

We come the last lesson of Ecclesiastes - the "big picture" book of the argument of living our lives for the Lord. To do otherwise invites calamity, especially at the end of our lives. It is possible to live a life apart from a personal relationship with the Lord for He supplies the means to do so. Even when the life of a sinner apart from Christ seems to be surrounded by the "ideal" and the "good," in the final analysis he *must* face the meaningless of life without Christ and the horrible judgment of God. There certainly is no positive assurance that a life lived in relative abiding by the law and in the prosperity *that is ultimately supplied by the Lord* is going to lead anywhere but an eternity in hell - the place reserved for the Devil and his henchmen. The sober fact is that men living apart from the redemptive work of Christ will face the harsh judgment of God but the righteous will be rewarded for their faith in the finished work of Christ - apart from any perceived good on their part.

While Ecclesiastes does not detail the redemptive work of Christ, it does lay out the responsibility of the sinner to seek the Lord *while he is young* and the Lord will bring him to Christ - the latter truth is supplied by other passages of God's word as found in the canon of scripture that He has been careful to preserve for all sinners to hear. So let's cover the last of this mini-series and see how Jesus Christ resolves the futility of life.

The Symphony of Life in God's Sovereignty.

Do not say, "Why were the old days better than these?" For it is not wise to ask such questions. [11] Wisdom, like an inheritance, is a good thing and benefits those who see the sun. Eccles. 7:10-11.¹

We all must face reverses in life - we all must face the loss of loved ones. The temptation is to ask of God "Why?" Solomon says this is the wrong attitude. Is he arguing against the normal process of grief? No. He is saying that it is not wise to become bitter about life's reverses - especially in light of God's word and His sovereignty. I apologize for repeating myself in dealing with this verse, but I feel that it deserves our attention one more time. The fact is that God does *not* shield the believer from the reverses of life - He does not keep men from disease any more than He protects from old age and death - or for that matter an untimely death. But we still ask the same question, "Why?"

Divine Viewpoint - the protector of the believer.

Wisdom is a shelter as money is a shelter, but the advantage of knowledge is this: that wisdom preserves the life of its possessor. Eccles. 7:12.

Part of the recovery process from traumatic loss or a serious reverse in life such as chronic illness is the application of Divine Viewpoint to our situation. It is natural to ask the "Why" question - it is supernatural to submit to the Truth that we are in God's hand - His

¹ Unless otherwise noted, all passages are from NIV.

sovereignty (ch 9:1). Solomon uses this interesting example from the economic world that as we, wisely, keep a "rainy day" slush fund in the bank to guard against the possibility of financial reverses - so we should wisely keep "banked" His wisdom so that in the day of calamity we have a reserve to draw upon. Today's convention is that the breadwinner should keep about 3 months of wages in a savings account so that if he should lose his job or be unable to work he has a means to support his family. That seems like an absurd plan but that is the recommended plan for the responsible breadwinner. But we live in a materialistic world where the possessions of things have a top priority. Never before has the phrase "keeping up with the Joneses" been applicable. We would rather spend our money on things rather than save it aside and that is unfortunately the attitude that many believers have with regard to "banking" Divine Viewpoint. It is not effective to turn to the Bible in our time of need to "discover" some truth that will carry us through - a sort of "magic bullet" that save the day. No. We must use *what has already been assimilated in the heart*.

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

The "why" of reverses in life is that we are all in the sovereignty of God and in order to recover from our despair we must rely on His wisdom not ours. We have already covered this passage in a previous lesson but I remind you that when the Hellenic Jews needed a word to translate the phrase "**...set the one over against the other...**" they used the Greek word from which we get symphony - in Barok music the precise illustration would be the use of two melodies in *counterpoint* to bring out a complex harmony - that is the illustration of God's sovereignty in our lives. Romans 8:28 is certainly true in the lives of believers - all things - the good and the bad - do work out for good - a symphony, if you please.

The Reward of Obedience Versus the Judgement of Disobedience.

When the sentence for a crime is not quickly carried out, the hearts of the people are filled with schemes to do wrong. [12] Although a wicked man commits a hundred crimes and still lives a long time, I know that it will go better with God-fearing men, who are reverent before God. [13] Yet because the wicked do not fear God, it will not go well with them, and their days will not lengthen like a shadow. Eccles. 8:11-13.

The righteous ask the question "Why doesn't God punish the evil deeds of men immediately?" Job asked the same question "**Why do the wicked live on, growing old and increasing in power?**" (Job 21:7). It is frustrating to the righteous to see unpunished evil - Solomon says it is downright puzzling for we would immediately punish

the evil - but as we learned in an earlier lesson we do not have omniscience and do not know all the implications of the actions of man - this is best left to our all-knowing God to punish the wicked in His time. We can rest in the knowledge that it will go better with the righteous who acknowledge the presence of God in their lives ("...who are reverent before God...").

The shadow of our lives. Verse 13 uses a common experience from every day life - the shadow. Consider the paradox - in verse 12 wicked men sometime live to an old age seemingly without being punished by God - *yet they cast no shadow*. The implication is that the righteous do cast a shadow - make that a full and rewarding life. Consider your legacy when at the end of our lives we must ask the question - what has been my shadow - my legacy - have I a life that is counted for Christ? Has my life cast a shadow over the lives of others? It looked like Paul, the apostle, was going to come to the end of his life - a criminal in the eyes of Roman law and yet he was able to say **"I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith."** (2 Tim. 4:7). His live had been dedicated to the preaching of the Gospel and the preparation of young men to carry on the good fight of faith and he offered no regrets for that life - Paul had cast a long shadow - he was the means of bringing many to Christ and was the leader of the defense of the Gospel in a cosmopolitan age of diversity of religions. Can we say the same thing - that our shadow is a long one of influence for Christ?

God Provides a Right Job and a Right Spouse.

**Always be clothed in white, and always anoint your head with oil. [9]
Enjoy life with your wife, whom you love, all the days of this
meaningless life that God has given you under the sun--all your
meaningless days. For this is your lot in life and in your toilsome labor
under the sun. Eccles. 9:8-9.**

Here we have another "Petunia in an onion patch." Nestled in all the gloom and doom of life's futility (without Christ) we have the wonderful provision by the Lord of a Right Occupation and a Right Spouse. But please notice verse 8 which is actually a bridge verse from the preceding. It is important for the young man and the young woman to observe the truth of being clothed in white - the symbol of purity. Anointing one's head with oil is the worshipful act of setting one apart as holy unto the Lord.² We need to understand that as believers we have the responsibility to make that decision that our lives do not belong to ourselves - to do with as we like - but our lives belong to the Lord. He and He alone has ultimately sovereignty over our lives and we need to live them in that light. God has provided for our happiness and fulfillment in specific ways. Here we have the wonderful truth that he has in eternity past provided for our occupation and our spouse. He will provide them both but it is up to us to put our lives in His hands.

² Exodus 30:22-25; 31-33

The Importance of the Right Choice.

As dead flies give perfume a bad smell, so a little folly outweighs wisdom and honor. [2] The heart of the wise inclines to the right, but the heart of the fool to the left. [3] Even as he walks along the road, the fool lacks sense and shows everyone how stupid he is. Eccles. 10:1-3

Interesting word-picture. Imagine a bottle of Channel #5 with a dead fly in it? The image here is the goodness of all the good that the Lord gives to men in order that they might enjoy life and through a series of disobedience that whole life is spoiled and become something disgusting - a perfume bottle with a dead fly in it! The imagery continues with the left hand versus the right hand. This is used in other places to depict contrast - here the left - away from the equator the cold - the right toward the sun - the warm. The disobedient will choose that which will ultimately result in calamity in his life the wise will choose the right pathway which results in the warmth of God's blessing. Ultimately the unwise choice of the rebellious will be obvious to all around him at least in the eyes of the righteous and the Lord. As pointed out in an earlier lesson, they didn't have Right Guard™ and the making of this perfume applied to both men and women. However, Don has pointed out that it was a constant problem that flies would be attracted to the apothecary's mixture - if left in the potion it would render it useless - disgusting. What an important lesson this is for us as we make our priorities and decisions. The perfume is all the good things the Lord has given in His generosity. We have so much potential for counting for the Lord and to have a rewarding life *in Him*. But along come the flies of our bad decisions, our laziness, our egotistical inclinations and we become a stench in the Lord's nostrils and to those around us.

It is important for us to consider our choices in life as important - we should not base them on our preferences - rather on what is right in the eyes of the Lord. This principle can apply in every area of our lives - make the wrong choice - turn to the left and we have the Fly of our follies in the perfume of our lives - turn to the right and our lives are a wonderful testimony to those around us of the work that the Lord can do in a sinner's life. And our lives are a sweet smelling savor to the Lord.³

³ 2 Cor. 2:14-15 "Now thanks be unto God, which always causeth us to triumph in Christ, and maketh manifest the savour of his knowledge by us in every place. [15] For we are unto God a sweet savour of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish:" KJV

Prepare for the End of your Life in your Youth.

Light is sweet, and it pleases the eyes to see the sun. [8] However many years a man may live, let him enjoy them all. But let him remember the days of darkness, for they will be many. Everything to come is meaningless. [9] Be happy, young man, while you are young, and let your heart give you joy in the days of your youth. Follow the ways of your heart and whatever your eyes see, but know that for all these things God will bring you to judgment. [10] So then, banish anxiety from your heart and cast off the troubles of your body, for youth and vigor are meaningless. [12:1] Remember your Creator in the days of your youth, before the days of trouble come and the years approach when you will say, "I find no pleasure in them"-- Eccles. 11:7-12:1

It is wonderful to wake up in the morning to see the Sun. This is a picture of youth - the day is full of opportunities. The picture here is that the Lord has given the life of the youth as a full, rewarding sun-filled day and that he should not squander it in laziness or disobedience but in enjoyment for what the Lord has provided him. Yes, there will be dark days but make the plans in light of the sovereignty of the Lord. We are not to worry about the bad times but, rather, cast our worries on Him and finally - -

We are to remember our Creator - especially while we have our health and vitality - yes, Seniors - this verse is for you and me - whatever days we have left both young and seniors alike - those days are given to us by the Lord so that we *can* have pleasure in them and that we can say that the Lord has been good to us in our old age.