

## **Chapter 15**

### **The Searchings of Mind and Will: Proverbs, Ecclesiastes**

In ordinary everyday conversation we frequently describe the functions of our personality as mind, emotions and will, but Scripture does not follow this order; it would put them emotions, will and mind. As we have already seen, the book of Psalms is the expression of our human emotions. In similar manner the book of Proverbs is the expression of the will, while Ecclesiastes is the record of the investigations of the mind. Proverbs, therefore, sets before us the choices of life. Those choices govern all that we do and say and are therefore the very heart of our conscious existence. Both the emotions and reason are to be considered in making up our minds, but the final decision of the will governs our conduct and ultimate destiny.

The profound significance of these choices is beautifully described in the introduction to the book of Proverbs:

"The proverbs of Solomon the son of David, king of Israel: to know wisdom and instruction, to discern the sayings of understanding, to receive instruction in wise behavior, righteousness, justice and equity; to give prudence to the naive, to the youth knowledge and discretion, a wise man will hear and increase in learning, and a man of understanding will acquire wise counsel, to understand a proverb and a figure, the words of the wise, and their riddles" (Prov. 1:1-6, NASB).

Proverbs is the book designed expressly to help us confront the mysteries of life. It covers the whole of life, from childhood through youth and maturity, and gives us very practical guidance for very practical problems.

As the introduction suggests, most of the book comes from the pen of Solomon, the son of David and the wisest king Israel ever had. When young Solomon succeeded his father as king of Israel, he was granted a vision from God in which he was permitted to choose what his heart desired above everything else. Solomon asked that he be granted wisdom to fit him for the task of ruling. Because he asked for this instead of riches or fame, God gave him all three. The book consists, then, of the laws of heaven applied in a logical and reasonable way to life on earth. The secret of it is given in verse 7, chapter 1: "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction."

The fear of the Lord mentioned here is not a craven fear that God is going to whip or torment us, but rather a fear that we might hurt His loving heart and awaken His just correction toward us. The closest English translation is really "reverence" or "respect." In a world of deceit and illusion, the greatest gift we can be given is the gift of truth. We are told at the beginning of this book that God is the source of truth and the only trustworthy source; therefore the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge of the truth. It is not the end; it is but the beginning. And only the one who in his heart has a continuing respect for God's wisdom can properly evaluate and understand life.

The book appears to be difficult to outline, as, like the dictionary, it seems to change the subject with every verse. But there is a definite structure which can be detected. Following the brief introduction there is a series of ten remarkable discourses on wisdom which are the wise teachings of a father to his son. Ten times in the first nine chapters we find words to this effect: "Hear, my son..." These discourses begin with the child in the home and then follow the youth as he moves out into the busy streets of the city and encounters various new circumstances of life. He is taught how to choose and make friends, how to face the perils which are at work to destroy his life, and finally to discover the forces which will make him strong.

These "facts of life" discourses are followed by two collections of proverbs--from chapter 10 through 24 and

from chapter 25 through chapter 31. The collection in chapters 25 to 29 is said to be "the proverbs of Solomon which the men of Hezekiah king of Judah copied" (25:1) some centuries after Solomon's death. The closing two chapters bring before us the words of two otherwise unknown individuals; Agur, son of Jakeh, in chapter 30 and Lemuel, king of Massa, whose words are found in chapter 31.

## **Concerning the Choosing of One's Friends**

Chapters 1 and 2 are given largely to the problem of how to choose one's friends while yet young in years. Perhaps nothing is more important for a child to learn early in life, for the influence of peers has a powerful effect. Two types of friends are described, personified as two alluring women who cry to us from the streets of the city and the public places of life. One reflects the divine view of life which is true reality. The other is described as a "loose woman" whose smooth words reflect the popular outlook of the day; and though they sound fair and logical they lead to ruin and death. Confronted by these two contrary outlooks the young believer is exhorted. "My son, if you will receive my sayings, and treasure my commandments within you, make your ear attentive to wisdom, incline your heart to understanding; for if you cry for discernment, lift your voice for understanding; if you seek her as silver and search for her as for hidden treasures; then you will discern the fear of the Lord, and discover the knowledge of God. For the Lord gives wisdom; from His mouth come knowledge and understanding" (2:1-6, NASB).

Chapter 3 follows the young man as he grows up and makes his way into the city and is immediately confronted with pressures and temptations. The section speaks very delicately and frankly about the pressures of sex and about the destruction that wrong responses to these pressures can effect on a life. There is also strong admonition against getting involved in shady financial transactions.

No young person ever imagines that he or she will become a failure in life. No one has ever said to me, "My ambition is to be a bum on skid row." Yet the heartbreak of life is that with the best of intentions, and often with frightening rapidity, we can suddenly find ourselves in trouble up to our ears and all our dreams of glory faded and gone. A young man recently told me of how he had left his home and moved to the city and did what he thought was right and what he hoped would fulfill him. At the urging of new friends he became involved in drugs until he began to experiment with LSD and ended up mainlining on heroin, experiencing fantastic hallucinations. He eventually became a procurer for a prostitute on the streets of San Francisco and there, like the prodigal son, he finally awakened to what was happening to him and began to seek God again.

That is the kind of thing that the writer of Proverbs is seeking to forestall. He points out that life is simply too big for us to handle by ourselves. No matter how good advice may seem to be, if it is not consistent with what God has told us, it is not to be trusted. Thus he sums up the section by saying: "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not rely on your own insight. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths. Be not wise in your own eyes; fear the Lord, and turn away from evil. It will be healing to you' flesh and refreshment to your bones" (3:5-8).

Once again the two ways of life are symbolized by two women. One is an adventures, bold and impudent, offering immediate pleasure and delights but actually intent only on self-satisfaction. Whoever follows this philosophy is like an ox led to the slaughter or a stag or bird caught by a hunter. In chapter 7 the young believer is warned: "Do not let your heart turn aside to her ways, do not stray into her paths. For many are the victims she has cast down, and numerous are all her slain. Her house is the way to Sheol, descending to the chambers of death" (v. 25-27, NASB). It is not merely sexual sins which are thus described, but the whole philosophy of the world which offers fame and fulfillment and suggests that we deserve the very best and finest things of life. One only has to listen to the commercials on television or view the advertisements in magazines to see the same philosophy abounding today.

But in chapters 8 and 9 the delights of true wisdom are described. Here are the secrets hidden (from the natural man) from the very foundations of the earth which touch upon the deep things of life and reveal the true secrets of security and true identity. This all corresponds exactly with the advice of the apostle Paul in Romans 12:2: "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect."

## Concerning Most of Life's Situations

Beginning with chapter 10 through chapter 24 are the actual proverbs of Solomon; all very pithy, practical words of advice concerning most of the situations of life. The method of teaching is either by contrast or by climax. In the contrast the writer sets two things side by side and shows the good and evil results of various attitudes and actions. In the teaching by climax he makes a statement in the first half which is then enlarged upon and concluded in the second. A vivid example of contrast is found in 10:7: "The memory of the righteous is a blessing, but the name of the wicked will rot." Another is found in 10:10: "He who winks the eye causes trouble, but he who boldly reproves makes peace." There the deceitful look expressed by a wink is contrasted with the one who frankly and forthrightly speaks truth, even though what he says is not especially welcome. The result of that kind of frankness is peace.

An example of climax is found in 10:22: "The blessing of the Lord makes rich, and he adds no sorrow with it." Again in 11:31: "If the righteous is requited on earth, how much more the wicked and the sinner!"

Another form of teaching is that of vivid simile, such as 10:26: "Like vinegar to the teeth, and smoke to the eyes, so is the sluggard to those who send him." As vinegar sets the teeth on edge and smoke burns the eyes, so is the man who is entrusted with a message but who dawdles along the way. Another of this sort is found in 11:22: "Like a gold ring in a swine's snout is a beautiful woman without discretion." Imagine an ugly pig with swill dripping from its mouth, but with a gold ring affixed to its nostril! The gold ring signifies value, but it is in the wrong place. So is a beautiful woman who has not learned that true beauty is the inner beauty of spirit.

Still another of this type is found in 12:4: "A good wife is the crown of her husband, but she who brings shame is like rottenness in his bones."

These observations clearly reflect a true evaluation of life rather than the shallow and artificial viewpoints found in the world's thinking. The chapters of Proverbs cover a wide range of subjects and do so in short, pithy epigrams; but there are also more extended treatments of subjects. For instance in chapter 12:16-22 there is a short discourse on the tongue and the dangers and blessings which can come from it: "A fool's vexation is known at once, but a prudent man conceals dishonor. He who speaks truth tells what is right, but a false witness, deceit. There is one who speaks rashly like the thrusts of a sword, but the tongue of the wise brings healing. Truthful lips will be established forever, but a lying tongue is only for a moment. 'Deceit is in the heart of those who devise evil, but counselors of peace have joy. No harm befalls the righteous, but the wicked are filled with trouble. Lying lips are an abomination to the Lord, but those who deal faithfully are His delight" (NASB).

There is not only truth for young people in Proverbs, but also wisdom for parents. In 13:24 there is a verse which many children have wished were not included in the Scriptures: "He who spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is diligent to discipline him." This is the biblical basis for the saying: "This hurts me more than it does you!" In this connection also 22:6 is an often quoted verse: "Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it." The first part of this verse should really be translated "Train up a child according to his way." This means a parent should find out what is in the child and bring him up according to his natural bent, so that what God has hidden in him may be developed and drawn out. A child trained in these ways will not depart from that training when he is older.

Further wisdom concerning discipline is found in 23:13,14: "Do not withhold discipline from a child; if you beat him with a rod, he will not die. If you beat him with the rod you will save his life from Sheol." The rod here is not an iron rod or even a thick stick, but a light twig which stings but does not bruise. This is of course counsel for parents with small children. When dealing with adolescents it is quite different.

Certain of the Proverbs present very profound insights into the nature of life and reality. It would be good to commit them to memory since they represent a necessary understanding of life. One such is found in 14:12: "There is a way which seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death." How clearly this states that our own actions nearly always seem right in our own eyes, but we cannot see the end. Here again we must not rely upon our own judgment but trust in the wisdom of God.

Another verse of profound insight is 20:27: "The spirit of man is the lamp of the Lord, searching all his innermost parts." This is probably one of the most important verses in the Bible to help us properly understand our humanity. Our human spirits are designated the "lamp of the Lord" and this is true whether the individual is a believer or an unbeliever. But the "lamp" is not a light. The human spirit is the lampstand, made and designed to project a light, but the light itself is that of the Holy Spirit of God. When the lamp of the spirit holds the light of the Holy Spirit, then one is enabled to search the innermost part of one's life and to understand oneself for the first time. Where the lamp does not hold the light of God, the individual dwells in darkness and walks and lives in darkness.

Still another insight into human nature is found in 19:3: "When a man's folly brings his way to ruin, his heart rages against the Lord." How true to life this is! When someone's foolishness brings him into trouble, whom does he blame? The Lord, of course, or if he is married perhaps he takes it like a man and blames it on his wife, as Adam did in the Garden of Eden. But the ultimate blame is cast upon the Lord.

This should lead one to say in the words of 20:9: "Who can say, 'I have made my heart clean; I am pure from my sin?'" An honest answer to that question will soon put the blame for evil where it properly belongs and open the way for the cleansing of God.

### **Concerning What God Has Concealed**

In chapter 25 begins the second collection of proverbs which were copied by the men of Hezekiah. Verse 2 is very suggestive in this connection: "It is the glory of God to conceal things but the glory of kings is to search things out." This suggests a possible reason why King Hezekiah set his men to copy the proverbs of Solomon which had not previously been recorded for he was a king who loved to search out what God had hidden. If you want to have a royal experience I suggest that you search the Word of God for the things God has concealed there. You will find it an exciting treasure hunt and highly rewarding.

Chapter 26 has some very helpful words about troublesome people in general. Verses 3-12 present a series on fools and how to handle them. Verses 13-16 tell us what to do about sluggards and what is wrong with laziness. Verses 17-23 concern meddlers and how to handle them. Then verse 24 to the chapter's end is all about the loveless--those who hate others. Here we learn what hatred will do to the man who indulges in it.

These proverbs from the men of Hezekiah reflect the concern of rulers and kings for the rights of their people. For instance in 28:27 we are told: "He who gives to the poor will not want but he who hides his eyes will get many a curse." Again in 29:7: "A righteous man knows the rights of the poor; a wicked man does not understand such knowledge." Still again in 29:14: "If a king judges the poor with equity his throne will be established for ever." These proverbs clearly recognize the problem caused by social injustice and lay the responsibility to correct this not only upon the king but on individual citizens in the realm as well. We must ever remember "no man is an island." We must not shut ourselves away from those around us who are less fortunate than we. These proverbs remind us that we have a responsibility toward them.

Chapter 30 contains the words of Agur. This chapter somewhat parallels the closing chapters of Job for Agur is greatly impressed by the wisdom of God in nature and His power and might as contrasted with the frailty of human beings. He finds numerous examples in nature which give warnings against disobedience toward parents to excite the imagination and awaken wonder to warn against allowing sudden good fortune to go to one's head and to encourage those who feel very small and insignificant yet do great and remarkable things.

When Agur says: "Three things...four" (see v. 15, 18, 21, 29) he is not being uncertain as to the number but is using this climactic formula as a way of emphasizing the truth he presents.

Chapter 31 contains the words of Lemuel king of Massa. We know nothing more about him but in a brief section he is given certain exhortations about royal responsibilities and the chapter concludes with a most remarkable poem in acrostic form (each verse begins with a new letter of the Hebrew alphabet) which seems also to come from the pen of Lemuel. It praises the model wife who is devoted to her husband's and children's welfare and interests and is diligent and tireless in providing for all her family's needs. She is gracious toward those outside the family and amply deserves the gratitude of her husband and children.

The secret of her accomplishment is given in verse 30: "A woman who fears the Lord is to be praised." It is remarkable that in this description of the model wife the woman is involved in much work that would often be thought of as "man's" labor. She buys and plants fields she sells goods which she herself manufactures and she works beside her husband in all the enterprises of life. There is only one field which she does not enter, and that is the realm of government. It is her husband who sits in the gates among the elders of the land. The participation of women-in government was not unknown in Israel, as witness Deborah the judge, and Hannah the prophetess. But these served not as men but in their unique function as women, supporting and augmenting the male leaders.

The nature of Proverbs is such that it requires frequent reading to absorb its content. Dr. Billy Graham has made a habit of reading Proverbs through once a month. This is made easier by the fact that the book has 31 chapters corresponding with the number of days in most months. The book is so filled with practical, earthy wisdom that it would not be too much to read a chapter of Proverbs every day of a lifetime. Undoubtedly it would save from many heartaches and introduce many blessings.

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## **Ecclesiastes**

The book of Ecclesiastes is unique in the Bible, for there is no other book which limits itself to a completely human rather than a divine point of view. As a consequence, the book of Ecclesiastes contains error, and yet it is wholly inspired. This may confuse some because many feel that inspiration is the guarantee of truth; but this is not necessarily so. Inspiration merely guarantees accuracy of a particular point of view. If it is God's point of view the statement is completely true. If it is man's point of view, or even the devil's point of view, it may be true or it may not be true. Only careful comparison with the divine point of view will determine which it is.

This is what makes possible the charge that one can prove all kinds of things by quoting the Bible. This is certainly true; but what is often being ignored is that the Bible invariably points out the error and makes it clear that it is error. In the opening two verses of this book, it is carefully pointed out that what is recorded is not divine truth. In verse 2 and many times throughout the course of the book the phrase "under the sun" is repeated. Everything in the book is evaluated according to outward appearance--that is, man's point of view of reality. It is only that which can be observed under the sun.

It is this character that makes the book of Ecclesiastes the favorite book of atheists and agnostics. Many of the cults quote frequently from this book, because it gives purely naturalistic views of death and immortality. For instance in 3:18-20 it says: "I said to myself concerning the sons of men, 'God has surely tested them in order for them to see that they are but beasts.' For the fate of the sons of men and the fate of beasts is the same. As one dies so dies the other; indeed they all have the same breath and there is no advantage for man over beast, for all is vanity. All go to the same place. All came from the dust and all return to the dust" (NASB) Clearly this is a contradiction of what is taught elsewhere in the Bible, that man is different from the beasts, and that beyond man's physical death lies a continuing existence with awareness and personal expression. Yet only divine revelation can teach us that truth. Man's observation "under the sun" makes it appear that man is no different from the beasts and his death no different from theirs.

Ecclesiastes, however, is not an atheistic book, for to be atheistic is to be unrealistic and the Bible is never unrealistic. Atheists are those who have convinced themselves, by somewhat tortured argument, that there is no God, though every inward testimony of their conscience and the structure of the universe around give constant witness to the fact that there is a God. Usually it takes a good deal of education to be an atheist, and it is a remarkable fact that primitive people are never atheistic. Atheism arises from a desire to escape life's reality, and especially a desire to escape any sense of responsibility toward a God to whom one must answer. But Ecclesiastes is not atheistic, even though it is written from a humanistic point of view. Ecclesiastes views God as men in general view God: as waiting at the end of life to subject men to judgment and possible condemnation, but not offering anything vital to the enjoyment of life during the life span.

Though the name of Solomon is never mentioned in the book, the writer identifies himself in the very first verse as the son of David, king in Jerusalem. Even some evangelical scholars have felt that certain indications in the book require a writer who lived much later than Solomon's time. It may be possible that some of the words of Solomon were incorporated into a work written some time after Solomon's reign. However, King Solomon was in an unusual position to undertake the experiments and investigations reflected in this book, for during the 40 years of his reign there was utter peace in the kingdom of Judah and Israel. Since he did not have to concern himself with military pursuits, he had all the time he needed to follow through with investigations into the meaning of life. Furthermore, he had all the wealth he needed and was possessed with a keen, logical and discerning mind which had gained for him the reputation as the wisest man in the world.

The value of Ecclesiastes, therefore, is that it sets forth life from the standpoint of the natural man apart from divine revelation and views life from the best possible advantage.

In most of our modern versions, the writer calls himself "the Preacher." This, however, is not a good translation of the Hebrew word used. The idea is one who investigates or gathers facts together; perhaps the best translation would be "the Searcher." The book presents the conclusions of one whose brilliant mind has searched through all the phenomena of life and come up with one definite conclusion. That conclusion is stated in verse 2: "Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher, vanity of vanities! All is vanity. " We use the word vanity in a different sense today. To us vanity is conceit over personal appearance. If someone spends long hours primping before a mirror we regard him/her as suffering from personal vanity. But in Ecclesiastes vanity means emptiness, futility, meaninglessness. When the Searcher has completed his survey of life he says that everything is futile and without meaning--there is no sense to anything.

He supports this conclusion with a series of arguments gleaned from sifting through various philosophies of life. Perhaps the most interesting thing about this book is that all the philosophies by which men have attempted to live are summarized here. To quote from the book: "There is nothing new under the sun." Though we are almost 30 centuries removed from the time of the writing of this book, yet nothing new has been produced in the world of ideas than what is reflected here.

The Searcher first investigates what might be described as the scientific outlook, or the mechanistic view of the universe. His view of nature is that it is a meaningless cycle of processes which repeat themselves without progress or meaning. His conclusion is: "That which has been is that which will be, and that which has been done is that which will be done. So, there is nothing new under the sun" (1:9, NASB). Nevertheless, there are some remarkable recognitions of the scientific processes here which were not known in the world of science of Solomon's day. For instance, there is a description of the circuit of the winds, "The wind blows to the south, and goes round to the north, round and round goes the wind, and on its circuits the wind returns" (1:6). Men of science were not aware of this until some centuries after this book was written. There is also a description of the evaporation cycle of circulating waters: "All streams run to the sea, but the sea is not full; to the place where the streams flow, there they flow again" (1:7). Though the writer has this keen insight into nature, his outlook is that life goes on and we are lost in the meaninglessness of the universe where nothing is to be heard but the clanking of gears. This is a very common philosophy today. What is man in a universe like this? He is but a tiny speck with no meaning or significance whatever.

In chapter 2 the writer examines the philosophy of hedonism: the pursuit of pleasure as the chief end of life. What will give life meaning? Millions today say: "Just enjoy yourself. Have a good time. Live life with gusto. Do as you like. Seek pleasure. That is the purpose of living. That's why we are here." So the Searcher says: "I said to myself, 'Come now, I will make a test of pleasure; enjoy yourself.' But behold, this also was vanity" (2:1). Then he proceeds to itemize the pleasures he sought. He first tried pleasure in the form of laughter or mirth. He sought out opportunities to give himself to genial, laughing, happy company; but after a time he says even this yielded weariness of spirit.

Then he tried acquisition of possessions. Perhaps meaning would come from wealth: "Then I became great and increased more than all who preceded me in Jerusalem. My wisdom also stood by me. And all that my eyes desired I did not refuse them. I did not withhold my heart from any pleasure, for my heart was pleased because of all my labor and this was my reward for all my labor" (2:9,10, NASB). But this too produced emptiness of spirit and did not satisfy his longings.

Then he says: "I turned to consider wisdom and madness and folly" that is, he set himself to investigate opposites in the realm of ideas. Though he saw that wisdom excels folly as light excels darkness, nevertheless his ultimate conclusion was that it all comes out at the same place. "Then I said to myself, 'As is the fate of the fool, it will also befall me. Why then have I been extremely wise?' So I said to myself, 'This too is vanity.' For there is no lasting remembrance of the wise man as with the fool, inasmuch as in the coming days all will be forgotten. And how the wise man and the fool alike die!" (2:15,16, NASB).

Then he comes to this terrible conclusion: "So I hated life, for the work which had been done under the sun was grievous to me; because everything is futility and striving after wind" (2:17, NASB).

Here is a man who has given himself to pleasure, to amassing possessions, to the pursuit of wisdom and the realm of ideas, and yet all he can say is: "I hated life." Despair is the end of it all.

Chapter 3 begins a second major discourse which ends at Ecclesiastes 5:20. It is an investigation of what is called existentialism today. Americans, I think, have difficulty understanding why existential thinking has so powerfully gripped the minds of people in our world. The philosophy became popular at the end of World War II when Europe was left in shambles and the great cities of Europe were in ruins. It was evident that all that men had previously pinned their hopes on--government and religion as they knew them--had been powerless to arrest the catastrophe and terrible chaos of World War II. At the end of it, men were left with utterly shattered hopes concerning what they had previously trusted in. They said to one another "What can we trust? We can't trust religion, for it did nothing to stem the awful tide of tyranny under Hitler. We can't trust government because it is the very tool of such power. So what can we trust?"

Someone then suggested that the only thing to be trusted is one's own reactions to life as we experience various circumstances. Though no two persons may have the same reactions, at least each person's reaction is real to him. So the philosophy of existentialism became wide-spread.

Now the Searcher says: "I too tried this. I discovered that I also reacted to events and had certain inescapable experiences in life." He says:

"For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven:

a time to be born, and a time to die;  
a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what 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, a time to gather stones together;  
a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing;  
a time to seek, 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 for war, and a time for peace.

"What gain has the worker from his toil?

"I have seen the business that God has given to the sons of men to be busy with. He has made everything beautiful in its time; also he has put eternity into man's mind, yet so that he cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end" (3:1-11).

Here is the explanation for all the restlessness of humanity. Man can never be content with simple existence. He must look deeper. Eternity is in his heart (see v. 11, NASB). So the events of life are inescapable and are

experienced by all men, yet when they are over they all turn to dust; and despite the variety of experience man has not found contentment for there is a restless longing placed within him for something deeper. His conclusion, therefore, is: "There is nothing better for them than to be happy and enjoy themselves as long as they live" (3:12). This theme of "eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow we die" is repeated again and again throughout this book as the only workable relief to the endless discontent of life.

In chapter 4 the Searcher investigates what we would call the "competitive enterprise" of life--capitalism. When the Searcher tried the competitive system he saw that it resulted in injustices and oppression. Behind it were selfish motivations resulting in inequities. So he said it all came to the same end: "A poor, yet wise lad is better than an old and foolish king who no longer knows how to receive instruction" (4:13, NASB). In other words, what good does it do to get to the top of the heap when a young man at the bottom with nothing but a few smart ideas can surge ahead? What is the good of it all?

In chapter 5 he tries religion, to do good and to be good. Yet he points out that religious people can do very unethical things and they also oppress the poor. Furthermore, there is no power in deadly religious formalism to arrest wrongs or change inequities. So it too comes to the same end--emptiness and vanity.

Chapter 6 sets forth his experiments with materialism--the philosophy of the "good life." Once again he concludes: "If a man fathers a hundred children and lives many years, however many they be, but his soul is not satisfied with good things, and he does not even have a proper burial, then I say, 'Better the miscarriage than he' " (6:3, NASB). Thus if one has everything and yet there is still a craving which these things cannot satisfy, one is no better off than if he had never been born. It all comes to the same place.

In chapter 7, Solomon approaches life from the standpoint of stoicism---a cultivated indifference to events. In this philosophy there is an attempt to be moderate in all things, so the Searcher says: "I have seen everything during my lifetime of futility; there is a righteous man who perishes in his righteousness, and there is a wicked man who prolongs his life in his wickedness. Do not be excessively righteous, and do not be overly wise. Why should you ruin yourself? Do not be excessively wicked, and do not be a fool. Why should you die before your time?" (7:15-17, NASB).

Chapter 8 through the first eight verses of chapter 11 are a connected discourse examining what might be referred to as the "common sense view" of life. Anyone approaching life is exhorted to master the power structures of the world in which he lives. The Searcher says in effect, "Try to understand who is the boss and who is not and do your best to be on the right side at the right time. " It is easy to recognize that philosophy around us today. But here is the Searcher's conclusion: "I saw every work of God, [and I concluded that man cannot discover the work which has been done under the sun. Even though man should seek laboriously, he will not discover; and though the wise man should say, 'I know,' he cannot discover" (8:17, NASB).

Chapter 9 examines- the world's value judgments which have an aura of wisdom about them but are not accurate. The race is not always to the swift or riches to the intelligent. The battle does not always go to the strong, for the Searcher says: "Moreover, man does not know his time: like fish caught in a treacherous net, and birds trapped in a snare, so the sons of men are ensnared at an evil time when it suddenly falls on them" (9:12, NASB).

Chapter 10 presents a collection of proverbs which exhort one to maintain discretion in life, but it is all an enlightened expression of selfishness which is the underlying motivation.

In chapter 11 success is seen as simply a matter of diligence. One need only work and apply himself. But then the Searcher concludes: "Indeed, if a man should live many years, let him rejoice in them all, and let him remember the days of darkness, for they shall be many. Everything that is to come will be futility" (11 :8, NASB). So he has proved his case. All the way" through it is the same: life lived from a human point of view comes out to meaninglessness and futility.

There comes a remarkable change of viewpoint at 11:9 and through the concluding chapter (chap. 12). All the way through the Searcher's investigation of life his continually repeated conclusion has been "Eat drink and be merry, for tomorrow you must die." It is stated in various ways in 2:24, 3:22, 5:18, 8:15, 9:7, and in 10:19



the Searcher says: "Bread is made for laughter, and wine gladdens life, and money answers everything." One has only to look around in modern life today to see that the world comes to the identical conclusion. It is the inevitable conclusion of any approach to life that erases God from the picture. Man is told to live like an animal, but this denies the glory of humanity. It reduces man to the level of the beast and the statement, "eat, drink and be merry" becomes the most hopeless statement one can make about life. What is life if it consists only of that? It is indeed utterly insignificant and without meaning. Life goes out like a candle flame in the end, and utter pessimism rules the life lived without God.

But the Searcher now speaks directly to youth and says: "Rejoice, young man, during your childhood, and let your heart be pleasant during the days of young manhood. And follow the impulses of your heart and the desires of your eyes. Yet know that God will bring you to judgment for all these things" (11:9, NASB).

Then a new, truer view is presented in 12:1: "Remember also your Creator in the days of your youth, before the evil days come, and the years draw nigh, when you will say, 'I have no pleasure in them'" (12:1). Verses 2 through 7 are a marvelously beautiful description of old age and death: "...the silver cord is snapped...the golden bowl is broken...the pitcher is broken at the fountain...the wheel broken at the cistern, and the dust returns to the earth as it was, and the spirit returns to God who gave it." Before this occurs, the Searcher says, youth are well-advised to put their lives in the hands of a loving Creator and to walk with Him through the varied experiences of life.

Thus a gleam of light comes at the end of this pessimistic book, for the Searcher concludes: "The end of the matter, all has been heard. Fear God, and keep his commandments; for this is the whole duty of man" (12:13). It is most unfortunate that the word "duty" has been inserted in this version, as well as others, for it is not in the Hebrew text. What the verse actually says is: "Fear God, and keep His commandments; for this is the wholeness of man." This is what makes man whole! The secret is to enthrone God in the days of your youth. If you want to find the secret of living so that the heart is satisfied and the spirit enriched and fulfilled according to God's intention, then "remember your Creator in the days of your youth, before the evil days come." Enthrone God at the center of your life and you will discover all that God intended life to be. You will be able to rejoice all the days of your life.

The philosophy that begins and ends in the dust and says that dust is all there is to life is indeed "vanity," uttered folly. But the Searcher's ultimate conclusion is that wholeness comes from putting God at the center of life.

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