

The purpose of this lesson is to move on from the principle of doing God's will to some practical considerations. My passage is selected from Ecclesiastes. Ecclesiastes has been avoided by many bible students because it is a difficult book to understand in light of its apparent cynicism regarding its viewpoint. I think we should do a little preview of the book in order to gain some insight and then we will be turning to chapter 9.

The title of the book, Ecclesiastes is actually a transliteration from the LXX which is in turn taken from the original *qopheleth* which means the preacher. Solomon wrote three books under his *God-breathed* gift.¹ Each book is a hallmark of a stage in Solomon's experience as he lived his life as a believer in Jehovah. Song of Solomon was the earliest where he writes a very personal, romantic account of his encounter with his right woman. Proverbs was written during the height of his spiritual maturity. However, it does indicate that Solomon is going through a period of great temptation to depart from Jehovah - he sees in his own temptation the temptation that his own son, Rehoboam is experiencing. We have, in Proverbs, a very poignant account of a father's concern that his son seek the Lord's wisdom rather than his own.

Ecclesiastes has an entirely different tone to it. It has been misunderstood by many bible students, I fear, as a book written entirely with the theme of the futility - make that emptiness of life here on earth. Given that theme, I fear that we will lose out on a very important literary "device" that is used in the book - that of the use of two themes in counterpoint to each other. This literary device is epitomized in 7:14 where the good times of life are brought into "agreement" with the bad times.²

Solomon departed from the Lord in his lustful pursuits.³ As a result of his carnal pursuits, he was plunged into a period of estrangement from Jehovah and received the awful judgement from Jehovah that his kingdom would be torn from him and given to his servant, Jeroboam. The scriptures fall silent on the rest of Solomon's life so what I am about to say is inferred from piecing together the three books written by Solomon. It appears from the historical account that Solomon never recovered from his life of carnality but I think that is more a historical omission than historical fact. Ecclesiastes proves that point I think. I would like to suggest that the book of Ecclesiastes was written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and that the writer was certainly Solomon, himself, in the latter years of his life some time after his second encounter with Jehovah when Jehovah announced that his kingdom was to be torn in two. True, Jeroboam did

¹ Called the Theopneustic gift. Theo = God, pneustic = breathed. Ask for my Bible study series on the Doctrine of the Holy Spirit.

² Eccles. 7:14 In the day of prosperity be joyful, but in the day of adversity consider: God also hath set the one over against the other, to the end that man should find nothing after him. (KJV, the best translation of this passage, by the way).

³ Read pertinent parts of I Kings 11.

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flee to Egypt until Solomon's death but I would like to suggest that the Holy Spirit would not allow a book written by a carnal king to be included in the canon of scripture. By inference (and I know I stand on ground that is a bit shaky) if this book was written by Solomon, he must have been brought back into communion with the LORD and the LORD saw fit to have him write this very important treatise on the futility of life apart from living in the preceptive will of God. That is the theme of Ecclesiastes. For a man to live a life apart from the preceptive will of God is for him to experience the ultimate in emptiness - life in a vacuum of meaning and purpose. The challenge for the believer is this: total commitment of one's life to obeying the Word of God is paramount to a life of fulfillment. To do otherwise is to live as the unbeliever does - to live a life under the instructive discipline of God and to experience a life of futility. Peter put it this way:

For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. [9] But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins. 2 Peter 1:8-9 (KJV).

What are the "these things" that Peter is referring to? None other than the "exceeding great and precious promises" of God's word. This is the tragedy of the casual believer - he never realizes the richness of the grace of God - rather, under God's instructive discipline and His providential goodness experiences only what any other unbeliever can experience. This is not God's plan for the life of the believer - we are not to live on the same plane as the unbeliever - rather to live in the center of His Preceptive will and certainly His Decreed will - this is the plan of God for us. Ecclesiastes warns all of us not to be like the unbeliever - rather to remember our Creator - the implication being that we belong to Him as His creatures and as we will discover, are under His watch and care.

The Righteous are in the Hand of God, but may experience good or evil.

So I reflected on all this and concluded that the righteous and the wise and what they do are in God's hands, but no man knows whether love or hate awaits him. [2] All share a common destiny--the righteous and the wicked, the good and the bad, the clean and the unclean, those who offer sacrifices and those who do not. As it is with the good man, so with the sinner; as it is with those who take oaths, so with those who are afraid to take them. Eccles. 9:1-2 (NIV).

What both the believer and the unbeliever experience seem to be the same. Good or evil seem to be a "fate" or an event of chance. The difference is that the believer is in the hand of God. That's the difference. The problem is if we view our circumstances from the viewpoint of the world. Nothing makes any sense - except for grasp for all that we can and to hope that nothing "bad" will happen to us. We must consider the fact that we, as believers, *are in God's hands*. We need to consider what it means to be in

the Lord's hands. In Joshua 4:24, the Lord was mighty in Joshua's conquests. In 1 Kings 18:46, the Lord's hand was upon Elijah so that he had strength to outrun the chariot of Ahab. In Isaiah 5:25 and 9:17, however, the disciplinary hand was upon His people and even after much suffering - it still was upraised in discipline. However, in Isaiah 40:2 and 41:10 the Lord's hand is one of comfort and benign rule over His people. I think it is important to realize that whether we are aware of it or not - we as His children are in His hands and cannot escape His sovereignty - whether it be the "good" in our lives or the "evil" in our lives - we are, indeed, in His hands. So the hands in Ecclesiastes represent the Decreed Will of God in our lives. We accept the prosperity from His sovereign hands without a murmur - in fact, we may not even *acknowledge* that the good is from His hands. I fear that many believers delude themselves into thinking that the good in their lives are the result of their own doing! What a delusion! If there is anything we can learn from our passage in Ecclesiastes it is that both good and evil come from His hand and that He *allows or causes* our circumstances. It is the evil that catches our attention with regard to God. The "knee-jerk" response for us all is to say "why?" And yet, if we are to understand this and other passages we must understand the none of our circumstances catch God off guard - in fact, all of our circumstances are already recorded in God's dossier on us.⁴

So the inescapable conclusion from Ecclesiastes 9:1 and 2 is that we *are* in His sovereign hands and that although it certainly does not make sense to us at times as we live our lives "under the sun" we are still in His hands. I don't know about you but as for me - that's where I want to be - whether or not it makes any sense to me at the time.

We have one life to live for Him.

Go your way, eat your bread with joy, and drink your wine with a cheerful heart [if your are righteous, wise and in the hand of God], **for God has already accepted your works.** [8] **Let your garments always be white** [with purity], **and let your head not lack *the oil*** [of gladness *and appreciation*]. (Italics, my emphasis) Eccles. 9:7-8 (Amplified).

Oh, this is wonderful advise from Solomon (and the Lord)! I wonder if you catch the underlining theme of this passage? God "gives" us our circumstances. One noted Bible teacher calls all of our circumstances "gifts from God." When we are experiencing the "good" in our lives, let us have our heads anointed with the oil of gladness - appreciation that this good is from the Lord's hand. While we are in our happy circumstances - let us not neglect our garments of Christ's righteousness. Let us not

⁴ Psalm 139:15-16 My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place. When I was woven together in the depths of the earth, [16] your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.

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neglect the study of His word so that we might advance on from one precept from Him that we might obey it in gladness to another precept from that we might, again in eagerness, obey *it too*. This is the life we live before Him. We have a plan from God. Every detail might not be obvious to us as Solomon rightly teaches us here - but the plan is for our good.⁵ For the last few weeks I have been impressed with the thought that we should weigh everything with eternity's values in view. This passage certainly teaches that. We should always appreciate the good from His hands - we should always be careful to obey His Word as He in His wonderful grace reveals it to us precept by precept.

The verse (9) contain a wonderful lesson for us but I want to wait for another opportunity so that I can devote an entire lesson on it. Suffice it to say that God has included in His wonderful plan for us our life "under the sun" and has provided for us a spouse *and* a vocation. I hope you will forgive me if I pass on that passage for now so that I can use it to introduce the wonderful concept that even our life's work and our life's companion has been provided for us - what an exciting revelation from His word! Permit me to move on to verse 10.

Living our lives as unto the Lord is Paramount.

Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might, for in the grave, where you are going, there is neither working nor planning nor knowledge nor wisdom. Eccles. 9:10 (NIV).

And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men; Col. 3:23 (KJV).

This is the key. When we receive a precept from the Lord understanding it - we should be eager to obey it. When we receive a task from our vocation - it should be done eagerly - knowing that it is not our immediate supervisor who has given us the task but the Lord, Himself. Tasks around the home should be treated with the same care. The Lord will reward such an attitude with His blessing - both in our growth in maturity and in our relationships with each other.

We have only life to live for Him - we should not squander it in selfish pursuits. It is not for us to seek our personal gratification at the expense of others but to prayerfully seek His Preceptive Will for our lives and to live our lives knowing that after we are finished here there is no more opportunity to glorify Him as His children here in this sinful world.

⁵ Read Romans 8:28.