

Daily Bible Study

“What is the “Real” Chief End of Man?”

Ecclesiastes 12:9-14

October 28 – November 2, 2013

MONDAY –This week, we come to the end of our study of **Ecclesiastes**. It has been a wonderful study of an incredible book; a book which truths fly in the face of so much modern Christian thinking. Without trying to be critical of the first question of The Westminster Shorter Catechism, we have entitled this week’s study which brings the entire book and teachings of “the preacher” to a close; “What is the “Real” Chief End of Man?” The Catechism answers the question of “What is the chief end of man?” with the following answer: “Man’s chief end is to glorify God and enjoy him forever.” This is certainly true and as we will see the things that Solomon instructs us concerning *the conclusion of the whole matter* do not contradict this but rather shed light on how we can do this. Solomon here makes a final statement confirming his own position on the meaning and purpose of life. The Preacher’s conclusion ends by focusing upon the one source of truth that is valid for anyone sincerely searching for the meaning of life; God and His Word. A New Testament comparative text could be Paul’s instructions to Timothy concerning The Word of God which alone is sufficient to make a man complete and mature (**2 Timothy 3:15-17**). Read Solomon’s instruction to us as students in the exam room of life from **Ecclesiastes 12:9-14**: ⁹*And moreover, because the Preacher was wise, he still taught the people knowledge; yes, he pondered and sought out and set in order many proverbs.* ¹⁰*The Preacher sought to find acceptable words; and what was written was upright—words of truth.* ¹¹*The words of the wise are like goads, and the words of scholars are like well-driven nails, given by one Shepherd.* ¹²*And further, my son, be admonished by these. Of making many books there is no end, and much study is wearisome to the flesh.* ¹³*Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep His commandments, For this is man’s all.* ¹⁴*For God will bring every work into judgment, Including every secret thing, Whether good or evil.”*

Suggestion for Prayer: Lord, help me learn from this text the importance of hearing & heeding your Words which glorifies You, makes much of You, and makes my life better.

TUESDAY – **Ecclesiastes 12:9-10**: ⁹*And moreover, because the Preacher was wise, he still taught the people knowledge; yes, he pondered and sought out and set in order many proverbs.* ¹⁰*The Preacher sought to find acceptable words; and what was written was upright—words of truth.”* The wisdom of Solomon is seen in his desire to teach people. As Bob O’Leary taught us long ago here in Bible class, knowledge is acquiring information but “wisdom” interprets and applies information for the good. It is actually “skill” in living out the knowledge. Solomon here follows the example of many wise men of Scripture as he

teaches us God’s Words. Moses was given God’s Words, God’s commandments so that he could give and teach them to the people (**Deuteronomy 6:1** and following). Ezra “... *had prepared his heart to seek the Law of the LORD, and to do it, and to teach statutes and ordinances in Israel*” (**Ezra 7:10**). A final example of a wise teacher from Scripture is Jehoshaphat, in **2 Chronicles 17:7–9**, who sent the Levites to the towns and cities of Judah to teach the people the Law of the Lord. In our text we see that **verse 9** tells us the Preacher *taught the people knowledge; yes, he pondered and sought out and set in order many proverbs*. A very important thing to see here is that Solomon was not content with merely “his own thoughts or opinions” on issues, he *pondered and sought out* the conclusions of others and compares them with his own. He gathers information, lays it out in an orderly way and then presents the *upright—words of truth*. The reason that his words end up as *upright—words of truth* is not due to the fact that he was smarter and compared opinions but rather that he was writing the very Words of God Almighty. As Peter would later write under the inspiration of The Holy Spirit, “...*for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit* (**2 Peter 1:21**). So he takes the Words of God and lays them before you and I. What will you do with them?

Suggestion for Prayer: Father, help me to listen and be thankful for the wise Words You send out to me through Sacred Scripture. May I be a wise hearer and skillfully apply and obey the Word of Truth that You teach and speak to my life.

WEDNESDAY – **Ecclesiastes 12:11-12** ¹¹*The words of the wise are like goads, and the words of scholars are like well-driven nails, given by one Shepherd.* ¹²*And further, my son, be admonished by these. Of making many books there is no end, and much study is wearisome to the flesh.”* Solomon describes the *words of the wise* and says they are like *goads* and *well-driven nails*. *Goads* were sharp pointed sticks used to drive an animal in the direction desired by the owner and the Word of God here specifically the words of Solomon from Ecclesiastes are meant not to drive us to despair, but to God Himself and into His presence. He has pointed out to us the gloom and barrenness of our landscape when consumed with self and selfishness and he has directed us to the vibrant, growing, lush pastures of God’s Kingdom and selfless living for God’s glory. Like Saul we often may “*kick against the goads*” of God’s direction (**Acts 9:5**) but thankfully God is patient with us and we need to be grateful for the temporal pain when we look around and still find ourselves within the sheep fold of God. God wants the truth *nailed* into your mind beloved and he wants it secured it firmly in our memory and understanding. Drive the Word home to Your heart through meditation, memorization AND obedience. The Psalmist says, “*Your word have I hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against you*” (**Psalms 119:11**). The picture here is also one of the shepherd driving in his tent pegs, therefore making his sheepfold secure. As mentioned earlier, we see that this is not Solomon’s opinions but these truths are given by *one Shepherd*. Every word, thought, and story recorded in Scripture is there by the express purpose of God. Solomon continues with an

admonishment to heed the Shepherd's words above all the writings of man. Be careful and watchful for novelty which is merely novel and not wise. Wisdom is not found in a "new" way to do something but in the time tested unfailing nature of the Word of God; living, powerful, wise, life giving and never failing Word of the Living God. People thirst for new ideas, new ways of understanding and interpreting the meaning of life. Even bizarre ideas and concepts get accepted and followed without critical examination. Be careful says Solomon, you will get weary in the never ending search for truth outside the Word of God and obedience to it. Don't follow man's wisdom however "real" or "clever" or "fresh" it may seem when it contradicts and does not square up with the often hard truths of God's Word. *"For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables". (2 Timothy 4:3-4).*

Suggestion for Prayer: Father, help me to see that Your Words don't always make me feel happy; they goad and poke me toward You and truth when I wander from it. Thank You for being forgiving and patient. Help me not make excuses but obey. Protect me from "jumping on the bandwagon" of new and exciting when it drives on a different road than the old, straight, true and faithful Word of God.

THURSDAY – Ecclesiastes 12:13: ¹³*Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep His commandments, For this is man's all.*" Solomon now closes this timeless epic blast as he in the vernacular, "boils it all down". It all comes down to this and I can't possibly in my human limitations stress to You the importance of this next directive and command from God. This command contains the way a person may have TRUE joy on earth and in heaven. This is the answer to our question from the first day of our study. **"What is the Real" Chief End of Man?"** *Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep His commandments, For this is man's all.* This is it beloved. Look at it, read it, meditate on it, obey it. *Fear God* and the unchanging authority of his Word, *and keep His commandments.* In the end, nothing else matters. This indeed *is man's all.* As the KJV translates it, *"For this is the whole duty of man"*. Godly fear is the beginning of wisdom (**Psalms 111:10, Proverbs 1:7**). We are not talking about a cowering fear that would belong to a person swallowed up, lost and abandoned in self and self-centeredness living for their satisfaction *"under the sun"*. This fear of God is the reverent submissiveness of one who has turned from self in repentance and truly found reconciliation with his Creator. As Charles Bridges puts it, "Here we walk with our Father, humbly, acceptably, securely—looking at an offended God with terror—but at a reconciled God with reverential love. All the gracious influences on the soul—cherished under the power of the Spirit—all flow out in godly fear towards him." Jim Winter gives us the following illustration from Church history of this lifestyle. "Bishop Hugh Latimer was a courageous man whose fear of God superseded all other fears. This was seen in the boldness he showed in the presence of King Henry VIII. One

new year's day, instead of carrying, according to the custom of that age, a rich gift to the king, he presented him with the New Testament, a leaf of which was turned down at this passage, 'Whoremongers and adulterers God will judge.' This might have cost him his life; but the king, instead of being angry, admired his courage. On one occasion, when preaching before Henry, the bishop spoke his mind very plainly, and the sermon displeased Henry. Latimer was commanded to preach again on the next Sabbath, and to make an apology for the offence he had given. After reading his text, he thus began his sermon: 'Hugh Latimer, dost thou know before whom thou art this day to speak? To the high and mighty monarch, the king's most excellent majesty, who can take away thy life if thou offendest; therefore take heed that thou speakest not a word that may displease. But then, Hugh, consider well! Dost thou not know from whom thou comest—upon whose message thou art sent? Even the great and mighty God, who is all present and able to cast thy soul into hell! Therefore take care that thou deliverest thy message faithfully.' Latimer was faithful to the end, being burned at the stake in 1555."

Suggestion for Prayer: Father, I beg You to help me see the importance of this command. O God, give me strength and power to do this for Your glory and my ultimate good.

FRIDAY – Ecclesiastes 12:14: ¹⁴*For God will bring every work into judgment, Including every secret thing, Whether good or evil."* We here see we need to prepare for final judgment. We learned earlier in the book that *"God will judge the righteous and the wicked"* (**3:17**) and after telling us to enjoy life we were warned *"But know that for all these God will bring you into judgment"* (**11:9**). It may appear that men get away with sin (**8:11**), but their sins will eventually be exposed and judged righteously. Those who have not trusted the Lord Jesus Christ will be doomed forever. Charles Spurgeon said, "The eternity of punishment is a thought which crushes the heart. The Lord God is slow to anger, but when he is once aroused to it, as he will be against those who finally reject his Son, he will put forth all his omnipotence to crush his enemies." Over and over Solomon told us to enjoy life while we can; but at no time did he advise us to enjoy sin. You can be joyful here in the present because of the security of your future in Jesus. If you are in Jesus Christ through repentance and faith then your sins have already been judged on the cross and *"there is therefore now no condemnation to them who are in Christ Jesus"* (**Romans 8:1**). But if you die having never turned in repentant faith to Christ, you will face judgment at His throne and be lost forever (**Revelation 20:11-15**). Life is worth living. You can be satisfied. It is in the keeping of God's commandments that a man knows true wisdom and satisfaction and this is the solution to the meaning and purpose of life. *"To fear the LORD your God, to walk in all his ways and to love him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul"* (**Deuteronomy 10:12**). **What is the "Real" Chief End of Man?** Jesus Christ is the Wisdom of God personified: *"And this is his commandment: that we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ"* (**1 John 3:23**).

Suggestion for Prayer: Father, thank You for helping me stand in the final judgment in Jesus.