

WISDOM
LITERATURE

*Rules for
Abundant Living*

Dr. Brian J. Bailey

version 1.1

“Wisdom Literature”

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PREFACE

In the scriptural sense, Wisdom Literature refers to two of the books that King Solomon wrote, namely, the *Book of Proverbs* and the *Book of Ecclesiastes*.

The title, *Book of Proverbs* (“Pro” meaning “for” and “Verba” meaning “words”), is translated in rabbinical writings as *Sepher Hokhmah*, which means *Book of Wisdom*. This is the theme of the Book.

Proverbs are essentially composed of two lines. The truth spoken in the first line may be confirmed by a similar thought in the second. For example, Proverbs 11:25 says, “*The liberal soul shall be made fat: and he that watereth shall be watered also himself.*” This is termed a “synonymous teaching.”

On other occasions, the first truth of a Proverb is explained in the second by means of its contrary, which is termed an “antithesis teaching.” We see an example of this in Proverbs 10:1, “*...A wise son maketh a glad father: but a foolish son is the heaviness of his mother.*”

The Book of Proverbs is filled with detailed instructions on practical living, concerning how to relate to God, parents, children, neighbours, those in authority, and even one’s enemies. The need to study Proverbs is emphasised by the prophet Isaiah, who said, “*And wisdom and knowledge shall be the stability of thy times, and strength of salvation: the fear of the Lord is his treasure*” (Isa. 33:6). Especially in

these tumultuous last days we need these pillars of strength to establish us. May we build our lives upon these pillars so that they will stand in the times of coming storms.

THE
BOOK
OF
PROVERBS

INTRODUCTION

1. A collection of proverbs from the teachings of King David
1:1–9:18
2. The proverbs of King Solomon
10:1–24:34
3. King Hezekiah appointed scribes to collect more proverbs
25:1–29:27
4. Miscellaneous proverbs attributed to Agur and King Lemuel
30:1–31:31

First Kings 4:32 states, “*And he spake three thousand proverbs: and his songs were a thousand and five.*” We are told that King Solomon spoke 3,000 proverbs (of which only 800 are recorded in the Book of Proverbs). His songs comprised 1,005 (of which only the last five are retained and included in the book entitled *The Song of Songs* written by Solomon.) The three books attributed to Solomon are traditionally said to have been written in the following time frames:

- Song of Songs—in the spring time of his youth
- Proverbs—in mid-life, or the wisdom of manhood
- Ecclesiastes—in his declining and disappointing old age

God’s Wisdom Seen in Creation

First Kings 4:33 continues, “*And he [Solomon] spake of trees, from the cedar tree that is in Lebanon even unto the hyssop that springeth out of the wall: he spake also of beasts,*

and of fowl, and of creeping things, and of fishes.” We see an example of this from Proverbs 30:24-28, which reads, “There be four things which are little upon the earth, but they are exceeding wise: The ants are a people not strong, yet they prepare their meat in the summer; The conies are but a feeble folk, yet make they their houses in the rocks; The locusts have no king, yet go they forth all of them by bands; The spider taketh hold with her hands, and is in kings’ palaces.”

This ratifies the truth that all nature reveals the glory and wisdom of God, as Paul states in Romans 1:20, *“For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse.”*

Purpose of the Book of Proverbs

Then 1 Kings 4:34 says, *“And there came of all people to hear the **wisdom** of Solomon, from all kings of the earth, which had heard of his **wisdom**.”* The Book of Proverbs is often referred to as a guide for successful living. The key word is **wisdom**, which is **the ability to live life skilfully, rooted firmly in the fear of the Lord.**

The purpose of this book of assembled Proverbs is stated in its prologue, *“To give subtlety to the simple, to the young man knowledge and discretion”* (Prov. 1:4). Furthermore, from verse 5 we understand it is to make the wise man wiser:

“A wise man will hear, and will increase learning; and a man of understanding shall attain unto wise counsels.”

We are going to study this book by means of the following subjects.

Outline and Contents

1. Wisdom
2. Knowledge
3. The Two Women—the Strange, Adulterous Woman, and the Virtuous, Wise Woman
4. Diligence and Hard Work
5. The Righteous and the Wicked, or the Two Men—the Righteous, Wise Man, and the Wicked, Foolish Man
6. Strong Drink
7. Wise and Foolish Children
8. The Words of Our Lips

PART ONE

Wisdom

Related to Proverb's principal theme of wisdom, two people are contrasted here—the wise and the simple. Basically, the difference between the two can be stated as those who apply themselves to the pursuit of wisdom, and those who reject or are negligent in hearing the voice of wisdom that cries unto the sons of men.

The wise are described in Proverbs 1:5-6 in the following manner, *“A wise man will hear, and will increase learning; and a man of understanding shall attain unto wise counsels: To understand a proverb, and the interpretation; the words of the wise, and their dark sayings.”* In contrast, fools are described in Proverbs 1:7 as those who, *“despise wisdom and instruction.”*

What Is Wisdom?

Wisdom is defined as the ability to live life in a manner that manifests the nature and purpose of God, as Paul suggests in Ephesians 3:10, *“To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God.”*

**Every right
choice
in life brings
forth
pleasant fruits!**

God makes the right decision in every situation, solving the problem. In other words, the rapids of life are negotiated successfully by the one who is filled with His wisdom.

Life is composed of choices, both little and great, every day of our earthly journey. Some are so important, like the choice of our marriage partner, that they impact the whole of our life and *eternity*. The Lord has forcefully impressed upon me that every right choice I make will bring forth pleasant fruits of righteousness, peace, joy, and prosperity.

Having defined wisdom, we want to determine the attributes of wisdom that we are to manifest on appropriate occasions. These are given to us in the form of conduct such as turning away wrath with a soft answer; being slow to speak and swift to hear; pacifying the angry and taking the lower place; choosing good companions rather than evil companions; and loving righteousness and hating wickedness. These qualities will enable us to triumph in life and, as wise sons, glorify our Heavenly Father.

Who Obtains Wisdom?

Wisdom cannot be purchased with silver or gold, as we read in Proverbs 2:6, “*For the LORD **giveth** wisdom: out of his mouth cometh knowledge and understanding.*” To whom does the Lord give wisdom? We are told in Ecclesiastes 2:26, “*For God **giveth** to a man that is good in his sight wisdom, and knowledge, and joy: but to the sinner he giveth travail, to gather and to heap up, that he may give to him that is good before God. This also is vanity and vexation of spirit.*”

When we set out feet on the pathway of wisdom, then the promise of Daniel 2:21 is ours, that God “*giveth wisdom unto the wise.*” This is confirmed by Luke 19:26, which says, “*For I say unto you, That unto every one which hath shall be given; and from him that hath not, even that he hath shall be taken away from him.*”

How Do We Obtain Wisdom?

The next question is, “How do we obtain wisdom?” Job chapter 28 asks and answers that question. In verse 12 we read, “*But where shall wisdom be found? and where is the place of understanding?*” Then the response is given in verse 28, “*And unto man he said, **Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom;** and to depart from evil is understanding.*”

The key to understanding the fear of the Lord is given in Proverbs 2:1-5, “*My son, if thou wilt receive my words, and hide my commandments with thee; So that thou incline thine ear unto wisdom, and apply thine heart to understanding; Yea, if thou criest after knowledge, and liftest up thy voice for understanding; If thou seekest her as silver, and searchest for her as for hid treasures; Then shalt thou understand the fear of the LORD, and find the knowledge of God.*” Therefore, as we hide the commandments of the Lord in our hearts and seek wisdom, then we shall understand the fear of the Lord.

The fear of the Lord can be defined as *cautious living*. This is where we ensure that everything we do is pleasing to the Lord, and that our choices in any given circumstance are

in conformity with His wishes and His holy will. David described this state of holiness, *“I have set the LORD always before me: because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved”* (Ps. 16:8). This is, after all, what we were created for. We were created *by Him, for Him, and for His good pleasure* (Rev. 4:11).

The Lord is the One who has redeemed us by His blood. Therefore, as Paul states, we are not our own—for we have been bought with a price (1 Cor. 6:20). We now become His bond slaves; He is our Master and Employer. Thus, we seek to please Him, just as a person wants to please his earthly employer.

Moreover, Solomon adds to the definition of the fear of the Lord, *“to hate evil: pride, and arrogancy, and the evil way, and the froward mouth”* (Prov. 8:13). Concerning this virtue, we should point out that as we will walk in His fear, then we will receive the Spirit of the Fear of the Lord. This seventh anointing of the Holy Spirit, as recorded in Isaiah 11:2, is His treasure (Isa. 33:6). It is clean, and enduring forever (Ps. 19:9). It is a blessing to find the fear of the Lord, for one who does so prolongs his days (Prov. 10:27). The fear of the Lord also brings a strong confidence, which is a fountain of life to all who possess it (Prov. 14:26-27).

O how wonderful and what a privilege it is to have this precious anointing that keeps our heart from sin! O seek His fear, beloved, for it is so clean and lovely!

The Benefits of Wisdom

Continuing in our study of the attributes of wisdom, we learn from Solomon that wisdom is the principal thing (Prov. 4:7), and that all one can desire such as rubies, gold, or silver, cannot compare with it (Prov. 8:11; 16:16). It is a priceless possession, and according to Proverbs 19:8, he that loves his soul gets wisdom.

In Proverbs 4:8-9, Solomon speaks of the benefits of wisdom, saying, *“Exalt her, and she shall promote thee: she shall bring thee to honour, when thou dost embrace her. She shall give to thine head an ornament of grace: a crown of glory shall she deliver to thee.”*

These benefits are exemplified in the life of Joseph, of whom Pharaoh said in Genesis 41:38-43, *“And Pharaoh said unto his servants, Can we find such a one as this is, a man in whom the Spirit of God is? And Pharaoh said unto Joseph, Forasmuch as God hath shewed thee all this, there is none so discreet and wise as thou art: Thou shalt be over my house, and according unto thy word shall all my people be ruled: only in the throne will I be greater than thou. And Pharaoh said unto Joseph, See, I have set thee over all the land of Egypt. And Pharaoh took off his ring from his hand, and put it upon Joseph’s hand, and arrayed him in vestures of fine linen, and put a gold chain about his neck; And he made him to ride in the second chariot which he had; and they cried before him, Bow the knee: and he made him ruler over all the land of Egypt.”*

We cannot excel in our earthly occupations without a sound dose of wisdom. Great statesmen, scientists, and management gurus, have paid homage in appreciation of the wisdom contained in Holy Scripture. It has aided them in their darkest hours. We know Winston S. Churchill kept a copy of the Bible upon his bedside table in the darkest hours of World War II, although his latter end was not noted for godliness.

Peter Drucker, the renowned and respected professor and author of 50 management books, practised and recommended reading from the writings of Solomon in the Book of Proverbs, and also the writings of Paul. Yes, the wisdom of Scripture is relevant to all areas of life and its trades.

Wisdom Is a Person

In the beginning of the book of Proverbs, wisdom is personified by a woman who cries to the simple that if they will but turn, she will pour out her spirit unto them and that she will make known her ways (Prov. 1:20-33). Later we find that the Lord Himself is the personification of wisdom, as we read in Proverbs 8:12 and 20, *“I wisdom dwell with prudence, and find out knowledge of witty inventions...I lead in the way of righteousness, in the midst of the paths of judgment.”*

The thought that a woman first personifies wisdom is understood by the fact that the Church, always illustrated by a woman, is to manifest the manifold wisdom of God (Eph. 3:10), as does her Heavenly Bridegroom.

Here we see the Lord as wisdom guiding us in life through the ways that will cause us to prosper. O that we would seek Him, for His arms are ever outstretched towards us to give us according to our desires!

The Lord continues, *“That I may cause those that love me to inherit substance; and I will fill their treasures”* (Prov. 8:21). The Lord Himself is the very embodiment of wisdom, for we read that it pleased God that in the Lord Jesus, all the fullness of wisdom and knowledge should dwell (Col. 1:19; 2:9).

This was made very clear to me when the Lord appeared unto me as Wisdom. As I looked upon Him, I realised that I was contemplating Him in whom all the wisdom, knowledge, and understanding of God dwelt. He knew everything about me and knew me better than I knew myself. He was the very embodiment of knowledge; and there was absolutely nothing He did not know.

He, in fact, is the One who keeps all nature on its course, even the stars, the moon, and the sun. He also has a purpose for each and every man, woman, boy, and girl, upon this planet earth. Everything has a purpose for its existence. If we will seek Him—to walk in His ways and His will for our lives—we shall know such blessedness, rest, joy, and peace.

Thus, wisdom is to know Christ (who is Wisdom), and to walk in the fear of the Lord with great prudence and

circumspectness. In so doing, we will avoid life's pitfalls, accomplish His purposes, and then be clothed with glory, honour, and blessed contentment.

PART TWO

Knowledge

What Is Knowledge?

Knowledge is precious. It consists of the ability to know things that are past, present, and future, and *above all* to know God and His ways.

The path to knowledge is given in Proverbs 2:3-9: “*Yea, if thou criest after knowledge, and liftest up thy voice for understanding; If thou seekest her as silver, and searchest for her as for hid treasures; Then shalt thou understand the fear of the LORD, and find the knowledge of God. For the LORD giveth wisdom: out of his mouth cometh knowledge and understanding. He layeth up sound wisdom for the righteous: he is a buckler to them that walk uprightly. He keepeth the paths of judgment, and preserveth the way of his saints. Then shalt thou understand righteousness, and judgment, and equity; yea, every good path.*” If we cry after knowledge and seek her, as for hidden treasure, then shall we find the knowledge of God and know His ways.

The fear
of the Lord
is the
beginning
of knowledge.

The fear of the Lord is also the beginning of knowledge, and the knowledge of the holy is understanding—indicating that a life of purity enables us to know Truth. In other words, if we desire to gain knowledge, we must *be holy*.

Hidden Knowledge

Knowledge is not always available; it is not given to just anyone. There is knowledge that is hidden. Proverbs 25:2 states that, *“It is the glory of God to conceal a thing: but the honour of kings is to search out a matter.”* One of the rewards for those who overcome is to have the privilege of feeding upon the hidden manna (Rev. 2:17) or heavenly truths that are obscured to the average Christian.

In 2 Corinthians 12:4, the Apostle Paul tells us of his experience of being caught up into heaven and hearing *“unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter.”* One must understand that even in heaven, there are degrees of knowledge, as illustrated in Daniel 12:5-7. There, we find two angels, one of whom was asking how long it would be to the end of these wonders. The other responded by saying, *“A time, times and a half.”* Therefore, it is clear that there are different realms of knowledge in the heavenlies, such that some have a deeper understanding than others.

The Pleasantness and Value of Knowledge

Proverbs 2:10-11 goes on to say, *“When wisdom entereth into thine heart, and knowledge is pleasant unto thy soul; Discretion shall preserve thee, understanding shall keep thee.”* By linking the little phrase *“Knowledge is pleasant unto thy soul,”* with Song of Solomon 7:9, *“And the roof of thy mouth like the best wine for my beloved, that goeth down sweetly, causing the lips of those that are asleep to speak,”*

we have an appreciation of the pleasantness of knowledge. Often when fresh knowledge is revealed to us as we are studying, it is like fine juice that rejoices the palate.

The reverse of this is Proverbs 19:2, which says, “*Also, that the soul be without knowledge, it is not good.*” But “*the heart of the prudent getteth knowledge; and the ear of the wise seeketh knowledge*” (Prov. 18:15).

I am reminded of an episode that occurred when I was in a research laboratory. There were many in the laboratory of all grades. All were relatively young; the director of our department who had a Ph.D. and D.Sc. was only 32 years of age. Most of us were in our early 20s. Some were content with their position and enjoyed spending their free time in pleasure.

However there were some, and one in particular, who spent their evenings in study. This one man responded to those who were trying to entice him to spend his evenings in riotous living as they did, “Later, you will see the benefits of my hours of evening study and you will wish that you had followed my advice.”

Some time later, in the time between my own studies in three Bible schools and my call to the ministry, I was working in another establishment. And there was this studious researcher—holding a well-paid consultative position of esteem. Certainly he had proved his point, as those who had wasted their youth were in very inferior, dead-end positions.

Wisdom in Pursuing Knowledge

Knowledge is truly a gift of God which is given to those who apply themselves wisely in the pursuit of knowledge. The Apostle Paul writes to his beloved son in the Lord, “*Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth*” (2 Tim. 2:15).

To apply oneself to the pursuit of knowledge is praiseworthy, but we have to do so with discernment as well as diligence. Knowledge may be compared to a hub from which many spokes emanate. We could perhaps give names to these spokes, such as physics (which would include the knowledge of all aspects and disciplines of computer technology), biology (the study of nature, the plants, and animals in general, as well as all the specialisations concerning these), or business management and other related disciplines or professions. However, to illustrate my point more clearly, I would like to consider the arts, and in particular, history and literature.

If we should walk, stand, and sit in these disciplines (learning through study, participating in conventions and seminars, and conversing with those who are eminent in those fields), what have we attained at the end of our lives? How has the accumulation of that knowledge benefited us eternally?

I might understand the history of the English-speaking peoples from the four-volume masterpiece of Sir Winston S. Churchill, with all the wisdom and knowledge of that statesmen and Nobel Prize winner for literature, but has it

brought me an understanding of the ways of God that will benefit me eternally? When one is old, one can evaluate more clearly the true values of life and study. The knowledge of many things does not necessarily prepare me to meet my God, or prepare me for my eternal destiny and purpose. May I add that it rarely prepares one for such purposes.

An illustration of the importance of being prepared for eternity is that often-quoted story recorded by John Bunyan in his visions. He spoke of a grocer in England. This grocer assiduously gathered knowledge from those grocers who were successful, until he, too, became prosperous. He died, and a vision of him in hell pictured him, full of remorse, saying, "I sought out knowledge for my business; but oh, if only I had sought out knowledge of the Almighty that would have prospered my soul."

Many, upon entering heaven, have been amazed at the similarity of earthly things to heavenly things such as houses, gardens, and occupations. The Apostle Paul made the statement to one dear saint, "What one does on earth prepares one for the ministry above." If one has been a teacher on earth, one will teach in heaven. There are many crafts and professions in heaven that replicate earthly workmanship.

Of a fact, there are those that farm in heaven, those who sew, and those who will care for gardens and buildings, to name but a few. Do you love caring for babies and children? There is a place for you in heaven, for there are many little children who have to be nurtured and brought up in heaven.

Knowing, however, the eternal significance of our earthly occupation (which is also, in God's infinite wisdom, helping Him to run His kingdom here below), we should earnestly seek Him. We need to know in what aspect of knowledge He would have us to specialise. We want our lives to be fruitful, for when we bring forth much fruit, we glorify our Father in heaven (Jn. 15:8).

We cannot disregard knowledge of earthly occupations, or we shall not prosper. However, by the same reason we cannot excel in these professions without a sound dose of wisdom. It is wisdom to ensure that our maximum effort is applied to the realm of knowledge that will prepare us for eternity.

PART THREE

The Two Women

Throughout the Scriptures there are two women who emerge in Holy Writ, and we term them “the good woman” and “the evil woman.” We meet them first in the Book of Genesis in the persons of Sarah and Hagar. They are also portrayed in 1 Samuel as Hannah and Peninnah; in the Book of Esther as Esther and Vashti; in the Book of Proverbs as the wise woman and the strange woman; and in the Book of Revelation as the Glorious Church and Mystery Babylon, the mother of harlots. We will now study these two women from the Book of Proverbs, for they affect the lives of one and all.

Two Women in Scripture

	The Good Woman	The Evil Woman
Book of Genesis	Sarah	Hagar
Book of First Samuel	Hannah	Peninnah
Book of Esther	Esther	Vashti
Book of Proverbs	Wise Woman	Strange Woman
Book of Revelation	The Glorious Church	Mystery Babylon

The Strange Woman

This term is found firstly in the Book of Proverbs in the following verses, “*To deliver thee from the strange woman, even from the stranger which flattereth with her words; Which forsaketh the guide of her youth, and forgetteth the covenant of her God*” (Prov. 2:16-17).

The prime root of the Hebrew word *zuwr*, translated “strange,” means to turn aside (especially in the sense of a lodging). This most solemnly describes this woman: one who has turned aside to another lodging rather than to the house of God.

We must realise at the onset that this woman was brought up *in the house of God*. She may well have passed through the various stages of Sunday School from a very tender age, to perhaps shining as a youth leader, singing in the choir, having prominence in a trio, or even being a soloist. She may have risen to teaching little ones in the Sunday School in which she herself had grown up. “Impossible!” you say; but regretfully, I have known many.

Notice that it says, “*which forsaketh the guide of her youth.*” Surely she was one in her late teens, and one who has had a deep experience with God Himself, for she has forsaken and forgotten the covenant of her God.

I have known many who have had profound spiritual experiences with God, such as visions of heaven and hell,

even visions of the Lord Himself and of angels. Yet they have forgotten these experiences. They have turned into the paths of deep immorality, seeking to seduce those that are still on the pathway of righteousness. Yes, the danger is actually *in* the congregation, for they still linger, seeking whom they might devour.

In one African country I encountered a problem among pastors to whom I was teaching the Book of Deuteronomy. I came to the verse which says, "*Thou shalt not bring the hire of a whore, or the price of a dog, into the house of the LORD thy God for any vow: for even both these are abomination unto the LORD thy God*" (Deut. 23:18). I did not even stop when reading this verse, for I thought that it was self explanatory—that neither a female or a male prostitute could place their ill gotten gains into the offering box. As we finished the chapter, I asked (as was the custom) if they had any questions. The most senior pastor raised his hand and asked what that verse meant, and I gave the explanation.

There was a profound silence in the class; and I felt in my spirit that I should ask what they had been doing. It was like pulling teeth to get them to respond, until I felt led to ask if the prostitutes were in the congregation. With great reluctance, they all admitted that the wealthiest person in the village was a village prostitute.

The prostitutes contributed generously to the churches, so that the churches were more or less dependent upon their offerings. I then realised that we had come to a crossroad

decision for these dear pastors. They had to make a consecration to refuse the offerings or they would go back and perhaps fall into the very pit that these village prostitutes were in, for they could well become one of their customers. The atmosphere was sombre.

Then the dear Lord gave me a thought, and I found myself asking if they had sufficient money for themselves and their churches. All declared “no” quite emphatically. I then felt the Lord guiding me to gently suggest that because they had broken His law, by accepting the donations from these prostitutes, He had withheld financial blessing. I then asked if they would make a consecration to refuse these offerings and put God to the test and see how He would respond. All were in agreement and together we made the consecration.

I left that area after a few days, but came back some months later. Pastor after pastor rejoiced in God’s goodness through their obedience. Their faces were smiling as they told testimony after testimony of roofs being put upon their churches, and new rooms being added where they could live in relative comfort.

I was told also of the impact that it had made on some (but regretfully, not all) of the prostitutes, as they realised that the Lord was not accepting their offerings and that their gifts were not atoning for their immoral ways. Some repented and forsook their life of sin. They would never have done this if the pastors had not made that consecration to refuse

the donations of these strange women. Great was their joy of being washed from their sins and returning to the godly paths of their youth, and the covenant of their God.

How the Strange Woman Destroys

The strange woman experiences, after a time, the sayings of Jesus who stated, *“Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin. And the servant abideth not in the house for ever: but the Son abideth ever”* (Jn. 8:34-35).

They then take up their abode in the high places of the city, sitting at the door of their houses, *“To call passengers who go right on their ways: Whoso is simple, let him turn in hither: and as for him that wanteth understanding, she saith to him, Stolen waters are sweet, and bread eaten in secret is pleasant. But he knoweth not that the dead are there; and that her guests are in the depths of hell”* (Prov. 9:15-18).

From the following verses, consider how this strange woman destroys men: *“For by means of a whorish woman a man is brought to a piece of bread: and the adulteress will hunt for the precious life...So he that goeth in to his neighbour’s wife; whosoever toucheth her shall not be innocent...But whoso committeth adultery with a woman lacketh understanding: he that doeth it destroyeth his own soul. A wound and dishonour shall he get; and his reproach shall not be wiped away”* (Prov. 6:26,29,32-33).

Recognising the Strange Woman

In Proverbs 7:10-11, we find the characteristics of the strange woman, who is described as follows, “*And, behold, there met him a woman with the attire of an harlot, and subtil of heart. (She is loud and stubborn; her feet abide not in her house: Now is she without, now in the streets, and lieth in wait at every corner.)*” The strange woman is known by her garments, which are gaudy and seductive. She is stubborn, loud, and demanding.

The strange woman can also be a married woman who is unfaithful to her husband. “*For the goodman is not at home, he is gone a long journey: He hath taken a bag of money with him, and will come home at the day appointed. With her much fair speech she caused him to yield, with the flattering of her lips she forced him*” (Prov. 7:19-21). We read now that she flatters with her lips young men, forcing them to yield, assuring them that the good man (her husband) will come home at the time appointed.

Then in Proverbs 7:26-27, “*For she hath cast down many wounded: yea, many strong men have been slain by her. Her house is the way to hell, going down to the chambers of death.*” Let us be reminded of this fact that we have already learnt about the strange woman—that she so often *knew* the ways of the Lord, but she *turned aside* from the straight and narrow. She destroyed many who perhaps had determined to be faithful. How many have I known who have told me that they were overcome by the flattery of

these strange women, although they did not want to go in her ways!

There was an outstanding member of society, a pillar in his village, and an example of moral and social integrity to all, who lent his ear to the blandishments of the strange woman. He fell into sin and then went deeper and deeper in sin, co-habiting with prostitutes. Because of them, he fell into deep financial straits, beginning with borrowing money and ending up with robbing banks. Identified by cameras in several banks, he was finally arrested. He confessed to the crimes and was sentenced to many decades in prison, where in all probability he will die because of his advancing years.

Another British politician, an army war hero, became likewise involved with prostitutes. As a result, he gambled, became involved in illegal activities, and was sentenced to many years of imprisonment.

When a young Christian myself, a naval officer told me of his having fallen into a sinful liaison with a girl against his will. He had become careless and, as it were, played with fire, and consequently became burnt.

I could continue with more examples, but surely this is sufficient to illustrate the point that we are not to listen to those whose words will cause us to err.

How important it is in reading these warnings that we add another point: “Be careful whom you marry!” One may start

well, but how does one finish? Let us ask the Lord how the marriage will finish. Is the girl going to be faithful until the end? Never forget that here in the Book of Proverbs these strange women left the guide of their youth. The warning are about those who started well but ended going through the gates of hell.

Being Preserved from the Strange Woman

What are the keys to being preserved from the strange woman? One key is found in Psalm 119:11, *“Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee.”* It is to hide the word of God in our hearts that we might not sin against Him.

Also, we are not to place ourselves in a vulnerable position by going near strange women. Let us remember the testimony of Joseph. When he was tempted by Potiphar’s wife, he fled.

In 1 Corinthians 6:18, the Apostle Paul warns, *“Flee fornication. Every sin that a man doeth is without the body; but he that committeth fornication sinneth against his own body.”* We never want to be put in the position of permitting such women to seduce us. In walking circumspectly, we shall be preserved. If they pursue, we are to respond as Joseph did—which is to flee.

Remember the solemn warning and promise of Solomon, who said, *“And I find more bitter than death the woman, whose heart is snares and nets, and her hands as bands:*

whoso pleaseth God shall escape from her; but the sinner shall be taken by her" (Eccl. 7:26). One is kept by the mercy and power of God. Then the opposite of this promise is the warning in Proverbs 22:14, *"The mouth of strange women is a deep pit: he that is abhorred of the LORD shall fall therein."* Our cry should be, "O may we please Him that we may be kept!"

The Good Woman

The good woman comes in many guises. We are introduced to her firstly as wisdom, in Proverbs 1:20. Solomon is then instructed to *"say unto wisdom, Thou art my sister; and call understanding thy kinswoman"* (Prov. 7:4).

Furthermore, this thought of the good woman being linked to wisdom is continued in Proverbs 4:5-9, *"Get wisdom, get understanding: forget it not; neither decline from the words of my mouth. Forsake her not, and she shall preserve thee: love her, and she shall keep thee. Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom: and with all thy getting get understanding. Exalt her, and she shall promote thee: she shall bring thee to honour, when thou dost embrace her. She shall give to thine head an ornament of grace: a crown of glory shall she deliver to thee."*

I would like to cite an illustration of an English politician who was a member of government. His little daughter was a member of a Sunday School class in which I was the teacher. This daughter, who was only four years of age, kept asking him to come to church and accept Jesus as his Saviour. She

said, “You think you are wise, but you need Jesus.” He made excuse after excuse.

Well, after two years, he became involved with a Jewish schemer and he broke the law for government cabinet officers in that he permitted this man to give him gifts. He was prosecuted by the Attorney General, as were several others. He then had to resign his position and his parliamentary seat. Thereafter, he had to take on a very humble and poorly paid position. He was virtually ruined, shamed, and disgraced. If only he had listened the voice of Wisdom through his little girl.

The Seven Pillars of Wisdom

The good woman, by her words of wisdom, protects from the ways and temptations of the strange woman, the adulteress (cf. Prov. 7:5). This good woman, personifying Wisdom and speaking truth from the house tops (Prov. 8:1-7), also builds her house with seven pillars (Prov. 9:1).

Purity is the most important aspect of wisdom.

These seven pillars of wisdom are given in James 3:17, “*But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy.*”

Thus, *purity* is the most important aspect of wisdom. It holds up the house of the wise. This is understood as we study the

parallels of these two women. The good woman (wisdom) is consistently warning concerning the other, who is sensuous and impure.

Then follows *peaceable*, which tends to sanctification and holiness, for it is peace that puts to rest the storms of one's soul from which anger, irritation, and other torments spring. The strange woman is clamorous, loud, and stubborn in her ways, certainly not a desirable companion for this life's journey.

Gentleness and its kindred spirit, kindness, flow forth from the wise in heart, whereas those who speak roughly gender strife and anger that bring forth contention. **It is not what you say, but how you say it.** We see this in the life of the Apostle Paul, when he said to the Thessalonian church in 1 Thessalonians 2:7, "*But we were gentle among you, even as a nurse cherisheth her children.*" As David said in Psalm 18:35, it was the gentleness of the Lord that made him great.

Easy to be entreated (the pleasant fruit of wisdom) brings forth sweet compatibility and unity of spirit, whereby partners working together become very productive. How important it is to know when to yield and when not to yield on principle but to stand firm for the truth.

Being *full of mercy* is the beautiful quality of a soul that can overlook faults in others, lift up from the pit those that have fallen, and put them on the straight and narrow path again. The

good fruits associated with mercy are so often *compassion*, *consolation*, and *encouragement*. Matthew 12:35 says, “*A good man out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things...*” We want to be those who bring forth from our hearts, love, joy, and peace.

Without partiality means being the same to one and all. We must learn from the Lord that He is no respecter of persons (Acts 10:34).

Without hypocrisy means being sincere. The complaint that is often voiced concerning professional athletes who profess Christ is that “if they talk it they should walk it,” which, according to sportscasters, so few do. I also read of a certain CEO of an airline who could be found in a casino every Saturday night and in his Methodist Church’s pews every Sunday morning. This would certainly be enough to make the good Rev. John Wesley turn in his grave, though he was wont to warn his ministers not to underestimate sin in the congregation.

Let us live what we profess, not being double minded. I heard the story of a church elder who taught others that they should not smoke, gamble, or commit adultery. A member of the congregation saw him smoking and knew that he went to casinos. Her comment was, “I have come out of these things and I want to be free, but the elder loves them and wants to continue in them.” The hypocrite is not so much one who is outwardly wicked, but one who is inwardly wicked.

Wisdom Builds and Foolishness Destroys

Another aspect of the good woman is that she is gracious and retains her virtue, being a crown to her husband (Prov. 12:4). How unlike the woman of Proverbs 14:1 whom we are now going to describe.

We read in Proverbs 14:1, *“Every wise woman buildeth her house: but the foolish plucketh it down with her hands.”* Such was the case when I was the assistant pastor in a church in France. This verse was in the heart of my senior pastor’s wife so much so that she would often comment upon it to me. This wife neglected her husband and was more concerned with her own affairs, with the result that he became interested in another woman.

After three years, when his adulterous relationship with the other woman was revealed, not only did he have to stand up in his church, confess and then resign, but his wife, too. She was so convicted of her lack of attention to his needs that she also confessed before the church in that last service. He then returned to his hometown and former church, where regretfully, his remorse was so great that he later committed suicide.

This situation obviously could have been avoided, had his wife but heeded the warning of this Scripture verse and met God on how He would have her handle her relationship with her husband.

Sadly, this was not the only situation in which near acquaintances of mine have been involved. A dear friend of Bible school days (such that I was the best man at his wedding) fell into an adulterous relationship whereby he had a daughter out of wedlock. Hiding this relationship for some time, he became irrational and covetous, speaking oft on the need for the congregation to give more for his upkeep, including a more prestigious car.

However, when his sin was revealed, his wife also had to stand up and acknowledge that she had not cared for him as she should have. She was more occupied with her own needs and lifestyle. He has since left the ministry, and become engaged in a secular pursuit that is not furthering his spiritual life.

The wise are diligent. When God speaks, we must not be lax in dealing with His warnings, for laxity can lead to an untimely disaster. Let this be a warning to all wives not to neglect their family relationships.

The Virtuous Woman of Proverbs 31

We now come to perhaps the most beloved of all chapters in this blessed book that deals with the wise woman. Proverbs 31 starts with the teachings that a mother gave to her son who had become king. His name, Lemuel, is now unknown to contemporary scholars, but the admonitions are eternal and can be used by any mother desirous of leading her son along the narrow path that leads to life everlasting. This

godly mother gives the following succinct admonitions that are good for all men (Prov. 31:3-9). They are:

1. Do not give your strength unto women
2. Do not give yourself to strong drink
3. Plead the cause of the poor and needy
4. Judge righteously

Proverbs ends with a beautiful description of a virtuous woman from verses 10-31: *“Who can find a virtuous woman? for her price is far above rubies. The heart of her husband doth safely trust in her; so that he shall have no need of spoil. She will do him good and not evil all the days of her life. She seeketh wool, and flax, and worketh willingly with her hands. She is like the merchants’ ships; she bringeth her food from afar. She riseth also while it is yet night, and giveth meat to her household, and a portion to her maidens. She considereth a field, and buyeth it: with the fruit of her hands she planteth a vineyard. She girdeth her loins with strength, and strengtheneth her arms. She perceiveth that her merchandise is good: her candle goeth not out by night. She layeth her hands to the spindle, and her hands hold the distaff. She stretcheth out her hand to the poor; yea, she reacheth forth her hands to the needy. She is not afraid of the snow for her household: for all her household are clothed with scarlet. She maketh herself coverings of tapestry; her clothing is silk and purple. Her husband is known in the gates, when he sitteth among the elders of the land. She maketh fine linen, and selleth it; and delivereth girdles unto the merchant. Strength and honour are her clothing; and she shall rejoice*

in time to come. She openeth her mouth with wisdom; and in her tongue is the law of kindness. She looketh well to the ways of her household, and eateth not the bread of idleness. Her children arise up, and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praiseth her. Many daughters have done virtuously, but thou excellest them all. Favour is deceitful, and beauty is vain: but a woman that feareth the LORD, she shall be praised. Give her of the fruit of her hands; and let her own works praise her in the gates.”

The price of a virtuous woman is far beyond that of rubies so that her husband can safely trust in her. Husbands can attest to the fact that being married to a *faithful* wife brings such rest, peace, and contentment. It is the foundation upon which a marriage of love is built. To have eyes for each other is so blissful.

The little phrase that “she will do him good” was quoted to me when parents were seeking to know whether to give their blessing to their son’s prospective fiancée, eventually to become his bride. They said that the Lord had given them that assurance in prayer. The end result was a very happy, fruitful marriage, and both were blessed in their place of work.

Then this virtuous woman was *hard working*. Never contemplate marriage with a lazy girl. Lazy women are drones that will become a burden for you for the rest of your life, bringing financial and emotional distress that will make your life a misery.

Certainly the portrait painted of this wonderful woman was that of a very industrious businesswoman who looked well to the affairs of her husband and household. “She ran a tight ship” is the expression often used when speaking of such a person. Everything that she did was fruitful, with no wastage. She had a hands-on method whereby she knew the needs of her household and could provide for all of them.

Not only did she work with her own hands to provide for the needs of her own family, but she also had *concern* for the poor and needy. This attitude leads to prosperity. Thus, we read that her clothing is silk and purple as is the raiment of all her household. Her husband is known and honoured when he sits among the elders of the city because of the diligence of his wife in plentifully providing for his household.

The constant repetition of the fact that she did not eat the bread of idleness, and was concerned with the needs of her household, suggests that this is a very rare virtue. Also, when we read Proverbs 31:29, “*Many daughters have done virtuously, but thou excellest them all,*” we realise that truly this woman shines forth from the multitude.

Although this woman’s works are so highly commendable, there is that which excels these virtues, and that is found in the following verse, “*She openeth her mouth with wisdom; and in her tongue is the law of kindness*” (Prov. 31:26). It is *one’s* speech that conveys the true worth of a person. From this virtuous woman flows the words of wisdom, with

their admirable seven qualities that are listed in James 3:17 (upon which we have already commented).

Moreover, from her mouth flows the law of *kindness*. “Sweet to one and all” is a very apt description of this wonderful woman. She is so pleasant that all speak well of her. The testimony of her husband and family is the highest praise of all, since they live with her day after day and see the constancy of her life. How many times have I known of those whose praise is sung far and wide, except by those of their inner circle? I am reminded of the former British Prime Minister Sir Anthony Eden, who was lauded wherever he went, except by his secretaries who really knew him. In contrast, the secretaries (whom my wife knew well) of the evangelist Kathryn Kuhlman, spoke far more highly of her than even her adoring public.

The key to the life of the virtuous woman is for all to use—the fear of the Lord. Let us seek the Lord for this treasure. In so doing, we can, whether male or female, attain unto those glorious attributes of this woman, who excels all others.

PART FOUR

Diligence and Hard Work

Being slothful brings nothing but sorrow and penury or poverty; therefore, the admonition of Solomon is to be industrious. The young are instructed: *“Give not sleep to thine eyes, nor slumber to thine eyelids. Deliver thyself as a roe from the hand of the hunter, and as a bird from the hand of the fowler. Go to the ant, thou sluggard; consider her ways, and be wise: Which having no guide, overseer, or ruler, Provideth her meat in the summer, and gathereth her food in the harvest. How long wilt thou sleep, O sluggard? when wilt thou arise out of thy sleep? Yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep: So shall thy poverty come as one that travelleth, and thy want as an armed man”* (Prov. 6:4-11).

The Importance of Self-Motivation

One lesson that the ant teaches us is self-motivation. Proverbs 30:25 reads, *“The ants are a people not strong, yet they prepare their meat in the summer.”* Self-motivation is a characteristic that a chief executive officer craves for in those whom he employs.

I was talking to an executive who was responsible for a large staff, and he was commenting on an employee that we had leased to him for a season to be, as it were, his right-

hand man. His comment to me was that he was eminently satisfied and grateful for this young man. Not only did he do to perfection all that was required of him, but he also had an eye for work that needed to be done of which the chairman was unaware. Thus, the business prospered under his hand.

He became almost like Joseph in Potiphar's house of whom it is written: "*And it came to pass from the time that he had made him overseer in his house, and over all that he had, that the LORD blessed the Egyptian's house for Joseph's sake; and the blessing of the LORD was upon all that he had in the house, and in the field. And he left all that he had in Joseph's hand; and he knew not ought he had, save the bread which he did eat. And Joseph was a goodly person, and well favoured*" (Gen. 39:5-6).

It is noteworthy that those whom the Lord chooses are all hard workers. We might cite Ruth, of whom the overseer of the reapers in the field of Boaz gave this testimony, "*And she said, I pray you, let me glean and gather after the reapers among the sheaves: so she came, and hath continued even from the morning until now, that she tarried a little in the house*" (Ruth 2:7).

The Importance of Having a Hands-On Attitude

We are also told and admonished as directors to take good heed to the state of our fields. Proverbs 24:27 says, "*Prepare thy work without, and make it fit for thyself in the field; and*

afterwards build thine house.” Likewise, Solomon said in Proverbs 27:23, “*Be thou diligent to know the state of thy flocks, and look well to thy herds.*” Like Boaz, he had a hands-on attitude towards his work and knew his workers. Boaz was well able to recognise that Ruth was a new addition to his work force. Thus, Boaz wonderfully exemplified Solomon’s admonition.

Reading various reports of the work habits of executives, many will state that it is important to know even the prices of doorknobs (as in the case of Donald Trump when he was involved in a particular building project).

Jamie Dimon, the new Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the conglomerate bank JP Morgan Chase in the year 2006, immersed himself in the details of the bank’s most important international office in Bournemouth, England, where he met some 500 plus employees. His new colleagues soon realised that he was a “detail man.”

In an interview with USA Today, Jamie Dimon (CEO) summed it up this way: “Sometimes, all that matters are the details.” He continued by saying, “Sometimes, details will sink you” (Farrell, 2005). Was it not Benjamin Franklin who commented, “Beware of little expenses. A small leak will sink a great ship?” (1758, *Poor Richard’s Almanac*)

The Rewards of Diligence

The rewards of the diligent, compared to the condition of the slothful, are as follows:

- Proverbs 10:4: *“He becometh poor that dealeth with a slack hand: but the hand of the diligent maketh rich.”* The hardworking person accumulates wealth.
- Proverbs 12:24: *“The hand of the diligent shall bear rule: but the slothful shall be under tribute.”* Thus the diligent shall be the master and the slothful the servant. In this book, we see the constant comparison between that which is commendable and that which is obnoxious.
- Proverbs 12:27: *“The slothful man roasteth not that which he took in hunting: but the substance of a diligent man is precious.”* Hereby we see that the slothful does not protect his gains, but the diligent preserves and keeps all that he possesses in good condition.
- Proverbs 13:4: *“The soul of the sluggard desireth, and hath nothing: but the soul of the diligent shall be made fat.”* Those who do not work shall not eat, as we read in 2 Thessalonians 3:10, *“For even when we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat.”* The Kingdom of God does not countenance laziness.

The Importance of Thinking Before Acting

Now there is the contrast between the hasty and the diligent. The diligent think before they act, as we read in Proverbs 21:5, *“The thoughts of the diligent tend only to plenteousness;*

but of every one that is hasty only to want.” The diligent are those who carefully think out their plans before putting them into action. In the end, they save much time and money, but the works of the hasty tend only to ruin.

The Importance of Discernment in Diligence

Proverbs 22:29 says, “*Seest thou a man diligent in his business? he shall stand before kings; he shall not stand before mean men.*” Those that are diligent meet and are recognised for their diligence by those of like mind (who have also attained unto high positions through their industrious nature). But may I add a word of caution here for the wise. **One needs first to determine the work that will be truly profitable.**

When one is old and looks back on one’s life, the tendency is to evaluate more clearly, realising that those things that were done for Christ will count. So let us be diligent and attend to *the things that will count eternally.*

The Lord gave a solemn warning in the parable about the man who laid up treasure for himself and was not rich toward God (Lk. 12:16-21). This rich man had ground that yielded a bountiful harvest. He then thought within himself to build bigger barns, and said to his soul, “... *Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry*” (Lk. 12:19). But God said, “... *Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided?*” (Lk. 12:20).

It reminds me of a series of cartoons in which a businessman was invited on many occasions to get right with God. His response on each occasion was that he had no time. However, the last cartoon depicted Death entering his office; and in agony, the man cried out, “But I am not ready.”

May we remember the following words in 2 Corinthians 6:2, “...*now is the day of salvation.*” Let us not harden our hearts.

Diligence and Promotion

Diligence and hard work will cause us later in life to be ready to occupy higher posts, greater responsibilities, and more fruitful avenues of work. The present Chief Justice of the United States of America—Justice John Roberts—was a law school student at Harvard. A classmate tells the following story.

He arrived at the school dormitory approximately a week before classes were due to begin. After depositing his belongings in his room, he was intrigued to see another room with the door open, and the light burning. Curious, he went along and saw John Roberts reading a law book that he had nearly finished. Enquiring why John Roberts was not going to enjoy the Boston nightlife before classes started, he was told that he wanted to prepare for the coming classes. That attitude, which prevailed throughout his career, caused him to be selected for high government positions and indeed contributed greatly to his selection as Chief Justice at the relatively early age of 50.

I met a minister who gave a similar testimony. He said that while other ministers might take days off, and enjoy evenings of leisure after their ministerial duties, he secluded himself in his younger years and studied. The end result was that he had written many books and had become a respected international teacher. Most thankfully, I followed his example and did likewise, and I still do, according to the grace God has given me.

Now that does not mean that we should not attend to the supreme importance of our character. This includes proper attitudes so that we maintain, at all times, the sweetness of Jesus as we perform our earthly duties. We should constantly be living in the fear of the Lord.

Indeed, as we examine the two careers—that of the Chief Justice with his avid love for the law, and that of the minister with his devotion to the Bible, what do we see? We see that at the end, the minister who has applied himself to the study of God’s law will have a far greater satisfaction than the Chief Justice whose love was for the law of his country. We are not minimising the importance of the office of Chief Justice. However, this is simply a factual observation considering what is of eternal value.

It is so important that, before we go down a path, we contemplate what will be the end result. Yes, be diligent, but apply diligence to a path that will bring eternal rewards and satisfaction. A fact of life that adds credence to these statements is that many chief executive officers in their retirement years seek to become schoolteachers.

In Great Britain, the Anglican Church formerly filled their pulpits with retired teachers, especially headmasters. Successful business careers do not truly satisfy the longing of the human heart; it is only Christ and the fulfilling of His will that fills the void which God created for Himself in these mortal temples.

As Solomon observed, *“Dead flies cause the ointment of the apothecary to send forth a stinking savour: so doth a little folly him that is in reputation for wisdom and honour”* (Eccl. 10:1). Let us be wise, therefore, and watch the little things.

Remember, he who is faithful in that which is little, is faithful in that which is much. In Luke 16:10-11, the Lord said, *“He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much: and he that is unjust in the least is unjust also in much. If therefore ye have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust the true riches?”* Also, there is the warning that he who is unfaithful in natural things will **not** be given responsibility for spiritual things.

For those of us who are already in the ministry, let us heed the admonition of the Apostle Paul to Archippus—that he was to take heed to the ministry which he had received in the Lord, and to fulfil it (Col. 4:17).

PART FIVE

The Righteous and the Wicked

Two kinds of men are contrasted in the Book of Proverbs. The one is termed “righteous” while the other is called “evil, wicked, or a sinner.” We look firstly at those who are called wicked.

The Wicked

The Desire of the Wicked

This group appears almost immediately in the Book of Proverbs; their ways are condemned in the instructions that Solomon received from his father King David, “*My son, if sinners entice thee, consent thou not*” (Prov. 1:10).

Sinners desire to rob and spoil the righteous and fill their houses with those ill-gotten gains, but their wicked ways shall return upon their own head, for “*Whoso diggeth a pit shall fall therein: and he that rolleth a stone, it will return upon him*” (Prov. 26:27).

**“There is no
peace, saith
my God, to
the wicked.”
Isaiah 57:21**

The wicked are sometimes those who have known the ways of righteousness, as we see in Proverbs 5:14, “*I was almost in all evil in the midst of the congregation and assembly.*”

Theirs is a way of darkness, and they know not at what they stumble (Prov. 4:19). The desire of those who leave the path of righteousness is to draw others to their ways and cause them to fall likewise. But as Proverbs 2:22 states: “...*The wicked shall be cut off from the earth, and the transgressors shall be rooted out of it.*”

The Price of Wickedness

The wicked are also very fearful. Those who are most wicked are in torment, having a tendency to change their sleeping quarters every night for fear of the night assailant. As it is written in Proverbs 10:24, “*The fear of the wicked, it shall come upon him: but the desire of the righteous shall be granted.*” Isaiah 57:20-21 declares that the wicked are like the troubled sea when it cannot rest; there is no peace for the wicked.

But oh how blessed is the sleep of the righteous, for God gives to His beloved sleep (Ps. 127:2)! I think one of the greatest examples of this is the testimony of King David who was being pursued by Absalom and was greatly outnumbered. He said, “*Thou hast put gladness in my heart, more than in the time that their corn and their wine increased. I will both lay me down in peace, and sleep: for thou, LORD, only makest me dwell in safety*” (Ps. 4:7).

The Plight of Those Who Leave the Path

There are numerous warnings that one should not turn to the right nor to the left. Rather, we should ponder the path of our

feet so that all our ways are established. I would like to give a few examples of the many that I have known who have forsaken the right way and the will of God for their lives. These stories relate to those who were once in church. In spite of having had a call to the ministry, they turned aside and went in the ways of this world. Note their end.

The Lure of Other Loves

The first one involves a young man who had a promising future as a pastor. In fact, his entire family were Christians and on fire for God. Then because of his fine gift of oratory and persuasive speech, he was lured into politics. He became famous and rose in the ranks of his political party and occupied high governmental positions. But all this came with a terrible price. He forsook his Christian witness, became a smoker, and also compromised his stand on righteousness.

This man represented the poor in his constituency and portrayed himself as the spokesman for them. Yet he himself became wealthy and led a double life. When travelling to his constituency of poor coal miners, he changed from his luxurious limousine to a rickety one belonging to his brother. He likewise dressed down to appear in the clothes similar to those worn by the miners.

Hundreds of miles away, this politician owned a very nice house with a wall that was not very high. One day, a pastor from a local church leaned over this wall. He was a pastor

who knew of the duplicity and said (using his first name), “Well ...a bit of a hypocrite are you not? What have you to say for yourself? Won’t you come back to church and live the life?”

The government minister sadly shook his head, but made no response, realising that he was not willing to pay the price. It was as though this was his last opportunity, the Lord holding out His hand to the one to whom He had once been Shepherd. Not long after, he was out of government and just a year later, he had to fight for his life, which he lost to cancer. His eternity we can but sorrowfully contemplate. It could have been one of joyous anticipation instead of one of darkness forever. The prosperity of fools will destroy them (Prov. 1:32).

A young man who was a pastor was also attracted to a life of politics. He quickly left the ministry to pursue a political career, but lost the election. Did he repent? No, the glitter of this world captivated him and he turned to business.

The result is that he has wealth and glamour, but is lost to Christ. He has affluence, yes, but as it is written, “*He that loveth silver shall not be satisfied with silver; nor he that loveth abundance with increase...*” (Eccl. 5:10). Much older now, the joy of the Lord has evaporated from his heart. He is sadder, even though he is filled with this world’s gifts. His hope of an eternity of pleasure is becoming but a mirage, like a cloud that evaporates.

The Lure of Crime

Over the decades that I have been privileged to be in the ministry, in every case I have observed studying the wicked, I have noticed that the old adage “crime does not pay” is true. I would like to cite one or two examples so that we may use them as warnings to the young, lest they be tempted to go in the way of the evil man.

In Central America, there is an orphanage filled with the love of Jesus. Against the counsel and pleas of faculty and fellow students alike, some of the orphans desired to go into the world and left. One such young man quickly joined a drug gang. Not long after, he was hit by a car and killed.

Some months later, his young friend had a vision in which he was taken down into hell. He was shown a cave from which terrible heart-rending cries were coming. Entering it, he saw a boy being beaten mercilessly with heavy whips across his back. When this boy turned his head, the boy being given the vision saw that it was his friend who had elected to run away from the orphanage.

By leaving the straight and narrow, we leave the domain of the King of Kings, and we enter the domain of the kingdom of darkness. To understand this, we would like to mention a passage from John Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress*.

Because they had strayed from the path, Christian and his companion Hopeful had arrived on the grounds of Doubting

Castle, whose owner was a giant named Despair. He put them in the castle dungeons and beat them without mercy. But they escaped the giant only by using the key of promise. Trusting in the promise of God, they returned by His grace to the path of eternal life. However, this was not before the giant had shown them the bones of others like themselves who had perished, having left the way.

Beloved, to leave the straight and narrow way is extremely risky, as not all return; some are ensnared by the wicked ones. Despair overcomes them and they lose all hope.

The Lure of Neglect

Furthermore, I have seen both the young and the mature turn from the path by neglecting personal prayer, Bible devotions, and church attendance. Little by little, they become colder in their heart and they succumb to the temptations of this world. Two boys in a certain Sunday School class stole money from the church offering box when they should have been in the main service. He that commits sin is a servant of sin and the servant shall not remain in the congregation forever (Jn. 8:34-35).

After continuing along the downward path, these boys then no longer came to Sunday School, and became the companions of those who were in drugs. They were witnesses to a drug-related murder, narrowly escaped being imprisoned as accomplices, and escaped further crime by enlisting in the Armed Forces. They also became immoral and had children out of wedlock.

I met a Sunday School superintendent who assured me that one of her pupils had been guilty of stealing from the offering box. This man later became Prime Minister of his country but lost his own soul. It is those little foxes, the little sins, which turn our feet from the straight and narrow way. When one does not repent, one stumbles on into the blackness of darkness forever, into oblivion.

The Lure of Wrong Alliances

Another subtle trap for the cold in heart is to make business alliances with the unsaved. In the end, many have fallen into dubious and grievous business deals. The ultimate result of the business deals has involved encounters with organised crime (leading to the murder of business partners), and a life of trembling and fearfulness (not knowing when they will become another target of the revenge of the mob).

At this point, it will be good to include a comment by a Mafia boss named Mickey, who decades ago was imprisoned on San Quentin. He stated that there was never an innocent person targeted by the mob; all were steeped in sin and misdoings, and deserved being hit by the trigger boys.

The Righteous

How wonderful it is to walk on the pathway of the just, which is as the shining light that shines more and more

unto the perfect day (Prov. 4:18). It is a battle to remain on this path, because great are the temptations that are placed along life's pathway to draw the simple astray.

We have to keep our heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life (Prov. 4:23). How are we to do so? The Psalmist tells us, *"Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? by taking heed thereto according to thy word. With my whole heart have I sought thee: O let me not wander from thy commandments. Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee"* (Ps. 119:9-11).

The key is to hide the Word of God in our hearts by meditating on it day by day. Therein is the key to a fruitful life. We read this in Psalm 1:1-3, *"Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. But his delight is in the law of the LORD; and in his law doth he meditate day and night. And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper."*

Here we see that by avoiding the paths and fellowship of those who are not godly, and delighting in the Word of God, we will be kept from leaving the straight and narrow path. Also, as we please God, He shall keep us from the clutches of the strange woman (Eccl. 7:26).

Often, we are asked, "How are we kept?" I would respond from Proverbs 21:12, *"The righteous man wisely considereth*

the house of the wicked: but God overthroweth the wicked for their wickedness.” Ecclesiastes 7:2-4 also reads, “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 lay it to his heart. Sorrow is better than laughter: for by the sadness of the countenance the heart is made better. The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning; but the heart of fools is in the house of mirth.”

These Scriptures indicate that in order to be kept, the righteous man sombrely considers the lot of the wicked—his destruction by God and his death. Pondering these things, the righteous man stays on the straight and narrow path so that he does not wander into the ways of wickedness.

The righteous man has many qualities that both David and Solomon speak of, some of which we will consider here. The lips of the righteous are gracious (Eccl. 10:12). The righteous also consider the poor. Psalm 37:21 says, “...*the righteous sheweth mercy, and giveth.*” They are blessed of God, as David said in Psalm 37:25, “*I have been young, and now am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread.*” Moreover, their inheritance will be forever (Ps. 37:18).

The key to a fruitful life is to hide God’s Word in our hearts.

In the annals of history, there are many luminaries who shine forth as guiding stars to keep us on the pathway of

righteousness. There is Venerable Bede who devoted his life to the study and commentary of God's Word. His life was termed one of joyful sweetness.

Also, John Wycliffe who strove earnestly for the truth of the gospel put to flight, by his pen and forceful preaching, the enemies of the cross in the days of King Edward III. His face shone forth with the glory of the gospel.

Then we have the Wesley brothers whose saintly lives were expressed through song and the message of holiness. Dying in ripe old age, John's closing words were, and the best of all, God is with us.

General William Booth of the Salvation Army was known for his joyous disposition. Illustrated by this little anecdote: marching through a town in Southern England, his band of followers was pelted by all kinds of rotten fruit. One little girl marching by his side was drenched by a pail of refuse. "Don't worry," the general cried out, "another diamond in your crown has just been added."

PART SIX

Strong Drink

The Beginning of Drunkenness

The Book of Proverbs is filled with warnings to the unwary of the dangers of strong drink. Throughout the history of mankind, we see the tragedies of imbibing the fruit of the vine and other strong liquor.

The first instance where strong drink brought a stain upon the character of a good man was during the period immediately after the Flood, when a new dispensation had been ushered in. It involved one of the three most righteous men—Noah. We quote Genesis 9:20-21, *“And Noah began to be an husbandman, and he planted a vineyard: And he drank of the wine, and was drunken; and he was uncovered within his tent.”*

The ensuing situation was tragic, because Ham saw the nakedness of his father and apparently told his brothers. This brought upon his son, Canaan, a curse that affected all generations, as we read in Genesis 9:25-27, *“And he said, Cursed be Canaan; a servant of servants shall he be unto his brethren. And he said, Blessed be the LORD God of Shem; and Canaan shall be his servant. God shall enlarge Japheth, and he shall dwell in the tents of Shem; and Canaan shall be his servant.”*

From then on, we see alcohol has ruined many lives. In the Old Testament days, very few of the kings of Israel heeded the counsel of the mother of Lemuel: *“It is not for kings, O Lemuel, it is not for kings to drink wine; nor for princes strong drink: Lest they drink, and forget the law, and pervert the judgment of any of the afflicted”* (Prov. 31:4-5). Certainly this was the case with Jeroboam II, as we see in Hosea 7:5, *“In the day of our king the princes have made him sick with bottles of wine; he stretched out his hand with scorners.”*

Drunkenness as Judgment

Drunkenness is one of the means whereby the Lord brings to pass His judgments upon cities. Firstly, let us consider Nineveh, of whom Nahum 1:10 says, *“For while they be folden together as thorns, and while they are drunken as drunkards, they shall be devoured as stubble fully dry.”* Then we have a repetition in Nahum 3:11, which declares, *“Thou also shalt be drunken.”*

Now when Jerusalem was to be judged, Jeremiah records, *“Then shalt thou say unto them, Thus saith the LORD, Behold, I will fill all the inhabitants of this land, even the kings that sit upon David’s throne, and the priests, and the prophets, and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, with drunkenness”* (Jer. 13:13). This warning was repeated by the prophet Ezekiel, *“Thou shalt be filled with drunkenness and sorrow, with the cup of astonishment and desolation, with the cup of thy sister Samaria”* (Ezek. 23:33).

Jeremiah 48:26 speaks of when Moab was to be judged: *“Make ye him drunken: for he magnified himself against the LORD: Moab also shall wallow in his vomit, and he also shall be in derision.”*

It was so with the fall of Babylon, according to the prophecy from the lips of Jeremiah, *“In their heat I will make their feasts, and I will make them drunken, that they may rejoice, and sleep a perpetual sleep, and not wake, saith the LORD”* (Jer. 51:39). Then too we have the account of Daniel 5, whereby the King Belshazzar and his lords had drunk wine from the golden vessels of the house of the Lord. That very night not only were they well drunk, but also the entire city. Therefore, they were unable to defend the city against the armies of Cyrus of Persia.

There is a solemn warning to those who make others drunk, *“Woe unto him that giveth his neighbour drink, that putteth thy bottle to him, and maketh him drunken also, that thou mayest look on their nakedness!”* (Hab. 2:15). Drunkenness is one of the works of the flesh in Galatians 5:19-21, where Paul warns that they that do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of heaven.

The Consequences of Strong Drink

Having mentioned all the sadness associated historically with drinking alcoholic beverages, we now want to consider the teachings of Solomon with respect to strong drink. Proverbs 20:1 states, *“Wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging: and*

whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise.” This simple statement makes it clear that it is wisdom not to touch wine, since it appears to be something other than it is. Men are deceived by it, and their end is sorrow.

Now let us consider this verse, *“He that loveth pleasure shall be a poor man: he that loveth wine and oil shall not be rich”* (Prov. 21:17). Lovers of pleasure, sport, wine, and oil, in effect shall become poor. Should we not be wise and heed this admonition to curb our appetites for these things? Do not forget that we develop a taste for things by constant use; we will eventually become addicted and be in bondage.

In the United States, football is such a popular pastime that millions watch the Super Bowl on television. It is even shown in some churches, or services are arranged not to interfere with it. Likewise, the World Series of Baseball captivates untold millions and draws them aside from other pursuits.

Wine operates the same way, often taking men away from their homes to spend countless hours in a tavern with all its associated evils. Consider the end of those tavern habitués: *“Who hath woe? who hath sorrow? who hath contentions? who hath babbling? who hath wounds without cause? who hath redness of eyes? They that tarry long at the wine; they that go to seek mixed wine. Look not thou upon the wine when it is red, when it giveth his colour in the cup, when it moveth itself aright. At the last it biteth like a serpent, and stingeth like an adder. Thine eyes shall behold strange women, and thine heart shall utter perverse things”* (Prov. 23:29-33).

Strong drink makes one a prey for the strange woman and her co-workers (the pick pockets, blackmailers, and the like). I have seen men of honour, those with respectable status in life, such as bank managers, become entrapped by drink. They have been brought down through drinking just to be socially acceptable; but then they were overcome with desire for such drinks.

One man soon became impoverished through drink. Then he got involved with prostitutes and gambling, and had to borrow money at horrendous interest rates. Finally, having borrowed all he could from his trusting relatives, he bought a revolver and committed suicide.

The pathway of strong drink is not the path even to contemplate going down, because all who walk that way, do so to their own sorrow. Some have even committed murder in order to obtain money for wine, as King Ahab did to obtain the vineyard of Naboth (1 Ki. 21). Is it small wonder that the Lord forbids His ministers to drink while performing their priestly duties?

Strong drink has destroyed many noble families.

We are admonished again by Paul in 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 that “...Neither...thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God.”

Our Lord also gives clear warning concerning the Last Days in Matthew 24:48-51, “But and if that evil servant shall say

in his heart, My lord delayeth his coming; And shall begin to smite his fellowservants, and to eat and drink with the drunken; The lord of that servant shall come in a day when he looketh not for him, and in an hour that he is not aware of, And shall cut him asunder, and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

May we notice, dear ones, that in this last portion of Scripture we are considering a man who obviously was waiting for the coming of the Lord. He was a believer who turned from the narrow path to participate with the drunkards in their feastings.

Let us consider the fact that the Bible is read primarily by believers. Therefore, the Lord is seeking to warn His people, so that they will not stray and touch strong drink, or feast with the drunkards.

We commend the following publication for further study on the matter of strong drink. David Wilkerson’s book entitled *“Sipping Saints”* includes (at the end of chapter one) arguments that the wine of the Scripture had two very distinct meanings—fermented alcoholic wine, and unfermented non-alcoholic wine or grape juice.

David Wilkerson mentions such secular authorities as Plato, Columella, Pliny, and Aristotle. Some of these give detailed processes whereby the wines were preserved from fermentation through boiling, filtering, and sulphurisation.

He also mentions Professor Moses Stuart who states that facts show that the ancients not only preserved their wines unfermented, but also regarded it as of a higher flavour and finer quality than fermented wine.

Let us close this section by simply saying that the Holy Scriptures give constant warning concerning the dangers of strong drink. Strong drink has destroyed many noble families, brought many a fine man to ruin, and brought many young professing Christians down into a Christless eternity.

A closing story may add emphasis to these truths. A lady friend of my mother, before her conversion, had married a drunkard. He died leaving her with two young boys. She warned them of the weakness and propensity to drinking that their father had imparted to them. She told them that one drink would send them on the road to ruin.

The older son, disregarding his mother's warning, believing that he would be strong enough to overcome the power of that one glass—took it. Drink overcame him and he was reduced to the absolute destitution of a helpless drunkard. The other son listened to his mother and became a shining witness all his life for Christ. May we be likewise.

PART SEVEN

Wise and Foolish Children

Much is said concerning children in this Book of Proverbs, for Solomon himself had many children of whom we have no record. He also had numerous siblings because of the many wives that his father David had, of which only a few are mentioned by name in Scripture.

In those days, sons were of great importance since they would determine the preservation of their father's inheritance. Solomon's son, Rehoboam (presumably his eldest), became king after him. Unfortunately, Rehoboam made unwise decisions that destroyed Solomon's inheritance. Therefore, as Solomon noted, a wise son glorified his father (Prov. 23:24-25).

Joseph is a shining example of a son who glorified his father, Jacob, and certainly, he prepared an inheritance for him in the land of Egypt. He, too, was the one out of all his brethren who Jacob had prepared to be his heir.

Isaac preserved Abraham's inheritance by digging again the wells of his father that had been blocked by the Philistines. Thus walking in the ways of his father and maintaining the covenant relationship.

David took particular care in instructing Solomon during those 19 formative years to teach him wisdom. The first

nine chapters of the Book of Proverbs are devoted to the proverbs of instruction of both David and Bathsheba for their son's edification. "*Hear, O my son, and receive my sayings; and the years of thy life shall be many. I have taught thee in the way of wisdom; I have led thee in right paths*" (Prov. 4:10- 11).

Note how often David and Bathsheba mention "strange women," for they knew the lustful nature that they had given to their God-appointed heir to the throne. It is good for parents to make their children aware of the besetting sins that they have passed on, so that they can scrupulously deal with them. In this way, they will obtain mastery over these sins and be delivered from them.

Foolish Sons Bring Sorrow

The other sons of David had given him great grief. Amnon had molested his sister, and Absalom had slain Amnon, and then sought later to kill David.

Solomon's own observation concerning sons is given in the following verse, "*The proverbs of Solomon. A wise son maketh a glad father: but a foolish son is the heaviness of his mother*" (Prov. 10:1). The heart of the mother is broken because the son of her womb walks in the ways of fools. That foolish son is ever on her mind and though she might have other sons who are wise and give pleasure, his foolish ways are constantly making her heart sad.

I have known of mothers even brought to an early grave by the foolish ways of their sons. One comes to mind as I write. The son had made an unfortunate marriage with an unbelieving girl. Ever a source of sorrow to the mother, it was very reminiscent of Rebekah's (wife of Isaac) complaint concerning the daughters of Heth (Gen. 27:46).

The attitude of this foolish son (described in Proverbs 10:1) towards his mother is an enigma. According to Proverbs 15:20, he despises her. I have had to counsel a grieving mother who has had to endure the shouting, screaming, and mocking of a foolish son. He fears not the Fifth Commandment, which states, "*Honour thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee*" (Ex. 20:12).

These foolish sons not only bring sorrow, but also impoverish the parents. I have talked with a father who himself left the paths of God many years ago and married an unbeliever. Although he prospered and became a multi-millionaire, he told me that he is becoming poor through having to pay the debts that his sons constantly amass in their folly. Solomon well said that, "*A foolish son is the calamity of his father...*" (Prov. 19:13).

Solomon continues speaking about family relationships in Proverbs 19:13, "*...the contentions of a wife are a continual dropping.*" Here, he points out that a quarrelsome wife is like a constant dropping. The aforementioned foolish son is often a product of an unwise marriage to a contentious woman. So

often does Solomon repeat the woes of a son that wastes or robs his father and cares not for his mother (Prov. 19:26). We might look to the case of Randolph Frederick Churchill who led a riotous life, and his father, Sir Winston Churchill, was forced to pay his debts on several occasions.

Again, these situations are so real to me even as I write these pages, because I have to deal with parents who are being sued by their very children.

Wise Sons Bring Joy

O how very different is the lot of the father and mother who have brought into this world a wise son! *“The father of the righteous shall greatly rejoice: and he that begetteth a wise child shall have joy of him. Thy father and thy mother shall be glad, and she that bare thee shall rejoice”* (Prov. 23:24-25).

I can think of several pastors who have sacrificed much to preach the gospel and are living in very reduced circumstances, but God has blessed them by giving them wise sons. In their wisdom and through honouring God themselves, these sons have become, at early ages, multi-millionaires in their own right. They are now caring for their parents by giving them cars, lovely houses in which to live, and providing for them financially in their old age. As it is written, *“thy sons shall marry thee,”* meaning that a wise son shall take care of his parents, as a husband takes care of a wife (Isa. 62:5).

The Key to Having A Wise Son

Wise sons are produced through training, which implies discipline. Parents are admonished in Proverbs 22:6 to train up a child in the way he should go, so that when he is old, he will not depart from it.

The key to having a wise son is given to us in Proverbs 23:26, *“My son, give me thine heart, and let thine eyes observe my ways.”* This cannot be just a one time commitment, but as King David states in Proverbs 4:23, *“Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life.”* It is a continuous way of life, and bears the peaceable fruits of righteousness.

A son who respects his father stays on the pathway of righteousness. I personally can attest to this truth—reverence for my own father kept me from evil companions.

Let us therefore meditate often on the ways of the wise and the foolish children, and of the great blessings of bringing up wise children. They are health to our bones and a source of constant joy and gladness. But do not give up on the others, because they could well become like the Prodigal Son (Lk. 15:11-32). When they come to their senses after their riotous living or their foolish and disrespectful behaviour, they sometimes do make even deathbed repentances, and you will have them in eternity with you. It is more blessed if they turn

Continue to pray for the prodigal and never give up hope!

back to God earlier in life so that they may have a blessed eternal inheritance awaiting them in heaven above.

Continue to pray for the prodigal! I know of many parents, especially mothers, who have had promises of conversions of their wayward children—that God will bring them back into the fold, even after the parents have passed on to eternity. Never give up hope!

PART EIGHT

The Words of Our Lips

One of the warnings and admonitions in this book of wise sayings concerns the words of our mouth. It is written that *“Death and life are in the power of the tongue: and they that love it shall eat the fruit thereof”* (Prov. 18:21). Our Lord warns us that for every idle word that we speak we shall have to give an account on the Day of Judgment. By our words we shall be justified or condemned (Mt. 12:36-37).

One of the most sombre episodes in history, illustrating how one’s words determine the course of a nation, is with respect to the children of Israel, who declared that they would perish in the wilderness. Speaking to them through Moses and Aaron, the Lord said, *“...As truly as I live, saith the LORD, as ye have spoken in mine ears, so will I do to you”* (Num. 14:28). The Lord ordained that they would perish, *just as they had spoken in His ears*, but that their children would enter into the Promised Land (Num. 14:29-31).

It is out of the abundance of the *heart* that the mouth speaks (Lk. 6:45); so the cure for the mouth lies in the heart. We need to ask the Lord to circumcise our hearts. As He cuts away those things that are offensive in our lives, from our lips will flow the sweetness, kindness, and graciousness of our blessed Lord. The Apostle James declared that a perfect man is the one who does not offend in word (Jas. 3:2).

Speaking the Right Words

Now we will consider the writings of Solomon with respect to the words of the wise and their dark sayings—for out of their mouth comes knowledge and understanding.

“The tongue of the just is as choice silver...” (Prov. 10:20), for their words are precious and meaningful. These refrain their lips, knowing that *“in the multitude of words there wanteth not sin: but he that refraineth his lips is wise”* (Prov. 10:19). They speak only with purpose and intent.

The lips of the righteous feed many and they know what is acceptable (Prov. 10:21,32). The words of the righteous also deliver, bringing one out of trouble (Prov. 12:6). Yet the wicked are ensnared by their own words, which trap them. *“The wicked is snared by the transgression of his lips: but the just shall come out of trouble”* (Prov. 12:13).

We cannot over emphasize the importance of speaking right words and studying to answer, so that we say the right thing at all times, in every situation. Proverbs 15:28 confirms this, *“The heart of the righteous studieth to answer...”* For in so doing, our words will be established and we will become like Samuel, of whom it is said, *“the LORD was with him, and did let none of his words fall to the ground”* (1 Sam. 3:19).

Right words leave their sweet taste in one’s mouth, but wrong words leave a foul feeling, even as we read in Job 6:30, *“Is there iniquity in my tongue? cannot my taste discern*

perverse things?” How we should pray the prayer of David in Psalm 17:2, when he said to the Lord, *“Let my sentence come forth from thy presence....”* Often when deciding issues concerning those whom I counsel, I ask the Lord that my sentence or decision might come from heaven’s throne room. In this way, the mind and will of God is accomplished with respect to that particular person.

In concluding this passage on the words of our mouth, let us dip into the writings of David in the Psalms, where he says, *“Whoso offereth praise glorifieth me: and to him that ordereth his conversation aright will I show the salvation of God”*

Right words
leave their
sweet taste in
one’s mouth.

(Ps. 50:23). Those who are careful with their speech win the heart of God and prepare for themselves His so great salvation. In other words, they come to know His salvation in every situation with which they are confronted.

Solomon adds, *“...let thy words be few”* (Eccl. 5:2), and reminds us that even a fool, when he is silent, is esteemed a wise man (Prov. 17:28). I would like to end on a true story that leaves room for thought.

A Life and Death Issue

A certain man went to a doctor and declared that he had cancer. The doctor, after thorough examination, declared

that he had none. The man continued periodic visits, always claiming that he had cancer, to which the doctor responded in the negative. Eventually after many months of visits, the doctor found cancer cells, which after continued visits were perceived to have grown. Eventually, cancer claimed the life of that man.

The doctor's comment was that he brought it upon himself by his negativism and his confession. However, if we will declare that which is right, we will enjoy the fruits of a good confession and see the salvation of God. Indeed, a wholesome tongue is a tree of life (Prov. 15:4).

Let us hearken to the words of Proverbs 17:27-28, which reads, *“He that hath knowledge spareth his words: and a man of understanding is of an excellent spirit. Even a fool, when he holdeth his peace, is counted wise: and he that shutteth his lips is esteemed a man of understanding.”*

EPILOGUE

As we have seen, the Book of Proverbs is a collection of maxims for everyday living, given by the wisest man who ever lived. If we will but follow and practise these, we will enjoy a life of fruitfulness, joy, and peace. Our lives will have been lived with purpose; and when old, we will have the satisfaction of looking back on a life well lived. We will be a role model for others to follow, and an influence for good for generations to come.

May we join with Reverend Billy Graham by recommending that one should read meditatively a chapter of proverbs a day (Grossman, 2005), appropriating the truths that are therein and living these truths out in one's life.

The
Book
of
Ecclesiastes

INTRODUCTION

The Hebrew word *Qoheleth* (translated “Ecclesiastes”) occurs in Scripture only in this book. Its meaning is essentially “one who convokes or addresses an assembly.” Therefore, he is a preacher or teacher. He is identified immediately in the first verse as being the son of David, king in Jerusalem. None fit this description so well as Solomon, for he speaks as one who has received great wisdom and wealth.

By tradition this book was written towards the end of Solomon’s life. In it, he surveys all his labours and gains, finding them to be but vanity and vexation of spirit. We may say that the purpose of Ecclesiastes is to instruct the young on the *true values* of life, which are to fear God and keep His commandments.

This then is the theme that we will adopt in this commentary: the search for the meaning and purpose of life as lived here upon this earth.

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PART ONE

Statement of the Author and the Theme *1:1-2*

As stated in our introduction, the author is clearly identified as Solomon. He was the son of David, and was moreover king of Israel in Jerusalem (Eccl. 1:12). Only one son of David fulfilled this description and that was Solomon, since all other kings were only kings of Judah. He was also a man of great wealth and wisdom.

To Solomon alone were those blessings given by God, as we read in 1 Kings 3:12-13, *“Behold, I have done according to thy words: lo, I have given thee a wise and an understanding heart; so that there was none like thee before thee, neither after thee shall any arise like unto thee. And I have also given thee that which thou hast not asked, both riches, and honour: so that there shall not be any among the kings like unto thee all thy days.”*

Solomon’s Disobedience

Although Solomon retained his wisdom throughout his life and his riches, they did not make for a happy life. He refers to himself as an old and foolish king who will no longer be admonished (Eccl. 4:13). His subjects also were oppressed. This is confirmed in 1 Kings 12:4 when Jeroboam and the tribes of Israel came to Rehoboam and asked him to alleviate the grievous service that King Solomon had imposed upon them.

Moreover, in spite of his wisdom, Solomon neglected to keep the commandments of God for kings in the matter of the multiplication of wives, *“Neither shall he multiply wives to himself, that his heart turn not away...”* (Deut. 17:17). In so doing, he was led astray by his wives to worship idols instead of the only true and holy God. *“For it came to pass, when Solomon was old, that his wives turned away his heart after other gods...”* (1 Ki. 11:3).

One is amazed that he who taught others did not teach himself. Yet is that not the case with so many preachers and teachers, even as the Apostle Paul stated, *“Thou therefore which teachest another, teachest thou not thyself? thou that preachest a man should not steal, dost thou steal? Thou that sayest a man should not commit adultery, dost thou commit adultery? thou that abhorrest idols, dost thou commit sacrilege? Thou that makest thy boast of the law, through breaking the law dishonourest thou God?”* (Rom. 2:21-23).

Solomon was also declared by Jesus to have been arrayed with great glory (Lk. 12:27). Yet of what benefit was it, when he lived in disobedience? He had a wonderful start, being called Jedidiah (meaning “the beloved of the Lord”). At the end, however, God had become his enemy by stirring up many against him.

How different might his assessment of life have been if he had only walked as David did! How different might it have been had he heeded the counsels of his own Psalm, which

had issued forth from his inspired lips. Psalm 1 was written on his way northward to Lebanon when he saw a tree planted by a riverside. He exclaimed, “*Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. But his delight is in the law of the LORD; and in his law doth he meditate day and night. And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper*” (Ps. 1:1-3).

“If only,” we say again. How that little word “IF” could be re-echoed in the lives of so many! If only he had walked in obedience to the Lord *all* the days of his life. There would have been that excitement, as Paul expressed, of hitting the mark of the high calling of God for his life (Phil. 3:14). There would have been the joy of seeking to fulfil all of God’s good will that He had ordained for him before the foundation of this world. Moreover, of being like Daniel, having the commendation of standing in his appointed place in heaven that has been allotted to him (Dan. 12:13). Let us, beloved, learn from the life of Solomon—to seek wisdom and *live* by these precepts, instead of just teaching them.

Because of his life, Solomon became morbid in his old age; and his assessment of this life was that all was vanity or “without value.” We, therefore, shall examine this book, understanding why Solomon came to this conclusion. In some cases, his examples are well and truly justified by those who, like him, walked in foolishness during their earthly sojourn.

PART TWO

Questioning the Profit in Life 1:3-11

King Solomon now reviews life from the aspect that there is seemingly an everlasting sameness. He contemplates the fact that as one generation passes and another comes, basically nature remains the same, simply repeating itself in endless cycles.

He observes in Ecclesiastes 1:4, “*One generation passeth away, and another generation cometh: but the earth abideth forever.*” Yet God has stated in Isaiah 41:4, “*Who hath wrought and done it, calling the generations from the beginning? I the LORD, the first, and with the last; I am he.*”

The Lord calls “*the generations from the beginning.*” Each generation (as we contemplate history and especially from a scriptural standpoint) *did* contribute to civilisation and the work and purpose of God. **In each generation, God builds upon another, bringing forth a fresh revelation of His glorious wisdom and nature, furthering knowledge of His ways.**

The Seven Dwelling Places of God

There is an ever-unfolding expression of His purposes as, for example, we contemplate the progressive revelation contained in the seven dwelling places of God.

1. *Tabernacle of Moses*: This is the tabernacle named after Moses. In the Tabernacle of Moses, we see the three main sections: the Outer Court, the Holy Place, and the Holy of Holies. This speaks of the following three main groups of Christians: little children, young men, and fathers.

Each of the articles of furniture in the Tabernacle (such as the Altar of Burnt Offering, the Laver of Water, the Candlestick, the Table of Shewbread, the Altar of Incense, the Ark of the Covenant, and the Mercy Seat) speaks of a particular experience in the Christian life.

The main theme of this Tabernacle is to reveal how a Holy God can dwell with sinful man. It shows how an unregenerate man can enter the Door of Salvation, and through progressive experiences, come into the literal presence of God in the Holy of Holies.

2. *Tabernacle of David*: The Tabernacle of David consisted of the sixth and seventh pieces of furniture—the Ark of the Covenant and the Mercy Seat (where the Lord's presence was) being placed in the tent on Mount Zion. The fact that David went in and sat before the presence of the Lord in this Tabernacle speaks of ascending into the presence of the Lord and abiding there (see Ps. 15 and Ps. 24).

3. *Temple of Solomon*: A new dispensation opens with the building of the Temple of Solomon and the dedication of that Temple on the Feast of Tabernacles. At the dedication,

the glory of the Lord filled the Temple, speaking prophetically of the glory of the Lord coming upon His people in the Last Days, as well as during the millennial reign of Christ.

4. *Restoration Temple*: The Restoration Temple of Zerubbabel, which was completed in 516 B.C. after the Temple of Solomon, was destroyed in 586 B.C. It portrays the restoration of the Church from the Dark Ages, when the light of the Gospel was well nigh extinguished.

5. *Temple of Herod*: The Temple of Herod was built by a heathen king. It was for a people living in a spiritually dry ground. It was graced by the Lord Himself, who was called a “root out of a dry ground.”

6. *The Church*: This is followed by the Church Age, wherein the Scriptures are fulfilled that the Gentiles will be joined to Israel. We, as believers, become the Temple of the Living God. He walks in us and we become His sons and daughters.

7. *Temple of Ezekiel*: The last of the seven dwelling places will be the Temple of Ezekiel. It will be constructed in Jerusalem after the return of Jesus at His Second Coming. Here, He will dwell, reign, and receive worship by His own nation who rejected Him at His First Coming. Also, all those who qualify for the First Resurrection, being blessed and holy, will rule and be priests unto Him.

Progressive Revelation in the Church Age

Even in the Church Age there is a sense of progression, for the prophecies of Daniel are being fulfilled before our very eyes. “Knowledge will increase,” (Dan. 12:4) declared this righteous man; and we are seeing the marvels of science open up on the right hand and on the left. The miracles of communication, the invention of the airplane, the telephone, and now the cell phone, whereby one can instantly be in reach throughout the world from one continent to another, are now here.

Spiritually, a deeper message is being proclaimed from the pulpits, and the rise of the enemy is being seen. Light and darkness are coming to maturity so that the scene may be laid for Christ’s Second Coming. Each generation is building upon the previous. As individual bricks, they are being used of Him, in the fullness of time, so that the purpose of His handiwork may be displayed before mankind.

Yet with all these wonders of science and the mysteries of His glorious Word unfolding before us in our generation, we must acknowledge the observation of Solomon that nature does remain the same. In a sense, there are the invariable consistencies in His handiwork from the creation. But that is exactly what God declared: “*While the earth remaineth, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease*” (Gen. 8:22).

In His wisdom, some things do not change; and therefore, the predictability of the seasons is a comfort to us all. We see

this not only in nature, but also in man. We are prone to the same human weaknesses and failures as those of previous generations. This is a blessing, in that we can learn from their mistakes, as well as their triumphs in laying hold of the grace of God. In this way, we may mature and attain unto higher heights in God.

**THE SEVEN DWELLING
PLACES OF GOD**

- 1. Tabernacle of Moses*
- 2. Tabernacle of David*
- 3. Temple of Solomon*
- 4. Restoration Temple*
- 5. Temple of Herod*
- 6. The Church*
- 7. Temple of Ezekiel*

PART THREE

Questioning the Profit in Wisdom 1:12-18

We have now in Ecclesiastes 1:17-18 the preacher's own personal testimony concerning his search for wisdom, "*And I gave my heart to know wisdom, and to know madness and folly: I perceived that this also is vexation of spirit. For in much wisdom is much grief: and he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow.*"

Some commentators have suggested that this book is a mass of contradictions, or that it presents two wisdoms—that of this world and that of God. However, this belief springs from a misunderstanding of the text and also of Solomon's own confessions.

Solomon is not suggesting that wisdom is not important, as it may seem in certain verses. If that were so, he would be denying his own writings in Proverbs 4 and 8, where he eulogises wisdom as being the principal thing; wisdom is far more precious than anything that one can desire. Such an inspired writer could never be so inconsistent in his statements.

No, Solomon is describing his own search for understanding and wisdom concerning the works of God. Solomon declares that he has seen all the works that have been done under

the sun and knows that they simply do not satisfy the heart. For in much wisdom and knowledge, there is indeed sorrow. One's eyes are opened to the sadness in the human race. Men and women are toiling with apparently no sense of purpose.

In the days of Solomon, many, including Solomon himself, were enamoured with acquiring vineyards and pools of water for those vineyards. Today, there are many who are seeking satisfaction by being caught up with one pursuit or another such as computers or pleasure seeking.

I have seen those whose minds are like a horse with blinkers without any peripheral vision, totally enthralled with what they are pursuing. They have lost the vision of the larger purpose in life, and in so doing; they miss the point of life.

Pope John Paul II rightly observed, “The complexity of the communications system in which we move — Internet is one more proof of it — causes bewilderment about what is real, what surrounds us, and who surrounds us. The question that the new technologies pose to man, who sees himself immersed in a technological world, continues to be the question about the meaning of life: ‘Who am I? Where do I come from and where am I going? Why does evil exist? What is there after life?’” (*New Means of Communications Reviving Age-Old Questions, Says Pope,* 2003)

God Is Purposeful

Whether people realise it or not, the truth is that God did create us for a purpose. For the Lord clearly states in

Isaiah 45:18, *“For thus saith the LORD that created the heavens; God himself that formed the earth and made it; he hath established it, he created it not in vain, he formed it to be inhabited: I am the LORD; and there is none else.”*

Therefore, as Paul says in Romans 1:20, *“For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse.”* Proverbs 16:4 also says, *“The LORD hath made all things for himself: yea, even the wicked for the day of evil.”*

We may, with confidence, proclaim that God has created all things with purpose for our instruction. In particular, His people—the Church (whether in Old Testament times, called the Church in the wilderness, or in New Testament times)—are called to manifest the manifold wisdom of God. The intent is to make known unto the principalities and powers the infinite ways of our Almighty God and Heavenly Father (Eph. 3:10-11).

Every living creature has purpose, though with our very finite limitations, we might comprehend but only a fragment of these things. Yet the Lord has been making it plain to me that whatsoever a person does upon this earth, there is purpose, and that each person is needed.

In particular, in our own fellowship there are those with very significant ministries whose worth is evident to all. Behind the scenes, others toil at seemingly very insignificant positions, but they are like small cogs in the large machine.

If they were not functioning correctly in their God-ordained positions to one degree or another, this would prevent those who are more visible from performing at top efficiency. All are essential; without all the cogs, big and small, the work will not go forward, or if so, only under greatly reduced speed and efficiency.

The Sadness of Ignorance

Returning to Solomon's observations, it is true that in much wisdom and knowledge there is sorrow, for one can see so many people *not comprehending* their divine place in the plan of God. They are discontented as a result of making many errors of judgment. Without the understanding of God, one sees a maze of industry, seemingly without purpose, a coming and going of endless toil without satisfaction. The thought is, "Where is the end of it all?"

If we will look to God, the blurred image in our telescope will come into focus and we will see clearly. He did not create this world, its inhabitants, or its smallest creature in vain; everything is with purpose. All form part of the revelation of the greatness of His wisdom, and are instruments of His instruction to us all.

PART FOUR

Questioning the Profit in Pleasure

2:1-3

The Futility of Pleasure, Foolish Mirth, and Wine

In Ecclesiastes 1, the main thought is that “wisdom brings sadness because one’s eyes are opened to the ignorance of the human race concerning God’s purposes.”

Here in Ecclesiastes 2, we see that Solomon *himself* pursued wisdom *without an understanding of God’s purposes*. So often, we struggle with the very weaknesses that we perceive in others, and so it was with Solomon. **Wisdom is knowing how to make the right choices.** Sadly, while Solomon knew the right thing to do, he failed to walk in the light of the wisdom that the Lord had gifted him with.

For example, we know that Solomon multiplied wives and concubines, even though it was not the Lord’s will for him (Deut. 17:17). His wives eventually turned his heart away from the Lord (1 Ki. 11:3). How this should serve as a warning to us—it is not enough to know a lot about Scripture and the ways of God, or even to be able to give wise counsel to others. If we know what we ought to do, but choose *in our own lives* not to obey the Lord and walk in His purposes, then the wisdom that we have received becomes without purpose.

Solomon, dissatisfied with his pursuit of the knowledge and wisdom without the understanding of God's purpose, then turns himself to the pursuit of *pleasure*. This comes in many forms and it is a tremendous waster of one's time and strength. Truly, he that loveth sport shall be a poor man (Prov. 21:17). Pleasure tends to penury and those that live therein shall not be rich.

Then Solomon gave himself to *laughter*. Oh, what a void endless laughter creates in one's heart. How empty, how shallow are those who laugh heartily over nothing! On the other hand, the laugh of the Holy Spirit through God's people is so satisfying, as we see in Psalm 126:2.

Solomon gave himself to *wine* despite the many warnings he himself gives concerning wine in his other book of wisdom. He wrote in Proverbs 21:17, "*He that loveth wine and oil shall not be rich.*" Again, we read in Proverbs 20:1, "*Wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging: and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise.*"

Used but Not Approved of God

Solomon was able to give wise counsel to others, even though he did not necessarily apply such counsel to his own life. Insight into the ways of God is given to us concerning this matter by the Apostle Paul when he says, "*For the gifts and calling of God are without repentance*" (Rom. 11:29). Apparently, the God-given gift of wisdom remained with Solomon the whole of his life, in spite of the fact that

he wandered far from the straight and narrow path of the righteous.

Therefore, it is a solemn warning to us all—although the gifts God has given us may still be operating, it is not a sign of His approval. Here we refer you, beloved, to the awesome words of our Lord Himself when He said, *“Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity”* (Mt. 7:21).

The Danger of Playing with Sin

Solomon then went downwards, letting his desires take hold of him, and he descended into the realm of folly and foolishness. Leaving, as it were, the dignity that becomes a king, he behaved as the fool. Yet at the same time, he retained his senses and did not let folly completely control him. He did so as one who sips a strong drink to determine its taste, not intending to permit it to overcome him.

God's gifts are
not a sign of
His approval!

He did all this, he says, to determine what is best for the sons of men to do under heaven (Eccl. 2:3). We would say that this is a very dangerous pastime since, in the end; Solomon did leave the pathway of the righteous because he tasted the

forbidden fruit. We shall see later in Ecclesiastes 8:8 that no one is discharged in a time of war; similarly, wickedness will not release those who practise it. Sin has an awesome power and its chains are strong. So many people think that playing with sin will not be harmful, and that they may take their leave of those pleasures at will.

My wife, when teaching children in Sunday School, so often used a simple, but very meaningful illustration for the power of sin. She would have one boy stand in front of the class and another take a piece of string and put the string around the first boy just once. He quickly broke loose. However, after the string was wrapped around him just four or five times, he was unable to get loose.

In some cases, falling only once is sufficient for a strong bondage of sin to be developed, keeping that person in captivity for life. To be set free, the person must confess and plead the blood of Jesus; for it has the power to break the curse of conquered sin and to set the captive free.

PART FIVE

Questioning the Profit in Great Works 2:4-17

When It Is Never Enough

Next, Solomon seeks satisfaction in building houses. He said in Ecclesiastes 2:4, *“I made me great works...”* Many rich men indulge themselves in such fantasies. It appears that one house will not suffice, so they build another and so on until they own several houses (depending upon their means). They only live in them for one month, if that, during the year. Then there arises the problem of who will care for them. They have to employ those who will “house sit” or manage them, a cause of concern. It does not provide the pleasure and rest for which the soul of man yearns.

Solomon then planted vineyards. Gardens and orchards followed, in which he planted all kinds of fruit. The planting of vineyards was a passion for the Israelites, who were an agricultural people. Their desire was expressed in the promise in Solomon’s day, found in 1 Kings 4:25, *“And Judah and Israel dwelt safely, every man under his vine and under his fig tree, from Dan even to Beersheba, all the days of Solomon.”*

It was an expression of rest and contentment to this people who so loved their land. That passion for vineyards was so great that when Naboth refused to sell the vineyard that he

had inherited from his father, a king like Ahab was willing to acquire that vineyard by underhanded means such as murder (1 Ki. 21). Seemingly one can never say enough is enough. I realised this when I was in Switzerland. There we had a hotel and land, which surrounded it. We had purchased a cow to provide milk for the staff and student body. The supply of milk from the cow (which was a good milk producer) dried up.

We enquired of a local farmer, who was also a parishioner, for the reason. He said, “Oh, a cow needs the company of another cow in order to provide milk.” In other words, a contented cow provides milk. Thus, we bought another cow.

We were then informed that the field in which we had placed them was too small, and we had to buy another piece of ground in order to have sufficient grass for their nourishment. There was literally no end to this acquisition of land, for we were told another cow could be sustained but it would be better to have yet another piece of ground to provide adequately for their needs.

Enough is enough, for we soon realised that the capital that we had laid out for the purchase of cows and land was much more than we could save for many years in their milk production. In the end, we found that buying milk would have been considerably less costly.

Solomon must have encountered the same problem, for he taxed the people heavily in order to fulfil his desires.

Another problem now emerges with Solomon's ever-increasing desires: pools of water are needed to water the orchards and the trees. These orchards needed menservants and maidservants to provide the necessary labour to sustain these fields. Solomon also possessed large numbers of cattle both great and small.

However, the more one possesses, the more one has to have in order to take care of these possessions. Cattle, for example, have to be provided for and so it goes on. Not surprisingly, these great works failed to satisfy the heart of Solomon.

In Ecclesiastes 2:11, he remarks, "*Then I looked on all the works that my hands had wrought, and on the labour that I had laboured to do: and, behold, all was vanity and vexation of spirit, and there was no profit under the sun.*" There is only so much that one is able to enjoy.

How true that a little with peace is a great blessing, even as Solomon stated in Proverbs 23:4-5, "*Labour not to be rich: cease from thine own wisdom. Wilt thou set thine eyes upon that which is not? for riches certainly make themselves wings; they fly away as an eagle toward heaven.*" In 1 Timothy 6:6, the Apostle Paul advises his spiritual son Timothy, "*...godliness with contentment is great gain.*"

We may pause here to comment on the fact that Solomon had accumulated excellent words of wisdom and sound advice in the Book of Proverbs, which he did not follow, as we see in Ecclesiastes (which contains his testimony).

The Dangers of an Undisciplined Life

Solomon also acknowledged that he gathered silver and gold and the peculiar treasures of kings which are described in 1 Kings 10:21-22, *“And all king Solomon’s drinking vessels were of gold, and all the vessels of the house of the forest of Lebanon were of pure gold; none were of silver: it was nothing accounted of in the days of Solomon. For the king had at sea a navy of Tharshish with the navy of Hiram: once in three years came the navy of Tharshish, bringing gold, and silver, ivory, and apes, and peacocks.”* Apes are a type of sensuality, and peacocks, of course, speak of pride—both sins predominated in the life of Solomon.

The pleasures of King Solomon also included a large harem of some 300 concubines and 700 wives. As we stated earlier, this was expressly forbidden by the laws of kings in Deuteronomy 17. These women eventually turned the heart of Solomon away from the worship of the one and only true and living God to the worship of idols and gods of the heathen (1 Ki. 11:4).

Then, as we have said before, in spite of accumulating all the goods of this world, the wisdom of God remained with him. We should add a note of warning—if one deliberately turns away from the living God and goes in the way of this world, there are occasions (as with the Israelites) where God gives him up to profitless doctrines. Please do not tempt God, for He is not to be trifled with! As we read in Ezekiel 20:24-25, *“Because they had not executed my judgments,*

but had despised my statutes, and had polluted my sabbaths, and their eyes were after their fathers' idols. Wherefore I gave them also statutes that were not good, and judgments whereby they should not live."

This undisciplined king is a warning to us all, for his unbridled lusts brought him to the place whereby he could have anything that he saw. He did not withhold himself from the objects of his desire. Solomon rejoiced in all his labours, but when

Please do not tempt God; He is not to be trifled with!

he contemplated them, he saw the emptiness of this world's possessions (Eccl. 2:11). Rehoboam, who succeeded his father Solomon, is not mentioned as being so rich. In fact, he became poor through his own disobedience and was obliged to give the treasures of the temple to Shishak the Pharaoh who came up and ransacked his palaces (1 Ki. 14:25-26).

Neither riches nor the crown descend to all generations, as Solomon himself wrote, "*For riches are not for ever: and doth the crown endure to every generation?*" (Prov. 27:24). In fact, for Solomon the following truism was fulfilled, "*to the sinner he giveth travail, to gather and to heap up, that he may give to him that is good before God*" (Eccl. 2:26).

Solomon gathered, but for the pleasure of whom? Certainly it was not for himself, because it gave him no satisfaction. In five short years after his death, his son had lost all to the king of Egypt, the enemy of Judah. Even the northern ten

tribes had left because of Solomon's disobedience. As we contemplate his life, we can well see that such a man cannot leave a lasting blessing to his people.

The End of the Wise and the Foolish

Solomon does acknowledge that wisdom is better than folly, for the wise man's eyes are in his head, but the fool walks in darkness (Eccl. 2:14). Yet he sees that that which happens to the fool, also happens to the wise—they both die. Solomon draws this conclusion in Ecclesiastes 2:16, *"For there is no remembrance of the wise more than of the fool for ever; seeing that which now is in the days to come shall all be forgotten. And how dieth the wise man? as the fool."* But that truly is not so, since we read in Psalm 45:17, *"I will make thy name to be remembered in all generations: therefore shall the people praise thee for ever and ever."* The name of the wise is revered and remembered with fondness on earth, and certainly there is a heavenly recognition.

Solomon, we suggest, could not perceive the handiwork of God because he was so egocentric. He hated the life that God had given him. We, on the other hand, should appreciate every day that He has so graciously given us, and trust in His love to work out something pleasing in us and through us for His glory. Then life has the purpose that God intends it to have. If we use it for our pleasure, as did Solomon, it will only appear to be in vain. The beauty of God's purpose will be missed.

PART SIX

Questioning the Profit in Labour 2:18-23

Now in Ecclesiastes 2:18-19, Solomon declares, “*Yea, I hated all my labour which I had taken under the sun: because I should leave it unto the man that shall be after me. And who knoweth whether he shall be a wise man or a fool? yet shall he have rule over all my labour wherein I have laboured, and wherein I have shewed myself wise under the sun. This is also vanity.*” Here, he is saying that he hated all his labour because he will leave it to the man who will follow him. Then he asks himself, who knows whether his successor will be wise or foolish?

Solomon’s Foolish Successor

We have already noted that the king who followed Solomon and inherited all his labours and treasures was Rehoboam, a man who made many foolish decisions and choices. Solomon had already been told that at his death, because of his own disobedience, the Lord would take away ten tribes from him. Only for David’s sake did this not happen during his lifetime (1 Ki. 11:11-13).

When the ten northern tribes appeared before Rehoboam declaring that Solomon’s reign had been an oppressive rule and that they would only serve him if he alleviated the

oppressiveness, Rehoboam demanded that they return in three days' time. During this time he consulted two groups of people. The first group comprised the old men, who were the counsellors of his father, *"And they spake unto him, saying, If thou wilt be a servant unto this people this day, and wilt serve them, and answer them, and speak good words to them, then they will be thy servants for ever"* (1 Ki. 12:7).

But then we read in 1 Kings 12:8-11, *"But he forsook the counsel of the old men, which they had given him, and consulted with the young men that were grown up with him, and which stood before him: And he said unto them, What counsel give ye that we may answer this people, who have spoken to me, saying, Make the yoke which thy father did put upon us lighter? And the young men that were grown up with him spake unto him, saying, Thus shalt thou speak unto this people that spake unto thee, saying, Thy father made our yoke heavy, but make thou it lighter unto us; thus shalt thou say unto them, My little finger shall be thicker than my father's loins. And now whereas my father did lade you with a heavy yoke, I will add to your yoke: my father hath chastised you with whips, but I will chastise you with scorpions."*

When Jeroboam and the ten tribes came before Rehoboam, he spoke according to the counsel of the young men, *"Wherefore the king hearkened not unto the people; for the cause was from the LORD, that he might perform his saying, which the LORD spake by Ahijah the Shilonite unto Jeroboam the son of Nebat"* (1 Ki. 12:15). Therefore the people left Rehoboam and made Jeroboam their king according to the word of the Lord.

Now let us, for our edification, consider Rehoboam. He ascended to the throne at the age of 41, which would have meant that King David his grandfather had probably seen him and may even have blessed him. He had lived throughout the reign of his father, perceiving the early ardent spiritual fervour of Solomon and then his decline through his consorting with all his concubines and wives.

Moreover, we are told that Rehoboam did evil, for he prepared not his heart to seek the Lord. Solomon should have watched over his heir to ensure that he aligned his heart with the heart of God, even as the first nine chapters of the Book of Proverbs show us how David earnestly taught Solomon.

The Key to Fruitful Labour

The end of the matter was that all of Solomon's labours did not bring generational blessing to his people, but in fact were lost very soon after his death. Should we not pause and consider as to whether we shall leave treasures of eternal benefit to our natural or spiritual children? Will our good works precede us, laying up treasure in heaven? Because of our training of those who follow us, will good works also follow us into heaven's tablelands?

Solomon then goes on to say in Ecclesiastes 2:20-23, *“Therefore I went about to cause my heart to despair of all the labour which I took under the sun. For there is a man whose labour is in wisdom, and in knowledge, and in equity; yet to a man that hath not laboured therein shall he leave it*

for his portion. This also is vanity and a great evil. For what hath man of all his labour, and of the vexation of his heart, wherein he hath laboured under the sun? For all his days are sorrows, and his travail grief; yea, his heart taketh not rest in the night. This is also vanity.” Then Solomon adds that this man has no rest in the night. His sleep was being disturbed by endless doubts and worries. Yet this is not necessarily always the case.

God gives sleep to His beloved, the one who lives *in His will* (Ps. 127:2). Now let us contrast this with the life of our Saviour here upon earth as we contemplate these verses, *“And said unto me, Thou art my servant, O Israel, in whom I will be glorified. Then I said, I have laboured in vain, I have spent my strength for nought, and in vain: yet surely my judgment is with the LORD, and my work with my God”* (Isa. 49:3-4).

Even when His labour appeared to be in vain, our Lord put His trust and the purpose for His life into the hands of His Heavenly Father. The response of His Father was to give Him the following promise, *“He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied: by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities. Therefore will I divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong; because he hath poured out his soul unto death: and he was numbered with the transgressors; and he bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors”* (Isa. 53:11-12). The end result was that the Lord saw His

life, entrusted into the hands of His loving Heavenly Father, was one of great fruitfulness.

The end of the matter for the one who lived not for Himself but for the will of God is so different from that of the one who lives for himself, as was the case with Solomon. As our Lord said in Matthew 16:25, *“For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it.”*

**God gives
sleep to His
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Let us therefore be so admonished to live for Him who died for us, that we may behold the beauty of His purposes in and through our lives. Furthermore, that we may understand history—past, present, and future—in the light of His most glorious presence.

PART SEVEN

The Beauty of True Contentment 2:24-26

Here is the tormented Solomon contemplating that which is truly blessedness. Before we continue with his observations, I am reminded of one who, similar to Solomon, sought to build. His name was Cecil Rhodes, the Empire Builder. His comments from a restless soul were: “So much to do and so little time to do it in.” At a certain reception in Salisbury, capital of the country of Rhodesia (which has been renamed Zimbabwe), he perceived William Booth, founder of the Salvation Army, sitting in a corner of the room. “I would give all that I have to have the joy and peace that that old gentleman possesses,” said the renowned founder of the countries of North and South Rhodesia, to which he had given his name.

What were Solomon’s observations upon the nature of true blessedness? In one word—*contentment*. He describes this in the following manner: “*There is nothing better for a man, than that he should eat and drink, and that he should make his soul enjoy good in his labour. This also I saw, that it was from the hand of God*” (Eccl. 2:24).

He continues by lifting us to a higher plain, “*For who can eat, or who else can hasten hereunto, more than I?*” (Eccl. 2:25). Solomon, in wistful contemplation, reflects upon the fact that

he, above all other, could eat and drink to satisfy his appetite. In reality, he did not have that true blessedness because he had given himself to other pursuits, which had robbed him of the joy of simple pleasures.

Solomon then goes on to state what we might consider as one of the most prized promises from God to those who please Him. We quote Ecclesiastes 2:26, ***“For God giveth to a man that is good in his sight wisdom, and knowledge, and joy: but to the sinner he giveth travail, to gather and to heap up, that he may give to him that is good before God. This also is vanity and vexation of spirit.”***

Pleasing God

Let us consider firstly the candidate. He is one who pleases God. What do we have to do to please God? The Lord Jesus tells us, *“He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him”* (Jn. 14:21). Again to emphasise this truth He says in John 14:23, *“If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him.”*

Now a very beautiful truth follows. When one loves another and is loved in return, there is a strong desire to give a very meaningful gift to show one’s appreciation. Men do so to their wives. One seeks out a gift that the wife will treasure and love; either to wear it like a piece of jewellery, or to use it as an ornament in a prominent position that they can

contemplate from day to day. This is true with us mere mortals who have very limited resources to show our love. How much more would the One with limitless resources at His disposal choose the very best in His treasure house to give to those who love and please Him?

The Blessing of Wisdom

Next, let us see the gifts that He feels are the most beneficial to those who please Him. Looking again at Ecclesiastes 2:26, *“For God giveth to a man that is good in his sight **wisdom, and knowledge, and joy...**”* Three great gifts have been so selected, wisdom being the first. Of this gift Solomon has declared in Proverbs 4:7 that wisdom is the principal thing, and then in Proverbs 8:11: *“For wisdom is better than rubies; and all the things that may be desired are not to be compared to it.”*

The Blessing of Knowledge

This is followed by knowledge. What satisfaction knowledge gives! We all want to know the purpose of life, even the very insignificant details along the way. We are born with a healthy desire or curiosity to know things. There is a depth of peace that comes with the knowledge of God’s plan for us as a race, nation, church, or individual. Knowledge of the overall purpose brings a sense of well being to our very soul.

The Blessing of Joy

The third blessing, which God considers so important and valuable, is joy. He has selected it as a gift for His friends. To

be filled with the joy of the Lord is our strength (Neh. 8:10). This joy overcomes all adversity. It is amazing that the Lord can give a well spring of joy within us, even when we are passing through some of the severest trials known to mankind, such as the death of a loved one.

I personally had this experience. Long before the passing of my wife, the Lord had quickened the following Scripture to me, *“Thou hast turned for me my mourning into dancing: thou hast put off my sackcloth, and girded me with gladness; To the end that my glory may sing praise to thee, and not be silent. O LORD my God, I will give thanks unto thee for ever”* (Ps. 30:11-12).

I was privileged to learn the source of the music to which these verses had been put to song. A certain Christian brother in Christchurch, New Zealand had six children. His wife died in hospital and coming home that evening, he was grief-stricken as he contemplated what lay ahead for him, having to care for and raise those children without his dear companion. That night, after having put all his tearful children to bed, he went into the living room alone and prayed. The presence of God came down and he began singing these verses to music inspired by the Holy Spirit.

We sang this song often in church services in that country and elsewhere. Seemingly the tune would rise up in my own being from time to time. I found this chorus so pleasurable to sing. Then the time came when my own dear wife passed away after numerous years of operations and confinement

due to a stroke. The hours after the funeral were difficult, but as I was walking in the hotel following a beloved pastor and his wife, the Spirit of God fell upon me and I saw as in a vision my mourning chains fall off. The joy of the Lord just flooded my soul, and I was able to sing and dance unto the Lord in my room.

The joy of the Lord overcomes all adversity!

The answer to sadness and sorrow is joy, which I experienced from time to time even when looking after my wife during the years that she was experiencing that very limiting stroke. The joy of the Lord carried me through it all by the strength that it gives. **There is true contentment—when the wisdom, knowledge, and joy of the Lord, flood our soul.**

Labouring in Vain

Now by the will and determinate plan of God, the wicked are ordained to labour, but their gains are laid up for the righteous (Eccl. 2:26). How many of God's servants have seen buildings erected through large sums donated from those who do not follow the Lord or even attend church!

Let us learn the lessons of this passage: the Lord will cause others to provide for all our needs if we will please Him, even though they are not walking with us. This is clearly seen in passages such as Isaiah 60:4-7, which reads, "*Lift up thine eyes round about, and see: all they gather themselves*

together, they come to thee: thy sons shall come from far, and thy daughters shall be nursed at thy side. Then thou shalt see, and flow together, and thine heart shall fear, and be enlarged; because the abundance of the sea shall be converted unto thee, the forces of the Gentiles shall come unto thee. The multitude of camels shall cover thee, the dromedaries of Midian and Ephah; all they from Sheba shall come: they shall bring gold and incense; and they shall shew forth the praises of the LORD. All the flocks of Kedar shall be gathered together unto thee, the rams of Nebaioth shall minister unto thee: they shall come up with acceptance on mine altar, and I will glorify the house of my glory.”

PART EIGHT

God's Appointed Time for All Things 3:1-10

Ecclesiastes 3:1-10 says, *“To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven: A time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up that which is planted; A time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up; A time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance; A time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together; a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing; A time to get, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to cast away; A time to rend, and a time to sew; a time to keep silence, and a time to speak; A time to love, and a time to hate; a time of war, and a time of peace. What profit hath he that worketh in that wherein he laboureth? I have seen the travail, which God hath given to the sons of men to be exercised in it.”*

**Doing the
right thing at
the right time
is an essential
in life.**

In this section, Solomon declares that the universe and the work of God are governed by time. As His creatures, we are also bond slaves to time. Time governs all things, and our release will only come when time will be no more.

In this life we must be aware of time. We know that the gestation time of a child is 280 days. This enables the parents to prepare for the new arrival. They can prepare his or her bedroom, making sure that the necessary clothes and toiletries are waiting for the birth of the little one. Generally, this is a most joyous occasion shared by one and all in the family.

The child's growth is measured by time, even when he is sent off to his first class at school. Then for the next 12 years, his education is governed by measured increments of time. Finally, there comes the first graduation from high school, followed by a college career for some. After another graduation, one takes his first steps into the workplace, dealing with a workweek of 40 hours for many people who are just starting out. However, as one ascends the steps of promotion (which in some cases is also governed by time), the week's workload increases, resulting in a commensurate increase of time at the place of work.

Then again for some, there comes the blessedness of the time for retirement; that people who are more successful in life generally occupy by another form of work. Then comes the inevitable—the laying down of our life to enter the portals of eternity, where time will be no more.

Being Ready

However, while still being clothed upon with this mortality, we must give good heed to time, all the more so, as we near the end of this dispensation. Notice that it was really only

with the advent of rail travel, that one became very aware of the necessity of possessing a watch. It is an ever-increasing necessity since the departure times, not just of trains, but also of coaches and airplanes, have all become very precise.

We can make or break appointments through lack of punctuality; and sometimes the personal loss can be severe. One may miss a class or a seminar in which one might be the speaker, or miss a wedding of a treasured friend by failing to make a vital connection.

Of course, all this is minimal compared to a lack of readiness for that most precious meeting with the Lord. The Parable of the Ten Virgins in Matthew 25 illustrates the seriousness of that situation.

Knowing the Seasons

The sense of being ready is illustrated in the negative when the Lord wept over Jerusalem because they did not know the day of their visitation and therefore failed to receive Him. Because of this, Jerusalem suffered destruction some 40 years later by the hands of the Romans in A.D. 70 (Lk. 19:44).

In the sense of the spiritual, seasons of refreshing can be missed by a lack of awareness of time. How serious is the meaning of time, which can affect our eternity! How blessed it is to be surrounded by those like the tribe of Issachar who had an understanding of the times and knew what Israel should do (1 Chr. 12:32).

The importance of being aware of the time can extend to knowing when we should visit countries and nations with the Gospel message. Sometimes there are only short windows of opportunity when a country becomes open to the Gospel, and then they are closed again.

An open door is only fruitful if one moves in at the appointed time, or else it is lost for one generation, or perhaps even forever.

God's Appointed Time

When Solomon gives a list of some things that are governed by time, he includes "*a time to every purpose under the heaven*" (Eccl. 3:1). We might well remember our Saviour's First Coming, of which Paul states in Galatians 4:4 that, "*...when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth His Son...*" We know therefore that His Second Coming will likewise be in the perfect timing of God.

There is a time to be born and a time to die, which has been predetermined for each of us by heaven's wisdom. Psalm 90:10 says, "*The days of our years are threescore years and ten; and if by reason of strength they be fourscore years, yet is their strength labour and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away.*" These teachings of Moses are now being seen. Through food and good exercise, the life span for most in civilised Western nations is now in the 80's. Yet even when we are 80 years of age, it is as though our life has been but a fleeting moment in time.

Redeeming the Time

Let us therefore heed the admonition of Paul, who exhorts us in Ephesians 5:16 to redeem the time, for the days are evil. Let us use our time wisely. Let the moments given to us be employed in prayer, study, and if permitted, even for teaching, preaching, and testifying. Surely all of us can give testimony of the goodness of the Lord to all those who put their trust in Him.

Let us be diligent in well doing, for in so doing we lay up for ourselves eternal riches in glory (Mt. 6:19-21). May we never forget that we shall know one another in glory. We will remember the kindness that we have shown each other during the time of our earthly sojourn.

In closing these comments on time, let us consider that the main admonition was that to each subject, there is a time allotted. Our concern must be to be occupied in doing everything in its allotted time slot. A well-known Bible story illustrates this truth.

When the children of Israel were at Kadesh Barnea, they were told to enter into the Promised Land. They refused, and the Lord through Moses told them that they were to return to the wilderness. Then they repented and wanted to go into the Promised Land the following day. However, they had passed the time appointed and they were told not to go in. Nonetheless, they did not heed the word of the Lord, went in, and were defeated (Num. 14). Doing the **right thing** at the **right time** is an essential in life.

PART NINE

The Eternal Nature of God's Works 3:11-14

Ecclesiastes 3:11-14 says, *“He hath made every thing beautiful in his time: also he hath set the world in their heart, so that no man can find out the work that God maketh from the beginning to the end. I know that there is no good in them, but for a man to rejoice, and to do good in his life. And also that every man should eat and drink, and enjoy the good of all his labour, it is the gift of God. I know that, whatsoever God doeth, it shall be for ever: nothing can be put to it, nor any thing taken from it: and God doeth it, that men should fear before him.”*

Contemplating the handiwork of God in nature, we must concur with Solomon when he states that God made everything beautiful in His time. When God created the world, He saw that on each day of Creation, it was good. The beauty of the original Creation has since been marred by the fall of man. Even so, God may in His graciousness restore what has been marred. Concerning vessels that have become marred through sin, wilfulness or rebellion, we can take courage and hope in the illustration found in Jeremiah 18. In this illustration, the vessel marred in the hands of the Potter was made into another vessel, as it pleased the Master.

Moreover, **all that God does is perfect and nothing can be taken from it or added to it.** This is also brought out

in Revelation 22:18-19, *“For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book: And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book.”*

God is the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End (Rev. 22:13); His work is complete. Yet that which God does is hidden from man, so that men may fear God exceedingly, realising that they must trust Him in all things and know that He does all things well (Eccl. 3:11). We cannot question His wisdom, for He made heaven and earth with all its complexities. Even when Job questioned the dealings of God in his own life, the Lord responded by asking, *“Who is this that darkeneth counsel by words without knowledge?... Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth? declare, if thou hast understanding”* (Job 38:2,4).

Therefore, mortal man is filled with awe as he contemplates God’s perfection. Solomon sums up this situation by saying that man should simply rejoice and do good all the days of his life (Eccl. 3:12).

PART TEN

God, the Righteous Judge of All 3:15-22

Sin Has Consequences

In the realm of judgment, one must never forget that **God requires that which is past**. As Solomon observed in Ecclesiastes 3:15, *“That which hath been is now; and that which is to be hath already been; and God requireth that which is past.”* A wise man is therefore one who asks the Lord to go through his life, to reveal hidden sins, and to graciously cleanse them by His most precious blood. In Psalm 139:23-24, King David prayed, *“Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.”*

That the past is required is also true concerning national justice. At the time of writing this passage, there was a man in the United States, Tookie Williams, who, having been found guilty of four brutal murders some 20 years ago (and the formation of the Crips gang that has been responsible for the deaths of thousands) sought clemency. Although during his time in prison he wrote children’s poems and lectured by means of a telephone to youths not to follow his evil past, justice could not be denied. The California Supreme Court denied him another hearing and the governor of the state refused to grant clemency, pointing out that he was guilty

of the four murders and should pay with his life. He was sentenced to death (“Supreme Court rejects Williams’ plea,” 2005).

Manasseh’s Wickedness

We may see the attitude of justice in the case of Manasseh, king of Judah: *“And he did that which was evil in the sight of the LORD, after the abominations of the heathen, whom the LORD cast out before the children of Israel...And the LORD spake by his servants the prophets, saying, Because Manasseh king of Judah hath done these abominations, and hath done wickedly above all that the Amorites did, which were before him, and hath made Judah also to sin with his idols: Therefore thus saith the LORD God of Israel, Behold, I am bringing such evil upon Jerusalem and Judah, that whosoever heareth of it, both his ears shall tingle”* (2 Ki. 21:2,10-12).

After Manasseh, there arose a very godly king, Josiah, and a great revival ensued. In spite of this, and the fact that Manasseh himself had later repented (2 Chr. 33:11-17), we read in 2 Kings 24:1-4 of how the Lord brought judgment upon Judah after Josiah died, *“In his days Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came up, and Jehoiakim became his servant three years: then he turned and rebelled against him. And the LORD sent against him bands of the Chaldees, and bands of the Syrians, and bands of the Moabites, and bands of the children of Ammon, and sent them against Judah to destroy it, according to the word of the LORD, which he spake by*

his servants the prophets. Surely at the commandment of the LORD came this upon Judah, to remove them out of his sight, for the sins of Manasseh, according to all that he did; And also for the innocent blood that he shed: for he filled Jerusalem with innocent blood; which the LORD would not pardon.”

Saul and the Gibeonites

Again there is a case of God’s requiring the past with respect to the sins of His people Israel when King Saul broke the oath between Joshua and the Gibeonites. *“Then there was a famine in the days of David three years, year after year; and David inquired of the LORD. And the LORD answered, It is for Saul, and for his bloody house, because he slew the Gibeonites”* (2 Sam. 21:1). This was some 20 years after the event and David was now the king, but God still required that which was past. The crime required the execution of Saul’s remaining living sons.

So often, men are lulled into a false sense of security concerning that which is past, but let us consider what God said in the days of the wicked Jehoiakim, *“And they consider not in their hearts all their wickedness: now their own doings have beset them about; they are before my face”* (Hos. 7:2).

What Is Our Response?

If, however, we will repent of our evil deeds, and walk in righteousness, so that all is under the precious blood of Jesus,

then we have the promise from Micah 7:18-19, *“Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage? he retaineth not his anger for ever, because he delighteth in mercy. He will turn again, he will have compassion upon us; he will subdue our iniquities; and thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea.”*

While God forgives when we repent, He still allows us to experience the consequences of our sin (as was the case with King David and Bathsheba). **True repentance accepts the consequences of sin**, and in fact, this can turn out to be a blessing for us because we learn to hate the sin.

Continuing in our original passage in Ecclesiastes 3:16, *“And moreover I saw under the sun the place of judgment, that wickedness was there; and the place of righteousness, that iniquity was there.”* Solomon notes that in the place of judgment, which is the judgment seat of God, both the righteous and the wicked are present. The Preacher says that God will judge both. Let us be among those who are righteous, for God knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked shall perish (Ps. 1:6).

Upon contemplation, Solomon realises that both man and beast die. Ecclesiastes 3:18-22 says, *“I said in mine heart concerning the estate of the sons of men, that God might manifest them, and that they might see that they themselves are beasts. For that which befalleth the sons of men befalleth beasts; even one thing befalleth them: as the one dieth, so*

dieth the other; yea, they have all one breath; so that a man hath no preeminence above a beast: for all is vanity. All go unto one place; all are of the dust, and all turn to dust again. Who knoweth the spirit of man that goeth upward, and the spirit of the beast that goeth downward to the earth? Wherefore I perceive that there is nothing better, than that a man should rejoice in his own works; for that is his portion: for who shall bring him to see what shall be after him?"

Yet the spirit of man goes upwards to appear before God whilst the spirit of the beast goes down. Is man better than a beast? Why does man not just be content and rejoice in his works, because he will not know what happens after him? This, however, is short-sighted for *each life of man has a purpose*; a beast only has to satisfy the wants of man.

PART ELEVEN

The Sorrows of Oppression and Envy 4:1-5

In Ecclesiastes 4:1, Solomon mourns over the oppression in the world, *“So I returned, and considered all the oppressions that are done under the sun: and behold the tears of such as were oppressed, and they had no comforter; and on the side of their oppressors there was power; but they had no comforter.”*

Many have been the oppressive regimes throughout the history of the world, starting from the Egyptian oppression of the Israelites at the time of Moses. The reason for the oppression in this case is given by Pharaoh thusly, *“Now there arose up a new king over Egypt, which knew not Joseph. And he said unto his people, Behold, the people of the children of Israel are more and mightier than we: Come on, let us deal wisely with them; lest they multiply, and it come to pass, that, when there falleth out any war, they join also unto our enemies, and fight against us, and so get them up out of the land. Therefore they did set over them taskmasters to afflict them with their burdens. And they built for Pharaoh treasure cities, Pithom and Raamses. But the more they afflicted them, the more they multiplied and grew. And they were grieved because of the children of Israel. And the Egyptians made the children of Israel to serve with rigour: And they made their lives bitter with hard bondage, in mortar, and in brick, and in all manner*

of service in the field: all their service, wherein they made them serve, was with rigour” (Ex. 1:8-14).

This condition in Egypt was later referred to as the iron furnace (Deut. 4:20, Jer. 11:4), from which the Lord eventually delivered the children of Israel through Moses.

In life, there are other less arduous situations in which we are placed and later delivered. Such a case is that of Joseph in Potiphar’s house of which the Lord speaks in Psalm 81:6, *“I removed his shoulder from the burden: his hands were delivered from the pots.”* How many have had similar burdens and God has used them for His glory.

There was Brother Lawrence, that saintly monk who wrote about and practised the presence of God. Whilst others in his class at the abbey had gone on to priestly duties, he had to remain amongst the pots for ten years. But then, God raised him up to be one to whom the nobility of France turned to learn the ways of God. **Do not despise the low places, the unpleasant duties, and burdens. Often, they are God’s paths to prominent and fruitful ministries.**

Why the Lord Allows Oppression

The purpose of oppression is expressed by that beautiful man of God, Jeremiah, who spoke with such pathos when he said, *“Remembering mine affliction and my misery, the wormwood and the gall. My soul hath them still in remembrance, and is humbled in me. This I recall to my mind, therefore have I*

hope. It is of the LORD'S mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness” (Lam. 3:19-23).

God does not keep us in darkness forever; there is the appointed time when He will deliver us from the bondages that He has ordained for us. This is to teach us many lessons, some of which are humility, meekness, faith, hope, and trust in the Lord. We would do well to remember a word that the Lord gave to my wife—**He never brings His people into caves, for they are dead ends. God brings His people into tunnels that have a bright end and a future.**

Tunnels are safe, short, and sure. The only disadvantage is that they are dark. However, in them are many treasures of darkness by which we are enriched when we come out. Faith and meekness are just two of them. We see this when the Shulamite comes forth from the wilderness, perfumed in frankincense (speaking of faith) and myrrh (representing meekness). *“Who is this that cometh out of the wilderness like pillars of smoke, perfumed with myrrh and frankincense, with all powders of the merchant?” (Song 3:6).*

The low places are often God's paths to prominent and fruitful ministries!

Why Oppressors Oppress

Now returning to our theme of oppression, **the reason oppressors oppress is so often rooted in the fear that they**

have of those whom they oppress. In this instance, the Egyptians feared that they would be overthrown by the more numerous Israelites, for they were multiplying more quickly than the Egyptians.

As we consider other oppressive regimes, we may contemplate Communism. Wherever communism has reared its evil head, its leaders were very afraid of the masses whom they dominated. Joseph Stalin was wont to sleep in different beds each consecutive night, for fear of assassination by his fellows. He conducted purges, even removing at one time all the officers above the rank of Colonel. He was a paranoiac maniac.

Saddam Hussein of Iraq would often turn up at a citizen's house asking to sleep there for the night. None of course dared to refuse such a request. But oh, the sorrows of the oppressed, for they knew not when his anger would turn upon them! They would be eliminated for even a chance remark. This was the case with the minister of health. After he had given an opinion that did not please Saddam in a cabinet meeting, he was murdered in cold blood and his remains were delivered to his grieving wife.

The Sorrow of Envy

There is also the sorrow of those who envy their neighbours, who by their industry and right living have prospered. Of this, Solomon said in Ecclesiastes 4:4, "*Again, I considered all travail, and every right work, that for this a man is envied*

of his neighbour. This is also vanity and vexation of spirit.”

Those that envy experience sorrow. But then too do those who are envied, for they suffer the cruel and jealous remarks of the idle spendthrifts who live in poverty and hardship because of their wrong choices.

O how true is the maxim in 1 Timothy 6:6 that godliness with contentment is great gain! Let us read the prayer of the wise man: *“Two things have I required of thee; deny me them not before I die: Remove far from me vanity and lies: give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with food convenient for me: Lest I be full, and deny thee, and say, Who is the LORD? or lest I be poor, and steal, and take the name of my God in vain”* (Prov. 30:7-9). Such do not suffer the sorrows of envying others, nor are they the object of the envy of others. Moreover, they do not suffer like the fool who folds his hands and eats his own flesh (Eccl. 4:5).

PART TWELVE

The Blessings of Quietness of Spirit 4:6

Moving on to Ecclesiastes 4:6, it says, “*Better is an handful with quietness, than both the hands full with travail and vexation of spirit.*” This is the continuation of the thought of the blessedness of one who seeks to be contented with sufficiency and not abundance (which we have just covered in the last section).

I am reminded of a man who owned a cork factory and was prosperous, but he never had peace. He was in a state of constant agitation, being tormented by the fear of the cork catching fire. It did not, but he went to an early grave because his heart aged and became diseased through worry.

Then we see the blessedness of sufficiency and the curse of the love of riches. Many marriages have become hell on earth through one spouse craving for more money and constantly nagging the other to gain more. Have you ever experienced the pressure of being nagged? It changes a placid good-natured man into a screaming maniac incapable of sound judgment. All joy goes; and one lives in a state of misery, never being able to satisfy the wishes of the wife. As it says

**“Godliness with
contentment is
great gain.”
1 Timothy 6:6**

in Proverbs 21:9, *“It is better to dwell in a corner of the housetop, than with a brawling woman in a wide house.”*

I have seen many fine men reduced to abject servility and cringing fear when in the presence of these demanding women. They often flee the home and find another woman who treats them with respect and kindness. Thus, the sins of adultery and companion ills enter into the lives of those who are thus tormented. I have sought to warn such men to assert their authority and rebuke their wives, but they will not, because of fear. So they are forced to endure lives of constant vexation of spirit. Remember the love of money that these women possess is the root of all evil and is also the source of much of life’s misery (1 Tim. 6:10).

May you dear reader be wise and contemplate these issues of life. We repeat, *“Godliness with contentment is great gain”* (1 Tim. 6:6). The author thanks God continually for being able to abide in this blessed state.

PART THIRTEEN

The Folly of the Loner 4:7-8

Ecclesiastes 4:7-8 says, “*Then I returned, and I saw vanity under the sun. There is one alone, and there is not a second; yea, he hath neither child nor brother: yet is there no end of all his labour; neither is his eye satisfied with riches; neither saith he, For whom do I labour, and bereave my soul of good? This is also vanity, yea, it is a sore travail.*”

While it may be said that some of the greatest of all saints—Joseph, Moses, and Elijah—had to walk alone at times in their lives, it was not a way of life for them. Joseph was reunited with his family, Moses was reunited with Aaron and Miriam, and Elijah was given Elisha in later years. These men of God did experience separation from their brethren for a time, but they could hardly be termed “loners.”

This is a term that is used when one chooses what the Lord would have spared them from. Moreover the sense in this passage of Ecclesiastes is one who ceaselessly toils for this world’s goods. “*...He hath neither child nor brother: yet there is no end of all his labour; neither is his eye satisfied with riches...*” (Eccl. 4:8). Yet this one has no one unto whom he may leave the fruit of his labours.

What may we learn from these lessons? Namely that **one should consider the end from the beginning. For what**

purpose do I labour? If we walk with God, all that we do has purpose, but if not, it is written that the wicked lay up for the righteous. Ecclesiastes 2:26 says of the sinner that, “...*to the sinner, he giveth travail, to gather and to heap up, that he may give to him that is good before God...*”

Let us not forsake the assembling of ourselves together (Heb. 10:25) for there is safety in being with a multitude of counsellors, and there is no lack of wisdom (Prov. 11:14). If we listen to the counsel of the godly, we shall be able to live a very profitable life for the glory of God.

Ephesians 4:15-16 says, “*But speaking the truth in love, [we] may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ: From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love.*” **We need each other, for we live by that which each member of the Body of Christ supplieth.**

This section flows easily with the next in that the solution to the folly of being a loner is to develop godly friendships. A friend is there for adversities, and he sharpens his friend’s focus and abilities.

Friendships improve one’s whole personality.

PART FOURTEEN

The Blessings of Friendships 4:9-12

When alone and in difficulty, we can encounter insurmountable obstacles that cannot be moved by our own strength. There are situations that only two or more can manage, such as a car being in the ditch, sickness that keeps one bedridden, or lifting a box that one cannot carry alone.

Another example would be walking on ice or a slippery path that requires another to walk alongside for balance; one balances and brings stability to the other. Even in the area of communication, it is difficult to speak to those of another language you do not know, without an interpreter.

Apart from being able to accomplish certain tasks, there are even greater benefits in life in not being alone. In more than ten references to friends in his book of Proverbs, Solomon cites many blessings of friendships, such as “*A friend loveth at all times...*” (Prov. 17:17) and “*...There is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother*” (Prov. 18:24).

Proverbs 27:17 says, “*Iron sharpeneth iron; so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend.*” This means that a loving friend corrects and helps perfect us in our works and character. If we fall, he is there to lift us up, and to rejoice our hearts by the sweetness of his hearty counsel. Yes, a friend

is a very blessed treasure. May God give us such ones who will surround us, and help us attain the goal and mark of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.

Friendship with Jesus is the highest privilege of all. Let us never forget that Jesus said, *“Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you”* (Jn. 15:15). Friendship with Jesus—O what fellowship divine! O what blessed sweet communion with the Lord. He is there to guide and instruct us through all of life’s hazards, so that we become more than conquerors through our Beloved Friend.

**Friendship with Jesus is the highest
privilege of all!**

PART FIFTEEN

The Tragedy of the Reign of an Old and Foolish King 4:13-16

It is a fact of life that our rulers influence our lifestyle, destiny, and happiness. A king is surrounded by counsellors who have the responsibility of guiding that king in judgment. Although they advise him in matters of state, the king nonetheless has the last word. If he (like Solomon at the end of his life) will not listen, errors that are very costly to the population will ensue. The ones who almost always suffered were those who were living near to the poverty line; so often they became poorer.

Rehoboam, king of Judah, lost a kingdom because he listened to the wrong counsellors. He also impoverished his people, because later he lost the treasures of gold that Solomon had amassed—to Shishak, king of Egypt, whom God raised up because of Rehoboam's wicked ways.

How important it is that those of us who are responsible for the oversight of others seek to ensure that they are well cared for and happy.

PART SIXTEEN

The Wise Worshipper 5:1-7

Our Lord told the woman at the well that God desires those who would worship Him in spirit and in truth (Jn. 4:23). Worship transforms us. We become like that which we worship, whether it be good or bad. As we contemplate the Lord, we are changed into the same image, from glory to glory, by the Spirit of the Lord (2 Cor. 3:18). However, those who worship idols become like them (Ps. 115:4-8; 135:15-18).

Now Solomon admonishes us in the matter of vows. **When we come into the house of worship, we need to be careful about what we promise God, for we must fulfil that which we vow.** God remembers. A case in fact may help us to understand.

A Canadian friend of mine was also the president of our work in Switzerland. One day while praying, he was bemoaning the fact that the situation, which we were in, was very difficult indeed. Then the Lord took my friend back to the time when he was a young teenager at the altar of his church. There he had cried to God to send him to the most difficult place on earth. Now the Lord said, "I have, after all, only fulfilled your request." So let us be careful how we pray, for those prayers and vows will be answered.

How important and intensely satisfying it is to worship the Lord at all times, as Job did (Job 1:20-21). Worshipping in

spirit and in truth (Jn. 4) means that we worship and pray according to the will of God.

Let us not complain in our circumstances, nor seek to alleviate them by foolish vows, thinking that we can bargain with God. Consider the case of the judge, Jephthah, of whom we read, *“And Jephthah vowed a vow unto the LORD, and said, If thou shalt without fail deliver the children of Ammon into mine hands, Then it shall be, that whatsoever cometh forth of the doors of my house to meet me, when I return in peace from the children of Ammon, shall surely be the LORD’S, and I will offer it up for a burnt offering”* (Jdg. 11:30-31). Who came forth from his house to meet him but his only daughter, whom he had to offer up before the Lord?

Oh, let us listen to the wisdom of Solomon, *“Better is it that thou shouldest not vow, than that thou shouldest vow and not pay”* (Eccl. 5:5). Furthermore, we read in Ecclesiastes 5:6, *“Suffer not thy mouth to cause thy flesh to sin; neither say thou before the angel, that it was an error: wherefore should God be angry at thy voice, and destroy the work of thine hands?”* Let us consider the end of the matter. Let us worship God in the beauty of holiness and let our words be few, being a listener more than a talker.

As we develop our personal relationships with the Lord, we learn to know and hear His voice. Then we shall know *when* and *how* to make wise vows acceptable unto Him.

PART SEVENTEEN

Oppressive Government

5:8-9

In Ecclesiastes 5:8-9, Solomon makes certain observations about oppression, *“If thou seest the oppression of the poor, and violent perverting of judgment and justice in a province, marvel not at the matter: for he that is higher than the highest regardeth; and there be higher than they. Moreover the profit of the earth is for all: the king himself is served by the field.”*

As we study the nations of this world and their rulers, we find that without exception, the governing elite of oppressive governments live a privileged life. The populous live in poverty. This was true in the time of Stalin, Mao, and Castro.

Solomon has mentioned this theme of oppression before, and it is interesting because it was one of the sins of which he himself was guilty. **So often we ourselves have a tendency to teach and preach our own weaknesses; and we would profit if only we would listen to our own messages.** This was the case with Solomon, yet he did not profit from his own teaching. The consequence was that at the end of his life his subjects were complaining because of the harshness of his rule (2 Chr. 10:4).

Let us consider very carefully the effect that our decisions have upon others. May we be examples, as was Jacob, of leading

the flock gently and not overdriving them (Gen. 33:12-14). In this life we should seek to make the lot of others easier so that they may enjoy the few swift years that they have upon earth. We who are older may not have family cares; and we may be able to devote long hours to study, writing, and the ministry. However, the younger men do have wives to please and children to enjoy. Therefore they need hours of leisure and times of relaxation for their families. Let us think upon their lives, which can be so different from ours. We influence them through our decisions.

PART EIGHTEEN

The Misery of Money 5:10-17; 6:1-12

Another of life's enigmas is that nearly all people work for money and seek to become rich, yet riches do not bring happiness. In fact, the *love* of money is the root of all evil. Thus Solomon, the world's richest man of his day, stated in Ecclesiastes 5:10 that, "*He that loveth silver shall not be satisfied with silver; nor he that loveth abundance with increase...*" **Material things cannot satisfy the void in the heart of man, who has been created to be satisfied by God and God alone.**

Then Solomon notes (in verse 11) the fact that when our possessions increase, we need more people to watch over them. Our only benefit is to behold the increased goods that we have. More gardens, more gardeners—and our only benefit is to look at them, for the increase goes to provide for the sustenance of those whom we employ to tend to them.

At death we can take nothing with us. We have to contemplate the fact that the fruit of our labours is going to be left for others to enjoy. Do we know whether they will handle them wisely? I am reminded of an article I read concerning an AIDS patient who spent his time, energy, and money on model railways. Contemplating the fact that he had but six months to live, his prime concern was this: who was to enjoy

his railway after his death? He considered this with a certain amount of frustration, wondering whether or not that person would truly appreciate all the time and expense he had put into the building of his display.

Many a parent and grandparent are vexed by the same thoughts when making out their wills. They often place codicils in their wills so that their heirs will not be able to touch the inheritance until later in life. They hope that by this time, they will have gained some appreciation of the worth of money, having regard to the effort involved by their forefathers in accumulating the wealth, and use the money wisely.

Our whole consideration is to reflect upon the purpose for which we work, knowing that we can take nothing of this world's goods with us when we step into eternity. Unless we are working for God's kingdom, we are working for the wind.

The whole key, Solomon insists, concerning money, is that it brings no satisfaction and that none of us knows how our wealth will be used after we are long gone. Certainly, Solomon's great wealth soon evaporated after his death. The riches of King Jehoshaphat were dissipated through the wickedness of his son Jehoram. The empire that Josiah had won back was soon lost, through the wickedness of his son Jehoiakim, to Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon.

The wealth of Persia that Darius III inherited fell to Alexander the Great, which after his death, went to his generals.

Wherever Alexander had passed through, city after city, they quickly revolted and slew the garrisons that he had placed there. No, lasting treasures are not land and money, but a good name and right teaching, that others may benefit there from (Prov. 22:1, Mt. 5:19).

There is a television show in the United States called “The Apprentice,” owned by a real estate billionaire, Donald Trump. One of the young men who wished to be considered for the show gave as his reason a desire to see whether money would bring him happiness. Donald Trump responded that money did not bring happiness. It only made life’s misery a little more comfortable.

I have noticed in life that many, after accumulating much of this world’s goods, realise that money does not bring them happiness. They spend the rest of their lives seeking to give it away for charitable purposes. For example, John D. Rockefeller took more pleasure in his charities than in his businesses at the end of his life.

PART NINETEEN

The Blessed State of Those Who Are Content with What God Gives 5:18-20

Ecclesiastes 5:18-20 says, “Behold that which I have seen: it is good and comely for one to eat and to drink, and to enjoy the good of all his labour that he taketh under the sun all the days of his life, which God giveth him: for it is his portion. Every man also to whom God hath given riches and wealth, and hath given him power to eat thereof, and to take his portion, and to rejoice in his labour; this is the gift of God. For he shall not much remember the days of his life; because God answereth him in the joy of his heart.”

How many times the message sounds out: “Godliness with contentment is great gain” (1 Tim. 6:6). We find that it was one of the great and notable qualities of Queen Esther, as we see in Esther 2:15, “Now when the turn of Esther, the daughter of Abihail the uncle of Mordecai, who had taken her for his daughter, was come to go in unto the king, she required nothing but what Hegai the king’s chamberlain, the keeper of the women, appointed. And Esther obtained favour in the sight of all them that looked upon her.”

The remarkable thing is that Solomon could so teach this blessedness, but he did not possess this blessedness himself, for whatsoever his eyes desired he sought (Eccl. 2:10). **One of the keys to a life of happiness is to trust the Lord and**

believe that what He chooses for our lives is best. Paul puts it like this when he writes, “*And having food and raiment let us be therewith content*” (1 Tim. 6:8).

However, this blessed state is one to which we attain through learning, as Paul declares in Philippians 4:10-11, “*But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly, that now at the last your care of me hath flourished again; wherein ye were also careful, but ye lacked opportunity. Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content.*”

The state of blessedness relates to a *situation* in which we are placed, and also to *those things that we possess*. It was preached even by John the Baptist as he taught the soldiers: “*And the soldiers likewise demanded of him, saying, And what shall we do? And he said unto them, Do violence to no man, neither accuse any falsely; and be content with your wages*” (Lk. 3:14). **Let us therefore ask the Lord for grace to be content in whatsoever situation we do find ourselves and with whatsoever possessions we have.** This is a mark of true saintliness.

PART TWENTY

The Blessings of Him That Feareth God

7:1-29; 8:12

In this passage in Ecclesiastes 7 and 8, Solomon enters into a number of choice wise remarks concerning several aspects of life in general.

The House of Mourning

One subject is the *benefits of the house of mourning over the house of feasting*, because in mourning, one contemplates the shortness of life and the length of eternity (Eccl. 7:2).

Visits to graveyards and contemplating tombstones also have very salutary effects upon our spirits. One minister, musing in a certain graveyard, said to the Lord, “O I wish I were with them!” The Lord replied, “But have you thought what they would do if given the opportunity that you have to still serve Me upon earth?” The minister saw the point and became more diligent than ever before in redeeming his time.

Prosperity Is Not Necessarily God’s Approval

The truisms that Solomon propounds in this passage are profound. So often are we prone to be like the friends of Job, who considered prosperity to be a sign of God’s approval, and consider adversity a sign of His judgment. Yet Solomon

observes, *“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. All things have I seen in the days of my vanity: there is a just man that perisheth in his righteousness, and there is a wicked man that prolongeth his life in his wickedness”* (Eccl. 7:14-15).

Although the wicked may seem to prosper, David had this to say in grappling with the same problem, *“When I thought to know this, it was too painful for me; Until I went into the sanctuary of God; then understood I their end. Surely thou didst set them in slippery places: thou castedst them down into destruction”* (Ps. 73:16-18). **It is the end of the matter that counts.**

Do Not Be Overly Wicked or Righteous

With his usual profundity, Solomon says in Ecclesiastes 7:16-18, *“Be not righteous over much; neither make thyself over wise: why shouldst thou destroy thyself? Be not over much wicked, neither be thou foolish: why shouldst thou die before thy time? It is good that thou shouldst take hold of this; yea, also from this withdraw not thine hand: for he that feareth God shall come forth of them all.”* Continuing this thought of the righteous and the wicked, he warns that those who are

Easy to be
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ground!

overly wicked die before their time. Those that are overly righteous destroy themselves. Here, we do well to consider the meaning of such an observation by the wise man.

I have known in my lifetime those who are so over-scrupulous that they literally destroy their ministry and life. Here is such a case. We had an oil tank on our grounds, which are of a considerable area. There was a minor leak and some gallons of oil seeped out. We did our own inspection and found that all was well. There was no harm whatsoever ecologically, but my administrator wanted to bring in the authorities. I warned him that it was not necessary. He then envisaged that our tanks would have to be replaced, even though the leak was from a pipe.

The replacement of tanks would have cost a phenomenal amount of capital expenditure, and again I was sure that this was not necessary. However, my administrator felt that the authorities, who agreed with us that the tanks did not have to be replaced, were only doing a cursory inspection. He was so upset that he resigned.

His resignation came at a time when I had to care for my wife who was ill, and required personal 24-hour care. I was also responsible for many other aspects of the ministry. A young man graciously took care of the tanks for me and the end of the matter was good. Sadly, the administrator lost his way spiritually, and in the area of employment, ended in dismal early retirement. The kindness of the young man I have never forgotten, for it preserved our work at that time.

The fourth of the seven pillars of wisdom is called “easy to be entreated,” which is the ability to know when to yield and when to stand your ground (Jas. 3:17). May God so grant us this virtue so that we do not ruin our life and ministry by being stubborn when we should yield.

The Purpose of Knowledge

Ecclesiastes 7:29 reads, *“Lo, this only have I found, that God hath made man upright; but they have sought out many inventions.”* Solomon sought things that were exceeding deep and found them not. How different this king was from his father David, who said, *“LORD, my heart is not haughty, nor mine eyes lofty: neither do I exercise myself in great matters, or in things too high for me. Surely I have behaved and quieted myself, as a child that is weaned of his mother: my soul is even as a weaned child”* (Ps. 131:1-2).

In our pursuit of wisdom and knowledge, let us understand that there are things that the Lord wishes us to know; but as Moses stated in Deuteronomy 29:29, *“The secret things belong unto the LORD our God: but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law.”* God gives knowledge and wisdom to us, not to satisfy man’s curiosity, but rather that we may accomplish the will of God.

The Fear of the Lord

This section is summated by the succinct remark in Ecclesiastes 8:12, *“Though a sinner do evil an hundred*

times, and his days be prolonged, yet surely I know that it shall be well with them that fear God, which fear before him.” **The fear of the Lord is to walk carefully before the Lord, doing only those things which please the Lord.** In Proverbs 8:13, the fear of the Lord is defined as “...*to hate evil: pride, and arrogancy, and the evil way, and the froward mouth [or perverse speech]...*” So let us be among those who wisely walk in the fear of the Lord all the days of our life.

PART TWENTY-ONE

Wisdom In Submitting to Authority

8:1-7

In Ecclesiastes 8:2, Solomon advises, *“I counsel thee to keep the king’s commandment, and that in regard of the oath of God.”* **Submission to authority is one of the key requirements of God for His people.** We read in Romans 13:1-7, *“Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation. For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same: For he is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil. Wherefore ye must needs be subject, not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake. For for this cause pay ye tribute also: for they are God’s ministers, attending continually upon this very thing. Render therefore to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honour to whom honour.”*

“Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no powers. For there is no power but of God...”

Biblical Examples of Submission to Authority

The Lord Himself paid tribute money, even to the extent of performing a miracle to provide for Peter and Himself (Mt. 17:25-27). He honoured the law when He sent the leper whom He had healed to be declared clean by the priest (Lk. 5:12-14). The Apostle Peter also gave instructions to honour the king (1 Pet. 2:17).

Therefore, we may safely say that in all situations, save those that transgress Scripture, we should and must be in submission to the laws of the country in which we find ourselves. There are many excellent examples in Scripture concerning the blessing of submission to authority.

Let us consider David's attitude with respect to Saul. Even when David had the opportunity to kill Saul, when the latter was in the same cave as David and unaware of the danger, David refused to touch the Lord's anointed. Moreover, when the Lord had put a deep sleep upon Saul (who was hunting David), David still would not harm Saul. David was smitten in his heart when he simply cut off the edge of Saul's garment (1 Sam. 24, 26).

A quiet, submissive spirit is of great price in the sight of God (1 Pet. 3:4), and those who live by this truth are blessed by God. He appoints all those in authority and He gives to them wisdom, as we read in Proverbs 8:15-16, *“By me kings reign, and princes decree justice. By me princes rule, and nobles, even all the judges of the earth.”*

All who approached David called him lord and did obeisance to him, while those who rose up against him were severely punished. We have the classic example of Absalom, who died because of his rebellion against his father David. Also Ahithophel, one of the co-conspirators, hanged himself (2 Sam. 17, 18).

The kings of Judah were expressly admonished to submit to the king of Babylon; we quote Jeremiah 38:17-18, *“Then said Jeremiah unto Zedekiah, Thus saith the LORD, the God of hosts, the God of Israel; If thou wilt assuredly go forth unto the king of Babylon’s princes, then thy soul shall live, and this city shall not be burned with fire; and thou shalt live, and thine house: But if thou wilt not go forth to the king of Babylon’s princes, then shall this city be given into the hand of the Chaldeans, and they shall burn it with fire, and thou shalt not escape out of their hand.”*

The sequel to this dialogue was that Zedekiah did not submit, which would have been his wisdom. The consequence was that he went into Babylonian captivity having seen all his children slain before his eyes. Then the king of Babylon put out his eyes so that he was blinded.

If only (as it says in Ecclesiastes 8:1-7) we will keep the commandment of the king, then we have the promise that we will feel no evil thing. When death does come, we shall welcome him as a dear friend, knowing that we have applied ourselves to obey both the earthly king and the King of Kings, who will receive us with joy.

The Blessings of Godly Submission

O how I love that verse in Jude 1:24! *“Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy.”* Unto God our exceeding joy!

Many are the deathbed scenes that one can recount, but as a teacher, I thought that this one was very interesting. It concerned an old and wise teacher who was conversing with his friends and former students as they gathered around his bed. Seeing them for the last time, he said, “Just think, in a few hours all the questions I have will be answered.” He was facing death, not only without fear, but as one would be anticipating greeting an old friend with joy.

PART TWENTY-TWO

Wisdom In Trusting God That His Works Are Perfect

8:8-17

Trusting God to Direct Our Paths

Wisdom predominates the writings of Solomon; and here is another aspect of that priceless virtue. To trust God is wisdom in its highest element since God alone knows the plans He has purposed for our lives. As Jeremiah stated in Jeremiah 10:23, “...*the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps.*” If we try, we shall be of all men most miserable, for we will wander, not knowing where we go. We shall become indeed most frustrated, and at the end, we shall discover that we have missed God’s path for our lives and not fulfilled His divine plan.

In his writings, Solomon dwells oft concerning those that have once been upon the path of righteousness and have left it, to their eternal loss. Here again he ponders the lot of the wicked who were buried, saying in Ecclesiastes 8:10, “*And so I saw the wicked buried, who had come and gone from the place of the holy, and they were forgotten in the city where they had so done: this is also vanity.*” With lives that counted for nothing, they were as a shadow; neither had they a reward, for the memory of them is forgotten.

**Man should
trust God
implicitly!**

Should we not consider eternity so that, at the end, our lives will have made an impact upon others? Moreover, consider that our works will precede us. If we have made an impact upon others for good, then our works likewise will follow us. To illustrate the fact that our works do follow us in the negative sense, I quote from the writings of John Bunyan (Bunyan [n.d.], as cited in Daoud, [n.d.]). In his days, there was a noted writer by the name of Hobbes who had written a book, *Leviathan*, declaring that there was no God.

John Bunyan had been granted the opportunity to visit hell, and meet this man. He said to John Bunyan, “I was once well acquainted with you upon earth and had almost persuaded you to be of my opinion.” After identifying himself as the writer of *Leviathan*, this man then enquired if John Bunyan was in hell because of his writings. Hobbes was relieved when he found that to be not the case because it would have increased his judgment in hell. Hobbes said, “...I was afraid when first I heard your voice that you had likewise been consigned to punishment. Not that I can wish any person happy, for it is my plague to think that many are so while I am miserable; but because every soul that is brought hither through seduction while I was on earth, doubles my pain in hell.”

In heaven, we shall be overjoyed to meet those who have been persuaded to live a godly life by our example or by our writings. Some people may already be in heaven due to our influence upon their lives; and thus, some of our works have preceded us.

Trusting God in Delayed Judgment

God's ways are perfect, even in the matter of delayed judgment. Let us read Ecclesiastes 8:11, "*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.*" The purpose of God waiting in judgment is understood by the positive and the negative effect it has upon men.

Isaiah 30:18 says, "*And therefore will the LORD wait, that he may be gracious unto you, and therefore will he be exalted, that he may have mercy upon you: for the LORD is a God of judgment: blessed are all they that wait for him.*" Here the Lord waits that men might repent so that He may come with a blessing, and not in wrath. Likewise, the Apostle Paul stated that he waited before coming to Corinth to give them opportunity to amend their ways, so that his visit would be a joyous one (2 Cor. 2:1).

In the negative sense, God waits in order for the cup of iniquity to be filled, so that judgment might be seen by all to have been justly meted out. For example, the inhabitants of Jerusalem would not repent, but rather said, "*...let us eat and drink; for tomorrow we shall die*" (Isa. 22:13).

The Lord's Higher Ways

Returning to our theme (that wisdom is to trust God, whose works are perfect), Solomon contemplates the fact that the work of God cannot be found out by man. Of this, he says

in Ecclesiastes 8:17, *“Then I beheld all the work of God, that a man cannot find out the work that is done under the sun: because though a man labour to seek it out, yet he shall not find it; yea further; though a wise man think to know it, yet shall he not be able to find it.”* Therefore man should trust God implicitly.

Thinking now of my own life, I could never have imagined what God would give, and what He has given me the privilege of doing. Not even the way whereby He has accomplished, and is accomplishing His work in my life.

Even if God had told me of the end before it happened, I would never have chosen to come by the way He has led me. Looking back I can see that every experience has been necessary for my instruction in understanding, in some small way, the ways of God that I am privileged to teach. These bitter and sweet stops along life’s path have worked out, I trust, a life-giving quality in my teaching.

Therefore, although I did not understand God’s purposes at the time when I was forced to live in abject poverty, and was not permitted to make my needs known to any but God, now I do. I understand the plight of the poor and I feel for them. If it were possible, I would lift all out of their poverty or penury and place them in comfortable homes and secure jobs. For I know the agony of one who does not know where his next meal or night’s shelter will come from.

I understand Job, who in his prosperity could say when his trials came, *“For the thing which I greatly feared is come*

upon me, and that which I was afraid of is come unto me” (Job 3:25). Also, as Solomon states in Ecclesiastes 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.”* There is a sense that in this life, the godly do not place their confidence in present blessings, whether they be possessions, health, or positions. They are well aware of the fact that God can change all, as in the case of Job, who was wealthy one day and the next, reduced from health to sickness, and from wealth to poverty. Thus, the godly walk in reverent fear.

May God help us to be truly wise and put our trust wholly in Him. Then our lives will become so much richer, as He works in us that which is pleasing in His sight.

PART TWENTY-THREE

Using the Time Wisely to Accomplish Much 9:4-12

Remembering that Solomon wrote these words in his old age when he had become disillusioned by reason of his own sinful ways, we should examine his comments very carefully. After all, we read Scriptures for our own edification, in order to improve our lot during this earthly sojourn and to gain a better resurrection. We preface our remarks thusly for this portion because we must not become pessimistic, as Solomon tended to do.

The Living Dog And Dead Lion

Solomon begins by saying that in being joined to the living there is hope. A living dog is better than a dead lion (Eccl. 9:4). However, if the dead lion has meritoriously lived and finished his course with joy, then his place is preferable to an untried dog that will not be able to attain such a prestigious position as the lion.

**Let us only
keep true
emotion
and passion
in our lives.**

His observation in Ecclesiastes 9:5, *“For the living know that they shall die: but the dead know not any thing, neither have they any more a reward; for the memory of them is forgotten,”* is true, if they have failed to achieve the purpose in their lifetime that was accorded to them.

Ecclesiastes 9:6 says, *“Also their love, and their hatred, and their envy, is now perished; neither have they any more a portion for ever in any thing that is done under the sun.”* Another thought that is worthy of our meditation is that the emotions; love, hatred, and envy—of the dead are all perished. The emotions of the dead remain with them in hell, in their anguish, whereas the emotions of the saved are purified.

How important it is to consider while we still have life that all our emotions are passing vanities. We should not allow them to deflect us from the eternal path of life! In fact, at this time it would be wisdom to consider our emotions and our passions. Where are they leading us? Let our emotions be spirit-controlled so that they are channelled into passion for the will of God. We truly want to love righteousness and hate wickedness, for in so doing we shall have an eternal reward of the oil of joy above our brethren (Ps. 45:7).

Why should we waste our strength? Passion and emotions are very draining and health threatening. Therefore, we need to wisely, carefully examine and eliminate all considerations in our minds concerning those who have offended us, for even thinking about them is very unprofitable. Let us seek the Lord to have our “Manassehs,” that gift of “holy forgetfulness” working powerfully in us. In this way, like Joseph, we may forget the sorrows and the heartaches of our father’s house or the wrongs that have been done to us by our brethren and those of our own house.

Let us only keep that true emotion and passion within our lives, which is a love for God and a hatred for all that is called sin. If that be so, we may well rejoice, for God will now accept our works.

Clean Spiritual Garments

Another very important maxim in life is that of keeping our garments clean. Solomon admonishes in Ecclesiastes 9:8, *“Let thy garments be always white; and let thy head lack no ointment.”* That is a prime concern of everyone—that our clothes are clean at all times. If they are not, we change them or wash them. How much more important it is that our spiritual garments be white and gleaming and unspotted by the flesh (Jude 1:23).

It is intriguing that the high priest Joshua (when appearing before the Lord in Zechariah 3) had filthy garments. He had undoubtedly been ministering to others, yet had neglected his own spiritual condition. Such too was the case of the Shulamite in Song of Songs 1:6, when she exclaimed to the Lord, *“Look not upon me, because I am black, because the sun hath looked upon me: my mother’s children were angry with me; they made me the keeper of the vineyards; but mine own vineyard have I not kept.”*

The author of the hymn *“Rock of Ages, Cleft for Me,”* Augustus Toplady, was riding from one meeting to another and was so convicted of the Holy Spirit that he had to stop, dismount from his horse, and meet the Lord. For though

he was ministering under precious anointing to others, his own life lacked the personal anointing of fresh oil upon his own head.

Incidentally, it was during one of his journeys that he encountered a fierce rainstorm and was forced to take shelter in a cleft of a rock. It was through that experience that this famous old hymn was birthed, which has given hope and courage to multitudes that have sung or heard it.

A little lesson for us all is that when the fresh oil has ceased, stop and get a refill, for one never knows what spiritual encounter with the Lord this refill will bring to enrich your life.

The Joy of Marriage

Now continuing our examination of this passage that Solomon wrote, we find we are to live joyfully with our wife, whom we should love all the days of our life (Eccl. 9:9). Here Solomon is telling us that marriage should be a continuous joyful experience, not just the courtship. Once again we have the case of Solomon preaching, but not practicing what he taught. He had married 700 wives and had 300 concubines, who turned away his heart (1 Ki. 11:3).

If there be one lesson that predominates in this book, it is the sadness of one who preaches and does not practise. Let us beware, for if we practise evil works, this will alienate or scramble our minds (Col. 1:21). **Teaching right truths**

and practising them brings a healthy, joyful being and a clear mind. Also, we have the joy of anticipating wonderful rewards in the Kingdom of Heaven. **Let us be true to our own God-given message, which He has entrusted to us.**

Giving Our Best

We now come to the theme of this passage, namely, *“whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might”* (Eccl. 9:10). The thought here is that the only time that is given to us to work is this short time upon earth. Therefore, let us use the time wisely and occupy ourselves until He comes for us, in death.

When the author had the experience of dying some many years ago, this truth became very real to him. He died in his bed and the angel of the Lord came to him to take his spirit from his body. He then stood just above his bed and seeing his body, laying lifeless before him, the solemn truth gripped him that he could do no more work for Jesus. A profound sadness gripped his being and that sadness overcame his soul. So let us redeem the time that is left us (Col. 4:5), because today is the first day of the rest of our life.

Then Solomon closes this passage with the thought that no one knows the time when the Lord will come for us, *“For man also knoweth not his time: as the fishes that are taken in an evil net, and as the birds that are caught in the snare; so are the sons of men snared in an evil time, when it falleth suddenly upon them”* (Eccl. 9:12).

Everyone assumes that they have still got plenty of time, especially if they are young, but that is not necessarily the case.

I was standing in our college inner court when three girls walked by in unison; the Lord spoke to me, “I am very careful concerning the girls that I give to My sons to marry.” Now these girls were all very desirous of marrying students in their class. These girls were not what one would term as being the top of the line, spiritually, academically, or ethically. I looked at them again and I saw, as it were, a spiritual darkness over them.

These girls were, however, the best of friends, since likes go to likes. They were all so arrogant and confident that they would get the students that they wanted. The end of the matter was that they did not marry fellow students. Their marriages were disastrous. One girl, after enjoying only two years of marriage, suddenly became ill, dying after only three days. The others have had sad experiences, one married an AIDS victim, and another entered into a violent partnership which has since ended in divorce. Let us be pleasing in His sight so that we will have a long life of much fruitfulness.

Another truism is seen in Romans 9:15-16: *“For he saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that showeth mercy.”* **O let us humble ourselves before God, that we might find favour in His sight!**

PART TWENTY-FOUR

Wisdom, Greater Than the Weapons of War 9:13-18

Ecclesiastes 9:15-16 says, “*Now there was found in it a poor wise man, and he by his wisdom delivered the city; yet no man remembered that same poor man. Then said I, Wisdom is better than strength: nevertheless the poor man’s wisdom is despised, and his words are not heard.*” Here, Solomon recounts the story of an unknown man who saved a city from extinction by his wisdom, giving no other facts. Yet the premise is true that wisdom is greater than weapons of war.

A group of us were touring Israel after the Six Day War. We had as our escort and guide, a reservist Israeli army captain. He regaled us with many stories of how the outnumbered Jews won the war. On one occasion he took us to the Golan Heights. There he showed us a road down which the Syrian tanks had come against a very poorly equipped and outnumbered company of Israeli soldiers. These Israeli soldiers were waiting with no tanks or anti-tank weapons of any kind with which to do battle.

One enterprising soldier, we were told, took off his army greatcoat and laid it down on the pathway of the tanks. The Syrian tank commander in the first tank espied the greatcoat. He immediately called the tank column to halt. Then he gave the command to reverse their course and return back up the Golan Heights as fast as they could. Later when asked for

an explanation of his actions, he said that he did not trust the Israelis and was sure that they had some device under that army coat that would have blown up all of his tanks. So without a shot being fired, that young Israeli soldier had won a key battle with his wisdom and knowledge of the Syrian mind.

Wisdom, however, also wins many battles through right actions and audacious moves. One need only study the battle plans of Alexander the Great to see how true this is. Alexander the Great at times completely outmanoeuvred the enemy and struck terror into the hearts of his opponents through his unexpected appearances, resulting in their surrender without a battle being fought.

One of my old physical education masters at school had been a major in the British Army in West Africa in World War I. He loved to regale us with stories of his army career. One such story concerned a German army detachment camping in a valley, thinking that they had captured a small detachment of British Army Engineers working on a bridge project. The British, however, had been aware of the German manoeuvres. A much larger number of British troops, under the command of this major, occupied the hills around the valley, but they were out of sight of the Germans.

When the Germans surrounded the small group of British engineers, they pointed to the greater number of British comrades on the hills, who would have decimated the Germans by their superior force and firepower. They reasoned

with the Germans that there would be an unnecessary loss of life, to which the German officer in charge agreed; he surrendered and not a shot was fired. Wisdom in tactics had won the day without the use of weapons.

Wisdom triumphs on many occasions. It may be sharpening an axe before it is used, thus requiring less force to be employed by the woodcutter. Or wisdom could be providing sufficient oil for a night of vigil, like the wise virgins of Matthew chapter 25.

Sinners Destroy

This passage ends on an unusual note of comparison, when Solomon states in Ecclesiastes 9:18, *“Wisdom is better than weapons of war, but one sinner destroyeth much good.”* The wise preserves, but the sinner destroys. How often in life must one bear testimony to this truth!

I remember that in the last days of World War II, the British Army had surrounded a German town in the Schwartzwald. Their commander was unwilling to open fire on what seemed to be a defenceless city and invited the mayor to surrender. Apparently all the citizens desired to do so, but a young Nazi officer inspired his troops to make a suicidal stand and prevented the mayor from surrendering. The British had no recourse but to answer the German fire, and they annihilated the town with their artillery. A great loss of life ensued, and the town was also virtually demolished. Yes, one sinner can do much damage.

We could take into account the scriptural case of Achan, whose sin of burying the gold and garments of Jericho caused the loss of 36 Israelite men of war (Josh. 7). How many sinners since then have blocked churches from moving on with God!

PART TWENTY-FIVE

The Graciousness of a Wise Man's Words *10:1-20*

The Gracious Lips of the Wise

Ecclesiastes 10:12 says, *“The words of a wise man’s mouth are gracious; but the lips of a fool will swallow up himself.”* One of the virtues of a wise man is the graciousness that flows from his lips. This was a fact with our Lord. *“And all bare him witness, and wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth. And they said, Is not this Joseph’s son?”* (Lk. 4:22). The wise woman of Proverbs chapter 31 was noted for the fact that she opened her mouth with wisdom, and in her tongue was the law of kindness, which is a fruit of graciousness.

A little highlight in the life of John Wesley may be inserted here. He was noted for his abhorrence of the abundance of jewellery that the wealthy ladies of his time were wont to wear. Their titivating could take literally hours and often they would make their first appearance of the day as late as four in the afternoon (a source, too, of constant irritation for the reverend gentleman).

At this time, he was being entertained, along with another of his itinerant preachers, in such a house where the ladies were descending from their boudoirs and arranging themselves at the meal tables decked out in all their finery. This itinerant

preacher, seeing all the rings upon one of the young ladies hands, took it in his, and put it before Reverend John Wesley. In a tone of great scorn, he asked the good man, "What do you think of this hand, sir, for a Methodist's hand?" Seeing the obvious embarrassment of the young lady, John Wesley responded very graciously, "The hand is very beautiful."

That evening, the young lady was at the meeting without her jewellery, listening very intently to the message. Afterward she responded in deep gravity to the invitation John Wesley gave to receive Christ's gift of salvation by faith (A Methodist Preacher, p.307, 1903).

Had Reverend Wesley replied harshly, as the itinerant preacher had expected, the young woman would not have come to the meeting and thereby a soul would have been lost. It was won with gracious words.

A Little Folly Ruins Reputations

Solomon commences his passage on the words of a wise man being gracious by a very solemn truism concerning one who has a reputation for wisdom and honour. He says in Ecclesiastes 10:1, "*Dead flies cause the ointment of the apothecary to send forth a stinking savour: so doth a little folly him that is in reputation for wisdom and honour.*" Over the years that the Lord has been pleased to give me, I have noted that people are known and remembered for very little things, things that can damage their reputation.

One such occurrence involved a student in one Bible School where I attended as a student. He recounted to me that an elder in his church was held in esteem and reverence for his godly life of abstinence and sobriety. However, this student at that time was not walking with the Lord, and it was his custom to visit taverns and drink on Friday nights. Far from his local village on one Friday night, he was drinking in a tavern when to his amazement, in comes the elder, laughing and shouting raucously with a woman who was obviously a prostitute. The elder espied this young man who was in his Sunday School class and, horror stricken, he abruptly turned the woman around and went hastily out of the tavern. A reputation was destroyed in an instant.

At another Bible School as a student I was horrified to learn that the leaders of the Pentecostal movement, whom I had revered, were not on speaking terms one with another. We were later told that they had reconciled only after one of them was on his deathbed.

What shall we say of Alexander the Great, deified by order of the Roman Emperors some three centuries after his death for his brilliant campaigns? In his own lifetime and immediately after his death, he was despised and regarded as a murderous tyrant who imposed his will with violence. After reading several biographies on his life, it amazes me how different biographers and students come to such different opinions on the worth of his life. Surely, Alexander had more than one dead fly to spoil his reputation.

The Wise Seek Peace

Solomon then takes up the comparison between the wise and the foolish with respect to their words. The wise man pacifies the spirit of the ruler, but the fool is full of mischievous madness (Eccl. 10:4,13). I have noted that the foolish woman will say things only to provoke one against another and cause strife. She delights in the mischief that she causes, while the wise seeks to pacify the aroused spirits.

A soft answer brings forth peace (Prov. 15:1), but the fool seeks purposefully to turn people against each other, even in the congregation of the righteous. It is a very grave sin in the eyes of the Lord, for fools cause much evil and even delight to do so. They hinder the congregation from moving on in God, and also hinder the presence and blessing of God from enveloping His people.

I am reminded of a certain story that was told me in the Carolinas. The prayer warriors were praying for revival and for God to move in church. One of the apparently foremost of these prayer warriors fell sick, even unto death. So the others directed their prayers for her healing. Then God spoke to one of the ladies, who later recounted this story to me. The Lord said, "You asked me to remove the hindrances; I am removing her by death. Stop praying for her healing, but rather pray that My will be accomplished." Well, she did so; the other lady died, and revival broke forth. That other prayer warrior was in fact sowing dissension by her words and was the cause of the blockage to the move of God.

The Danger of Child Leadership

Then Solomon takes up the question of leaders and leadership, bemoaning the fact that when children are the leaders of a country, the land suffers. He says in Ecclesiastes 10:16, *“Woe to thee, O land, when thy king is a child, and thy princes eat in the morning.”* This was exactly the situation when the Babylonians besieged Jerusalem. The kings began to reign often in their teens or shortly thereafter. King Jehoahaz of Judah was but 23 years of age; Jehoiakim was 25 years old; Jehoiachin was 18 years of age; and the last one, Zedekiah, was 21 years old. Of previous kings, Uzziah was but 16 years old, and Manasseh (the worst of them all) was only 12 when he began to reign.

As it is written in Proverbs 20:21, *“An inheritance may be gotten hastily at the beginning; but the end thereof shall not be blessed.”* Solomon was but 19 years of age and his end was despicable. How blessed is the land where the kings eat for strength, and not in dissipation and drunkenness. I well remember a certain South Pacific country where the Prime Minister was in a constant state of drunkenness. His cabinet ministers were so disgusted that they, and later the country, took to calling him “Piggy.”

May God grant that we receive good and wise leaders so that our lives are ones of peace and prosperity. Often we find that God gives the people the leaders they desire and deserve. This was the case with Jehoiakim, king of Judah, who was a drunkard, as were his people (Hos. 7:2-5).

PART TWENTY-SIX

Flowing with the Laws of Nature and Trusting God to Bless Your Efforts 11:1-6

God created nature; and all of His creation is governed by certain pre-determined rules that are not to be violated. Sir Isaac Newton made that observation in so many words when he declared the law of gravity after an apple fell from a tree upon his head.

Sowing the Word of God

So let us see what gems of wisdom and truth we may garner from the laws of nature in this passage. Firstly, we are told, *“Cast thy bread [or truth] upon the waters: for thou shalt find it after many days”* (Eccl. 11:1). Let us link this promise with Isaiah 32:20, *“Blessed are ye that sow beside all waters, that send forth thither the feet of the ox and the ass.”*

We must understand that if we will sow the Word of God in all places, it will return to us, and we shall have a harvest from that sowing. Lives will be saved, transformed, and matured through perhaps a Bible given, a book taught, or a message delivered in the most obscure place of the earth. Go back and there will be fruit awaiting you there in the years to come. Perhaps even a church, or several planted, through your obedience to sow beside all waters.

A classic example is Philip the evangelist when he met the chamberlain of the court of Queen Candice of Ethiopia. From that meeting, tradition tells us, the Church of Ethiopia was founded. Another instance is that of a missionary to India founding a small church in India, and then having to leave and return to his own country. Yet, from that one small church, over 1,000 have been planted throughout the sub-continent.

How many have I known whose start was in the drug culture, but after being redeemed, later on in life they have become missionaries of note; very fruitful and gratifying to the Master.

Ecclesiastes 11:2 continues, “*Give a portion to seven, and also to eight; for thou knowest not what evil shall be upon the earth.*” To give portions to seven means to be generous, and to give portions to eight means to be overgenerous. You do not know when disaster will hit, during which you will be dependent upon the generosity of others. This flows with the promise that the liberal (the generous) shall live by their liberality or generosity (Isa. 32:8).

Where a Tree Falls, It Lies

Moving on to Ecclesiastes 11:3, we read, “*...and if the tree falleth to the south, or toward the north, in the place where the tree falleth, there it shall be.*” The solemn thought that where a tree falls, so it lies, applies to mankind in the sense that when we die, so we will be for eternity. Let us therefore

ensure that when our lives are over, we will have attained our full maturity and will have fulfilled the purpose for which we (as a tree planted by the Father) have been ordained.

The Importance of Diligence

There follows an oft-repeated admonition that occurs both in Proverbs and Ecclesiastes that one must be diligent. Contemplating the weather does not gender hard work. As Ecclesiastes 11:4 says, *“He that observeth the wind shall not sow; and he that regardeth the clouds shall not reap.”* For the sluggard finds every excuse for not working. Proverbs 26:13 declares, *“The slothful man saith, There is a lion in the way; a lion is in the streets.”*

The Lord also spoke of the path of the wind in saying that the wind blows where it will, and we do not understand from whence it comes or where it goes (Jn. 3:8). Likewise, no one can understand the work of God.

Ecclesiastes 11:5 reads, *“As thou knowest not what is the way of the spirit, nor how the bones do grow in the womb of her that is with child: even so thou knowest not the works of God who maketh all.”* **We must therefore trust in the goodness of the Almighty who does all things well, and watches over us always for our ultimate good.**

As Solomon exhorts in Ecclesiastes 11:6, *“In the morning sow thy seed, and in the evening withhold not thine hand: for thou knowest not whether shall prosper; either this or that,*

or whether they both shall be alike good.” In the morning we sow our seed, and in the evening we are not idle, because we do not know what part of our labour will prosper. Again, we must be diligent, leaving the increase in the hands of God, knowing that in His good pleasure, He will determine the place and time to bless.

PART TWENTY-SEVEN

The Importance of Remembering the Creator in One's Youth

11:7-10; 12:1-8

Knowing the Lord and His Ways

This importance of learning this truth in our youth cannot be over emphasised, since these are our formative years. Truths learnt early in life are firmly embedded into our very being; they last a lifetime.

Knowing God is, of course, a prerequisite to remembering God. Therefore, the *knowledge of God and His ways*, when learned while young, will remain until ripe old age. As we read in Proverbs 22:6, “*Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it.*”

My own blessed mother, who learned the Scriptures while in Sunday School, would recite them well into her late 90s, even as the Holy Spirit brought them to her remembrance.

John Wesley had learnt the Scriptures while sitting at his mother's knee. However, he also learnt the classics while in his teens at Oxford. When on his deathbed, he recited them, for they too were deeply embedded in his spirit. Therefore, that which we learn at a young age will impact the whole of our life and mould our character.

Winston S. Churchill would devour the history of his warrior ancestor John Churchill, the Duke of Marlborough, among other notable English and foreign soldiers and sailors renowned for their bravery. The result was that Sir Winston was in turn admired by all for his courage in face of personal and national danger. His fighting speeches during World War II came from a heart of boldness, developed by his avid reading of the exploits of these heroes.

Suffice to say that the pious reading of the Scriptures, and the lives of saints during his early years influenced John Wesley in his life of piety, and were responsible for the formation of the Methodist fellowship in later years.

Likewise, the Venerable Bede's early years spent studying the Scriptures and other sacred literature in the monastery of Jarrow in Northern England prepared his heart to write some of the best loved devotional books in the English language. These have greatly influenced the lives of the English speaking peoples for generations. One of the most significant of these books was "*The Life and Miracles of St. Cuthbert, Bishop of Lindisfarne.*"

The knowledge of the Lord is acquired through the practising of the admonition contained in Psalm 1:1-3, "*Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. But his delight is in the law of the LORD; and in his law doth he meditate day and night. And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit*

in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper.”

We Are Accountable

One of the important teachings in this passage is that we will be called into judgment and held accountable for what we do in our youth. Ecclesiastes 11:9 says, *“Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth; and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thine heart, and in the sight of thine eyes: but know thou, that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment.”*

Decisions made in our youth can well determine our destiny, since they will then cause us to choose the eternal path upon which we will walk. In particular, how important it is to be careful which disciplines and subjects we study, for that can mould our mind. As a man thinks, so is he (Prov. 23:7).

Philosophy is very dangerous, for it is atheistic and will turn our minds and hearts away from the one and only true God. We had in our Bible school a brilliant student who studied philosophy of the Greeks, as well as the Bible. It was not long before he lost his faith in Christ.

**Decisions
made in our
youth can
determine our
destiny!**

Thus Solomon concludes on this subject of youthful pleasures by instructing us to remove the sorrows that come from sin

and the evil practices of fleshly lusts, that can, of a truth, bind us to devilish ways (Eccl. 11:10). Therefore, before the evil days and the blackness of darkness of hell come, let us cleave unto our Creator. The call throughout the Scriptures is always, *“Seek ye the LORD, all ye meek of the earth, which have wrought his judgment; seek righteousness, seek meekness: it may be ye shall be hid in the day of the LORD’S anger”* (Zeph. 2:3).

Now Is the Time

So many have the tendency to say, “I will come to the Lord later in life after I have sown my wild oats,” but rare is it that they meet God in time. I remember a certain vision of hell that someone was given. There they saw a young lady pleading before the Lord that He knew that she had determined to serve Him one day. Unfortunately, that day never came, because she lost her life while living in pleasure. She was killed in an automobile accident when her chauffeur hit a house (Baxter, p. 33).

We are warned not to say, “Tomorrow we will do this and that, for we know not what tomorrow shall bring.” In James 4:13-15, the Apostle James admonishes us, *“Go to now, ye that say, To day or to morrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain: Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away. For that ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that.”*

The constant admonition is to turn to God before darkness comes, not only in the sense of death, but also that of grim situations when things change in the earth and difficult times come. **Let us be prepared for them by seeking the Lord now, so that we are abiding in the Lord, protected and watched over by Him in those difficult times of need.**

Judgment after Death

In Ecclesiastes 12:3-7, we also are given the description of death. How foreboding are those words in verse five, *“Because man goeth to his long home, and the mourners go about the streets,”* wailing their mournful tunes! A sense of void and emptiness pervades the town. A voice is no longer to be heard, a person is no longer to be seen.

One will no longer perform useful work, and is forever departed to a home below in the blackness of darkness forever. He is likened to a pitcher that is broken and discarded, which will inevitably turn to dust. So shall the sentence decreed upon man in Genesis 3:19 be fulfilled, *“In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.”* But our spirit shall go to God who made us. Then shall we stand before God to give an account of the short life that has been granted to us.

What have we accomplished for the benefit of our fellowman and for the glory of God? What kind of person are we, and shall we be accepted into His eternal kingdom? Shall we be

greeted with the words, “Well done, thou good and faithful servant; enter thou in to the joy of thy Lord”? Or shall we hear those words of doom, “Depart from Me, ye wicked servant, into the lake of fire prepared for the devil and his angels”? (Mt. 25:14-41).

A life well lived will have its eternal rewards and be welcomed into the peace and joy of the kingdom of the Heavenly Father. May we be wise and so live, so that we shall receive a welcome on that day when we are called to give an account for ourselves before the throne of the Most High.

PART TWENTY-EIGHT

The Wisdom of the Preacher in Setting in Order His Teachings

12:9-12

Setting Things in Order

Ecclesiastes 12:9 says, “*And moreover, because the preacher was wise, he still taught the people knowledge; yea, he gave good heed, and sought out, and set in order many proverbs.*” It is wisdom to set things in order. We are created by a God of order, and as such, we learn through an orderly procession. For example, in mathematics we learn the addition tables, followed by those of subtraction, multiplication, and division. This applies to every avenue of learning. We cannot jump over grades, for if we try, those gaps will cause us problems and we will soon be floundering because of a poor foundation.

The Importance of a Sound Foundation

While this is certainly true in the approach to our grasp of secular subjects, more so is it true when we come to spiritual truths. Let us see what the Apostle Paul, that great teacher of the Church, writes in his letter to the Hebrews. He speaks of foundational truths, “*Therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection; not laying again **the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God, Of the doctrine of baptisms, and of laying***

on of hands, and of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment. And this will we do, if God permit” (Heb. 6:1-3).

The Christian life is like the building of a house, as the Lord Jesus Himself says in Matthew 7:24-27: *“Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock. And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it.”*

If that foundation of repentance from dead works is not fully laid in our lives, then it is like constructing our lives upon the sand. When the storms of life do come, then we shall crash. Was that not true of the great King David? His spiritual house was built upon disobedience in the area of the multiplication of wives (2 Sam. 5:13, Deut. 17:15-17). Therefore, he could not stand in the matter of Bathsheba, wife of Uriah (2 Sam. 11).

This was quickened to me when visiting Athens, Greece. There in a garden, we were being shown one of the parks of the city. While we were walking down a colonnade of pillars, which had been erected before the era of Christ, we noticed that one had fallen. When examining this pillar, we were

shown a cracked foundation that had been pierced by a blade of grass (a symbol of the flesh, cf. Isa. 40:6), which brought it tumbling to the ground. This is a solemn warning to those who allow the works of the flesh to resurrect themselves in their lives. Many strong leaders have been brought down through these works of the flesh; and their influence and ministries have fallen into the dust of oblivion.

Upon this sound foundation of repentance, one should build the pillars of faith toward God. As Romans 1:17 says, “...*The righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith.*” We are to receive salvation by faith. Then we are to fulfil all faith (as Jesus said to John the Baptist) by being water baptised, followed by receiving the baptism of the Holy Spirit with the initial evidence of speaking in other tongues.

It is as we move on in God that we, as wise master builders, will lay a good foundation and build solidly in the lives of those to whom we have the privilege of ministering. Upon these good foundations, we should build gold, silver, and precious stones of truth, leading to the perfection of the beauty of Christ being formed in our lives, and in those to whom we minister (1 Cor. 3:11-15).

Roasting the Truth

Our teachings, as we have said before, must be *set in order*. This is very true for wise teachers of God’s Word. The truths that we receive in prayer, by revelation, or by plain hard

study must be “roasted,” in contradistinction to the habits of the sluggard, of whom we read in Proverbs 12:27, “*The slothful man roasteth not that which he took in hunting: but the substance of a diligent man is precious.*”

To roast means to break truths down into easily assimilated truths, that those whom we teach may clearly understand. One of the best means of keeping our truths that we teach is to publish them, so that the notes may be freely distributed in classroom settings. These then are like nails upon which studies can be based; and further truths can be affixed to them.

Certainly, as the preacher notes in Ecclesiastes 12:12, “*And further, by these, my son, be admonished: of making many books there is no end; and much study is a weariness of the flesh.*” John the Apostle made a similar observation in John 21:25, “*And there are also many other things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written. Amen.*”

Therefore, we should make sure that we write books of worth and also that we, in the very limited time we have upon this earth, utilise our time wisely, reading books that will promote godliness and knowledge of the Almighty. Idle reading is very wasteful and also dangerous in that we might imbibe knowledge that would cause us to err (cf. Prov. 19:27).

PART TWENTY-NINE

The End of All Teachings: Fearing God and Keeping His Commandments

12:13-14

Ecclesiastes 12:13-14 says, *“Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man. For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil.”*

When one considers all the precious truths that are revealed in God’s Holy Word (some truths are hidden), what is the core teaching on life’s purpose? **It is to walk in reverent fear before the Lord all the days of our life so that we perfect holiness in the fear of the Lord.** It is to walk carefully and circumspectly, measuring our conduct and our words so that in all matters of life we seek to please the Lord.

With respect to the commandments of God, they are summed up by the reply of the Lord to a lawyer’s enquiry, “Which is the great commandment of the law?” *“Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets”* (Mt. 22:37-40).

EPILOGUE

As we have already commented, it is remarkable that a man such as Solomon, imbued with such wisdom, could teach with such profundity of wisdom and knowledge, yet could not walk in his own teaching. We know that even some of the kings of the earth came to see and hear his wisdom. Solomon is therefore put before us as one of the most awesome examples and warnings to us of *knowing, but not practicing the truth*. He is also a type of one who experiences (and lives in) times of great revival.

During the reign of Solomon, the glory of God was manifested in the Temple. Prosperity was everywhere, yet he and the people were not *living* the truth. It is certainly a picture of the Last Days as well as the millennial reign of Christ upon earth. The presence and glory of God will shine forth through His Church, and the gifts of God will be poured out upon His people.

However, what does Jesus portray as being the state of the Church in these last days? Let us read Matthew 7:21-23: *“Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.”*

We should take to heart that in the Holy Scriptures, there were *many* who were *used of God*, like King Saul, but *later rejected*. Of Saul, it is said that God later became his enemy and would not speak to him (1 Sam. 28:15-17).

These two books that we have joined together portray the wisdom of God that flows through the life of the son of that great man, David. Regretfully, they also show the wrong choices that Solomon made because he was a captive to the lusts of the flesh.

These books contain awesome warnings to us that it is not sufficient to just “talk it” but we must “walk it.” Let us therefore take heed to do all that Solomon taught, yet not live as he did.

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