek philosopher Epicurus. He taught that pleasure was the ultimate good in men and that every choice man were to make should be on the basis of whether it would bring pleasure. Much of our society is so aligned in

⁷ Acts 15:20, 29; 21:25.

thought. We live in a feel good society. Solomon tried pleasure and found it to be a futile pursuit. Here are some of the subjects that he dealt with in Ecclesiastes chapter 2:

Laughter is foolish - verse 2. Recreational drugs, in this case wine, was found to be meaningless (verse 3). Curious thought associated with Solomon's drinking of wine - that while he participated in getting drunk he claimed to have retained his wisdom. Really? Then we go on to Solomon's equivalent to a HGTV special - his hobby of gardening and landscaping (verses 4 - 6). Sorry, I couldn't resist that jab. His preoccupation with beautifying his palace gardens was quite obsessive, in my opinion. He did come to the conclusion that his efforts without the Lord had become quite an exercise in futility:

I denied myself nothing my eyes desired; I refused my heart no pleasure. My heart took delight in all my work, and this was the reward for all my labor. [11] 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. 2:10-11.

Finally, in verse 10 we read that Solomon was quite involved in visual stimulation - from art to probably the erotic - nothing was withheld from his eyes. Whatever his heart wanted to look at - he indulged in with tragic results - probably part of his involvement with having many wives and mistresses was the result of his addiction to visual stimulation. Certainly art was also although art in itself was not a problem - forgetting the beauty of the Lord was.⁸

Well, enough of this - I find it really quite tragic that a man so smart as Solomon could have been so duped with his preoccupations but are we any less prone to repeat these tragic bad choices. I think we need to be very careful when we do not get up on our soap box and point our fingers at the foolishness of Solomon when we ourselves are involved in the pursuits of this life at the expense of our own dedication to the Lord. It is so easy to get so wrapped up in the "good life" that we forget that it was the Lord who provided everything we hold dear.

Next, Lord willing we will wrap up this short series. I wish we could have taken a closer look at Ecclesiastes but perhaps we all have a better idea of where Solomon was coming from and can glean important truths from reading his argument against living life without the Lord. Next time we conclude with the topic of "The Futility of Life is Resolved in Jesus Christ." Hope to see you then.

⁸ Psalm 27:4.