

Ecclesiastes

Walk-thru

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**A Voice in the Wilderness
P.O.Box 9531
Spokane, WA 99209 USA**

www.a-voice.org

The unconventional punctuation styles you will see are related to the way these studies were originally intended for the e-mail audience, using plain text to keep file sizes smaller for bulk mailing; creatively 'formatting' with punctuation, for various kinds of emphases, in the absence of formatting the actual type. You may find occasional misspellings, and the more rare cases of a Scripture reference going to a wrong passage; those will be 'typos', not intentional. With this type of POD (Print On Demand) publishing, it seems simplest, and the most prudent use of time, to not completely go through and revamp everything, but to just leave things as they are. Please accept this book, warts and all; but rather, please pay attention to, and receive God's Truth presented herein.

Ecclesiastes

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Vanity of Vanities (*Ecclesiastes 1*)

"Vanity of vanities, says the preacher, vanity of vanities! All is vanity. What is the profit to a man in all his labor which he labors under the sun?" (vs2-3)

reflection about the "woman whose heart is snares and nets" and in seeking out good people, that of men he had found one in a thousand, but "a woman among all those I have not found". (7:26-28)

Just as Paul exhorts the believer to keep "spirit, soul and body" pure before God, in the same order we find Psalms, Proverbs and Ecclesiastes. And this was the revelation as I was just now sitting down to this:

- ?? Psalms is for the spirit
- ?? Proverbs is to the soul
- ?? Ecclesiastes is about the body

And so, as the "preacher" reflects on humanity of "dust" (Ps103:14): It is all vanity. Vanity, not like one thinks of what they used to call a "vanity mirror", where a person could prop themselves up to look at themselves, dabbing here, tweezing there, poking someplace else, smoothing, ruffling, painting on, wiping off; because they were "vain" about what they hoped was their superior 'appearance' before others. But 'vanity', because while the person -thinks- they look "so fine", it is only skin-deep; and in reality they are nothing. All that 'war-paint' is actually worthless.

Dust: one sees some on the furniture, goes "Phooo!", and it's gone. "What is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away." (Ja4:14) Watch steam coming out of a kettle: you see it coming out of the spout, and then a foot or two away, and you no longer see it. Those water molecules still exist, but they are no longer visible. Same with man-of-dust...for a moment you see him; and the next, "Poof!", he's gone. Although, in the realm of the spirit and soul, we know he still exists wherever God has ushered him.

But this book is about the 'body'.

The word "vanity" (vs2) is related to "profit" (vs3) The word "vanity" has to do with 'worthlessness'. Futility: What's the use?! And the way vs3 is worded, the question is asked (what is the profit?), with the assumed answer, "Nothing!"

Man! Solomon sure had some "self-esteem" issues, eh! Quick, call the 'counselor'!!! Well...not so quick. He's going to give the "conclusion of the whole matter" at the end: "Fear God, and keep His commandments; for this is for every man. For God will bring every work into judgment, including every secret thing, whether good or evil." (12:13-14)

But man's existence on this earth is "under the sun". God set up creation to where earth orbits the sun, and derives its energy from it. And thus, it could be said that man's physical existence is dependent upon the sun. People are born, and they die. But the earth "stands perpetually". (vs4)

This is one of those verses that, if you've ever heard Jack Van Impi, he derives his notion of the "8th day" teaching of this earth remaining "forever and ever and ever" (he doesn't believe it will be "burned up" 2Pet3:10) from an unfortunate rendition of words here (along with other similar cases e.g. Ge9:16, 17:7-8, Is45:17, Eph3:21). All the other translations say the earth stands "for ever". And "forever" certainly means "without end". But that's not what this passage is teaching; and the Hebrew word has many shadings of meanings, including "forever", but also as the VW-edition says, "perpetually". (And Scripture agrees with Scripture) Man comes and goes, but the earth continues on. The earth keeps rotating on its axis, orbiting the sun, like clockwork, year-in, year-out... on-and-on; and man's existence on it is fleeting. The earth David lived on is the 'same' earth we live on 3000 years later. Where are David's bones? Who knows. Perhaps by now some of the molecules that made up his body, by the time the dust has been blowing around the earth, maybe some are in N.America by now? Who knows. But the same earth keeps spinning and spinning and spinning.

The winds keep swirling around, the same air Noah breathed 5000 years ago, keeps blowing around the globe today; the jet stream swirls north and back south, on its path towards the east, and circuits round and round. Rivers keep flowing, those water molecules evaporate into the air and come back down as rain and snow. The same water that flooded the earth in Noah's day, today splashes on the coastlines of the continents.

Today's 'western' societies are -newly- embracing the ancient gods Ra and Isis (like the bumper sticker I see around here, "Isis, Isis/ Ra, Ra, Ra"), they come up with what they presume are 'new' ideas of immorality. In this country the concept of "gayness" is as though it is pounding a 'new' path to universality. Ra and Isis were from Egypt millennia ago, and Sodom and Gomorrah were characterized by open perversity and were destroyed. Nothing new. Technology experiments with cross-breeding of animal forms, thinking they are breaking new ground; and yet, if we can assume that mythology, when a person travels back far enough, is often based on past realities, we might assume they already had cross-mutated forms way-back-when. "It has already been in the days of antiquity, which were before us" (vs10) But as generations come and go, "there is no remembrance of former things" (vs11a) While there is mythology that 'suggests' such things, there is no documentation as to 'how' they might have done it. Today is called the "information" age. And yet, if things were to continue as they are, a day would come when even today's technology and vast databanks of information would find "no remembrance of following things of what will be" (vs11b)

Man's existence has always been comprised of "labors under the sun". (vs3b) God promised Adam, "In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread till you return to the ground, for out of it you have been taken; for dust you are, and to dust you shall return." (Ge3:19) We can talk of 'spiritual' things, and of man having a 'soul'...but his existence on this earth is to feed and

cloth his 'body'. That's what he thinks about most. And that requires "labor".

But even if a person seeks to rise above just the -physical-, and strives after wisdom, Solomon concludes that even that is "striving of spirit". Later we'll see more...but when a wise man dies, of what benefit was all his wisdom?

And of what does wisdom consist? A person who is wise, understands better the "grief" and "sorrow" that exists (vs18), that it is "madness" and "folly" (vs17) We might think of a policeman knowing more than the average citizen; but 'what' is it he knows? That body trapped in the car wreckage. The corpse found at the scene of the murder; as he also hears all the testimony and comments of witnesses....things he would not tell his children at home for their bed-time 'stories'.

And when the person dies...what happens to all their wisdom? Who notices?

This is the basic gist of the book. The following chapters address more specific issues. But the basic thrust is of the futility of life on this earth, as mankind is born, and dies. And existence is full of labor. We mentioned the equation of man and animals. If one observes many animal species, one notices how much they 'labor' to exist. They are "busied with" (vs13) flying back and forth, full-tilt, with single beaks full of food for their young in the nest, who are voraciously hungry, waiting... this they do all day long. In the evening they preen, and sleep through the night, to begin it all over the next day. Then, you see their dead body lying on the ground, for whatever cause; pick them up and throw them in the garbage. Gone. Man has it a little easier...but the end result is the same.

This is looking at man's existence as 'body'. Full of striving. But for man God has something better than for mere animals. One of the ways in which man surpasses animals is in the 'spiritual'. As Jesus taught:

"Therefore do not be anxious, saying, What shall we eat? or What shall we drink? or What shall we wear? (all: things for the 'body') For after all these things the Gentiles (unbelievers) seek. For your Heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you. Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble." (Mt6:31-34)

As we see this 'trilogy', notice the relative emphases God places on each aspect. Psalms has 150 chapters, and even though many of the chapters are short, the entire book contains more words than any of the other books. Proverbs is next, at 31 chapters. And Ecclesiastes comes last, at 12 chapters. Man is always busy looking at his physical existence, but Scripture gives the least amount of attention to that. But that which is most

important, God, and man's relationship to Him, man gives the least attention. However, if I were to guess, I would suspect people tend to read the Psalms more, Proverbs less, and Ecclesiastes the least. And perhaps that is as it should be?

But Ecclesiastes -is- included. Perhaps its purpose is so that we don't get bigger heads than we already have, to help us to "not think more highly of [ourselves] than [we] ought to think" (Rom12:3) To realize that, in spite of society's efforts to boost everyone's self-esteem; in reality, we are 'nothing'....without God. We don't need -self- esteem, but we need to "esteem the reproach of Christ greater riches than" the world. (Heb11:26)

Out of the Heart (*Ecclesiastes 2*)

"I said in my heart, Come now, I will test you...." (vs1)

For most of my life I've been a people-watcher. Back in college, to sit someplace while taking a time out between classes and studies, watching others milling about. Sit having lunch at a mall, watching people doing this and that. Go to the park on a holiday and watch people interacting. Sit someplace, eyes closed, listen to the sound of children playing. When I was younger I used to also daydream, wondering about this and that: thinking about doing "experiments" on people, to see what effect certain things would have. e.g. How much liquor would it take to make a person act this way, or that... etc. Well, actually, those experiments have already been done, haven't they. And in real life we see the results regularly. When I was young I didn't know that. But when we read, isn't the book of Job actually the record of one big "experiment". Satan suggests to God 'why' Job is such a goody-two-shoes, but 'if' such-n-so were to happen... So God tells satan: Give it your best shot.

I wonder if Solomon actually set out, in the beginning, to "test"? Or are these the reflections of his life after the fact? When people pursue pleasure, are they not typically simply going after self-gratification? But he notices that it is "vanity". How many times do people really 'yuck' it up at a party, with loud boisterous laughter and crude jokes and the playing of pranks on one another; but then the party is over, the person is by themselves, and reflection occurs... "Man! I sure made an idiot of myself!" And maybe somebody also got hurt during one of the pranks, and are now in pain.

Solomon tried out alcoholism for awhile. I can drink as much as I want, it doesn't bother me... I'm just as alert and wise as usual. (vs3) Isn't that the typical alcoholic's response? But to others around them it's plain as day: They parked 3ft away from the curb when they came home this time, it took them 10 minutes to collect themselves to emerge out of their vehicle, and if you try to engage them in conversation their speech is slurred.

Ok, then... how about... wealth, and everything that goes with it. (vs4) Houses, vineyards, irrigation systems, servants, wealth, continual gourmet dining with personal chef, personal in-home entertainment system and theater, and women....lots and lots of women. (vs8) Any red-blooded man's dream come true: so many women, whenever the desire is there, take your pick of the best of the "hotties" of the kingdom.

Imagine the ability to imagine 'anything' a person might wish for, and have the ability to 'make-it-happen'. And nobody to say "no" to those lusts. (vs10)

And what did Solomon conclude in the end?

"Then I looked on all the works that my hands had done, and on the labor that I had labored to do; and, behold, all was vanity and striving of spirit; and there was no profit under the sun." (vs11)

For the most part "reality" TV is stupid. But I do find myself watching some of them... like I said above: I'm a people watcher, and observe human nature; what makes people tick. Recently there was a series where multi-millionaires and ordinary people (in debt) were paired up into teams, to compete, to win \$200,000 in the end. The rich were from backgrounds of huge corporations and/or royalty. As the rich came into the 'game', most of them looked down upon the poor. As the game concluded, after the rich had had to also get their own hands "dirty" in -common- work, doing some of the same things the poor do, and coming to 'understanding', some left the game proclaiming that they would never again look down upon others, like they had been used to. Their vast wealth had become devalued to them.

How many times does one see a rich person in some sort of personal calamitous situation, where they will utter something like: I would give all that up, in order to ??? How many rich people come to the conclusion that, "You can't -buy- happiness." ? How many rich people, for all their wealth, sit at home hooked on drugs because their life has no meaning? All the trinkets of wealth do not assuage that "striving of spirit". (vs11) For all the wealth and things, there was no "profit" to it. Wealthy; but poor.

Jesus said: "But woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation. Woe to you who are full, for you shall hunger. Woe to you who laugh now, for you shall mourn and weep." (Lk6:24-25)

And: "Come now, you rich, weep and howl for your calamities that are coming upon you. Your riches are corrupted, and your garments are moth-eaten. Your gold and silver are corroded, and their corrosion will be a witness against you and will eat your flesh like fire. You have heaped up treasure in the last days. Indeed the wages of the laborers who reaped your fields, which you kept back by fraud, cry out; and the cries of the reapers have reached the ears of the Lord of Hosts." (Ja5:1-4)

So then, let's look at wisdom. Doesn't Solomon speak of the "wise son makes a father rejoice" (Pr10:1)

So, a wise man gains wealth, and with his wisdom builds up a kingdom. Is not wisdom better than folly? But who comes after? (vs12) During the reign of Solomon's son the kingdom that Solomon had built up, was divided. So, "what was the use" for Solomon to go to such extravagant lengths? It was wasted by his son.

Supposing Solomon's son would have been considered a "fool". But if their bones could be found, to lay them out side-by-side...who was better?

(Remember from the prior lesson: Ecclesiastes focuses on 'body') How does a fool die? He comes to the end of his life, gasps his last breath, is buried, and his body rots. How does a wise man die? He comes to the end of his life, gasps his last breath, is buried, and his body rots. "Same as the fool!" (vs16b)

Solomon was hating his life, even before he died and left it to his son. (vs18) A person acts wisely, leaves his works to whoever follows, and what becomes of all those labors of wisdom, in the hands of who follows?

Recently I have made observations of the Bible school I attended years ago. It was founded by a couple of Godly men. Today it is in the pits of apostasy, by those who followed. How many ministries that became big enough for there to be an 'organization', have done the same thing. Moody Bible Institute, Back to the Bible Broadcast, the Evangelical Minister's fellowship that my dad had a hand in starting in one of the areas of N.Dakota, etc.etc. Even with something 'small' like this ministry, I think about it... I expect to be raptured to meet the Lord in the air that way. I have things setup to somewhat run itself, seeing as how it's the internet. But supposing somebody comes along and digs their fingers into it? What happens then? Will it be somebody who came to Saving Faith after the rapture, and God will use them to make sure the website stays up and running? or will one of antichrist's servants dig around and corrupt it, just as successors of these other organizations have done?

Solomon says, "This also is vanity" (vs19)

Solomon turns to "despair" over the whole thing. (vs20) Perhaps, if during his times of wanton pleasures he hadn't allowed his multiplicity of wives to turn his heart away from God, he might have been more at peace about it, knowing that "all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose." (Rom8:28) If all his works had not been so much -his-, but had been -God's-, he might have been more at peace? If God brought it about, is not God also able to maintain it and preserve it? For as many as there are who would pervert the Scriptures, God does have those few here and there who militantly hold faithfully to it. Even during the reign of Ahab, God encourages Elijah, in similar despair, "I alone am left, and they seek my life, to take it away" God says, "Yet I have left in Israel seven thousand, all whose knees have not bowed to Baal, and every mouth that has not kissed him." (1Ki19:10,14,18)

You see...that's why Psalms (God and spirit) comes before Ecclesiastes (man).

And this is what Solomon concludes. What does -God- give?

"Is it not good for a man to eat and drink and make his soul behold the good in his labor. This also, I saw, that it was from the hand of God. For who can eat, or who can enjoy, apart from Me?" (vs24-25)

Even in our flesh, as many who become older finally come to realize, after earlier lives of toiling and struggling to "make it big": to live an honest life, to work an honest job, earn an honest wage; and then to enjoy the fruits of his labor. To "behold the good in his labor" (vs24) Some people are never satisfied. But work is 'good'. It is what God has given man to do. And if a person can find contentment in that work, and be satisfied in the life that that work provides...that is what God provides.

Is it 'wrong' to be content with one's house? No. Is it wrong to think and plan about work? So... it's not sitting, swooning, raising ones hands and "praising the Lord!" But 'work' is what God has given. "Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God."

(1Co10:31) If a person lives a faithful life, that -is- 'worship', because it is doing with what God has given, as God intended, to His 'glory'. And what is "worship", if not that?

If a person has wisdom, do not fret at what someone coming after may do with it; because that wisdom is not yours. It comes from God. (vs26) So... the person following may mess up -your- 'empire'; but if the wisdom came from God, he knows who else He can trust with -His- wisdom, since it is His to begin with. Your legacy may become marred, but God's legacy will continue with whoever else He anoints. And though your 'body' may be buried and will rot, your soul and spirit will be in His presence with the welcome: "Well done, good and faithful servant" (Mt25)

a Season & a Time (*Ecclesiastes 3:1-17*)

"To every thing there is a season, and a time for every purpose under the heavens" (vs1)

In the first lesson we observed how the earth spins and spins and spins. Back in the 60s-70s I used to hear the Byrds on other people's radios in public places singing, "To every thing, turn, turn, turn; there is a season, turn, turn, turn..." And they would break out into essentially singing these first few verses. When I first heard them, "singing Scripture" (Wow! Listen to that!), not knowing who they were (I didn't keep up with all the hippy pop groups of the day), I immediately wondered: What sort of "christian" group are they alleging to be? (...that they would sing Scripture, essentially word-for-word. That was more than christian groups were doing back then!) But just like that other song of those days, beginning with "Jesus loves the little children" which then broke away into "everything is beautiful in it's own way"...this one then also rearranged the order of the doublets, repeating "a time for peace" (which the passage says only once), and as they closed it, not quoting "a time for war", leaving that out, and closing with "A time for peace, I swear it's not too late", in an anti (Vietnam) war emphasis. It might have been Scripture; but when they arranged the words as they did, everybody of that era knew what they were saying.

Astrology looks to the stars. People speak of thanking their "lucky stars". Various religions and cults look to things like birth dates, and alignment of planets, to map out their existence. For everything that God designed, it seems that satan has his counterfeits.

But this chapter begins with a God-ordained truth: God created the universe as a sort of "clock". "Then God said, Let there be luminaries in the firmament of the heavens, to distinguish the day from the night; and let them be for signs and seasons, and for days and years" (Gen1:14)

The universe was designed as one huge 'calendar'. Jesus' birth, crucifixion, resurrection and Pentecost all occurred -exactly- to-the-date/s according to Israel's feast days, as well as astronomical alignments. When Jesus was born 'something' in the heavens alerted the wise men. At His crucifixion 'something' came along to darken the sun from earth's view, and also stir up several huge earthquakes...just right at the -precise-moments. Jesus' crucifixion was exactly at the time the Passover lambs were being slaughtered, He rose from the dead at the moment the high priest was waving the sheaf of the firstfruits, and the Holy Spirit came to the Church (to-the-day Ac2) in fulfillment of Pentecost. God's 'clock' keeps accurate time, and He is never 'late'; He is always 'on time' for His appointments.

"The Lord is not slow concerning His promise, as some count slowness, but is longsuffering toward us, not purposing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance." (2Pet3:9)

We are not going to cover each opposing couplet, you can read them for yourselves. (You -do- have your Bible open, yes? ...so you can follow along in these studies, and read the entire passage?)

God has given man work to keep busy with. (vs10) Perhaps it seems futile? (vs9) But when man keeps time with God, God's 'schedule' is "beautiful" (vs11) How beautiful is it, and "wonderful", when in the appropriate sequence of events a man has his "way...with a virgin" (Pr30:18-19) But how utterly loathsome when a perverted adult does things with children, and "causes them to sin/stumble" (Mt18:6, Mk9:42); things which not only injure them for the moment, but also scar them for life, and make that future God-intended "wonderful" moment to be virtually impossible for many!

But when "time" is under consideration, man also thinks about "eternity" (vs11) What are the chances that the animals wonder about their own 'origins'? They certainly don't make plans for the future: "Observe the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns;" (Mt6:26a) When the cat family hunts, they hunt for the present moment; and perhaps a carcass will last a couple days while they feed. Then, they get hungry...and hunt again. Yes, we know that ants store up food, and the "sluggard" is advised to "go to the ant" (Pr6:6) and learn some wisdom, and get rid of some laziness. But do they do so with a written 'schedule' and the planning of their elected officials; or do they simply scurry back and forth daily based on how God designed them?

The reason man thinks about eternity is because -God- has put that curiosity in his mind. We see time progress; do animals consider "time" the way we do? My neighbor, in conversations across our back fence, has told about back in 1980 when Mount St. Helen's erupted, and that huge ash cloud drifted over to Spokane, in the middle of the day their chickens went into the shed to roost (sleep) because it got dark, just like at night; they didn't know it was still the middle of the day, but "went to bed" because it got dark. We reason (with logic) as to what came 'before'. And like putting two mirrors facing each other, and observing the countless reflected images receding into the 'distance', we wonder, "Where does it start?" and if we look in the opposite direction, "Where does it end?" Just as one theoretically cannot see the 'final' reflected image, because the images would reflect 'infinitely', neither can man fully fathom eternity...although God has put it within us to 'ponder' it; but only God -knows- it. God is the One who "declares the end from the beginning, and from antiquity things which are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all My pleasure;" (Is46:10) This is part of the -definition- of God...timelessness; being 'eternal'. And only man is made "in the image of God" (Ge1:27); and yet, being the creation, not the Creator, thus being 'less' than the Creator, we are given to 'ponder' eternity...even though we cannot fully fathom it.

And so...if we cannot fully fathom eternity, we cannot either fully fathom all of God's work. His work is related to His eternity. What He does now sets in motion those things for eternity-future that we do not yet know. And I expect it is conceivable that, the things that are -now-, have some basis in eternity past, of which we are not yet aware, which have not been recorded in Scripture. Job was not informed of the conference between God and Satan, before all his calamities fell upon him. While he was in the midst of suffering, there he was, drowning in a bit of self pity, even though He also knew God was His Redeemer. (Job19:25) If one thinks about it, one might wonder what sorts of 'conversations' were held between God and the "morning stars" and "sons of God" (Job38:7) before He commenced the creation as recorded in Genesis; and since we are presently in the 'middle' of that previously-discussed scenario, we are not yet privy to that prior planning? If we knew the nature of those 'discussions', we would possibly behave differently...and be incapable (by definition) of living "by faith"? (Rom1:17)

But for man, for the here-and-now, God has designed our existence with a certain "good" thing. During the span of "his life" (vs12) it is "good" for man to do -do- "good" and "rejoice" in it. And what is that good? To "eat and drink, and enjoy the good of all his labor" (vs13)

But... isn't that terribly 'earthly' minded? Are we not told that the "weapons of our warfare are not carnal"? (2Co10:4) Well, that is speaking of "spiritual" matters. But remember: this book is about 'body'. So... to work an honest livelihood, build a 'comfortable' home, have the necessities of life, to enjoy this life and all it offers...is "good". Yes, there are 'spiritual' matters that relate to God's Kingdom. But God made this earth and put man on it, and gave man "dominion" over the creation. (Ge1:26,28,etc) Man's dominion is not over God's Kingdom... God has that, as the Almighty. But man's dominion is over the earth; and when man works diligently and makes a good life, that is "good". It is God's -gift- to man. Earth was made for man. God says, "I have made the earth, and created man on it...." (Is45:12)

Man can only deal with his own life span. Eternity is God's domain. The only 'planning' that man can do for eternity is in making sure his name is in the Book of Life. But again, that's "spiritual". But for man's 'body', his life is on this earth, 'now'. When he goes to God's Kingdom his form will be different; he will no longer be "flesh and blood" of corruption; but will be "changed" (1Co15:52) So, this life on this earth is a one-time thing; and it is the only thing man can deal with at this time.

There is also a coming judgment. That judgment is based on "works" (Rev20:13) God "exact what is pursued" (vs15b) In other words, God holds man accountable for his life on this earth. God gave man this earth to live on, and be "good" on. Like parents going out for awhile, telling the children to "BE GOOD while we're gone", and the children know that if they are bad, there will be consequences. It's the same with our lives on

this earth. God has left man to have "the run of the place". And 'how' does he behave?

Solomon noticed that wherever one turns, that wickedness proliferates. (vs16) Those that are evil certainly have wickedness. But also, where the righteous are, there is wickedness. When he dedicated the temple, he prayed to God regarding people turning towards the temple (God's presence) to repent of their sin, observing parenthetically "(for there is no one who does not sin)" (1Ki8:46) His father, David, noted, "They have all turned aside, together they have become corrupt" (Ps14:3) And even writing to Believers John says, "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us" but we need to "confess" sin and receive forgiveness. (1Jn1:8-9)

Judgment is coming, for both "the righteous and the wicked" (vs17) There is a certain "time" when this will happen. Daniel writes: "And many of those sleeping in the earth's dust shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to reproach and everlasting abhorrence. And the prudent shall shine as the brightness of the firmament, and those who turn many to righteousness, as the stars forever and ever." (Dan12:2-3) Daniel was told to "seal" those words "until the time of the end". (vs4)

But in God's design and purpose "under the heavens", there is coming a certain 'time'. It is proclaimed of a -certain- 'moment' to come...

"Do not seal the Words of the Prophecy of this Book, for the time is at hand. He who is unjust, let him be unjust still; he who is filthy, let him be filthy still; he who is righteous, let him be righteous still; he who is holy, let him be holy still. And behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to every one according to what his work shall be. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the Ending, the First and the Last. Blessed are those who do His commandments, that they may have the right to the Tree of Life, and may enter through the gates into the city. But outside are dogs and sorcerers and prostitutes and murderers and idolaters, and whoever loves and produces a lie." (Rev22:10-15)

Man is Beast (*Ecclesiastes 3:18-22*)

"I said in my heart concerning the manner of the sons of men, that God tests them, that they might see that they themselves are beasts." (vs18)

Seeee??!! Evolution is right, after all! The Bible says so! Right here...didn't you see it? The Bible says that we, as humans, are 'animals'. So, if I want to have a tree house (like I've seen 'something' on TV lately...haven't paid attention to 'what' it is), I can live with apes and monkeys. Or like that other commercial (for whatever?), I can walk into a zoo in Japan and 'introduce' myself to the monkeys, and pretend to have a conversation with my distant cousins.

Modern medicine uses heart valves from pigs for transplants into humans. Have they not also experimented with heart transplants from monkeys?

When a couple gets into a fight, one might say to the other in anger, "You beast!" ...or call them the offspring of some animal species. Or if feeling amorous, "You animal, you!"

And indeed...do not animals and humans do many of the same things. We pretty much eat the same things from plants, whose nutrition comes out of the ground; we drink the same water; we breathe the same air for the same needs for 'oxygen' in our systems. Most animals have a blood circulatory system and nervous systems to make everything work. God made everything to procreate, to be "fruitful", to multiply and "fill the earth". (Ge1:28) To reproduce "after their kind" And with little variations, reproduction tends to follow the same course of events for everybody.

[THOUGHT: Perhaps this is why Jesus says that "...in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage..."? (Mt22:30) Because in Heaven we are no longer "beasts", and procreation is something that beasts (of dust) do? :]

And then, they all, equally, die. (vs19) They all return to "dust". (vs20) God made animals out of the earth (Ge1:24), made man out of the dust of the earth (Ge2:7) ...same molecular physical source. They both get nutrition ultimately from the ground through plants. And then die...back to dust. (Ge3:19, Ps90:3) Man might have hunted animals, and animals might have hunted man; but see their dry bones lying next to each other... what can either do to each other? And how is one better than the other? The lofty king (or pharaoh) that used to snap his fingers, and 'swish', somebody's head went rolling...now dried out...grave robbers come along, and who is to stop them? That king/pharaoh can no longer snap their fingers. Nobody pays them any mind. The bones of the one they commanded beheaded, lying next to theirs; what sort of interaction do they have with each other? They are both, equally, 'done' on this earth. kaput, finito, zap, zilch...gone. Ab'dee ab'dee ab'dee a....that's all folks!

What happens at death? God asks Job: "Have the gates of death been disclosed to you? Or have you seen the gates of the shadow of death?" (Job38:17) On occasion when a Believer dies, it has been recorded that as they see God's splendor inviting them, they utter such words audible to the living who remain behind. On occasion, when a wicked person dies, they utter sounds/words of horror. We can assume these incidents are real, in that we have the account of Stephen seeing "the Heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God" (Ac7:56) just before he died a martyr's death.

But in most cases when a 'body' dies, what do they experience? That is one of those things God does not "disclose" to the living, until it is -their-'time' to pass through that 'gate'.

When a human dies, the living standing by do not see their spirit going "upward". (vs21a) And if we understand that the "soul of the flesh is in the blood" (Lev17:11), what happens to the person's soul when they die? Where is that division between soul and spirit? We do not know. God does. (Heb4:12-13) All we can -see- is the 'body'. And from what we see, if we didn't know through faith that God is in Heaven, it might appear that man and beast are no different. Which is why unregenerate man, in worldly 'wisdom', promulgates a -Godless- 'theory', totally unproven and scientifically unprovable, of 'evolution'.

Since man cannot "see what shall be after him" (vs22b), the 'preacher' concludes that man should "enjoy" his existence on this earth, "rejoice in his own works". Work for a living, and gain happiness and contentment from it. "For that is his portion."

What does "portion" mean? Supposing people are lined up at the cafeteria, and it is -their- 'turn'... the server digs into the big pot with the serving spoon, 'plops' the food onto the person's plate. That is their "portion". They don't get -everything- in the pot. They get the amount that was deemed by 'somebody' to be an 'appropriate' amount to serve an 'individual'. Jesus teaches in praying: "Give us day by day our bread sufficient for the day." (Lk11:3) We don't need riches and wealth, but 'enough' to live on. As Paul expresses the contentment: "And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content." (1Ti6:8)

That is our physical existence on this earth, for the short 'breath' of a time we live here. Working contentedly for our needs.

And if one fears God: "I have been young, and now am old; yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread." (Ps37:25)

That is our portion.

Human interactions (Ecclesiastes 4)

OPPRESSIONS:

"So I returned, and considered all the oppressions that are done under the sun. And behold the tears of the oppressed ones, and they had no comforter!" (vs1a)

This comes from a society where workers were often slaves; they were 'owned' by their masters. If they didn't like their work, that was just "too bad". And if they didn't perform up to expectations, they could be punished. And in those societies punishment could be cruel. So "tears" are understandable.

But what about in our 'free' societies: how many jobs haven't I worked at over my lifetime, working alongside other fellow-employees; and how often are there not the complaints, whining and grouching about the 'conditions' or the boss' attitudes and methods. If a person dislikes the situation enough, they can "quit" and look for another employer; or they can grumble, grit their teeth, and trudge their way along through life, always being unhappy. If they refuse to be corrected in their work and/or attitudes, they might be "fired". And there is sorrow. Sometimes if an employee feels they were grossly mistreated, even tears.

They might be working alongside fellow-disgruntled workers, and they empathize and grumble together; but in that empathy there is no real comfort. They are always miserable. It is part of the curse, "In the sweat of your face you shall eat your bread..." (Gen3:19a)

"And on the side of those who oppressed them there was power, but they had no comforter" (vs1b)

Being a small business owner for the past some (??) years my conversations are now typically with different people. It is typically the other business owners, bosses and managers who order signs. People who hire those aforementioned employees. And our conversations are of a different sort from the ones back in those days when I wasn't writing my own paychecks.

But you know...it's really no different. Just as with employees, there are some who are continually happy, and others who are always down in the dumps and complaining. It's the economy, it's so hard to find good help, the owners of the mall where the business rents space are such creeps, the government requires so much jumping thru hoops for licenses and zoning, and on-and-on it goes.

Bosses don't usually have any camaraderie with employees such that they can discuss their woes, because some things you just don't discuss with

underlings. You can grouse while chatting with other business owners, but eventually you go back to your own business 'alone'. No comfort.

And you know, having been in both places... people are people. It doesn't matter their 'station' in life. These 'conversations' are really the -same-. For many people, life is a drag. Many people try to drown it at the local tavern, others with drugs, others with partying. They might get together in their support groups, or therapy sessions, or get together with friends, or visit across the fence. But eventually the person goes home, inside their -own- house, within their own space, and they are WITH THEMSELVES. They might try to run-away from life by various means; but one thing that is inevitable... they always take themselves with them. And there is no comfort.

Remember: in this series we're talking 'body'...

So, the preacher "congratulated the dead who already have died, more than the living who are still alive" (vs2) A dead person doesn't have to get up in the morning, dragging to the bathroom mirror to start brushing teeth and doing all those things in attempts to look presentable to the world. A dead person doesn't have to deal with rush hour (snail) traffic. A dead person doesn't have to deal with that cantankerous co-worker.

Oh...but one better yet! "Yea, better than both is he who has never existed, who has not seen the evil work that is done under the sun" (vs3) Since we (physically) don't know what's beyond the "gates of death" (Job38;17); there might be the possibility of -bad- 'memories' of what -was- while we were here. A person who has never been born has no memories, because they never existed. No comfort, either. But no sorrows, no toils, no evil, no tears.

SUCCESSFUL WORKS:

Well... but... What if a person has pulled themselves up by their bootstraps, worked real hard, developed and grown a hugely successful business empire, with thousands of employees whom they pay well and with great benefits, and with the huge profits engages in philanthropy for this cause or that... Surely such a scenario is a sign of comfort and value?

"Again, I considered all labor, and every successful work, that for this a man is envied by his neighbor. This also is vanity and striving of spirit" (vs4)

As this is being written (June) some movie star couple has just given birth to a baby and the tabloids have been going wild over it; scrambling to find 'pictures' to show to the world. Apparently some entity paid over \$4-million for the privilege of being the "first" to get a look. Such -striving-! Somebody like Bill Gates grows from computer 'nerd' to a global empire, in a very real

sense -could- 'control' everything globally, since most computers work with the MS operating systems, being the wealthiest man (is he?) on earth... and how many are the comments of "lesser" mortals, "If I could only have the 'scraps' from his table!" I wonder how many people actually -know- him as a 'friend'; but rather, most drool after his riches. They don't care about - him-, the 'man'...but his status.

And how many have been the cases where some rich person died, with no beneficiaries. They lived their life miserly, amassed the fortune, and died alone. Nobody to inherit all the results of their labors. The government comes in and liquidates the assets, however governments do such things.

Did he ever ask, "For whom do I labor and deprive my soul of good?" ?

"This also is vanity; indeed, it is an evil task" (vs8)

"Better is a hand filled with rest than two hands full with travail and striving of spirit" (vs6) As Paul says, "And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content" (1Ti6:8) As Jesus exhorts us to pray, "Give us this day our bread sufficient for this day" (Mt6:11)

PARTNER SUPPORT:

Where do we find "contentment" and "comfort"?

Again remember: we are talking "body" here. (If you're only just now joining this series, here; recommended that you read the first lesson) I can imagine some reading along will be just itching and dying, raising your hands and straining/grunting like in elementary school, "Oh! Oh! Oh! I know, I know!", to speak of our spiritual relationship with God. But that "conclusion" comes at the end, after exhausting all the 'vanities' of the "body" (12:13)

What is the use of gaining riches, unless there is someone to share it with? (vs8) Going into business is often better as a 'partnership'; each can help the other; if one is in a slump the other can help fill the void and overall they make a profit. (vs9)

When doing things like rock climbing, dirt trail riding, swimming, etc., it is - always- recommended to be on a "buddy system". Why? Very rarely do two tumble or drown at the same time. If one hits the rut crooked, and takes a tumble and gets hurt, the other is there to help rescue them; first of all, -being- there to -know- they are hurt and need help; and then to effect the assistance. If a person strikes out on their own and falls off that cliff, nobody knows where they are, much less that they are in need; and unless they are like that famous incident from a few years ago, where the 'lone' person got his hand pinned under a boulder down in that crevasse

and had the ability and will-power to cut off his own arm, to free the rest of his body to save himself...they die.

"...but woe to him who is alone when he falls" (vs10)

I've never been in a fight, nor ever learned combat technique (I missed the draft "by -that- much"...as Maxwell Smart used to say); but if an attack is happening, two people resisting the attack is more effective than a lone individual. One gets in trouble, the other can come along and 'whack' the enemy and rescue. The US military tries to recruit with that stupid slogan about the "Army of one". So why is it then, that that other saying is so popular: "You watch my back, and I'll watch yours" ? Because Army of -one- is not reality. How many ground-support crew is required to keep one pilot airborne? How many hundreds (thousands?) of earth crew is required to support a handful of astronauts in space?

Very often, people who are effective in their lives also have friends. Sometimes the friendship might be close enough that they are 'partners'. We know of David and Jonathan, and when Jonathan was killed in battle, David laments: "...your love to me was wonderful, surpassing the love of women" (2Sa1:26)

We think of Paul and Silas, together in prison, singing hymns. (Ac16:25) Before Silas, Paul and Barnabas had been partners in missionary work. Often when Christians go on visitation, they do so paired up as partner teams. When the Mormons, JW, etc come to your door, are they not usually a 'pair'?

"Again, if two lie together, then they have warmth; but how can one be warm alone?" (vs11)

When David became old, they didn't have electric blankets and such devices in those days; so they brought in Abishag to lie with him; not sexually, but for body-warmth. (1Ki1:1-4)

On the other hand, when two are lying together is it not typically a husband and wife. There is a saying that goes something like: Behind every great man is a good woman. Even though in this book Solomon bewails not finding a good woman (7:28), in the prior book he proclaims: "He who finds a wife finds a good thing, and obtains favor from Jehovah" (Pr18:22) And to find a wife that a man can "safely trust" in (Pr31:11); what a -treasure-! "Far above rubies" (vs10)

Many couples are comprised of a man and a woman, who live together; they squabble and make love; raise children and kick them out of the nest when they have grown up; and then retire and die. But for how many of them is the husband a husband; and the woman his 'wife'? How many wives truly become "one" with their husbands?

In following God, often, such 'beautiful' relationships are not possible; and are 'extraneous' to the man-of-God's ministry. A particular man comes to mind, somebody I knew when I was younger (I would suspect he's probably with the Lord by now), a strong preacher/teacher of the Word. But with my present understanding of things I am wondering if his wife even knew the Lord. Whatever the case, his ministry was 'in-spite-of' his wife.

Jesus enumerated the 'price' in following Him: "Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword."
(Mt10:34) ...and goes on to list the 'family' conflicts involved in following Him. In amongst those things that a person may need to leave behind, in order to "count the cost" (Lk14:28) to follow Jesus is, "...or wife" (Mt19:29, Mk10:29, Lk18:29)

In following and serving God, it is often a lonely road. Elijah: was all alone, and Jezebel sought to kill him. (1Ki19:10) Ezekiel: his wife dies and God doesn't even allow him to mourn (Ezk24) Jeremiah: is told to not marry (Jer16:2) Moses: he had Aaron, but Aaron was not always of purest heart; built the golden calf and rebelled against Moses' authority; so of what real benefit was he? After all, God only sent Aaron along to help, because Moses was dragging his feet, whining, "please send by the hand of..." someone else. (Ex4:13) But when it came down to it, it was -Moses- whom God used. It was -Moses- to whom God called out of the burning bush... not Aaron.

Paul sums up the matter: "But I want you to be free from anxiety. He who is unmarried cares for the things of the Lord; how to please the Lord. But he who is married cares about the things of the world; how to please his wife. There is a difference between a wife and a virgin. The unmarried woman cares about the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in body and in spirit. But she who is married cares about the things of the world; how to please her husband." (1Co7:32-34)

And in the final analysis when we stand before God, we will not be judged or praised for how our friends, partners or spouses supported or hindered us. We "...each of us shall give account concerning himself to God."
(Rom14:12)

WHO CARES?

"I saw all the living who walk under the sun, with the second youth who stands in his place. There is no end of all the people, of all who have been before them; they also who come after shall not rejoice in him. Surely this also is vanity and striving of spirit." (vs15-16)

Have you ever had occasion, you older ones, to live many years of your life, for years not being in contact with various people you knew when you

were younger. And then, some occasion presents itself, you discover 'where' they are and find an address for them. So you eagerly (excitedly) make contact. They reply -seemingly- just as eager over the fact that you made contact with them, encouraging you to keep in touch and "fill them in" on what-all has been going on in your life. So you reply, doing as they suggested, telling them somewhat of your life. And... silence! Not a peep.

Did they -really- 'care' about you? Or, were they being platitudinous? Giving the 'expected' response, -feigning- interest. But in actuality, they are so self-absorbed in their own "vanities under the sun", their former interest no longer extends to you.

Like being in a big city, with thousands of people coming and going. You might be a people-watcher like I am, and observe people as they do this and that. But as you spend time watching hundreds of people, they recede beyond view; you observe those who come along and they recede. And in the end, you go home, never to see any of them again. They die. You die. Others die. More are born after, and they die. And in the final analysis, who notices? Who cares? Does anyone pay any -real- notice of anybody else? So, to what end is all the scurrying?

"Surely this also is vanity and striving of spirit" (vs16b)

So what about it? The verse says, "but woe to him who is alone when he falls..." (vs10) Isn't that reason enough to forgo such strictness to doctrinal rules and values, ease up a bit and compromise, in order to have friends or partners...at all costs?

Paul was like this. When he stood trial he records: "At my first defense no one stood with me." (2Tim4:16) See? But what does he say? "But the Lord stood with me and strengthened me, so that the preaching of the message might be fulfilled through me, and that all the Gentiles might hear. And I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion. And the Lord will deliver me from every evil work and keep me safe for His Heavenly kingdom." (vs17-18)

Jesus also says, "Behold, the hour is coming, yes, has now come, that you are scattered, each to his own, and will leave Me alone. And yet I am not alone, because the Father is with Me." (Jn16:32)

When Daniel was alone with the lions, he responds: "My God has sent His Angel, and He has shut the mouths of the lions" (Dan6:22)

Due to our faithfulness to God we may at times lose human partners and friendships. But we have the Lord. Jesus calls us His "friends" (Jn15:14-15), and His love "sticks closer than a brother" (Pr18:24)

So, when the world forsakes, "then Jehovah will gather me up" (Pr27:10)

the House of God (Ecclesiastes 5:1-8)

"Guard your feet when you go to the house of God, and be more ready to hear than to give the sacrifice of fools. For they do not know that they are doing evil." (vs1)

What is a fool known for? There is a saying I heard years ago; I forget its exact wording at the moment, but it went something like: It is better to leave people 'wondering' whether or not one is a fool, than to open one's mouth and remove all doubt. "A fool's mouth is his destruction, and his lips are the snare of his soul" (Pr18:7)

In most evangelical churches when a person -goes- 'to' church, what is the typical atmosphere in recent years? Loud boistrous back-slaps, rowdy hand-shakes, loud raised voices of "Howdy do!" Children and youth are often allowed to run rough-shod throughout the sanctuary, often playing tag and hide-n-seek, even up on the platform ("altar") area...they might even pretend to each other to be preaching and leading services to their playmates...mocking, as children do. There is typically VERY MUCH LACKING the concept of: "...Jehovah is in His holy temple; let all the earth BE SILENT before Him." (Hab2:20)

The service starts and what do the platform leaders do? Yack, yack, yap, yap, blah, blah! Every little thing requires its own mini-sermon. This one church I was attending for awhile, some years ago, the pastor seemed like a Godly man and his sermons were pretty much right down the line Biblical. He would close his -good- and -inspiring- message, having drawn people's minds and hearts to God and His holiness; and then the song leader would get up to lead the closing song... and... he would go on and on and on, in his own little sense of self-importance, would presume to give us all a 'summation' of what the pastor had just preached...and totally -RUIN- the message that had just been delivered, before -FINALLY- getting to the song. Often, my insides were just ready to explode, wishing I could get up and yell to him: SHUT UP ALREADY! and let's sing the song!

The pastor 'prays' his morning "pastoral prayer". Oh... it is flowery, swooney, emotional and... long; and 'intoned'.

Or among people... "Let's pray" which consists of more yackity yack, preaching, bragging, or making the argument that the other was not hearing during their preceeding conversation...which "prayer" attaches an aura of 'holiness' and 'rightness' to their case.

People stand up to give "testimonies"...and they blab on and on, jibber-jabbering away telling everybody about 'themselves'. Often sounds more like "show-and-tell" time, than anything dealing with worship and/or exhortation.

And what if a person wishes to go -to- 'worship' "in spirit and in truth"? (Jn4:24) If one wishes to sit quietly, praying, reading the Bible or meditating while the organ is playing softly; one is hardly able to, but what people come up boisterously to shake hands and engage in yackity yack. Years ago one told of how he was sitting next to the aisle, praying...and one of the loud boistrous ushers came by, nudged him in the shoulder, "What-cha-doin'? Sleepin'? Yuck-yuck, hardy har!"

I've said this before... but there is much we 'evangelicals' could learn from the pagans about -REVERENCE-! When catholics are preparing for their sun-worship, they sit quietly, respectfully, contemplatively... often kneeling in 'prayer'. Islam, when the call is given out: "Allllah...blah, blah,blah!" they all bow to the ground and prostrate, with their heads to the dirt.

But evangelicals are all bouncing around like jack-in-the-boxes; boing, boing, boing; hee-hee-haw; like slinkies going down the stairs: sproing, sproing, sproing! And they -think- all the activity indicates "life".

But "they do not know that they are doing evil". To Israel God said, "My soul hates your new moons and your appointed feasts. They are a burden to Me; I am weary of bearing them." (Is1:14)

"Take away from Me the noise of your songs; for I will not hear the melody of your lutes (guitars). But let justice flow down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream." (Am5:23-24)

The verse says, "Guard your feet..." To the church God retorts, "When you come to appear before Me, who has required this at your hand, to TRAMPLE My courts?" (Is1:12) When Elijah confronts Ahab for his sin, for awhile it says that he "fasted and lay in sackcloth and WALKED about SOFTLY"; to which God responds by delaying the judgment. (1Ki21:27,29)

"What does God require....to walk humbly with your God" (Mic6:8)

This is -humility-; something vastly in short supply these days.

Usually those who are "rash" and "hasty" to talk first, and listen later, behave thusly from pride; from a sense of self-importance.

But what is the deal when we enter the house of God? Who is who? What is what? Who is where? Whose house is it? Why should our words be few?

"For God is in Heaven, and you are on earth; therefore let your words be few" (vs2b)

Today's "church" that behaves in the manner we've just been summarizing DOES NOT KNOW GOD! If they knew God, they would not behave as they do. They have not seen God's holiness where the doorposts are

shaking, and the seraphim are thundering, "Holy, holy, holy, is Jehovah of Hosts; the whole earth is full of His glory!" (Is6:3) They have not seen Jesus in His full radiance, where they are hiding their faces in the earth from fear. (Mt17:6) They have not heard Jesus' voice "as the sound of many waters" to then "fall at His feet as dead" (Rev1:15,17)

One who is lying 'as dead'...or is in fear with their nose in the dirt, is not spouting off jibber jabbers with their mouths. They know their station. They know God's power. They understand that it is "through Jehovah's kindness that we are not consumed" (Jer3:22) When they see God's glory and power they "put [their] hand to [their] mouth" (Job40:4)

There is a category that -specializes- in jabbering with their mouths. They say it is the indication of their salvation. They call it being "spirit-filled". Their "dreams come through much activity" but they are "fools" (vs3) [You didn't realize we were going to find something against charismania clear over here, too, did you!] The preacher calls it "vanity". (vs7)

Through much talk, many promises are made.

If you make a promise, make sure to keep it; fulfill it. God takes no pleasure in fools. (vs4)

B'but...they keep pressuring us. You know...that 'thermometer' where they are keeping track of all that money they are raising for the latest project-du-jour. Various ones have made sure that the rest of the congregation know how much -THEY- have pledged. And of course, everybody is looking around at everybody next to them, "Well...how much are -YOU- pledging? Huh? Tell us! If you're any sort of Christian, you're going to be up there in competition with so-n-so." And so, in order to not look bad, or to impress, or to cave under the guilt-trip being forced upon everybody... "I am pledging so-much \$\$\$"

But the Lord has not actually "prospered" them that much. (1Co16:2) They don't actually "have" it to give. (2Co8:12) They have not been content to "not let your left hand know what your right hand does" (Mt6:3) They have caved to group-pressure, and not kept their giving to the Lord "in secret" (Mt6)

"It is better that you should not vow (promise), than that you should vow and not pay" (vs5)

But again...this is the mouth. Hasty to utter promises in God's presence, when perhaps He is not asking it of you..."to be seen by men"

But the ones doing the pressuring are so high-up in the church. They are intimidating. They oppress the poor, to bring in the offerings so that they live in luxury. You see that it is wrong, and muse to yourself, "It's just not right".

Or in the world we see injustices: rulers, officials, judges and others in authority; making laws and passing down judgments that are unjust, perverting justice, promoting wickedness. We are often tempted to wring our hands in dismay at the seeming hopelessness of it all. What can we do about it?

"Do not be astonished at the matter" (vs8), nor be dismayed. Why? Because God is over them. We may have to give "account concerning [ourselves] before God" (Rom14:12); but so must they! And to whom much has been give, from them much is required. (Lk12:48)

"But fear God" (vs7b)

Can't take it with you (Ecclesiastes 5:9-20)

"And the advantage of the land is for all; even a king has fields being tilled"
(vs9)

A few lessons ago we observed that, if we saw the dead bones of a
pharaoh laid out next to one whose head he had whacked off, what would
phasnap hlandds ernessy more? T weTw () 40Tj Tj 0 -11.4 TD -0.2129 T1 0.3773 saw
F4
eliminata bad nexTw () Tj 0 -11.4 TD 95.1614 -09.3773 sawear se saws

And from his labor he shall take away nothing that he may carry in his hand" (vs15)

It's like that little joke that is told: The rich man as he is dying quickly 'picks his suitcase' and arrives at the Pearly Gates, where he is met by St. Peter; Peter sees the suitcase and asks, "What's in the suitcase?" To which the rich man replies, "All my worldly goods; it's full of -GOLD-" To which Peter incredulously replies, "You brought -pavement-???" (please see: Rev21:21)

But that which the poor man has, his labor and his sweet sleep; a product of the contentment his soul, which is invisible....the "things which are not seen are eternal" (2Co4:18)

You see...we are coming around to the same conclusion; which will be observed quite a few more times before this book is finished. This is Solomon talking; one of the wealthiest men of history...

"Behold that which I have seen: It is good and right for one to eat and to drink, and to see the good in all his labor that he labors under the sun all the days of his life, which God gives him; for it is his portion." (vs18)

And if a person is rich? For all the negativity spoken, is it necessarily 'wrong' to be rich? No. If God gives a person riches and wealth, if he has the ability to use it wisely and enjoy it "and to rejoice in his labor; this is the gift of God" (vs19)

Riches, in and of themselves, are not evil... -IF- the person "does not excessively dwell on the days of his life" because God prospers him and "keeps him busy in the joy of his heart" (vs20) After all, after Job had gone through his trial, which God allowed satan to test him with, God prospered him double all the wealth he had had prior to the testing. (Job42)

But wherein is the heart's focus? Yes, Ecclesiastes is about 'body'; but ultimately the body is connected backwards through the soul, to the spirit. Is our focus on this earth (even though we obviously live on this earth, have dominion and subdue it), the creation? Or is it on the Creator "who is blessed forever" (Rom1:25b) ?

"But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is evident that we can carry nothing out. And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content. But those who purpose to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all evils, for which some being greedy, have strayed from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows. But you, O man of God, flee these things and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness." (1Tim6:6-11)

Widespread Evil (*Ecclesiastes 6*)

"There is an evil which I have seen under the sun, and it is widespread among men..." (vs1)

Other than many of the OT prophets where God berates Israel for their rebellion and idolatry, could we not observe that Ecclesiastes is likely the most 'negative' and 'dreary' of all the books in the Bible. But then, why should it not be. If we remember that the book is the last of the human trilogy (Psalms:spirit - Proverbs:soul - Ecclesiastes:body) of what does the body consist? Dust. Man was formed out of dust (Gen2:7) and to dust we return (Gen3:19, Ps90:3) And happily for us, God does not deal with us as our hearts and deeds would deserve, since we are "desperately wicked" (Jer17:9) we should be "consumed" (Lam3:22-23), but He "remembers that we are dust" (Ps103:14) and extends His mercy with patience and longsuffering. (Rom2:4,9:22)

Even for Christians Paul expresses, "even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of the body" (Rom8:23) seeing as how our bodies of corruption (1Co15:50+) are part of this creation in sin which "groans and travails until now" (Rom8:22)

A sparrow finds a piece of food to work on, and another comes and swipes it. Cats come along and snag the birds. Foxes, wolves, and others stalk other animals. Big fish swallow smaller fish. And this happens with man.

"A man to whom God has given riches, wealth, and honor, so that he lacks nothing for his soul of all that he desires, yet God does not give him power to eat of it, but a foreigner devours it. This is vanity, and it is an evil disease." (vs2)

This happens on many levels, all the way from the local neighborhood burglary, clear up to government confiscation of private property for 'public' use, and nations preying upon other nations either individually or collectively through the UN or other means.

There are liberal elements who, although being rich themselves, consider it wrong for conservative people to be rich, so they devise means to rob those rich, to distribute it to the so-called "working" class, through taxation. If a person gets a windfall, easily half of it gets robbed from them by the government, and they don't get the use of that which they legitimately came into. Solomon calls it a "widespread...evil".

"If a man begets a hundred, and lives many years, so that the days of his years are many, and his soul is not filled with goodness, and there is also for him no burial; I say, a miscarriage is better than he;" (vs3)

What is the use in having a huge extended family and wealth, if one's life does not consist of 'good'? So many people have a "wandering of the desire" (vs9) for wealth. They scrimp and scratch after it, spend money on lottery tickets hoping for 'quick' riches. When they get it, what are the usual statistics? Typically such windfalls are squandered, lost, wasted, and often they end up in a worse state than before they started. And who remembers them at death? Who cares?

Solomon suggests that to be "miscarried" is better. (vs3) A baby who never sees the light of day never has to scratch and clamor after the ever-illusory lusts. They don't have the pain of attaining great things, to then have them swiped. All the sorrows and heartache of life, the still-born doesn't have to worry about. They came into existence, and passed immediately into the here-after.

Solomon expresses: "Do not all go to one place?" (vs6b)

Remember: the book is about "body". The 'spiritual' is not under consideration here.

A person can scramble to satisfy his mouth, and yet is not happy. (vs7) What advantage is there to the wise over the fool? If the poor knows how to live with what he has, is not the "sight of the eyes" better than the "wandering desire"? (vs9) Like the old saying, "A bird in hand is worth two in the bush"

Can a person change who he is? Whatever a person is, he is such by the decree of the One who is "mightier than he". (vs10) What makes any one person better than another? (vs11) And what is so special about any person's existence in this "vain life"? If he was wealthy, but died in obscurity (vs3), or died otherwise... "what shall be after him under the sun?" (vs12b) Who remembers either one? And what do the lives of either have to do with the life of those who follow? How do they, once they die, have any input into events after them?

Let us remember who is saying all these things... Solomon. With 1000 women, how many children did he beget? How vast was his family? We already know he was the wealthiest ruler of his day. By the standards of his day, he was a great 'success'. And yet, as he reflects, these are the dark broodings of his mind.

There is a famous little old saying that is good to consider:
"Only one life, 'twill soon be past; Only what's done for Christ will last"

"Come now, you who say, Today or tomorrow we will go to this city, spend a year there, do business, and make a profit; whereas you do not know what will be tomorrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away. Instead you ought to say, If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that." (Ja4:13-15)

Good Name (*Ecclesiastes 7:1-18*)

"A good name is better than precious ointment, and the day of death than the day of one's birth. It is better to go to the house of mourning than to go to the house of feasting; for that is the end of all men; and the living will take it to heart." (vs1-2)

About a month ago former President Ford died and was eulogized. There were many things said about the man, but the two things I especially took note of: He had been 1) honest, and had 2) healed the country after the trying times of Nixon, Watergate and Vietnam.

Those events all occurred around the time I was graduating college, getting into professional music, and got married. I didn't pay as much attention to news in those days as I do now. But I remember being impressed by the measure of the man as being 'honest' and level-headed. Of course, when he pardoned Nixon, at the time I wasn't of the impression that Nixon had been guilty (I assumed it was mostly a media crucifixion), so thought it was a good thing. But in years since, have come to realize that he had been dishonest. And by association, Ford was viewed by some as sharing in Nixon's dishonesty. But now, after history has borne out the cause and effect of everything, even some of Ford's worst critics like Ted Kennedy and other liberals were acknowledging that Ford had been an honest man, and that he had done the "right thing" for the good of the healing of the country, in pardoning Nixon...that he had been a good man and a good president.

That paragraph is not for the purpose of addressing politics, but as an example from the life of Gerald Ford, of this passage. If people had been taking the measure of the man back in the mid-70s, he was presumed to be an unassuming 'nothing' of a man. If one of the assassination attempts had been successful, or he had cracked his skull open during one of his frequent falling episodes, the funeral then would have been considerably different than it was a month ago. When Nixon died some years ago, even though it was the burial of a president, the media -just- could not refrain themselves from speaking of Watergate, and all those things they had hated him for throughout the 60s and 70s. Since he had been a president, they were somewhat 'forced' to say the 'proper' things, but they also had the old grudges. But when Ford was honored, I don't recall hearing one single negative or derogatory comment as to his character. In fact, it seemed as though they were fawning all over him with praise. And furthermore, I get the feeling that the nation would be starving for another such a person in 2008, if such a person even exists today in the political arena. People are hungry for an 'honest' leader.

Gerald Ford had a "good name" (vs1), and in the day of his death he was given high praise. In his honesty, it was noted that he was a man who

would "keep promises". This was the trait that was mentioned over and over.

As the Word says, when a good man dies, the living "take it to heart"

"Sorrow is better than laughter; for by the sadness of the face the heart is made better" (vs3) As Paul says, "For godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death." (2Co7:10) The exhortation: "Lament and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to shame." (Ja4:9)

When there is sorrow at the death of someone, it reminds the living of the shortness of our lives on this earth. And if a person becomes introspective, observing the person who died, how many often resolve to correct whatever might be amiss in their own lives?

"The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning; but the heart of fools is in the house of mirth...for as the crackling of thorns under a pot, so is the laughter of the fool; this also is vanity" (vs4,6)

And since we have mentioned a man of proven character, let's exemplify... this crackling/laughter of fools, the other extreme, Nancy Pelosi. Again, not going to talk politics. But you who follow the news, you know what is being observed here. The news is currently providing us apt object lessons on this passage.

"Better is the end of a thing than the beginning of it; the patient in spirit is better than the proud in spirit" (vs8)

People are often wowed by 'big' things. Many are impressed by big churches with thousands of members. If a famous author or speaker is advertised, the drawing card to get people to sign up for tickets is the vast 'numbers' (of books, tapes and past speaking engagements). If a person has 'nothing' to their credit, most people are not very much interested. But where did those vast numbers of the 'big' person start? Did they wake up one morning and realize: "Well, sh'zayamm! Look at all this greatness!" ?? No. Anybody who appears to be 'great', at some time in their past was 'small'. Any big building began originally with backhoes and steam shovels digging trenches in the dirt to pour footings and foundations...and then piles of building materials here and there.

Moses did great wonders at God's leading, such that he was held in awe by Israel and all of Egypt. "Moreover the man Moses was very great in the land of Egypt, in the eyes of Pharaoh's servants and in the eyes of the people." (Ex11:3b) But he started out, like anybody else, as a baby; and won over the heart of pharaoh's daughter by 'crying'. (Ex2:6) Apparently he knew he was supposed to lead Israel, but when he tried on his own, and killed the Egyptian, he ended up spending 40 more years in the

wilderness, herding sheep. A relative 'nobody'. But when he died, his life accomplishments for God: Israel was ready to receive fulfillment of the land of promise. If Moses had died as an infant, we likely would know nothing of him. But his death marked off a lifetime of major good works before God on behalf of Israel.

There is a saying, "Those were the good ol' days!" But what does the Word say? "Do not say, Why were the former days better than these? For you do not ask wisely concerning this" (vs10)

Have you ever waxed nostalgic over remembrances of old places and friends? I have. On occasion I have had opportunity to re-visit places and people I had known when younger...and guess what. Those 'good' old memories suddenly vanished, when seeing those places or people 'now'. Places get old and rusted. People change. I have changed. If a current visit with an old acquaintance is less-than-expected, did that person change to become 'less' than they were? Have my values changed? or perhaps I am not remembering clearly the 'realities' of what had been those many years ago?

"Consider the work of God; for who can make straight what He has made crooked? In the day of prosperity be joyful, but in the day of adversity take note that God also has ordained the one next to the other, in order that man should not find anything after him." (vs13-14)

Paul said, "...I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content." (Php4:11) And I have finally figured this out, too. I used to think: If only I could just go 'back' to such-n-such, and be like...??? But what does Paul say? "but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and stretching forward to those things which are ahead," (Php3:13)

As Samuel was leading Israel, and they had attained certain successes against the Philistines, he "...took a stone and set it up between Mizpah and Shen, and called its name Ebenezer, saying, Thus far has Jehovah helped us." (1Sa7:12)

The life of the Believer is a 'progression'. If we are always lusting for the good ol' days, we are lusting for a less-mature time. Israel did this continually, when things got a little rough in the wilderness, "We remember the fish which we ate freely in Egypt, the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic;" (Nu11:5) Jesus said, "No one, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God." (Lk9:62)

There's a lot more in the text, but this is a "walk-thru", picking out (by design) only the highlights. Hopefully you are reading the entire passage.

But for the Believer, we can receive understanding that God's ways are higher than ours. (Is55:9) Sometimes God allows our way to be smooth

and straight. At other times He allows kinks, crooks and twists in the road. He leads us through rocky steep climbs. If God gives a crooked road to travel, can we straighten it by getting ourselves all bent out of shape? Or do we accept it.

If God allows smooth sailing, receive it with thanksgiving. But if He also allows adversity, receive that, too. Again, as Paul said, "...for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content. I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in everything I am taught both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to lack." (Php4:11-12)

And notice the preacher says, about the items we have addressed, and those we have not (that you have read for yourselves): "It is good that you should grasp this; yea, also from this do not withdraw your hand; for he who fears God shall come forth out from them all." (vs18)

In other words: Understand this concept, that God allows both the good and the bad. And don't withdraw from the life God gives you. The writer of Hebrews speaks of "drawing back...to destruction" (Heb10:38-39) Job learned to understand: "But He knows the way that I take; when He has tried me, I shall come forth as gold." (Job23:10)

And yes, life ends in death. "And as it is appointed for men to die once, and after this the judgment," (Heb9:27) And when the judgment is handed down, of what did one's life consist?

How is one's name regarded at the end of their life, when all their works are summarized and weighed in the balances?

"A good name is rather to be chosen than great riches; and loving favor rather than silver or gold." (Pr22:1)

Wickedness and the tongue (Ecclesiastes 7:20-29)

"For there is not a just man on earth who does good and does not sin" (vs20)

This is something his father David also knew: "Jehovah looked down from Heaven upon the sons of men, to see if there were any who understood and sought God. They have all turned aside, together they have become corrupt; there is no one who does good, no, not one." (Ps14:2-3)

But how this goes against man's wisdom! Psychology teaches that all babies are born sinless, and that it is 'environment' that creates sin, due to the fact that poor b'beeee didn't get as much attention and love as they thought they deserved (koochee, koochee, there there). If only babies could be born into a sterile environment, without all the "baggage" of their parents!

Uh... didn't God already do that? "Lo, this only I have found, that God has made man upright..." (vs29a) He created Adam and Eve and put them in an idyllic setting, and pronounced it "extremely good" (Gen1:31)

God made man upright, but... what? "...they have sought out many schemes" (vs29b)

And now, working backwards through this passage, what is Solomon's #1 complaint? "I find more bitter than death the woman whose heart is snares and nets, and her hands like fetters" (vs26a)

But what about "lover boy"? Solomon had a thousand wives. If he 'hated' women so much, why did he spend so much time with them? In the culture of that day they were differentiated between wives vs concubines. (1Ki11:3) But in God's convention, when a man "goes in to her" she becomes his wife. (De21:13, 25:5) If he romanced a thousand women, why is he so hard on the female gender? Perhaps -because- he romanced a thousand!?? But out of all those, he did not find a single one who was not characterized by wickedness, folly, snares, madness. Not a single one that was trustworthy, not characterized by "many schemes". He says, "One man among a thousand I have found..." (vs28) but not a woman. And he was "still seeking".

Oh, indeed, men scheme! Men are shrewd and deceitful. But what happens when "the girls" get together to gossip? If there weren't some amount of truth, comedy and comedic jokes would not be what they often are, nor the sitcoms. But when Solomon found only "one" man among a thousand, the percentage isn't all that different, is it. "For there is not a just man on earth who does good and does not sin" (vs20)

So, when surrounded by schemes and dishonesty, a person might look at -others- and wring their hands. Why are -they- like that?? A person might hear a bit of gossip that works its way back, how so-n-so said such-n-such about you. Do you get upset? Seek out the person, "Why did you say such-n-such about me, you... so-n-so?!?!"

"Also do not take to heart all words that are spoken; lest you hear your servant curse you" (vs21) Why...!! the blankety-blank!!

Look honestly, now, inside yourself: "For your own heart knows that you yourself have also cursed others many times" (vs22)

"For we all stumble in many things. If anyone does not stumble in word, he is a flawless man, able also to bridle the whole body... Even so the tongue is a little member and boasts great things. Behold, how large a forest a little fire kindles. And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity. Thus the tongue is set among our members, defiling the whole body, and sets on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire by Gehenna. For every kind of beast and bird, and of creeping thing and creature of the sea, is tamed and has been tamed by mankind. But no man is able to tame the tongue. It is an uncontrollable evil, full of deadly poison. With it we bless our God and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the image of God. Out of the same mouth comes forth blessing and cursing. My brethren, it is not fitting that these things be this way." (~Ja3:2-10)

Perhaps the reason Solomon is so "bitter" over women is because, statistically, they -talk- more? As Jesus said, "Not what goes into the mouth defiles a man; but what comes out of the mouth, this defiles a man...those things which proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and they defile a man. For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, sexual perversions, thefts, false witness, blasphemies. These are the things which defile a man..." (~Mt15:11-20)

"In the abundance of words there is no end of transgression, but he who restrains his lips is prudent." (Pr10:19) "Even a fool, when he is silent, is counted wise; and he who shuts his lips, as a man of understanding." (Pr17:28) Perhaps this is why Peter speaks of the "meek and quiet spirit" (1Pet3:4)

So, are women worse than men? More sinful? More deceitful? Perhaps they appear that way because they talk more. But just because a man doesn't say all that's in his heart, it does not change the evil that resides there.

"The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it? I Jehovah search the heart, I examine the soul, even to give to each man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his doings." (Jer17:9-10)

But the blame for this is not on God! Many blame God for making man this way. For allowing sin. Some will also say, "the devil made me do it".

But Solomon reminds us that "God made man upright" -BUT- man "sought out many schemes/deceptions"

"Let no one say when he is tempted, I am tempted by God; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone. But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own lusts and enticed. Then, when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is finished, brings forth death. Do not be led astray, my beloved brethren. Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of Lights, with whom there is no change or shadow of turning. Of His own purpose He brought us forth by the Word of Truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures.

"So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath; for the wrath of man does not bring about the righteousness of God. Therefore lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness, and receive with meekness the implanted Word, which has the power to save your souls. But be doers of the Word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves." (~Ja1:13-22)

Justice (*Ecclesiastes 8:1-13*)

"Keep the king's edict, because of the oath of God. Do not be hasty to leave his presence. Do not take a stand in an evil thing, for he does whatever pleases him" (vs2-3)

This is a general Godly principle. Yes, Samuel chided Israel for the "evil" in "asking for a king" to rule over them. (1Sa12) Israel had rejected God from ruling over them (1Sa8:7); Israel was a theocracy.

But Jesus affirms this, to "render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's" (Mk12:17) Paul exhorts, "Let every soul be subject to the higher authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are ordained by God. Therefore whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will receive judgment on themselves" (Rom13:1-2)

And what does this mean, to "not be hasty to leave his presence"? Does this mean that a person should stick around, kissing up? Trying to gain brownie points? The context is pretty clear. "Do not take a stand in an evil thing." In other words, don't get into a temper, cuss him out, turn tail and stomp out, yelling threats. In the realm of kings, the king can order one of his guards to follow you out and put a bullet through your skull, right there on-the-spot. In the previous chapter the matter was mentioned: "For your own heart knows that you yourself have also cursed others many times" (7:22) But when around someone of high station, show the proper respect that their position requires. "...honor to whom honor" is due. (Rom13:7)

Not long ago the "Butcher of Baghdad" was hanged for his "crimes against humanity". The appeals process occurred, and within a few days, the sentence was executed. The media expressed how that, many in this country were -dismayed- at HOW QUICKLY the sentence was carried out. For you from other countries who might not be aware, death sentences are rarely (if ever?) carried out that quickly in the US. Usually the condemned person takes up space and tax dollars to support them on "death row" for -YEARS-. The appeals process takes 'forever', and once the appeals failed, then they languish in prison for protracted periods of time before the sentence is carried out; if, in fact, it ever gets carried out. I'm not sure why that is.

"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" (vs11)

And in this country crime is up. I know of a certain local person who has had so many DUIs, he's been in and out of court, in and out of prison so many times. The law says that after three times, the penalties are to be stiff, but even his current stint in prison (way more than the 'third' time!) is only a relatively 'few' months. And the way the system works, I've had

conversations with him....he -scoffs- at the system. Prison time is absolutely NO PUNISHMENT to him. He does not learn anything. His experiences do not 'modify his behavior' to in-the-future refrain from driving drunk. He thinks the required alcohol 'classes' are a big joke. He never spends very much time in prison, and the court processes (of which there have been many) always take 'forever' to get heard and sentenced. A PRIME EXAMPLE of the truth of this verse.

Sometimes a person wishes for the benefits of "frontier justice". If the person is found to be "guilty", take them -directly- from the court room, toss the rope over the tree branch, and hang them, right there, on the spot. And if others are contemplating committing such crimes, when they understand that justice will be meted out 'speedily', they will tend to think twice before planning their next caper. The "deterrent" factor.

In Israel God also ordained floggings: "then it shall be, if the wicked man deserves to be beaten, that the judge shall cause him to lie prostrate and be beaten in his presence, according to his guilt, by number." (De25:2)

Notice again: no lengthy appeal process, and then the 'scheduling' of the punishment for some 'future' date. Judgment is carried out, right there, on-the-spot. As Solomon says, "speedily".

Those who are righteous (they behave righteously, not being deserving of punishment) often sigh and wring the hands when the evening news is watched. Around Spokane it seems like there is continual crime going on. Thefts, burglaries, assaults, murders, rapes, road rage, etc. Some notorious rapist comes to the end of his prison term, after having raped how-many-umpteen victims years ago, so then the question: How likely is he to "re-offend"? Can he be released into society? Should he be put away in a permanent facility? So, what I'm sure must have been a lengthy process originally over 20 years ago, now becomes another lengthy legal process. In my own mind I think to myself how God's punishment for rape was "execution". (Le20:10, De22:25) This man who committed those brutal rapes and murders has a "free ride". He doesn't have to hold a job, but is 'given' room-and-board for the rest of his life, at a higher cost to the tax payers than what his actual living expenses would be if he were not a rapist, but was working for his own living as a "productive citizen". Not to mention all the other tax dollars spent for his further prosecution and defense to prolong his life. And a righteous person observing this perhaps feels a certain sense of "dismay" at how "plush" his existence is...compared to the brutality he perpetrated on his victims.

"Though a sinner does evil a hundred times, and his days are prolonged, yet surely I know that it shall be well with those who fear God, who fear before Him. But it shall not be well with the wicked, nor shall he prolong his days, which are like a shadow; because he does not fear before God" (vs12-13)

The righteous may wring their hands in dismay at what they observe as a "travesty of justice". But as Moses reviews with Israel, a person's "sin will find you out" (Nu32:23)

The wicked may "get away with" their crimes here on earth, but there is a God in Heaven who is keeping score. He confronted Cain when he had killed his brother Abel. (Gen4) There are 'books' in which the records are kept. At the end of this earth's history all of humanity will stand before God to be judged "according to their works" (Rev20:13b)

It will be "well" for the righteous. But it will -NOT- be well with the wicked. People may argue about whether any particular translation of the Bible speaks of "hell", or it uses other words to differentiate the various kinds of words used here and there throughout the Old and New Testaments; they spend their time arguing whether something agrees with their favorite "KJV", and others wrangle and "twist" (2Pt3:16) the Scriptures to try to explain away God's judgment of sin, claiming that it is too 'difficult' to understand, that they often neglect to understand that which we can know. Indeed, there is a cloud of mystery surrounding the here-after. God even proclaimed that it is an unknown: "Have the gates of death been disclosed to you? Or have you seen the gates of the shadow of death?" (Job38:17) We aren't meant to know, yet, the exact nature of 'where' the soul goes at death, before the event.

But we know enough. To Daniel it was explained: "And many of those sleeping in the earth's dust shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to reproach and everlasting abhorrence" (Dan12:2)

Paul proclaimed it like this: "...He has established a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has appointed. He has given assurance of this to everyone by raising Him from the dead." (Ac17:31) "...in the day when God will judge the secrets of men through Jesus Christ..." (Rom2:16)

The wicked may -seem- to be "getting off" without having to answer for their deeds in this life. But God is the "righteous Judge" (2Tim4:8)

Paul said, "I have hope in God...that there will be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and the unjust." (Ac24:15)

Amen!

Gladness (*Ecclesiastes 8:14-17*)

"Then I praised gladness, because a man has no better thing under the sun than to eat and to drink and to be glad; for that shall remain with him of his labor for the days of his life which God gives him under the sun."
(vs15)

Is the "preacher" (1:1) contradicting Scripture? Is he proclaiming something opposite of what Jesus will say a thousand years later in condemnatory terms about the fool who says, "...take your ease; eat, drink and be merry" (Lk12:19) "...for tomorrow we die!" (1Co15:32)

What is it to be "glad"?

First of all, what is it to be "merry"? Does not the context into which Jesus places the word, define it? According to the dictionary: Full of high-spirited gaiety, jolly, festive, entertaining, brisk. Is that not the context Jesus says, putting it together with "eat and drink". People get some alcohol into their systems, the voices start rising a few decibels, glasses and mugs are raised to each other, and typically the raised voices also begin to exhibit crude and vulgar language. And things often go further down-hill from there....

Whereas, to be "glad" is: Joy, pleasure, appreciation, to be pleased. Gladness is a state where a 'happy' and 'content' person is also exhibiting self-control, a Godly trait. (Ga5:23) Those that are partying and making 'merry' typically come to a point where they are "without self-control", one of the characteristics of the "last days" (2Tim3:1-3)

Notice the difference: the fool Jesus talks about is taking his "ease". He has become wealthy, and so is sluffing off with life. Whereas the one who is glad is contentedly glad because he is enjoying the fruits of his 'labor'. In Jesus' parable the man became rich because the 'ground' yielded abundantly; how much labor did he put into it, himself? But as Solomon said earlier: "The sleep of a laboring man is sweet, whether he eats little or much; but the abundance of the rich will not allow him to sleep." (Ec5:12)

And this is what God gives to man. As Paul says, "But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is evident that we can carry nothing out. And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content." (1Tim6:6-8)

Notice that these comments come with a qualifier. Solomon makes an observation, and "then" concludes what we have just looked at...

"There is a vanity which is done on the earth: There are just ones to whom it happens according to the work of the wicked; again, there are wicked

ones to whom it happens according to the work of the righteous. I said that this also is vanity." (vs14)

When seemingly 'good' people suffer adversity; their house burns down with all their belongings, half the family gets wiped out in a car crash, disease strikes them; others look on and think within themselves, 'That's just not -fair- for such good people to suffer such things!' But if such things happen to evil people, 'Well! They certainly -deserve- it!'

On the other hand, why should such an evil person fall into good times of prosperity, success and health. What did they do to -deserve- that?!

A person's 'gladness' comes from God. An evil rich person knows only how to make merry. But in his merriment, it is all empty.

"Do not eat the bread of him who has an evil eye, nor desire his dainty foods; for as he thinks in his heart, so is he. Eat and drink! he says to you, but his heart is not with you. The morsel you have eaten, you shall vomit up, and spoil your pleasant words." (Pr23:6-8)

See what is being said?

So, if we seek to search away from our physical existence, and seek after wisdom; we know that God is the source of gladness. We seek after God and 'how' does God accomplish His works? Those who know and trust in God with childlike faith understand the "certainty...and evidence of things not seen" (Heb11:1)

But there are many who are not content with the understanding that right now "we see through a mirror, dimly" and that we will not "fully know" until "then" when we "see Him just as He is" "face to face" (1Co13:12, 1Jn3:2) They do, like Solomon says, 'losing sleep' over it, to be 'scholarly' and 'wise'. They want to know -everything- 'here' and 'now'.

But even if they don't actually -know- everything, many of them will -pretend- to know. I get a kick out of Jewish would-be-wise people. Every once in awhile, through some link from Arutz-7, I will go to IsraelNationalRadio.com and click on the "Tamar Yonah" show to listen to some interview of some "expert" she hosts. These "experts" will start rambling along in their ethereal clouds of self-vaunted wisdom, spinning out words, making sure their hearers understand -just- what lengthy processes of thought have made them (the 'expert') such an expert, as they are 'now' condescending to talk 'down' to the rest of us commoners, and as their allotted limited time comes to an end, Tamar tries to get them to -quickly- be succinct and -say- whatever it is they are on the show to say. So far, when I've clicked to hear, I haven't heard any of them actually -say- anything intelligible. They never actually addressed the topic for which reason they were on the show in the first place, because they took the whole time to explain their own greatness.

For you fellow-Americans it's kinda like that cartoon commercial parody of higher education, where the 'professor' goes into a scholarly rant, "Blah, blah, yackity-yack, lskjdlfkj lkjsdljf lj fluctuations, it's a -RED-BULL- type of situation lsjdlfj lskjdlfjs blah, blah, yackity yack" and as the listener is still confused, "Silly little man! Red Bull give you wings!"

Or like when a person reads a catholic encyclopedia about the fate of unbaptized babies, they speak of "speculations" and "opinions" as they then go into a Red-Bull-esque rant about this scholar, that scholar, some other saint and what they had to say, and who may have historically agreed or disagreed with whom....paragraph-after-paragraph.

Solomon says that, even though a person seeks to find out the "work of God", no matter how hard one tries, they will "not find it". And even the so-called scholars, who pretend to know... they don't know, either. Like the experts that appear on the Tamar Yonah show. For all their words of knowing, when they are finished, they end up not having said anything.

The world likes to speculate the unknowable by speaking of "higher planes of existence". With sci-fi they depict an entity called "Ori" with God-like powers...and explain away the miraculous, as depicted, as being an 'energy' source or more advanced 'technology'.

But God asks Job, "Who is this who darkens counsel by words without knowledge? Now gird up your loins like a man; I will consult with you, and you declare unto Me. Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth? Declare, if you have become acquainted with understanding. Who has fixed its measurements? Surely you know! Or who has stretched the line upon it? To what were its foundations fastened? Or who laid its cornerstone....Have the gates of death been disclosed to you? Or have you seen the gates of the shadow of death?" (Job38:2-6,17)

We aren't -meant- to know. David was content to exclaim, "Such knowledge is incomprehensible to me; it is high, I am not able to reach it." (Ps139:6)

God says, "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return to Jehovah, and He will have mercy on him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon. For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways, says Jehovah. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts." (Is55:7-9)

God deals with both the wicked and the just. And for the just, there is "no better thing" than to be engaged in the labor of life, as God has placed us on this earth. After all, when God had created the earth, and put man on it, He pronounced the arrangement, "Extremely good!" (Gen1:31)

If the just person can be 'glad' and content in this life (as we remember that this book is about "body"), what better reward is there!

Paul speaks of the "simplicity that is in Christ" (2Co11:3) and of "avoiding the profane and empty babblings and contradictions of what is falsely called knowledge; by professing it some have strayed concerning the faith" (1Tim6:20-21)

But rather... be glad, and "...in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you." (1Th5:18)

All in the hand of God (Ecclesiastes 9)

"For all this I took to heart, in order to explain it: that the righteous and the wise and their works are in the hand of God. No man knows, whether by love or hatred, all that is before them. All happens alike to everyone; there is one event to the righteous and to the wicked; to the good and to the clean, and to the unclean; to him who sacrifices, and to him who does not sacrifice. As is the good, so is the sinner. He who swears is as he who fears an oath." (vs1-2)

When we speak of matters of the Church, and the pretender unbelievers that are in-amongst Believers, like the weeds among the wheat (Mt13:30), and speak of keeping the weeds out, we have observed that if weeds are -already- in the congregation, that one cannot necessarily go down the line "weeding": You, you, you...can stay, but you, you, you...there's the door. If a -person- is looking down upon a group of people from some perch or balcony, how does one spot the Believers to differentiate them from unbelievers? By the color of their hair? Coloration of the skin? Whether they have a limp or not? If they are right-handed or left-handed? By their clothing? If everybody were dressed alike, that does not tell what is in the heart.

When a baby is born, is it a "Christian" baby, or will it go to the grave an unbeliever? If it's a "Christian" baby, 'when' will the person be saved? If we cannot "know what shall be" how can we know "when it shall be?" (8:7)

A person is born, they grow, they live a life, they die. If you see a dead corpse lying there, was that person Godly or a sinner? As we have had wind storms recently, I experienced them just as my (unsaved) neighbors did. When I go shopping, I share the space with other (unsaved) shoppers. If it is raining, I get wet running from the vehicle to the house, just like my (unsaved) neighbors do.

And when all is said and done, "they go to the dead" (vs3b) And "no one has power over the spirit to restrain the spirit; nor power in the day of death; and there is no discharge from that war; nor shall wickedness deliver its owners" (8:8) When it's time to die, a person cannot sputter with, "B'but...wait! I refuse to die!"

If a person dies, leaving behind the live pets, those animals are better off than the dead person. (vs4b) They can rummage around with 'activity'. The dead person just lies there. Even a fool, if alive, is better than a dead person, because at least they have knowledge that they will die; they know they are alive. (vs5) For the dead person there is no more love, hate, ambition or anything. Their activity on the earth "under the sun" is over. They cannot strive for rewards or to gain more status to be remembered. (vs5-6) It is finished.

So, what is the exhortation?

Go, live life. Eat, drink, enjoy the fruits of your labor. "for God has already accepted your works" (vs7b) That's what God put us on this earth for. If we engage in the activities of life, we are doing as God designed...and to that extent we are pleasing to Him.

(Again: remembering that this book is about "body"; not soul or spirit)

If you are married? Live life together as a couple. Make your plans together, live together, and enjoy life together. Love each other. This, too, God designed. If a married couple are enjoying each other, this, too, is pleasing to God; that's what He designed and created. (vs9) and when He was finished, called it "extremely good" (Gen1:31)

Do you have something to do? Then do it with all you have, because in the here-after none of these things follow. (vs10) Wherever the "gates of death" (Job38:17) lead, nothing we have here can we take with us. We came naked into this world, and that's how we leave. (Job1:21)

However, for all the striving and hard work we might put into life, and enjoy it, outcomes are not necessarily under our control...

"I returned and saw under the sun that the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, nor yet bread to the wise, nor yet riches to men of understanding, nor yet favor to men of skill; but time and chance happens to them all." (vs11)

Again: Solomon is speaking as though only through -physical- observation. But notice that he interjects two truths throughout the book, as he will also conclude the book. 1) Wisdom, and 2) God.

The rest of this chapter closes with Solomon speaking of wisdom; how wisdom overcomes insurmountable odds. We won't look at it now, because we also have the series in Proverbs, which is pretty much totally about wisdom in its various forms.

But as Proverbs notes: where is the source of wisdom? Does one just reach up into thin air and grab a 'handful' of wisdom, and use it? Is wisdom sourced within a wise person? If a person is wise, where did they get their wisdom?

"The fear of Jehovah is the beginning of wisdom; and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding." "The fear of Jehovah is the instruction of wisdom..." (Pr9:10,15:33)

And that's where this chapter began. Solomon spins around a lot of words the way unregenerate scholarship does. Solomon had the entire known world coming to learn wisdom at his feet. (1Ki4:34, 10:24, etc) Paul, in

speaking with the Athenians, also spoke of earthly things, in order to direct their attention to the One they acknowledged as the "unknown God" (Ac17) God "created all things" (Eph3:9, Rev4:11) through Jesus Christ, and it is through Him that "we live and move and exist". (Ac17:28)

What we have seen in this chapter, about things happening by "chance" (vs11) is how unregenerate man sees things. Even when they pretend to speak of Jesus, as I was reminded the other day on a public TV program "Crisis of faith", their scholars and experts spew forth words, going round and round with speculations and theories, speaking of Jesus in totally 'human' terms...never once acknowledging Deity. And humanity does this, elevating Jesus as a "great (historic) teacher", as they do Plato, Confucius, Gandhi, Hammurabi, or what-have-you.

And as they try to speculate the origins of everything, science fiction comes up with a pale milky-eyed prophet-like figure of the "Ori" and "origin" (For you StarGate SG1 watchers this season) ...but everything comes down to "chance". By 'chance' there was a "big bang", and by 'chance' the material spewed forth and collected into stars and solar systems, and by 'chance' some chemicals formed and by 'chance' some of those chemicals started to -live-...on their own, by 'chance'.

Everybody ignores, rejects, explains away, denies the Key. Solomon spends many words giving man's arguments about futility and chance. But notice that he also gave the answer at the very beginning. What is the Key to life? to wisdom? Why is 'chance' NOT "chance" at all?

-- GOD --

Man does not know what is before them. (vs1b) Since man cannot predict 'what' will be, neither can he predict 'when' it will be. (8:7) But by definition, God does. By definition God says, "I am God, and no one else is like Me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from antiquity things which are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all My pleasure;" (Is46:9-10)

Man wringes his collective hands, often in dismay, worried about what will come to pass. Will man blow the earth up with nuclear weapons? Will man 'damage' the earth with global warming? Is man polluting the earth so badly that all animal species will eventually become extinct?

But the Believer does not worry. Christians often encourage each other with words similar to: It's in the Lord's hands. Don't worry, He's got everything under control. It will all happen according to His will. etc

That's exactly what Solomon says: "the righteous and the wise and their works are in the hand of God" (vs1)

So don't worry...

"...why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; and yet I say to you that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Now if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is thrown into the furnace, will He not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? Therefore do not be anxious, saying, What shall we eat? or What shall we drink? or What shall we wear? For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your Heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you. Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble." (Mt6:28-34)

Amen!

the Tongue and Authority (Ecclesiastes 10)

"If the spirit of the ruler rises up against you, remain quietly where you are; for quietness heals great offenses" (vs4)

What is that saying: "Let the sleeping dog lie."

I don't know what children's cartoons are these days, but it seems to me years ago there used to be one where this ferocious dog would be sleeping in his 'house', and other smaller creatures would come around (perhaps a cat?), poking at him, making noises...with the preparations to sprint away to safety. And when he was finally woken, gnashing his fangs, he'd go chasing the tormenter, who by now had escaped to safety and was now sticking out their tongue and wagging their hands from their ears. Ha, ha! You can't catch meeee!!! 'Woke up the sleeping dog!

There was actually such a real-life scenario I witnessed a few years ago. A squirrel was hippity-hopping in my neighbor's yard, in plain view of the dog from across the street. Instead of its usual "squirrel" hopping for the purpose of 'going' from point A to point B to forage food, it was hopping straight up, high into the air, and back down; not actually going anywhere. Seemingly trying to be as conspicuous to the dog as possible. And of course the dog was watching; a dog whose own yard boundaries were pretty clearly defined to it by fences, sidewalks, and owner reprimand/training. It knew it wasn't supposed to go out into the street. But sitting there, on its haunches, drooling after the squirrel...and the squirrel...taunting it. After a bit, the dog had exercised all the patience he could muster, and CHARGED across the street towards the squirrel. I've never before heard such fast claw scratchings against the driveway pavement as the squirrel scurried past me down the driveway, and up the maple tree, to safety. And of course, by now, the dog's owners are yelling at it to "HEY!!! GET OVER HERE!!!"

Had the squirrel been minding its own business, the dog might not have taken much notice. But it was hippity-hopping...-HIGH- into the air. Like the little goody two-shoes girl, making faces at the boy, goading him on to be "like a boy" and get into trouble, while she is the innocent little by-stander cherub...so she can later stick out her tongue and wrinkle her nose at him. Nya! Nya!

Those are things we might chuckle at. I laughed pretty hard when the dog chased the squirrel up the tree, as I had watched the whole thing, and waited for it to unfold.

But in real life, when monarchs are concerned, what happens if citizenry decides to picket? Police and militia are called out to quell the disturbance. If a person is in court and mouths off to the judge, are they not hauled off to prison for "contempt of court"? This, a separate issue from whatever the

original case might be. An employee, if they are continually grouching against management and production methods, will they not be relieved of employment?

As this is being prepared in August, 'currently' the "Big Brother 8" is running; I've been watching this season because I'm a people-watcher, and there are a couple of "characters" I'm keeping track of. However, there is this one "player" the rest of the house doesn't know about; he is called "America's Player". He is continually tasked by viewers to campaign for certain people to get evicted, vote certain ways, or to pull pranks on the other house guests, hopefully without detection. There have been some times the vote for eviction has gone in ways that have made the others suspicious, due to alliances and everybody thinking they know what each other is doing. There's even been a couple of times where they have "pinned" it on him, pointed to him, yelled at him, etc for going against the "alliance strategy". And in the game plan, as he denies it, and tries to cleverly point their attentions elsewhere; another thing I have noticed about him... when everybody else is all riled up, upset, yelling, shaking their heads, and generally all frustrated amongst themselves, the cameras will pan over and show him, sitting to the side, -quietly-. Keenly observing everything...but not uttering a peep. He "remains quietly where he is". Staying out of the thick of their animations. And indeed, given some time, and new events, any fingers that maybe had been pointing to him, well... he again ceases to be a "suspect".

The Believer is promised "affliction" (Jn16:33) But also notice what Peter exhorts:

"But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with MEEKNESS and FEAR; having a good conscience, that when they speak against you as evildoers, those who falsely accuse your good conduct in Christ may be ashamed." (1Pet3:15-16)

When Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah refused to bow to Nebuchadnezzar's image, their first response is, "we have no need to answer you in this matter" (Dan3:16) and immediately turn the focus on God who -can- rescue them, if it is His will to do so. They do not pontificate their own greatness, nor tell the king off. And what happens? When God does rescue them, what is the king's attitude toward them? Did he tear down the image? It doesn't say that he did. But he also issues an edict of protection for the three. Even though they won't obey his edict, he also 'respects' them. His conversion won't happen until ch4.

We've addressed this next thought before in the past. It is my sincere belief that, in our (as yet) "free" nations, governmental encroachment happens to some church entities where, if they behaved differently, the government would leave them alone. There are churches who roust up their members to go on pickets, create a ruckus in front of media cameras,

commit illegal acts (bombings and vandalism), whereas if they were to keep their noses clean, mind their own business, and preach the gospel like Jesus commissioned, the authorities would leave them alone.

Yes, Jesus preached to the multitudes...who sought Him out due to His good deeds of healing people, etc. But it says of His 'style', quoting prophecy,

"He will not strive nor cry out, nor will anyone hear His voice in the streets. A bruised reed He will not break, and smoking flax He will not quench, till He sends forth judgment to victory; and in His name the Gentiles will hope." (Mt12:19-21)

When Jesus was proclaiming Salvation, it was not yet the time for the "kingdom". In fact, even when He was brought before Pilate, Pilate wanted to release Him, because he found no wrong-doing in Him according to Caesar's laws. (Mt22:21)

And when the disciples ask Him if it's yet time to "restore the kingdom", Jesus instead tells them it is none of their business, but to PREACH the GOSPEL. (Ac1:6-8)

But what do we see today? Pastors, whom Jesus said are to be "servants" (Mt20:26), aspiring to national politics and leadership.

"I have seen servants on horses, and princes walking on the ground like servants" (vs7)

It is true that "evil...comes from the ruler's presence" and their "folly is set in great dignity" (vs5-6) But God does not commission His servants to take over Caesar's domain. He has sent us out as "sheep in the midst of wolves" (Mt10:16) It is not the Christian's place to rise up against Caesar. When it is the right time the King of kings, Himself, will do so. (Re19) When so-called "christians" try to delve into Caesar's domain, what they are doing is trying to be "greater than [their] Master" Christians are "messengers". A messenger is not "greater than the One sending him" (Jn13:16) And Jesus says, "If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them." (Jn13:17)

"The words of a wise mouth are gracious" (vs12a)

This is what was said of Jesus...

"And all bore witness to Him, and marveled at the gracious words going forth out of His mouth." (Lk4:22)

But the fool?

"The words of his mouth begin with foolishness; and the end of his talk is wicked madness" (vs13)

But BE CAREFUL with your words. And even before your words, be careful with your thoughts.

"Do not curse the king, not even in your thoughts; and do not curse the rich, not even in your bedroom; for a bird of the air may carry the voice, and that which has wings shall tell the matter" (vs20)

Sorry for another personal example, but it illustrates this verse...

Some years ago I parted ways, severed friendship, with a person. Why? She lied to me. Well... so what? Don't all people lie at some time? This was different. She had been a mutual friend of my wife and me. And when my unequal yoke took off, she remained a friend... for awhile. She was pretending to be -my- "friend", claiming to not have contact with my departed ex. But then along the way I discovered she had been in contact, serving as a sort of "spy".

When I parted ways with her, I told her why. I told her that she had been -lying- to me. Of course, she was all 'surprised', and wondering "how" she had lied to me, or "what" she might have said. Of course, I did not tell her 'how' I knew. If you once start tipping your hand to a liar, they then "figure out" where you are coming from, so they can make "adjustments" to their story, as they build lie upon lie.

How did I find out the lies? Well, you see, this "friend" also did some babysitting for a neighbor across the street. And along the way I also became acquainted with this same neighbor. One day as the neighbor and I were visiting privately, the subject of my 'ex' came up, and the neighbor made a comment, said in innocence, not realizing any significance to it. But it was something that, originally, would have been recognizable only to my ex and myself. How did this 'neighbor' know? Through the daughter that my "friend" was babysitting, heard during babysitting, and repeated in innocence...as children repeat things they hear. Where did the girl hear it? From my "friend" and/or perhaps when my 'ex' was there visiting, unknown to me...for sure, when there was contact of some sort, of which the "friend" -lied- when she said there was 'none'.

This is a very 'simple' example. The ones relaying the words (even the "friend") had absolutely no idea the words they said would have any meaning, other than the 'surface' meaning of words...just as a carrier pigeon has no knowledge of the message that is attached to its feet...it is set loose and "goes home", where somebody else retrieves the message.

That which comes out of the mouth in an unplanned unsuspecting moment is either truth related to events, or one's true thoughts.

"For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks." (Mt12:34)

When it comes to monarchs and politics, there are "birds" who are in the business to deliberately eavesdrop. I'm sure we've all seen the spy movies where a waiter picks up on conversations in a restaurant and relays information, or other such things. Today, technology is such that if some agency wants information badly enough, there is no keeping it from them. Sensitive microphones, phone tapping, e-mail snooping, surveillance cameras, computer networks and databases, etc.

When Paul speaks of "honor to whom honor" (Rom13:7) does such a thing not include the kinds of things one says about the authorities. Years ago I visited with an old friend who, at the time of my visit, he was in the Army as a surgeon; during the time of Clinton's escapades. When I said something about Clinton, he would not carry the ball and go down that topic. For good or bad, Clinton was -his- commander-in-chief. As Paul says, when brought before an illegally-convened court before the high priest, and then discovers it is the high priest: "You shall not speak evil of a ruler of your people" (Ac23:5) Or like some years ago when I went to our local AirForce "Aerospace Days", where the public can drive into the air base, and look at airplanes and watch air performances, I was chatting with a pilot of a B-52 that had been flown in from N.Dakota for the show, and making chit-chat about all the military engagements Clinton was commanding back in those days: there, too, he would not make comment. Even though I'm sure they had their own opinions, they were "under authority". They were representatives of their commander-in-chief.

In our "free" societies where the populace presumably elects their officials, there is freedom to talk about them, because the officials are... uh... 'officially' our "employees", their salaries paid from -our- tax monies. But in some countries where monarchies rule, there is often not such freedoms. Whatever nation the Believer resides in, the Christian comports himself according to Caesar's rules for that nation.

There used to be another saying: The only sure way for a secret to be secure between two people, is if one of them is dead.

And in society, there are the busybodies... the gossips. The neighborhood where I live has several of them. If something happened in the vicinity, and I happen by during a walk and stop to chat, they ask me "what I know" about it. Another one volunteers information about things I had no idea. Before the current occupants moved in, at one house years ago there used to be a couple of little ol'grandma type biddies, who when the house went on the market "For Sale", and we were interested and went to look at it, we found out all sorts of stuff about ourselves we hadn't known before.

"For we hear that there are some who walk among you in a disorderly manner, not working at all, but are busybodies." (2Th3:11)

"And besides they learn to be idle, wandering about from house to house, and not only idle but also gossips and busybodies, saying things which they ought not." (1Ti5:13)

But the Godly Believer is not to be like them.

"For we all stumble in many things. If anyone does not stumble in word, he is a flawless man, able also to bridle the whole body... And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity. Thus the tongue is set among our members, defiling the whole body, and sets on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire by Gehenna... But no man is able to tame the tongue. It is an uncontrollable evil, full of deadly poison. With it we bless our God and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the image of God. Out of the same mouth comes forth blessing and cursing. My brethren, it is not fitting that these things be this way." (~Ja3)

"Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show his works out of good conduct, in the meekness of wisdom." (Ja3:13)

Diligent Generosity (Ecclesiastes 11:1-6)

"Cast your bread upon the waters; for you shall find it after many days"
(vs1)

Over the years I have heard so many distortions of these words to support an equal number of cockamamie ideas and agendas. It was a popular expression to quote back in the 70s. However, that was long enough ago, and the ideas were so ludicrous, I have now forgotten what they were. But the impression of revulsion remains with me.

However, there is a famous saying: "What goes around, comes around."

Usually, that saying is applied to situations where somebody behaves cantankerously, doing injury or offending others; and then eventually, given time, bad circumstances come back upon the originator of the evil deeds. And people observe: See? He had it coming! He 'asked' for it!

However, there is also an equally true scenario. Perhaps somebody is stranded along the road, and a good Samaritan stops and helps, and gets them on their way. "What do I owe you?" "Awe, forget it...just help somebody else sometime" And so today's culture speaks of "spreading the luuv". One person does a good deed to one, that one does a good deed for another, and another, and eventually in that manner it is perceived that the original do-gooder's deed has spread to many others; and eventually down the road, one of those might help the original person.

If bread is spread on the water, what happens to it, if ducks are not in the immediate vicinity to gobble it up? Wherever the water is flowing, that's where the bread goes. Just like the tree that falls: wherever it lands, there it is. (vs3) So, what happens to that bread along the way? Perhaps a fish jumps up to grab a piece here. A bird gets a piece there. Perhaps a piece gets lodged in the rocks next to the shore where a squirrel or some other creature comes along and eats it. As those pieces travel down the stream, they provide benefit along the way. And the person who scattered the bread has no knowledge of the full extend of those benefits.

When giving aid to people, be generous.

"Give a share to seven, and also to eight; for you do not know what evil shall be on the earth" (vs2)

In these days of terror attacks, and calamities in various places of the world, there is talk by many of "stocking up" to be "prepared". Have enough food stuffs for several months, for several years. Different self-proclaimed "experts" pontificate differing recommended times. There are also those who have weapons and lots of ammunition so that they can "protect" themselves against others who did not make similar preparations,

and come along in marauding bands to steal from those who did stock up. Hollywood has produced some movies based on these themes.

To the Jewish mind, to do something "seven times" was a way in which they could feel self-righteous for having done "the right thing", as they compartmentalized and pigeon-holed their good deeds. Peter asks Jesus about forgiveness, "Up to seven times?" Jesus resp

Jesus taught this concept about the man who was being relieved of his position, who goes around to his master's debtors and lowers their debts. For what reason? "that..they may receive me into their houses" (Lk16:4) This being "received" isn't just for -visiting-, but to be nourished by them, for the privilege to sit at their meal tables.

How do you know but what the tables won't be turned? You have now, and they don't. But what happened to them could equally happen to you, and they are in your present situation of plenty. If you are stingy with them now, later when you need help, will they be stingy to you?

This is also the concept Jesus taught,

"And as you would have men do to you, you also do likewise to them." (Lk6:31)

And this also extends to one's enemy.

"If you encounter your enemy's ox or his donkey going astray, you shall bring it back to restore it to him. If you see the donkey of one who hates you lying under its burden, you shall refrain from leaving it to him; you shall help him set it free." (Ex23:4-5)

You see... if you "cast your bread upon the waters", and it disappears downstream from view, how do you know -who- is receiving benefit? Is it a friend or foe? It doesn't matter. Do it anyway.

A little different context, but Jesus commands the disciples regarding the healing He was giving them authority to do: "Freely you have received, freely give" (Mt10:8)

Even though we may work for what we have, even so, what we have comes from God. It is not for us to hoard. Yes, there is the concept that Paul teaches against purposeful laziness, "If anyone does not desire to work, neither shall he eat." (2Th3:10)

But if we are diligent with what God gives us, He will see to it that our needs are always met, too.

"I have been young, and now am old; yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread." (Ps37:25)

the Years of Life (Ecclesiastes 11:7-10)

"Truly the light is sweet, and a pleasant thing it is for the eyes to behold the sun. But if a man lives many years, and rejoices in them all; yet let him remember the days of darkness, for they shall be many. All that has come is vanity." (vs7-8)

Jacob, in looking back upon his life, commented:

"The days of the years of my pilgrimage are one hundred and thirty years; few and evil have been the days of the years of my life..." (Gen47:9)

And yet he also remembered -who- had sustained his life,

"God, before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked, the God who has fed me since I was born to this day, the Angel who redeemed me from all evil..." (Gen48:15-16)

When a person is young is there not often a sense of optimism and invincibility: Nothing can hurt me! And is it not the younger ones who engage in the X-treme sports; flipping motorcycles in the air, and all sorts of other things. The other day I saw a TV promo for 'something' where they showed these young punks attempting to jump between buildings and walls, and not making it...so they bang their heads and faces on the other side. When X-treme 'athletes' are interviewed it often comes out how many bones they have broken over the years. But then as they get old, all those joints that had been injured during the young years of "invincibility" begin to ache with arthritis and other ailments, and you see them hunched over, walking with canes and walkers, hobbling along.

Paul was given a "thorn in the flesh" to keep him humble. (2Co12:7) And yet he also could confidently say, "I have lived in all good conscience before God" (Ac23:1) and again, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith. Hereafter, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all the ones loving His appearing." (2Tim4:7-8)

But he also had darker memories,

"For I am the least of the apostles, who am not fit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God." (1Co15:9)

But he also understood,

"And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose. For whom He

foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son..." (Rom8:28-29)

By way of personal testimony, I can attest to God's grace in one's life. During my college years I became persuaded, not by the college elites of the world, but by a trusted fellow-christian, to "become tolerant" of all the apostasy that surrounded me. I never turned away from God; my heart was always as fervent with the desire to serve Him. But the tolerance tainted me. Then, due to my compromised state, having become blind to certain things, I became unequally yoked. Where God's purpose for me was to preach the Gospel, I spent time doing music, assuming that's how I was to preach. But those were also years of "leanness of soul" (Ps106:15); even when going from church to church doing concerts, in my heart I knew there was 'something' -more- I should be doing. Then, at a certain point God began peeling away the dirt and corruption: the -correct- "Gospel" message was renewed into my consciousness, the music was left behind, and the unequal yoke was removed. If the question were to be asked today, "What do you want to do when you grow up?", my answer is "- Exactly- what I am doing right now!"

Today I can "behold the sun" and enjoy the "sweetness" of life. Memories are still vivid of the youthful failures, and childhood abuses when growing up. But if I hadn't made those past choices, and if those other things hadn't happened to me as they did...all of which, in looking back, were "days of darkness", I would not be where I am to day. God -does- cause all things to work together for "good" to those who love Him. He takes everything in one's life and uses them to "conform" His child and servant into the "image of His Son".

And so, the exhortation to youth is, "Rejoice in your youth, young man" (vs9) One of the vigors of youth is fruitfulness, and the quiver that is full is blessed of God. (Ps127:3-5) The exhortation is to, "rejoice with the wife of your youth" (Pr5:18) There is so much that youth can do -because- of their youth, that becomes limited with age. So "rejoice" in youth. Enjoy it. God has blessed it.

But also, take stock of the "ways of your heart, and the sight of your eyes" because a time of judgment is coming. (vs9) We all give account before God concerning ourselves (Rom14:12) "every idle word" will be called into account. (Mt12:36)

Youth is often brash with its tongue, and impulsive in its deeds. And there is the attitude that this youthful state is forever, and there is no end in sight. But there -is- an accounting. As in the previous lesson, "what goes around comes around". They speak of youth "sowing its wild oats". Thing is, what is sown sprouts and grows up...and wherever the tree fell...there it is. (vs3) Whatever is sown, grows up, and one must live with the consequences. Things can never be UN-done!

Therefore, what is the exhortation to youth?

"..remove vexation from your heart, and put away evil from your flesh" (vs10a)

It's like a verse we did not address a couple lessons ago...

"As dead flies cause the perfumer's ointment to stink and ferment; so does a little folly to one esteemed for wisdom and honor" (10:1)

Yes, God can take a messed up life and "cause" it to turn out "for good"... But the even better way is to not mess up in the first place. This is one reason fathers are exhorted to use the "rod of correction" to "drive [foolishness] far from him" (Pr22:15) But even better than the rod is when a young person finds it in their soul to have a "heart" that is purified. Take those "flies" out of the ointment. Put away the evil deeds.

Today's society has things backwards. They assume childhood is "innocent", as they exhort parents to "listen to" their children...in so-doing they might learn something. But God's wisdom exhorts children to...

"...hear the instruction of your father, and do not forsake the law of your mother;" (Pr1:8) "Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. Honor your father and mother, which is the first commandment with promise:" (Eph6:1-2)

But they are "sooo old"! Remember? This book is about the "vanity" of physical life. "for childhood and black hair of youth are vanity" (vs10b) How

those

But there is something even more fundamental, which also concludes Tc 01

the Creator (*Ecclesiastes 12*)

"Remember now your Creator in the days of your youth, so that the evil days do not come, nor the years draw near, when you shall say, I have no pleasure in them" (vs1)

This verse, and the two closing verses, are likely among -the- MOST IMPORTANT WORDS one finds in all of Scripture while we are on this earth. And they are at the same time the MOST DESPISED by the condemned (Jn3:18) unregenerate world. The Bible begins with the words,

"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" (Gen1:1)

When a person picks up a new book to read, they typically open to the first chapter of the first page and start reading the first words of the author. The Bible, being the sort of book it is, one often turns to various books within the book in 'reference' fashion. But if the Bible is picked up, unknown to the reader, and they do as they do with most books, they are at Genesis 1:1, and read the words just quoted. When people read books, their decision to either 'continue' reading, or to 'put the book down' is often governed by their impression and reaction to the opening words of the book.

What do most people do with the Bible? They put the Book down! Why? Because they rebel at the opening premise: That -God- is the Creator.

But, -that- God -is- the Creator is God's opening salvo, and also the final warning before ultimate judgment of this present world system. Just before Christ comes to wrench the kingdoms away from satan, the message will be proclaimed "...to every nation, tribe, tongue, and people...

"Fear God and give glory to Him, for the hour of His judgment has come; also, do homage to Him WHO MADE THE HEAVENS AND THE EARTH" (Rev14:6-7)

What is the world's alternative to "God created"? Evolution. And where is it being taught? In the schools, in the "days of [their] youth". What happens when young people are raised on atheism? When they get old they remain in rebellion against God.

Christian parents, if for no other reason, this is reason enough for you to home school your kids. Train them up in the ways of "your Creator" when they are young. You know the exhortation...

"Train up a child in the way he should go; and when he is old, he will not depart from it." (Pr22:6)

This training needs to happen before death. vs2-6 are poetic expressions of man's death and mourning process. But ultimately, after this physical bodily life is done...

"the dust shall return to the earth as it was, and the spirit shall return to God who gave it" (vs7)

And then, as we observed in prior lessons, where is the person? All earthly activity and decisions of "vanity" are finished. The person is no more on earth. Thus, whatever decisions regarding eternity a person makes, must be done -now-, while still alive on earth...

"Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation" (2Co6:2)

And also...

"...as the Holy Spirit says: TODAY, if you will hear His voice, do not harden your hearts..." (Heb3:7-8)

The preacher then summarizes his purpose in writing the book. As Saul had led Israel away from God, David led them back to God; and Solomon was following in David's footsteps, built the temple, and instituted the temple worship as God had given it to his father, David. In those societies the king was the 'teacher' to the population at large. Perhaps some will remember the media showing us how Saddam Hussein used to sit on his throne and make 'utterances' of "wisdom" to his people. He was following in millenia old tradition from that area of the world. The king was considered to be all-wise and all-knowing.

Notice Solomon's commentary regarding his own process in this regard. He "pondered, and sought out" his proverbs. He "sought to learn acceptable words; written words of uprightness and truth" (vs9-10)

Words have meaning. Precise words have precise meaning. Perhaps one of the most stressful aspects of writing things of importance is the choosing of the exact words to convey exactly what is intended. Because precise words are often like "goads" (vs11) that prick; to get the hearer motivated. If God's Word is to be attached to the door posts of one's house (De6:9), one chooses carefully the "nail" by which it is attached.

And this, too, is why the choosing of the right 'translation' of Scripture is so important. There are impostors producing translations that say -different- things from what God gave. Because God's Words are pure words...

"The Words of Jehovah are pure Words, like silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times." (Ps12:6) -and- "Do not add to His Words, that He not judge you and you be found a liar." (Pr30:6)

And so... how do we know the CORRECT WORDS? The preacher acknowledges:

"The making of many books has no end, and much study is a weariness to the flesh" (vs12)

Some people often quote this verse to school students somewhat in jest. But indeed, there are many books. John concludes his gospel with,

"And there are also many other things that Jesus did, which if they were written one by one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that would be written." (Jn21:25)

How does one find the correct words? By reading umpteen b'zillion books written by this author and that famous person? Does one need a 'library' full of book-after-book of commentaries?

"But the anointing which you have received from Him (Jn16:13-14) abides in you, and you have no need for anyone to teach you; but as the same anointing teaches you concerning all things, and is true, and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you will remain in Him." (1Jn2:27)

After all the talk of "vanity of vanities, all is vanity" what is the preacher's conclusion:

"FEAR GOD, and KEEP HIS COMMANDMENTS; for this is for every man. For God will bring every work into JUDGMENT, including every secret thing, whether good or evil" (vs13-14)

It is very simple. What goes around, comes around. Whatever you "cast..upon the waters" will be "found after many days" (11:1) This physical existence consists of cause-and-effect. If you throw an object, wherever you throw it, that's where it lands. If a tree falls, that's where it is. (11:3) If you put lotion on your skin, it will become soft. If you cut yourself with a knife, it will bleed. Not too tough to understand....right?

Equally simple:

If you do righteousness, God will bless. If you do evil, God will judge.

And it doesn't matter whether or not you believe in the Creator, He still, nevertheless exists, and is watching. For instance... Even if you didn't believe in 'gravity', if you jump off a high place, you -will- land 'below', and if it was high enough, you -will- be injured or killed. That is the cause-and-effect of the truth of gravity's existence. In similar fashion, you can claim to be an atheist and believe in evolution; but nevertheless the Creator -will- provide you with the 'effect' of your deeds... judgment.

Just a side note here: With all those who claim to be "atheists", why is it when some calamity occurs, or something of great shock and surprise,

that the first thing out of their mouths is, often, "Oh God!!!" or even "Oh my God!!!" ?? If the Creator doesn't exist, in their minds, why do they call out to Him like that? The continual -saying- of something indicates the implied truth of the understanding by the sayer of that entity's existence. Yes?

God also reviewed the same thing with Israel, which is also for us...

"...Jehovah will...rejoice over you for good, as He has rejoiced over your fathers, if you obey the voice of Jehovah your God, to keep His commandments and His statutes which are written in this Book of the Law, and if you turn to Jehovah your God with all your heart and with all your soul. For this commandment which I am commanding you today is not too difficult for you to understand, nor is it far off. It is not in the heavens, for you to think: Who shall ascend into the heavens for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it? Nor is it beyond the sea, for you to think: Who shall go over the sea for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it? But the Word is very near you, in your mouth and in your heart, that you may do it...

"I call Heaven and earth to bear witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse. Therefore choose life, that both you and your seed may live" (De30:9-14,19)

Amen!