This study of the book of Ecclesiastes consists of 47 letters that I wrote for the benefit of my children and grandchildren. Solomon is writing to his son and warning him about all of the snares that can so easily trap us and make our lives unproductive. We can learn from this and trust that these letters will help towards this end.

WEEKLY LETTER #1 - ECCLESIATES

Ecclesiastes 1:1-2 “The words of the Teacher, son of David, king in Jerusalem: ‘Meaningless! Meaningless!’ says the Teacher. ‘Utterly meaningless! Everything is meaningless.’”

Some years ago I was asked to speak to group of young people on this book Ecclesiastes. I found it quite daunting, but for several years I have been reading and re-reading this book and believe that it holds some very important truths for us as we move into the New Year of 2012.

Here we find Solomon reminiscing over things in his life and when we read the introduction it seems like a very sour note that he is starting on and that despair and disappointment will be the theme of this book. However, what Solomon is trying to get across to his son, Rehoboam, is that life without God is not worth living.

We know that the writer here is Solomon because Solomon was the only son of David that was king of Israel. He is referred to here not with his name Solomon, but as teacher or preacher. The Hebrew word is "qohelet’" and is translated "preacher." The definition would be "a collector of sentences" (and that is what he has done in this book of Ecclesiastes as well as Proverbs), but can also refer to a public speaker.

This word could be translated as a leader in the assembly and this might be what Solomon is doing here in harking back to the days when he led the Israelites into the assembly in worshipping God in 2 Chronicles 5-7 where he "assembled" the people at the dedication of the Temple that he was ordained by God to build.

It seems that Solomon after straying far from God and coming back (Chapter 12) was writing to his son about the mistakes that he had made and to warn his son not to make the same ones. Although written to his son and for his son’s benefit it is timeless in the sense that it can be a great blessing as well as a warning to us in the 21st century. Ultimate truth does not change.

Any fool can learn through experience, but it takes a wise man to learn from the mistakes of others and through that making sure that he does not repeat them himself. Solomon made some bad decisions and he wants his son to learn from his mistakes and not make the same ones.

The word "vanity" (KJV) is used 33 times in this book and in (NIV) the word is "meaningless" and is used 35 times. The Greek word is "hebel" or (rarely in the absolute form) "habel" and is translated as "a vapor, a breath." James tells us in James 4:14, “What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes.”

We need to look at this book from the point of a father writing to his son and trying to warn him of the pitfalls in life and to avoid them at all cost. Solomon wants his son, Rehoboam, to learn from his mistakes and not to repeat them. When I read about Rehoboam’s reign I am not sure that he learned from his father’s mistakes, because it was during Rehoboam’s reign that the kingdom was split.

Solomon was writing about life, not as God intended, but how men experience it without God, like Solomon did. This to me is one of the reasons why this book is so powerful in helping us to make right decisions as we go through life.

So Solomon begins his meditations and thoughts asking the question if there is any meaning or purpose in life. I am sure that many of us, if not all of us, have wondered or asked: What is life all about? I remember asking that question when I was 18 years of age and seeing a brother (26) and a sister (14) get killed in a car accident. They died at a young age and I remember wondering if this is all there is to life? If so, then I should eat, drink and be merry, but if there is more to life then I need to find out what. This would seem to be what Solomon is aiming towards in his mediation and counseling his son - Rehoboam.

WEEKLY LETTER #2 - ECCLECIASTES

Ecclesiastes 1:3-7 “What does man gain from all his labor at which he toils under the sun? Generations come and generations go, but the earth remains forever. The sun rises and the sun sets, and hurries back to where it rises. The wind blows to the south and turns to the north; round and round it goes, ever returning on its course. All streams flow into the sea, yet the sea is never full. To the place the streams come from, there they return again.”

A question arises when reading this passage of Scripture: Where does man go for meaning and purpose in life when God is not in his life? Paul is describing a man without Christ in Ephesians 2:1-4 when he says that man is dead in his trespasses and sins.

Man will try to find meaning and purpose in life through his work, profession, or like T.M. Moore brings out in his expose of Ecclesiastes, through his experiences or the pattern and processes of the created world, but all of this is in vain, says the Teacher. Why? Because he (the Teacher) has done all of these things and found that when it comes to purpose and meaning in life it is lacking.

In Ephesians 2 Paul is saying basically the same thing. In the first few verses Paul is describing what the Ephesians were like when they were away from God. They were dead. The part of them (the spirit) that could know God was dead and no matter what they did in their work, profession, money, fame, etc. - nothing worked right because there was emptiness in their lives.

I often wondered why a man or a woman who seemed to have everything - fame, money, popularity, etc. would commit suicide. The answer is quite simple. Man is made for God and without Him in our lives there is no purpose or meaning.

Man without God gets up in the morning and goes through the same routine every day. It is “the same old - same old” as people say when asked how things are. Life becomes very monotonous and seems to have no rhyme or reason to it. Without God we cannot see the bigger picture of what He is doing, and that equals ‘history.’

I would imagine that Solomon is warning his son Rehoboam not to follow the same path. Perhaps Solomon saw that his son was making the same mistakes and he is warning him that it is a dead end path. We too can learn from this and realize that we are made for God and without Him our lives will be empty and incomplete.

We can observe the patterns of work, life, death, sunrise, wind and water, but they do not give us an answer to why we are here, who we are and what is life all about. When I was 18 and lost a brother and sister in a car accident I too was asking the question: what is life all about? Is there something more to life than what we most usually perceive and what Solomon is describing here in these verses?

So often we look for things that we can see for the reason of being here and we find that it leads only to frustration and despair. This is what Solomon is bringing out.

Writing to the Corinthians Paul told them what was important. “Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.” 2 Corinthians 4:16-18

Solomon is relating to his son Rehoboam directly, but indirectly the Teacher is teaching us. What are our eyes fixed on - our work, or experience, or patterns and processes of this world (sun, wind and water), etc. Or, are we fixing our eyes on that which is unseen, but is eternal?

Our time here on earth is of short duration, but the decisions and choices that are made have eternity in them. We need to choose wisely because one generation comes and one generation goes, and in its going makes room for the one coming. Death takes us all, but after this comes judgment.

It would seem that Solomon is trying to say to his son, “Rehoboam, choose wisely, son. Learn from me and do not make the same mistakes. Life without God is empty and of no account.”

WEEKLY LETTER #3 - ECCLESIASTES

Ecclesiastes 1:8-11 “All things are wearisome, more than one can say. The eye never has enough of seeing, nor the ear its fill of hearing. What has been will be again, what has been done will be done again; there is nothing new under the sun. Is there anything of which one can say, ‘Look! This is something new?’ It was here already, long ago; it was here before our time. There is no remembrance of men of old, and even those who are yet to come will not be remembered by those who follow.”

When I read a passage like this the one thought that comes into my mind is that we never learn from history. The Teacher is bringing out that there is nothing new under the sun. What has been will be again like an endless cycle.

I see the same thing with Satan. His methods are shallow, but they are effective simply because we do not listen or learn our lessons from those who have gone before us. It seems that we go through life with blinders on our eyes unable to see. Perhaps this is what Paul and John meant: “The god of this age has **blinded the minds of unbelievers**, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.” 2 Corinthians 4:4 “But whoever hates his brother **is in the darkness and walks around in the darkness;** he does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded him.” 1 John 2:11

It would seem that Solomon is trying to get his son, Rehoboam, to listen and learn from what he (Solomon) has already experienced. Most of the things that we pursue are of no benefit and often can do harm to us-physically, spiritually and emotionally. It seems that every generation tries the same things that previous generation did in which they did not succeed. Perhaps one of the reasons they try the same thing as the previous generation and do not learn from their forbearers is because they think they can find meaning and purpose in their own life by themselves or on their own terms.

Solomon is trying to bring out to his son as well as to us that everything here on earth is fleeting and pursuing these things in trying to find meaning and purpose as an end in itself will not work. It is a dead end street.

Solomon uses the phrase “under the sun” 29 times in this book and like T.M. Moore says: “It always refers to man’s attempt to make his life make sense apart from God.” Solomon started out with God, but left the Lord and tried to find meaning in life apart from Him and through many trials and mistakes came to the realization that apart from God there is no real sense in this life.

Solomon is trying to get his son Rehoboam to listen and understand that apart from God there is no meaning or purpose to this life and without God we will find frustration, emptiness, fruitless toil and despair. It is only with God that we can begin to understand things that transpire during our short sojourn here on earth, like the suffering, heartache, catastrophes, etc. that happen as well as the courageous acts and sacrifices of many.

One of the principles that come out in Genesis 1 is that every living thing must live in that which it came, in order to sustain life and fulfill the purpose for which it was created. We are made in the image and likeness of God and without Him there is no real meaning in life. It is, like Solomon said - meaningless.

Like it has been said before that any man/woman can learn through experience, but a wise person will learn from the mistakes, blunders, etc. of others and not repeat the same mistakes.

WEEKLY LETTER #4 - ECCLESIASTES

Ecclesiates 1:12-13 “I, the Teacher, was king over Israel in Jerusalem. I devoted myself to study and to explore by wisdom all that is done under heaven.”

When Solomon became king over Israel stepping into the shoes of his father David, he asked the Lord for wisdom. “That night God appeared to Solomon and said to him, ‘Ask for whatever you want me to give you.’ Solomon answered God, ‘You have shown great kindness to David my father and have made me king in his place. Now, Lord God, let your promise to my father David be confirmed, for you have made me king over a people who are as numerous as the dust of the earth. Give me wisdom and knowledge, that I may lead this people, for who is able to govern this great people of yours?’” 2 Chronincles 1:7-10

This wisdom did not come to Solomon all at once, but as he studied, listened, observed, reflected, meditated, asked questions, etc. he grew in wisdom. When we read the Proverbs often we are admonished to gain in knowledge, understanding and to seek wisdom with all of our heart. This is what Solomon did when he became king. The reason that he asked God for wisdom was so that he could be the ruler that would govern the people wisely.

God had anointed Solomon to take over from his father, King David, the throne and Solomon asked for wisdom to do the job ordained for him. How true this is for us as well. God has given to us a job to do, a task to perform and we too need wisdom to fulfill His will for our lives.

The Psalmist tells us that the beginning of wisdom is “the fear of the Lord.” “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; all who follow his precepts have good understanding. To him belongs eternal praise.” (Psalms 111:10) Like everything else in life, wisdom starts with God. “In the beginning God…” (Genesis 1:1) Not only do we start with God, but we end with God. Paul said in the end when Jesus lifts the Kingdom up to the Father and He submits Himself to the Father it is so that “God may be all in all.” (1 Corinthians 15:28)

The beginning of wisdom starts with God, but we are to carry on in study, meditating, reflecting, observing, etc. to gain in wisdom with God being in the center of our thoughts. T.M. Moore says: “But the acquisition of **wisdom requires a lifetime** of living and working in relationship to God by grace through faith.” If God is not in the center then our wisdom becomes warped, darkened like Paul brings out in Romans when men rejected God “their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools.” Romans 1:21-22

We have talked a lot about a Biblical worldview and, I believe, this is what Solomon is bringing out here. When it comes to the issues of life we need to learn, study, reflect, meditate, etc. on what God says. When we are confronted with problems in our daily life we need to take the time to study, reflects, etc. to see what God says about it. It could be that we go to other professionals for help (and they might be God’s way to help us), but we are first to seek God and His enlightenment.

Another phrase that Solomon uses is “under heaven.” This is a phrase that would seem to refer to life as under the tutelage of God and His will. This is especially important for us today in our postmodern culture where we see things in bits and pieces, not the big picture. Because we see things in bits and pieces life often does not make any sense. It is only when we see the overall plan of God that our time in the here and now makes sense and we discover that we have a purpose.

Our Heavenly Father wants us to understand life the way He does and He has made it possible for us to know through study, reflection, etc. Paul tells us that we are to have the “mind of Christ.” He has given us His Spirit to lead us into all truth. We are without excuse. We are to ask, seek and knock and the door to wisdom will be opened to us so that we can have a greater understanding of what God is doing in this world and throughout all of eternity.

WEEKLY LETTER #5 - ECCLESIASTES

Ecclesiastes 1:14-15 “I have seen all the things that are done under the sun; all of them are meaningless, a chasing after the wind. What is twisted cannot be straightened; what is lacking cannot be counted.”

There is a lot that we can learn from Solomon’s instruction to his son Rehoboam. I mentioned before that anyone can learn through experience, but it does take a wise person to learn from the experience of others. On this note we can learn from Solomon.

It seems that Solomon is talking about these matters at the end of his life. He started out well. He prayed and asked God for wisdom that he might lead in the right way the people that he had been entrusted with so that he might fulfill the purpose that God had for him as the king of Israel, but we know that some place down the line his life got off the right track.

In 1 Kings 11 we read that he loved foreign women; he set up places for their idol worship and we read: “As Solomon grew old, his wives turned his heart after other gods, and his heart was not fully devoted to the Lord his God, as the heart of David his father had been.” 1 Kings 11:4

Although he was successful, wealthy, honored, and indulged himself apart from God he found that it is all vanity - meaningless. Solomon found that there was no meaning or permanence for his life and so we find him constantly repeating: “meaningless, meaningless all is meaningless.” Solomon is telling his son and us that no matter what we seek apart from God be it wealth, profession, power, etc. these bring no real and permanent satisfaction in life. It is all just chasing after the wind.

How we need to learn from this instruction of Solomon to his son Rehoboam! There was no-one more prosperous, pursued, explored the different pleasures of life than Solomon. At the end he is saying that without God it is all vanity; meaningless.

Didn’t Jesus bring out the same thing in his famous Sermon of the Mount when He told His disciples to: “But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.” (Matthew 6:33) Jesus said, “all these things will be given to you as well” when we seek first His kingdom. What “things” is He referring to? The ‘things’ mentioned come down to four things we all need: shelter, food, health and our future. I have had the privilege of traveling in many different parts of the world and it is these four things that men seek no matter what culture they come from.

Man tries to gain these things without God. The problem is that they are putting the cart before the horse and it does not work. Jesus said to put **His kingdom** first and all these things will be added. Very simple instruction, but so hard for man to follow, and like Solomon we find that without God life is meaningless.

Solomon wants his son to think carefully about going down the road of self-indulgence. What Solomon is telling his son is also for us. Solomon ‘has been there and done that’ and he is telling us that it is not the path to trod. We need to learn through his experience because it will save us a lot of grief. The pleasures of this world will not satisfy and we will never gain a measure of wholeness and well-being through what the world can offer. If we go down that path we will find that it is empty.

We have an enemy of our soul - Satan. He will come to us through our flesh and the world. We need to learn how to fight the good fight of faith. Paul told Timothy that the way to fight the flesh is to “**flee** youthful lusts, and follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart.” 2 Timothy 2:22

Writing to the church in Rome Paul told us how to fight the world: **“To not conform** any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is — his good, pleasing and perfect will.” Romans 12:2

So we are to **fight the flesh by fleeing** and **the world through being transformed by the renewing of our mind**. This is why the Book of Ecclesiastes is so important, but not just that one book, but all sixty six that make up our Bible. How true Moses’ words were to the children of Israel (and for us today): "Take to heart all the words I have solemnly declared to you this day, so that you may command your children to obey carefully all the words of this law. They are not just idle words for you; **they are your life.”** Deuteronomy 32:46-47

WEEKLY LETTER #6 - ECCLESIATES

Ecclesiastes 1:16-18 “I thought to myself, ‘Look, I have grown and increased in wisdom more than anyone who has ruled over Jerusalem before me; I have experienced much of wisdom and knowledge.’ Then I applied myself to the understanding of wisdom, and also of madness and folly, but I learned that this, too, is a chasing after the wind. For with much wisdom comes much sorrow; the more knowledge, the more grief.”

Solomon was a man who had acquired more wisdom and knowledge than any other. Through God’s gift to him when he prayed for wisdom and through study and hard labor he realized his desire.

This is one of the reasons why I think a study of Ecclesiastes is important. I doubt if I or any of you reading these weeklies will realize the wisdom and knowledge that Solomon had gained, and like Solomon is passing onto his son Rehoboam as well as to us we would be wise to listen to Solomon’s counsel.

I believe it is important to see the personal pronoun ‘I’ coming out. Solomon started out with a request and desire to have wisdom in order to govern God’s people wisely, but now it becomes more about Solomon than God. We will see more of this later on.

When ‘we’ or ‘I’ become the center, as it did with Solomon at some point, we will find that it is never enough. Solomon had everything: wealth, wisdom, servants, wives, concubines, etc. Rehoboam anticipating taking over the crown from his father probably thought that all of this will be his to do whatever he wants. Solomon is warning his son about the dangers of SELF and not God becoming the center. Solomon’s warning to his son is that it is madness and folly like he says in verse 17.

The self-centered life is a theme that runs throughout the Bible. The parables that Jesus gave bring this out such as with the rich farmer in Luke 12:15; the parable of the lost son in Luke 15:11 and the parable of the Pharisee and tax collector in Luke 18:9; just to name a few.

2 Corinthians 5:15 “And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.” Jesus died and rose again that we might be delivered from ourselves. We often deal with sins plural, but forget sin in its singular form **=** SELF. It is from this ‘self’ that we commit sins. Where does anger, pride, lust, etc. come from? SELF! The answer? CHRIST!

Solomon was telling his son that he cannot have it both ways. At the height of his wisdom Solomon decided that he would indulge in some madness and folly. It took the form of taking wives with their gods and the political trappings that came along with it. Soon Solomon’s mind was turned aside from the One and only true God.

The lesson coming out for Rehoboam as well as for us is that we cannot serve two masters. Like Jesus said we will hate the one and love the other. We cannot have it both ways. Might we learn from this!

Solomon began to compromise and even with his great learning, wisdom and knowledge his life began to unravel. He found just like he said:it is madness and folly. “For with much wisdom comes much sorrow; the more knowledge, the more grief.” Sorrow and grief mentioned here in connection with wisdom and knowledge could be referring to temptation. Temptation might look enticing, exciting etc., but we need to recognize it for what it really is: madness and folly. So much of Proverbs talks about this. (Chapters 6 and 7 of Proverbs for example). We need to be careful of the wiles of the devil when he tries to get us to think that there is something better than the Lord and His way.

It seems that Solomon in chapter one is setting the stage for the rest of the chapters. Here we see that wisdom is good and that we must seek wisdom from the Lord in order that we might fulfill the cultural mandate that has been given to us - His Children. We must keep in mind that it is Christ on the throne and not self and that the opposite of wisdom is folly and madness.

I believe Paul summed it up when he said to the church at Rome: “For this very reason, Christ died and returned to life so that he might be the Lord of both the dead and the living.” Romans 14:9

WEEKLY LETTER #7 - ECCLESIASTES

Ecclesiastes 2:1-11

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| When Solomon lays out all that he pursued, one wonders if he saw some of the same ‘lusts’ that drove him, in his own son Rehoboam. He is warning his son, and us: “It is all vanity” and it does not satisfy the longing of the human heart.  It would seem that the way Solomon is describing his actions that he allowed his wisdom and success to go to his head and did not recognize that it is God who gives success as well as wisdom. Again we see the personal pronoun coming out: ‘I’ made, ‘I’ built, ‘I’ planted, ‘I’ bought, ‘I’ had, ‘I’ gathered, ‘I’ had great possessions, etc. It is like T.M Moore says, “Solomon is reporting the facts, but it is how he is reporting them that is disturbing.” Where is God in all he did?  What we see with Solomon here is the so called ‘secular’ man. This type of person is self seeking, indulging himself, his lusts, etc. thinking that real happiness lies in what we possess or what we do. Paul told Timothy that “godliness with contentment is great gain.” I Timothy 6:6  A question that I have asked myself repeatedly is: When it comes to money when is enough, enough? This is the trap that Solomon fell into and he is warning his son that happiness, or fulfillment does not lie in what we have or even do. Happiness lies in our relationship with our Creator. Paul went on to tell Timothy: “If we have food and clothing, we will be content with that. People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction.” I Timothy 6:8-9  Money is not the problem it is the ‘love’ of money that is the problem. Wealth in the hands of a godly person can be a great tool or instrument in the hands of God for good and not evil. Money or wealth is like man himself; it is fleeting. The Psalmist said: “O Lord, what is man that you care for him, the son of man that you think of him? Man is like a breath; his days are like a fleeting shadow.” Psalms 144:3,4  Why do we look to things, wealth, etc. for happiness? You give an animal food and shelter they seem to be satisfied, but for man it seems to be a different story. There is a longing within man for something more and this is what makes man different from an animal. He is made in the image and likeness of Almighty God and until we find our satisfaction in Him there will always be a vacuum in our life. This seems to be summing up what Solomon was trying to get across to his son: Do not leave God out.  In Proverbs Solomon told his son: “Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life.” (Proverbs 4:23) It is out of the heart, the inner sanctum of man, the very issues of life come. Jesus said that out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks and as a man thinks in his heart so is he. No wonder Solomon tells his son and us to guard our heart with all diligence.  What Solomon did was to allow his heart to dictate what he wanted with his desires, passions, lusts, etc. and at the end Solomon recognized that it was all vanity or meaningless - a chasing after the wind. Another lesson that Solomon learned and that he wants us to learn as well is, just as you can’t find satisfaction in mere observation and experience, you won’t find it in pleasure and prosperity.  It is interesting that Solomon in experiencing all of this said that his wisdom never left him. There was, I believe, a sense of guilt that he could not shake. Even today in our secular world people try to live in a way as if God does not exist, but like Paul says in that every man, deep down in his soul, knows differently. “For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened.” Romans 1:21  WEEKLY LETTER#8 - ECCLESIATES  Ecclesiastes 2:15-26  Paul said that “it is appointed unto man once to die and then comes judgment.” Fear of death is something that lingers in the heart of all men. When I saw death for the first time up close when my brother and sister got killed in a car accident it was very final. That was it. There is a ‘finality’ to life in death.  In one sense, like Solomon is bringing out that when it comes to death whether one has pursued wisdom or folly, we are all going to die and we too will fade from memory. However, this is only half true, because like Solomon will explain later on we are made for eternity. We have a tendency to live in the here and now and not see things from the perspective of eternity.  When we look at the ‘here and now’ like so many in the world do and not see things from the perspective of eternity then it really does not make any difference whether we pursue a life of wisdom or folly. Why? Because we are all going to die.  Because we are creatures of time and space it is hard for us to comprehend eternity, let alone think and plan for it. But this we must do, because we have been made for eternity. Solomon later on says: “He has also set eternity in the hearts of men.” (Ecclesiastes 3:11) I remember a longing in my heart for something more than just the finality of life when I saw death for the first time.  To a certain degree Ecclesiastes is showing us how to present the Gospel to a secular unbeliever. Like we do with anyone that we want to present the Gospel to, we start on common ground and then proceed to show the inconsistencies of their secular worldview. Once they begin to see the vanity or meaningless of their life “under the sun” they may be open to consider that which is real and meets the deepest needs of the human heart.  Solomon went on to say: “I hated all the things I had toiled for under the sun, because I must leave them to the one who comes after me. And who knows whether he will be a wise man or a fool? Yet he will have control over all the work into which I have poured my effort and skill under the sun. This too is meaningless.” Ecclesiastes 2:18,19  I wonder if Solomon had his son Rehoboam in mind when he said this. Solomon planned, labored, toiled, etc., but would be leaving it all behind and who knows what will happen to it when he is gone. In this case what will his son do? Will he be wise or foolish? Will he take what Solomon did and build on it or will he waste it. Of course, we know what happened because it was during the reign of Rehoboam that the kingdom was split. (1 Kings 12)  Even with his wisdom and anointing Solomon had missed the mark, and was now writing with his son in mind to learn from his experience and not repeat the same mistakes. What this brings to mind is the need for mentoring and discipleship. However, we also need to keep in mind that we produce what we are. Discipleship and mentoring begins in the home.  Solomon had taken what God had given him and squandered it in selfish pursuits. How often we can do the same thing. What has God given to all of us? TIME! We only have so much time and how we use it will determine our eternal destiny.  In Matthew 16 Jesus told us about two roads that we could pursue: ‘self-pity’ or ‘deny ourselves, pick up the cross and follow Him.’ One is the way of Satan and the other is the way of Christ. We are often presented with the choice of one of these two roads.  Jesus told us to pick up the cross and follow Him, and He gave us three good reasons why we should do this and later on we find that this is what Solomon was bringing out at the end as well.  What are those reasons?   1. Matthew 16:25 “For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it.” It is in following close after Jesus that we find real life. 2. Matthew 16:26 “What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul?” We only have so much time here on earth. My first granddaughter was born recently. Looking at her the thought that came into my mind is: she had a beginning, but there is no ending. Yes, if the Lord tarries there will be death of the body, but the spirit lives on. How she uses the time the Lord gives her will determine her all of eternity. A sobering fact. 3. Matthew 16:27 “For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father's glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what he has done.” Jesus said: “I will come back.” When He does there is only one place that I want to be and that is ‘with Him.’   Solomon sees that all that he sought after was meaningless and he is warning his son to learn from his experience and avoid the same blunders that cost him so many headaches. We must learn the same thing.  Solomon sees that life is a gift from God and we are to be good stewards with it. Solomon took what God gave him and used it for self-indulgence and he is telling his son not to go down the same path. Solomon saw that his way was foolish and he was talking to discourage his son from going down the same path like a fool. “There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death.” Proverbs 16:25  WEEKLY LETTER #9 - ECCLESIASTES  PROPER TIME  Ecclesiastes 3:1, 11 “There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven: He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the hearts of men; yet they cannot fathom what God has done from beginning to end.”  In the first two chapters Solomon gives a brief biographical sketch of what he went through, lessons learned and now giving advice to his son - Rehoboam, not to make the same mistakes.  What Solomon is trying to get across here is that everything has its place in God’s order and without God it does not and will not make sense. It is not that we can understand everything, because we cannot, but this is where faith steps in.  In suffering for the sake of the Gospel Paul made this great declaration of faith: “That is why I am suffering as I am. Yet I am not ashamed, because **I know whom I have believed**, and am **convinced that he is able** to guard what I have entrusted to him for that day.” (2 Timothy 1:12) The key word is “know.” It would seem that what Solomon is trying to get across to his son - Rehoboam is also what Paul is trying to get across to his spiritual son Timothy, that God is in control and he does all things well.  We might not understand everything that happens to us, but like Paul we know that in God’s economy He does all things well. Cutting off ourselves from God we find that everything is vanity or meaningless. Bring God into the situation and it will make sense although we might not understand all of God’s working at the time.  I was reminded of a story I read recently that seems to illustrate this truth quite well. “A king, who did not believe in the goodness of God, had a slave who, in all circumstances, said: ‘My king, do not be discouraged, because everything God does is perfect, no mistakes!’  “One day they went hunting and along the way a wild animal attacked the king. His slave managed to kill the animal, but could not prevent his majesty losing a finger. Furious and without showing his gratitude for being saved, the nobleman said, ‘Is God good? If He was good, I would not have been attacked and lost my finger.’ The slave replied: ‘My king, despite all these things, I can only tell you that God is good, and He knows the reason why for all these things. What God does is perfect. He is never wrong!’  “Outraged by the response, the king ordered the arrest of his slave. Later, he left for another hunt and was captured by savages who made human sacrifices. In the altar, ready to sacrifice the nobleman, the savages found that the victim had lost one of his fingers, so he was released. According to them, he was not complete to be offered to the gods. Upon his return to the palace, he authorized the release of his slave that he received very affectionately and said, ‘My dear, God was really good to me! I was almost killed by the wild men, but for lack of a single finger, I was let go! But I have a question: If God is so good, why did he allow me to put you in jail?’  “The slave replied, ‘My King, if I had gone with you in this hunt, I would have been sacrificed for you, because I have no missing finger, therefore remember that everything God does is perfect. He is never wrong.’”  "As for God, his way is perfect; the word of the Lord is flawless. He is a shield for all who take refuge in him.” 2 Samuel 22: 31  God is never wrong! We can complain about life, but like Solomon is saying here: Everything has a purpose. “This is the day the Lord has made and we will be happy and rejoice in it.” (Psalm 118:24) This should be our attitude that when we wake up in the morning we wake up to His new mercies, and as we go to bed at night we reflect upon the day and see the Lord’s faithfulness that day.  With God we can begin to appreciate the beauty of life around us, even in those events that we do not understand, but by faith ‘know’ that God works out all things for His divine purpose. “And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.” Romans 8:28  WEEKLY LETTER #10 - ECCLESIASTES  Ecclesiastes 3:12-15 “I know that there is nothing better for men than to be happy and do good while they live. That everyone may eat and drink, and find satisfaction in all his toil — this is the gift of God. I know that everything God does will endure forever; nothing can be added to it and nothing taken from it. God does it so that men will revere him. Whatever is has already been, and what will be has been before; and God will call the past to account.”  After Solomon goes through what he had experienced and now what he knows about the Sovereignty of God, seeing something of His works and that man is made for eternity Solomon is more joyful than he was in chapter 2:18-22. Now he says joy and good works should be what man should aim for.  The Psalmist tells us: “Your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.” (Psalms 139:16) Paul goes on to tell us that, “We are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus **to do good works**, which God prepared in advance for us to do.” (Ephesians 2:10)  In these two passages of Scripture (Psalms and Ephesians) we are told that our days were ordained for us and that in Christ Jesus we have been created for good works. These are gifts from God to be received as such. We are to use them as God intends and to know His pleasure in doing so. In the film Chariots of Fire Erick Liddell speaking with his sister said: “God made me fast and when I run I feel the pleasure of God.” My son-in-law plays the drums and he told me the same thing when he is playing the drums in his band Arden Park Roots he feels the pleasure of God.  One of the main points that comes out here is for us to understand what we have been made for and to seek His will in seeing this fulfilled. Sometimes what we are made for might at first not be what we want. This was the case with me. God was calling me to full time service in preaching and doing what I am doing now. However, I thought that I wanted to be an engineer. In seeking His will and finally submitting to it and His will being done I have found what Solomon was trying to get across to his son: “That everyone may eat and drink, and find satisfaction in all his toil — this is the gift of God.” This is the way God intends our life to be: joyful and pleasurable, filled with thanksgiving and good works. Yes, there will be times of hardships, trials and sorrow and not understanding everything that happens to us, but we will know that God is Omniscient and Sovereign - we can rest in Him.  The same routine and pattern in life can lead to despair as we see with Solomon in chapter 1 verses 1-11. However what Solomon seems to be bringing out here in Chapter three is to learn to rest in God knowing that His way has eternity in it, is perfect and will be fulfilled. We need to learn to acknowledge His might and humble ourselves under Him.  The repetition and monotony of life can lead to boredom. How often we have had teen-agers to come and say, “I am bored.” One of the problems is that we live in ‘time and space’ or the ‘here and now,’ the ‘present’ and we do not see the bigger picture of what God is doing. We need to understand that God uses the patterns and repetitions of life to prepare us for what He has ordained us for.  When we stop and think about it we see that the earth keeps turning, the weather changes, the cosmos expands and sun rises, and because of these patterns laws of nature have come into existence. I know that tomorrow the sun will rise and the earth will keep on spinning, etc. What this brings out is the steadfast love of the Lord. God is faithful and we can depend on Him to do what He says.  No wonder the Psalmist says: “The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. **Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they display knowledge**. There is no speech or language where their voice is not heard. Their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world.” Psalms 19:1-4  How we can rejoice that when we wake up in the morning His mercies will be new and when we go to bed at night we can thank Him for His eternal love because of the patterns that have been set into motion.  WEEKLY LETTER #11 - ECCLESIASTES  The next three weekly letters will be dealing with the same passage of Ecclesiastes 3:9-22. The reason for this is that I am looking at this passage of Scripture from different perspectives and felt that it would be too long for just one weekly letter.  Ecclesiastes 3:9-22 “What does the worker gain from his toil? I have seen the burden God has laid on men. He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the hearts of men; yet they cannot fathom what God has done from beginning to end. I know that there is nothing better for men than to be happy and do good while they live.”   |  |  | | --- | --- | | Solomon is going back to chapter two in answering the question raised in verse 9. In chapter two he is dealing with life “under the sun,” but now he is bringing his experience into what he calls “under heaven.” Solomon strayed from the path of wisdom, but now in his old age he has returned.  Solomon is showing that from God’s perspective and our faith in Him the world is crowned with beauty. The Psalmist declares that creation cries out the beauty of God and what He has made.  Often I have prayed: “Lord show me your glory.” The Lord began to show me that all around we can see the glory of God - in the sunrise and sunset, the stars that come out at night, flowers that bloom with their variety of colors, my wife and I have been outside and seen the different forms that clouds in the sky have taken, the birth of our grandchild. All of this brings out the glory of God. (Romans 1:19, 20) My prayer now is: “Open my eyes that I might see how you have ‘made everything beautiful in its time.’” Solomon wants us to open our spiritual eyes and behold the ‘beauty of life’ even in those things that might not make sense to us at the time.  One of the things that I am slowly learning and Solomon is bringing out is that I do not need to figure everything out. I am finding that there is a rest that is in Him as well as trust knowing that He does all things well and that He is working all things towards His eternal purpose. Like I have said before and say again: “We start with God (“In the beginning…”) and we will end with God (“…so that God may be all in all.” 1 Corinthians 15:28). God wins because ALL power is on His side.  It is difficult trying to understand Ecclesiastes structurally, but the underlying theme seems to be that Solomon is trying to make a connection between where he thinks his son is and where he longs for his son to be. In the process much truth is coming out that can be a great help to us who are living “under the sun.”  Jesus said that here on earth we will go through many trials, tribulations, etc. Often when we go through these trials and tribulations we should ask for wisdom, like apostle James admonishes us in James chapter one, but if we do not understand everything that comes our way “we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.” (Romans 8:28) We can rest knowing that God will have the final say.  Not knowing the Lord at the age of 18 I lost a brother and sister in a car accident (I shared this in an earlier e-mail), I remember walking across the yard going into the house when I heard a voice behind me saying, “All things work together for good.” It was an audible voice that I heard. When I turned around to see who was speaking I was quite shocked to find that no one was in back of me. Several years later I learned that this verse (Romans 8:28) was speaking to me. Although the accident was a great loss it was the forerunner in bringing me and my bigger family to the Lord, knowing now that we have eternity in our heart and that we will spend eternity with Him.  Yes, “He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the hearts of men; yet they cannot fathom what God has done from beginning to end. I know that there is nothing better for men than to be happy and do good while they live.” Amen.  It would seem that Solomon is pondering the question that he raised in 2:18-22, but here he is much more hopeful when he considers that we are made for eternity and the fact of God’s sovereignty. Now Solomon is counseling that joy and good works should be our pursuit. This type of life can only be gained by looking to God, resting in who He is and seeking to do His will.  WEEKLY LETTER #12 - ECCLESIASTES   |  | | --- | | Ecclesiastes 3:16-22 “And I saw something else under the sun: In the place of judgment — wickedness was there, in the place of justice — wickedness was there. I thought in my heart, ‘God will bring to judgment both the righteous and the wicked, for there will be a time for every activity, a time for every deed.’ I also thought, ‘As for men, God tests them so that they may see that they are like the animals. Man's fate is like that of the animals; the same fate awaits them both: As one dies, so dies the other. All have the same breath; man has no advantage over the animal. Everything is meaningless. All go to the same place; all come from dust, and to dust all return. Who knows if the spirit of man rises upward and if the spirit of the animal goes down into the earth?’ So I saw that there is nothing better for a man than to enjoy his work, because that is his lot. For who can bring him to see what will happen after him?”  It would seem that Solomon is realizing that the outcome for the man living “under the sun” without God will be wickedness. In the place of judgment and justice there was wickedness that is the outcome of men living under the sun without faith in God.  God takes note of those who so transgress and He will bring them to judgment in His way and in His time. We read in the Scripture that God is often slow to move from the seat of mercy to the seat of judgment, but move He does. Because He is slow to move into the place of judgment we have a tendency to think that we are getting away with sin. However, we also see that when He moves from the seat of judgment to mercy it will sometimes be immediate or simultaneous. The Psalmist in Psalm 10 is bringing this out as well.  In verses 18-21 Solomon is looking at things from “under the sun” perspective. Solomon is hinting at the fact that man without God and apart from any absolutes is no more than beasts.  If man is not made in the image and likeness of God and does not have God’s Word telling us that we are ‘children of God’ then we are no better than the beasts of the field and the same fate awaits us both. How often we have heard how beastly man has been against his fellow man. All we need to do is go back through history and we see the beastiality of man without God and His absolutes.  Isn’t this exactly where evolutionary thinking is taking us today? If we are no different than the animals then we should not be surprised when men act that way. We read: “For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he….” (Proverb 27:3 KJV) Our thinking determines our actions. If we think we are no different than animals then we will act like animals.  It seems from this passage of Scripture that God is testing men and allowing them to embrace worldviews that will be nothing more than vanity, but it behooves those of us who are redeemed to make sure that we embrace a Biblical worldview. Again life without God leads to animalistic behavior where nothing seems to make sense.  In conclusion in verse 22 Solomon says to the man “under heaven:” “So I saw that there is nothing better for a man than to enjoy his work, because that is his lot. For who can bring him to see what will happen after him?” In other words ‘today’ is all that a man “under the sun” has. Animals do not think about death etc. do not go into depression over what might be, but seize today. If a man “under the sun” cannot enjoy his work, toil, etc. then he does not have anything to live for. Do not lose time fretting over things that you cannot know. Animals are not losing sleep over the possibility of death, etc. This seems to be the theme of Solomon’s argument and reasoning to his son Rehoboam.  However, we know that man is different than the animals. We know that life under the sun without God has no reason to it, but when our life is tied in with God we see that even the mundane tasks take on value and purpose. We know that there is a God and that we are made in His image and likeness. We know that we have eternity in our hearts.  This, to me, is a message that needs to be delivered to our secular age. Without God there is no rhyme or reason to life “under the sun,” but with God there is real purpose with joy, etc.  WEEKLY LETTER #13 - ECCLESIASTES  Ecclesiastes 3:15-22  Solomon tells us: “Whatever God does endures forever; nothing can be added to it, nor anything taken from it.” We see from this that His purpose and His plans are unalterable. And this is why if we can learn to rest in who He is and what He is doing as well as taking the gifts that He has given to us and use them for His purposes and so we can find meaning in this life.  Many find that life can be very monotonous which in turn can lead to disillusionment and in some cases despair. However, Solomon is trying to bring out that life does not have to be the same old, same old. We see that God often even uses ‘the same routines’ to accomplish His purpose.  When we bring God into the picture, the patterns and routines bring a great comfort. But for many without God it can and does become very monotonous. Psalms19 is bringing out the routine and pattern that God has set in motion showing us that it is by His Word that He sustains all things. (Hebrews 1:3)  These patterns and routines have become set laws and something that we can count on. We know that the sun will rise in the morning and that the cosmos is being held together by these laws by the very Word of God.  This routine is showing us the steadfast love and faithfulness of God. Knowing that He upholds all things by His Word and seeing the patterns and routines (laws) that govern us - brings us (or it should bring us) to put our confidence in Him knowing that His Word is true.  We see from verses 16 and 17 that Solomon does not gloss over some things that seem hard to understand, like for example: “Moreover, I saw under the sun that in the **place of justice, even there was wickedness, and in the place of righteousness, even there was wickedness.”** (vs.16) These are some of the things that we will see “under the sun” when men live apart from God.  But like Solomon is bringing out in vs.17 God takes note of those who do wrong and all will be brought into judgment. There is a time for everything and God will deal with it. Men might think they are getting away with it, but be sure that “their sin will find them out.” (Numbers 32:23) Wickedness might have its season, but God sees and knows all about it. Solomon says to not be surprised by it. The Psalmist in Psalms10 brings out the effects of the fall of man into sin.  If we carry on with the same thought that was in the previous paragraph in verse 18 we see that God is testing the “children of men” so that they see themselves as mere beasts. God is showing the world that without God and His absolutes we are nothing more than beasts. I was watching a YouTube video of a gang of teenagers ganging up on another teenager. They knocked him down and while down they all came like a pack of wolves to kick and hit. The thought in my mind was that this is exactly what Solomon is describing in this passage, that without God and absolutes we are beasts.  If all we have is Darwin’s worldview that men are not made in the image of God and without God’s Word telling us who we are, then we are left to conclude that man is no different from the beasts of the field. And the display of a beastly conduct that was shown in the YouTube piece is to be expected and we are all consigned to the same fate.  With vs. 22 we see the bottom line of what Solomon is trying to communicate on how we should live “under the heavens.” “So I saw that there is nothing better than that a man should rejoice in his work, for that is his lot. Who can bring him to see what will be after him?”  One of the things that the Lord has been speaking to me about over the years is learning to live one day at a time. It does not mean we do not think about the past, because from the past (history) we can learn, nor does it mean we do not think about tomorrow (future) because we can and need to plan and prepare. What it means “to live one day at a time” is to realize that **this is the day the Lord has made and I will be happy and rejoice in it**, this is the day the Lord has given me. I have no promise of tomorrow; that I will be alive or have no problems.  The Illinois Medical Journal had this article which I thought was quite appropriate: *“There are two days in every week about which we should not worry - two days which should be kept from fear and apprehension.*  *“One of these days is ‘yesterday,’ with its mistakes and cares, its aches and pains, its faults and blunders. Yesterday has passed forever beyond our control. All the money in the world cannot bring back yesterday. We cannot erase a single word we said.*  *“The other day we should not worry about is ‘tomorrow,’ with its possible adversities, its burdens, its large promise and performance. Tomorrow also is beyond our immediate control.*  *“Tomorrow’s sun will rise either in splendor or behind a mask of clouds, but it will rise. Until it does, we have no stake in tomorrow, for it is yet unborn.*  *“That leaves only one day: ‘today.’ Any man can fight the battles of just one day. It is only when you and I add the burden of those two awful eternities of yesterday and tomorrow that we are liable to break down.”*  Thus all a man “under the sun” has is the day before him and the work of his hands. | |   WEEKLY LETTER #14 - ECCLESIASTES  Ecclesiastes 4:1-4 “Again I looked and saw all the oppression that was taking place under the sun: I saw the tears of the oppressed — and they have no comforter; power was on the side of their oppressors — and they have no comforter. And I declared that the dead, who had already died, are happier than the living, who are still alive. But better than both is he who has not yet been, who has not seen the evil that is done under the sun. And I saw that all labor and all achievement spring from man's envy of his neighbor. This too is meaningless, a chasing after the wind.”  It is interesting that what Solomon saw in his own day “under the sun” is what we see today “under the sun.” The word oppression can also be translated- fraud, deception or wrongdoing. Perhaps this makes more sense to us here in the West, but in other parts of the world the word oppression would be quite apt.  Throughout history we see how “power was on the side of the oppressors” and people were taking advantage of one another. Why is this? In my last weekly letter I mentioned Proverbs 23:7: “For as a man thinketh in his heart, so is he.” (KJV) When a person’s frame of reference is not a Biblical worldview this is what happens. Why? Because when there are no absolutes people do what they think is right in their own minds and hearts, trying to get away with as much as they possibly can. The attitude is: It is not what we do that is wrong, but the getting caught of it.  Those who have no power are on the short end of the stick and like Solomon said, “there is no comforter.” How often throughout history we have seen this repeated time and time again. Even today if we took a quick survey of the world we would see this coming out in country after country. In 1992 the USA sent in 27,000 troops to keep supplies lines open to get relief to the hundreds of thousands that were being oppressed in Somalia. However, what do we have today in 2012? The same thing. The series of weeklies that I did on “Terror to Triumph” brings this out as we looked down throughout the ages.  The theme that Solomon seems to be bringing out is ‘life without God is nothing to rejoice over,’ and it is a theme that often in the next few chapters we will see.  It would seem that what Solomon is doing now with his son Rehoboam is bringing him down to earth to face the realities that are in everyday life. Those of us, especially here in the West, have a tendency to not realize or understand the evil that is in the world. Margaret Thatcher said in her book STATECRAFT that every politician needs to be faced with evil at least once in their career. She said that when she went to Bosnia and saw the horrors of what was done that she came face to face with evil, and it scared her.  Solomon said: “And I declared that the dead, who had already died, are happier than the living, who are still alive. But better than both is he who has not yet been, who has not seen the evil that is done under the sun.”  If we do look at life from a purely secular viewpoint and see the pain and suffering in the world a ‘secular’ man could and would say that it is better to be dead or better yet not to even have been born.  We see this type of reasoning coming out with parents who do not want to have any children because they do not want to bring them into such a world. I have heard young parents saying just that, but if we leave God out of the picture the world could be a horrible place to live.  My wife and I just got our first granddaughter (we already have two grandsons) and I was looking at her photo and the thoughts running through my mind are the things that she will face in life. However, what brings me great consolation is the fact that my daughter and son-in-law love the Lord and want to bring her up with a Biblical worldview. I believe that one of the reasons why people commit suicide or opt for euthanasia is because of what Solomon is talking about here.  Solomon is constantly repeating the truth that when God is taken out of the picture then there is nothing but hopelessness and despair. When as a teenager I saw my brother and sister killed in a car accident and because I did not know the Lord, there was such a sense of despair within me. Take away eternity realities and absolutes and what are you left with? Despair, hopelessness and a sense of ‘what is the use?’ Here in the West, this is a problem that is facing our youth more and more.  Our existentialist philosophers often bring out the view that is being expressed here - that life is absurd and isn’t worth living. Our postmodern thinking is bringing this in and it is something that we must fight against, to expose this way of thinking is the God’s worldview; the Biblical worldview.  The question that comes up in verse 4 is: Why do people (under the sun) go to work? Is it to find meaning in life? Is it to get the better things of life - to have more? But then this begs the question: When is enough, enough? How much do we need to be happy? Will a bigger house, better car or some other gadget, more money in the bank make us happy or content with life? If we do not get our values from God then we will then get them from what surrounds us and in a secular world they will be values that will never bring contentment. Jesus said, “For that which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God.” Luke 16:15  WEEKLY LETTER #15 - ECCLESIASTES  Ecclesiastes 4:5-8 “The fool folds his hands and ruins himself. Better one handful with tranquility than two handfuls with toil and chasing after the wind. Again I saw something meaningless under the sun: There was a man all alone; he had neither son nor brother. There was no end to his toil, yet his eyes were not content with his wealth. ‘For whom am I toiling," he asked, "and why am I depriving myself of enjoyment?’ This too is meaningless — a miserable business!”   |  | | --- | | Solomon continues on to describe “life under the sun” by pointing out the fool and the diligent man. The fool is the one who will not exert himself over anything. All he wants to do is tend to his own selfish interests and has no aspirations whatsoever and ultimately he comes to ruin. (vs.5)  On the other hand the diligent man is busy with as many projects as he can. For some reason he thinks life centers around things, work, experience, etc. Just a side note that this is something we can find in Christian work as well. We can be so busy in God’s work that we forget what is important. We can forget that God does provide periods of rest. Often we see Jesus pulling aside with His disciples to rest.  God wants us to work, but also we need to rest. But what is important is the ‘rest’ the Lord provides that we read about in Matthew 11:28-30: "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."  One of the things that we need to learn from the diligent man here is that we can take on so many projects, etc. that we get out of the sphere that God has given to us. God, just like Paul, has given us ‘sphere’ or ‘field’ that we are to work in. It is in that sphere that we have the anointing of God. But what so often happens is that we get out of that sphere we lose the anointing of God and find that we are working in the flesh instead of in the Spirit. Paul said: “We, however, will not boast beyond proper limits, but will confine our boasting to the **field God has assigned to us**, a field that reaches even to you.” (2 Corinthians 10:13) It is important to know the field that God has assigned to us.  Solomon, I believe, is keeping the fourth commandment of God in mind: Exodus 20:8-11 "Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your manservant or maidservant, nor your animals, nor the alien within your gates. For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.” We need rest for our physical bodies as well as rest for the spirit.  In this passage of Scripture another man is described, one who has no one to support or take care of, but he still works ‘like a dog’ just for his own lusts and desires. This is the man who is missing one important factor in life and that is human relationships. We are made for relationships - first with God and then with our fellowman. We lose them, we lose in life. Life becomes meaningless.  One of the values that man highly values is personal security. Perhaps this is one of the reasons we work and labor so hard, but forget that our security lies in our relationships, first with God and secondly with our fellowman. For those of us who know the Lord this is why I believe relationships in our nuclear family are so important as well as in the family of God. Our security is in relationships.  Solomon is beginning to move into the importance of relationships, but in this postmodern world that we live in, everything is digital where we all have a number and not a name. I told my two daughters that to be successful in life they need to learn how to develop and maintain meaningful relationships first with God and secondly within the family. |   WEEKLY LETTER #16 - ECCLESIASTES  Ecclesiastes 4:9-12 “Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their work: If one falls down, his friend can help him up. But pity the man who falls and has no one to help him up! Also, if two lie down together, they will keep warm. But how can one keep warm alone? Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken.”  Solomon is bringing out to his son, Rehoboam, that there is more to life than getting wealth and spending it; everybody needs other people. We cannot just think about ourselves and try to accumulate things and be successful.  We need other people in our lives. We do not live like an island off to ourselves, but we are made for community. However, we need to choose our friends wisely. Proverbs 24:1-2 tells us: “Do not envy wicked men, do not desire their company; for their hearts plot violence, and their lips talk about making trouble.” We find that we become like the company we keep.  When Solomon died his son Rehoboam took over, he asked for advice from the elders (who gave him wise counsel) but instead we read that he then went to the young men that he grew up with and asked and followed the counsel that they gave. The result – the kingdom was divided. (2 Chronicles 10:6-11)  Several years ago Gordon McDonald and his wife were speaking to the leaders in Operation Mobilization. My wife and I had breakfast with him and his wife. When he found out that I had been for a number of years the director of Doulos, one of Operation Mobilization ships, he asked me: What did you learn being on board a ship for seven years with three hundred people coming from about 40 different nations and representing all of the different denominations?  It was a good question. When I thought more about it I had to say that the one thing the Lord taught me (and He still is teaching me, I don’t think we ever fully learn) was the importance of relationships, how to build and maintain relationships.  When we mention relationships we need to define what we are talking about. There has been much confusion and misunderstanding when it comes to relationships and what they really mean.  Often people think that to have a right relationship we must all think alike. Isn’t this what Scripture teaches that if we are in Christ we all think alike?  Although we do not think alike we are to think together. So good relationships mean we think together. We see the importance of this coming out with the different nationalities. Different nationalities will think differently, but to have right relationships we think together.  Having right relationships does not mean that there will not be differences of opinion. It is only natural that if we think differently that there will be differences in our opinions.  What I have discovered over the years is that we need these differences of opinions, this different thinking on different issues. This is the beauty of the Body of Christ. There is no one person who has all the truth, who has all the wisdom, etc. This is why we need one another and the different ways of thinking. When we come to think together we can begin to see a bigger picture of who Christ really is through His Body.  Some people think that to have right relationships there will be no more conflicts. How untrue this is. It is true that in a marriage that is maturing over the years that conflicts will become less and less. Conflicts are not always bad, but often necessary for spiritual growth.  Having conflicts is not necessarily a bad sign as far as relationships are concerned. Conflicts are not the real concern, but working them out is the important thing in relationships.  If I understand Scripture correctly the Body of Christ functions according to how the interpersonal relationships are functioning. If the relationships are not right then the Body is not right. Broken relationships more than anything else hinder the growth.  Every day you and I allow evil things to come into our hearts. We need our brothers and sisters in Christ who can help us see these things so that they might be taken out of our lives. Jeremiah 17:9 says: "The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?" I need my brother to help me make sure that my heart is not deceiving me.  Another reason why relationships are important in the body of Christ is what I read in Matthew 18:18-20 "I tell you the truth, whatever you **bind** on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you **loose** on earth will be loosed in heaven. Again, I tell you that if two of you on earth **agree** about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. For where two or three come together in my name, **there am I with them."**  I think it is interesting to see that these three promises: the power to bind and loose, answers to prayer and the presence of the Lord – are conditional upon our relationship with one another and are sandwiched in between reconciliation and perpetual forgiveness both of which are necessary for maintaining right relationships. Yes, we are made for community and we need to work out our relationships with one another.  WEEKLY LETTER #17 - ECCLESIASTES  Ecclesiastes 4:13-16 “Better a poor but wise youth than an old but foolish king who no longer knows how to take warning. The youth may have come from prison to the kingship, or he may have been born in poverty within his kingdom. I saw that all who lived and walked under the sun followed the youth, the king's successor. There was no end to all the people who were before them. But those who came later were not pleased with the successor. This too is meaningless, a chasing after the wind.”  In reading this passage of Scripture one wonders if Solomon is reflecting back on his own experiences, or thinking back to his own youthful wisdom or perhaps even trying to relive them. It seems that he is relating his own experience and now beginning to take this advice in his old age, and at the same time trying to warn his son Rehoboam not to make the same mistake.  It would seem that Solomon is concerned about Rehoboam on whether he will be wise – like his father was in his youth and now again in his old age – or will Rehoboam not be remembered fondly, or be quickly forgotten as verse 16 seems to bring out.  However, in this passage there is something else that comes out which I think is very important and relevant to the time that we live in, especially here in the West. That is the importance of living for the generations and the future, not just for the present moment.  We have here in the West what we can call "The Hezekiah Syndrome" which we read about in 2 Kings 20:19 “‘The word of the Lord you have spoken is good,’ Hezekiah replied. For he thought, **‘Will there not be peace and security in my lifetime?’”**  Hezekiah is taken sick and in answer to prayer God heals him. After he is healed a delegation from Babylon comes and in the process Hezekiah shows them all his treasures and leaves nothing out. Prophet Isaiah comes and tells him that it was a bad thing and will reflect upon future generations. Hezekiah's comment was, **"Will there not be peace and security in my lifetime?”**  Here in the West, especially in the United States, we are piling huge amounts of debt upon future generations – our children’s children. However, the thought is the same as Hezekiah: Will there not be peace and security **in my lifetime**” We do not seem to understand that what we do or not do today affects future generations either for good or bad. This is a theme that runs through Ecclesiastes. (Ecclesiastes 1:11, 2:16, as well as other portions of Scripture such as Psalm 45:17, Psalm 78:1-8, 2 Timothy 2:2)  2 Timothy 2:2 “And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others,” is a principle that we seem to have forgotten today in our families as well as in the church. We are to pass on to future generations that wisdom which others have passed on to us.  In other words, we are part of the past and we are to contribute to the future. We cannot just live for ourselves in the moment. The secularist’s only hope is for the moment. For those of us who called and are in Christ there is far more to life, and like Paul told Timothy we too must pass wisdom on to those who are able to teach others also.  WEEKLY LETTER #18 - ECCLESIASTES  Ecclesiastes 5:1-3  “Guard your steps when you go to the house of God. Go near to listen rather than to offer the sacrifice of fools, who do not know that they do wrong. Do not be quick with your mouth, do not be hasty in your heart to utter anything before God. God is in heaven and you are on earth, so let your words be few. As a dream comes when there are many cares, so the speech of a fool when there are many words.”  In this brief interlude Solomon is giving some instructions on how we should conduct ourselves in the presence of God. Because of the death, burial and resurrection of Christ we can now enter boldly into the very throne room of God. (Hebrews 4:16) However, like Solomon is saying here it is more important to hear from God than to do something for God. Let us not come into the presence of God babbling like a fool.  A fool in Scripture is not someone who is mentally retarded or handicapped, but one who does things without really knowing what he is doing. He is one that will go through the motions of worship, rituals, etc., but without any real knowledge of what or why he is doing it.  We cannot pretend with God; there is to be no ‘play acting’ before God. So often we play act at church and our religious life rather than having a heart-felt experience of being open and transparent with God. So often here in the West church has become more of a cultural activity than a sincere expression of worship of the Almighty – in awe of who God is.  Isaiah gives us a glimpse of what it means when we come into the presence of God. In chapter five he is passing out ‘woe’ to many (and probably rightfully so), but in chapter 6 he comes into the presence of God and what does he say? “‘Woe to me!’ I cried. ‘I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty.’” Isaiah 6:5  In God’s sight words are important and they should be to us as well. With words we can communicate with one another and with God; with words we can convey ideas; with words we can bind and heal and with words we can bring death or life. Words are so important to God that He said: “I tell you that men will have to give account on the day of judgment **for every careless word** they have spoken.” Matthew 12:36  Every culture has what we call “opinion makers.” These are people who use words to make a living - teachers, lawyers, politicians, reporters, news casters, etc. Often they form the opinions of the rest of us. However, I would like to add that those of us who have ‘the kingdom of God within’ (Luke 17:21) should be opinion makers, not because of our own words, but because we have the Word of God. (Hebrews 4:12)  Not only is it wise to let our words be few in the presence of God, but also in counseling. There is a book called THE AWESOME POWER OF THE LISTENING EAR by John Drakeford that brings home an important truth. In counseling, people often want someone to listen and not necessarily to hand out advice. People having the opportunity in expressing themselves to someone who will listen will often solve their own problem.  Yes, God has given us the ability to talk, communicate and we should, but when we come into God’s presence let our words be few and not words that we dream up to try and impress Him or others. I am learning that my prayer life (using words) take on a whole new meaning through using the Psalms for my platform in meeting with God. "And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites (play actors), for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full.” Matthew 6:5  It would seem that Solomon is counseling ‘quiet and humble’ when we come before God in worship, and not to draw attention to ourselves through the many words that we might utter or in any outward public display. With so many words being spoken today it is important for us to have time to reflect, to stop and to listen.  Solomon is speaking to his son. Was Rehoboam faithful in going to the temple? And if so, was he coming like a sincere worshipper or like a fool? Of course we can ask the question: What about us?  WEEKLY LETTER #19 - ECCLESIASTES 5  Ecclesiastes 5:4-7 “When you vow a vow to God, do not delay in paying it, for he has no pleasure in fools. Pay what you vow. It is better that you should not vow than that you should vow and not pay. Let not your mouth lead you into sin, and do not say before the messenger that it was a mistake. Why should god be angry at your voice and destroy the work of your hands? For when dreams increase and words grow many there is vanity, but God is the one you must fear.”  A vow, solemn declaration, like words that we speak should not be taken lightly. How often we do find ourselves breaking our vows to others and to the Lord Himself. Moore says: “For Christians, the most common vows are those we take during the marriage ceremony and those we take upon becoming church members.”  According to verse 6, breaking a vow is a sin and it would seem the Lord does not take it lightly. Just like in our last weekly letter we should not be rash with our mouth so it is with vows-not to be rash in making them without some serious thought.  When reading a passage like this one might begin to think that taking a vow might not be a good thing. However, when we read the Word we do find many of God’s great men/women did make vows and kept them. A good example is the Psalmist himself. “I am under vows to you, O God; I will present my thank offerings to you.” Psalms 56:12  It was A.W. Tozer who said, and I concur, that if you are concerned about spiritual growth, new power in your life, new joy and a new personal revival in your heart you would do well in making certain vows and proceed to keep them. We need to keep Solomon’s advice at heart and not rush into making vows without a lot of thought and heart searching. In other words not to rush into it, and if we do fail we can humbly go to the Lord in repentance and start over.  Billy Graham said that the key to the Christian life is discipline. It is the carnal man who does not want the discipline of such commitments. It would seem from reading Scripture as well as looking at the history of the church that the ones God used are the ones that brought themselves under such a discipline.  In the early years of my Christian life and when I joined Operation Mobilization, I was introduced to the writings of Tozer and one of the first things I read were five vows he brought out that were necessary for all Christians. What were they?  The first vow was to DEAL THOROUGHLY WITH SIN. A problem today is that we do not call sin, sin, but some other name. Instead of repentance we lay down on a couch and have someone to tell us that our problem goes back to our childhood. We need to call if for what it is. If we are jealous then let us call it jealously; if we are suffering from depression because we seem to be unnoticed then let us call it self-pity.  The second vow is TO NEVER OWN ANYTHING. This does not mean that we cannot have things, but it is the idea of possessing that hinders us. “This is mine” is often the refrain that we hear. We recognize, like Solomon brings out later in chapter 5, we brought nothing into this world and we will take nothing out. God is the owner we are the stewards.  The third vow that Tozer recommends is to NEVER DEFEND YOURSELF. We are born with a desire to defend ourselves, but we read what God told Moses “I will be an enemy to your enemies and will oppose those who oppose you.” Exodus 23:22  Or, what Paul told the church at Rome: “Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: ‘It is mine to avenge; I will repay,’ says the Lord.” Romans 12:19  This does not mean that we do not defend our homes, property, family from people who would do bodily harm, but when it comes to our service and reputation we do not need to defend. The Lord will take care of it. My wife and I lived on O.M. ships for a total of ten years. Living on a ship with hundreds of other people coming from different backgrounds, denominations, etc. is like living in a fish bowl 24/7.  Often criticism would come my way regarding my leadership, decisions I made or even to my wife on how to raise children. Often the criticism came from those who did not have children, but had some good theories on how to raise them. I told my wife that all of this is a matter of perspective. It is how we look at the criticism. If what they say is right then we can change and we will be the better for it. We win. If what they say is not right then we have the chance to humble ourselves under the Mighty Hand of God and as we read: He lifts up the humble. Again, we win.  The fourth vow is to NEVER PASS ANYTHING ON ABOUT ANYBODY ELSE THAT WILL HURT THEM. Wouldn’t there be a change for the better in our Christian communities if this vow was taken and kept? So much damage and hurt has been passed on causing many to stumble and fall in their Christian walk.  Finally the last vow that Tozer recommends is to NEVER ACCEPT ANY GLORY. God will not give His glory to another.  Along with this we can ask ourselves the question: What is it that motivates us? Paul said that it was the love of the Lord that motivated him. Is this true with us? If it is not love motivating us then it will be false motivation - pride, reputation building, etc. Satan’s fall was that he wanted to be like the Most High. “You said in your heart, ‘I will ascend to heaven; I will raise my throne above the stars of God; I will sit enthroned on the mount of assembly, on the utmost heights of the sacred mountain. I will ascend above the tops of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High.’” (Isaiah 14:13-14) Our Lord gave up His reputation and so must we.  I am not talking here about sinless perfection, but seriously making vows before the Lord to be the person that God wants. These vows go against human nature. These vows introduce the cross. What does this mean? Nobody ever walks back from carrying his cross. When we pick up the cross we have said our good-byes. We never go back.  WEEKLY LETTER #20 - ECCLESIASTES  Ecclesiastes 5:8-12 “If you see the poor oppressed in a district, and justice and rights denied, do not be surprised at such things; for one official is eyed by a higher one, and over them both are others higher still. The increase from the land is taken by all; the king himself profits from the fields. Whoever loves money never has money enough; whoever loves wealth is never satisfied with his income. This too is meaningless. As goods increase, so do those who consume them. And what benefit are they to the owner except to feast his eyes on them? The sleep of a laborer is sweet, whether he eats little or much, but the abundance of a rich man permits him no sleep.”   |  | | --- | | At times it is not easy to follow what Solomon is trying to bring out. We know that he is speaking with his son Rehoboam in mind and concerned what kind of king he will be and what his responsibilities will be, but at the same time there are further ramifications that can be taken in that we too can learn from.  One truth that Solomon is trying to get across when it comes to his son being king and for any who are in a place of leadership is to see one’s responsibility, to be humble and come to serve.  Verse 8 says, “If you see the poor oppressed in a district, and justice and rights denied, do not be surprised at such things; for one official is eyed by a higher one, and over them both are others higher still.” Like T.M Moore brings out in his interpretation of verse 8: “How great is the king’s responsibility? Whatever goes wrong in remote provinces ultimately comes back to him.” Ultimately the king is responsible for his kingdom and what takes places in every part of it.  When I apply this to what has been taking place here in the States with the latest GSA scandal and how lavishly tax payers money has been spent - it ultimately comes back to the President of the United States. He might not have been personally involved, but, like the king, he is responsible for ‘his kingdom.’ Like President Truman said: “The buck stops here.”  This is also a lesson for anyone in leadership. It is important to realize our sphere that God has given us and to realize our responsibility within that sphere.  Verse 9 says, “The increase from the land is taken by all; the king himself profits from the fields.” Not only do we need to recognize the parameters of our responsibility, but to succeed in leadership we need to keep in mind the need for humility and being a servant. In a country like the United States where we have elected officials it is important that they know they are there to serve not to dictate. Because of the fallenness of man it is easy to see leadership in terms of dictating rather than serving. Jesus was the perfect example of leadership - He came to serve.  Solomon, instructing his son, is going beyond just having power of being the king, to how he needs to see that humility and servanthood makes for success. Also that the love of money or wealth is another trap that many fall into. This is also vanity, so says the teacher.  Wealth attracts many friends, but how true is that kind of friendship? We see the reality of verse 11: “When goods increase, they are increased that eat them.” (ASV) We all want friends because we saw in previous weeklies the importance of community, but we can never buy friends. True friends will come through humility (strength under control) and learning to be a servant.  We have seen in earlier chapters of Ecclesiastes that wealth and riches will never bring satisfaction or happiness. Once riches have gotten us what we want, or think what we want, we soon find emptiness in our lives and happiness is gone along with our friends. The one who would know what he is talking about is Solomon. He had it all; he has been there and done that.  Solomon who has been through it all: power and influence, wealth, etc., if these are the end result it will be nothing more than vanity. Not that there is anything wrong in these things individually, but if they are the end results then they become deceitful and destructive. We see this being played out here in the West through our materialism (abundance of things), relativism (no ultimate truth), narcissism (‘me’ generation) and superficiality (not really meaning what we say).  When we see the unhappiness in so many lives, broken homes, suicides and generally unhappiness among so many we realize the truth of Solomon’s words and the importance of a book like Ecclesiastes. |   In other words we are part of the past and we are to contributions to the WEEKLY LETTER #21 - ECCLESIASTES  Ecclesiastes 5:13-20 “I have seen a grievous evil under the sun: wealth hoarded to the harm of its owner, or wealth lost through some misfortune, so that when he has a son there is nothing left for him. Naked a man comes from his mother's womb, and as he comes, so he departs. He takes nothing from his labor that he can carry in his hand. This too is a grievous evil: As a man comes, so he departs, and what does he gain, since he toils for the wind? All his days he eats in darkness, with great frustration, affliction and anger. Then I realized that it is good and proper for a man to eat and drink, and to find satisfaction in his toilsome labor under the sun during the few days of life God has given him — for this is his lot. Moreover, when God gives any man wealth and possessions, and enables him to enjoy them, to accept his lot and be happy in his work — this is a gift of God. He seldom reflects on the days of his life, because God keeps him occupied with gladness of heart.”   |  | | --- | | In our last weekly we talked about power (leadership) and wealth, but here Solomon is bringing a conclusion concerning wealth. One of the things that comes out is: Wealth is uncertain. In Proverbs Solomon tells us: “Cast but a glance at riches, and they are gone, for they will surely sprout wings and fly off to the sky like an eagle.” Proverbs 23:5  Riches or wealth can hurt us, like the Teacher is saying, or riches can be lost in a bad venture. History backs this up. Do a Google search and you will see many entertainers, venture capitalists and business people who lost everything through overspending or in some bad venture.  Mr. Foreman, who at the age of 45 fought Moorer who was 28 and won with a knock out in the 10th round, was able to come back from the brink of bankruptcy and say: “If you’re confident, you’re wealthy.” He went on to say that he saw men (laborers and longshoremen) who worked on the docks that had a confidence about them. What he meant was that a laborer or longshoreman who has enough equity in his home and enough money in the bank feels secure, but some people, no matter how much money they have never get there. He went on to say: “I’ve seen a lot of guys with millions and they don’t have any confidence, so they’re not wealthy.”  Proverbs 11:28 “Whoever trusts in his riches will fall, but the righteous will thrive like a green leaf.”  In the last weekly letter I mentioned that one of the things that we are faced with in our society is narcissism (me, me, me, etc.). It is hard to get people to think beyond their own interests. We need to go beyond just thinking about ourselves, but also provide for people we are responsible for.  In all of this we come back to the same theme that without God and His perspective we cannot find meaning, purpose and happiness in life. Paul said, “I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want.” Philippians 4:11-12  Perhaps this is what George Foreman was talking about when he was referring to the longshoremen who had confidence.  We need to learn to take what the Lord has given us with thanksgiving and enjoy them. This is something that Solomon seems to be learning in his later years. Perhaps this is something that comes with age. I find myself enjoying things that seemed more like drudgery than enjoyment when I was younger. But it all comes down to one thing and that is being content with what the Lord has given.  So much of our economic downturn is due to a spiritual and moral crisis. When there is no ultimate truth and we make our own truth - then greed, ambition and lust for wealth lead to decisions that lead to compromise, lies and risk of security that threatens any business or financial dealings that we might have. What we have as a financial mess in Europe and the United States today is the result.  If there is no absolute truth then there is no absolute morality, and then anything goes. All sense of right and wrong, responsibility for our neighbors and families, as well as a nation is cast out the window. What is the problem in the Western World? We have lost sight of God. |   WEEKLY LETTER #22 - ECCLESIASTES  Ecclesiastes 6:1-3 "I have seen another evil under the sun, and it weighs heavily on mankind: God gives some people wealth, possessions and honor, so that they lack nothing their hearts desire, but God does not grant them the ability to enjoy them, and strangers enjoy them instead. This is meaningless, a grievous evil. A man may have a hundred children and live many years; yet no matter how long he lives, if he cannot enjoy his prosperity and does not receive proper burial, I say that a stillborn child is better off than he."  When we read verses like this one begins to wonder if Solomon is looking back over his life, realizing that he had everything that he could ever want, but he found too late in life, that none of it brought him enjoyment. Now he is in the process of turning it over to his son, but what will his son do with it? Solomon learned late in his life that God gives us good gifts, but we need to recognize that they are gifts from God and they are to be used for his glory and not for our on self-aggrandizement.  "You make known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand." Psalm 16:11  We see from Psalm 16:11 that real joy does not come from the gifts, but from the Giver; that we have joy in His presence. Along with that joy comes the strength to overcome obstacles, problems, and any other thing that the enemy of our soul might throw at us. Nehemiah said to the men building the wall of Jerusalem: “The joy of the Lord is our strength.” (Nehemiah 8:10) To me the great tragedy of human life is to miss that perfect, good will of God for our lives. Romans 12:1-2  The last thought in this passage of Scripture is the word "evil," but not just evil, but a grievous evil. Why is this so? Because we are made for eternity and like the book of Ecclesiastes tells us we have eternity in our heart. We not only miss God's will in this life, but by missing the Lord we consign ourselves to eternal misery. If we were more mindful of this, perhaps in reaching out to our neighbors we would take heed of Paul's words to his spiritual son Timothy: "And the Lord’s servant must not be quarrelsome but must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful. Opponents must be gently instructed, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth, and that they will come to their senses and escape from the trap of the devil, who has taken them captive to do his will." 2 Timothy 2:24-26  Ecclesiastes 6:3 seems to recap these first two verses. Here we have a man that has many children but with all the 'stuff' that he had he could not enjoy them and even at the end his children have departed and he has no one to bury him; no proper burial.  Solomon is stating that this is no life at all. It would seem to be a life of a man who has a passion for his possessions and not for his children. Could this be a mistake that we make, even those of us in the ministry, where we are consumed with the ministry and neglect our own family? It is not unusual today to find those in full-time ministry being greatly used of God, but their family life is a mess.  We are not to waste our love on our possessions, but first love God and secondly our family. Isn't this a problem that we have, especially here in the Western world, where we have such a breakdown in our families – divorce, fatherless homes, etc.? Like the Teacher is telling us at the end when we need them the most they will not be there for us.  As I have said before that any fool can learn through experience, but it takes a wise man to learn from the experiences and failures of others and not make the same mistakes. Ecclesiastes can teach us so much, but will we learn?  WEEKLY LETTER #23 - ECCLESIASTES  Ecclesiastes 6:4-6 “For it comes in vanity and goes in darkness, and in darkness its name is covered. Moreover, it has not yet seen the sun or known anything, yet it finds rest rather than he. Even though he should live a thousand years twice over, yet enjoy no good – do not all go to the one place?”  Solomon is reiterating the fact that if a man cannot find life "under the heavens" he will not find it "under the sun" either. It is interesting to see how Solomon describes that a stillborn child is better off than the man that he's describing in verses 1-3. No matter how long he lives, how many things he might have, how many experiences he might go through if he cannot enjoy the things God has given then a stillborn child is better off. This man's life is vanity and chasing after the wind.  I think it's interesting to see why Solomon says that a stillborn child is better off. Moore brings out that covenant children, dying in infancy, may be regarded as redeemed and saved on the basis of their parent’s faith. It would seem that this is indicated in the case of the child that was born to Uriah’s wife in second Samuel. He answered, “While the child was still alive, I fasted and wept. I thought, ‘Who knows? The Lord may be gracious to me and let the child live.’ But now that he is dead, why should I go on fasting? Can I bring him back again? I will go to him, but he will not return to me.” 2 Samuel 12:22-23   In the New Testament, Paul would seem to be indicating the same thing. "For the unbelieving husband has been sanctified through his wife, and the unbelieving wife has been sanctified through her believing husband. Otherwise your children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy." 1 Corinthians 7:14  I think it is also important for us to see that the stillborn child is spoken of as though it were a fully human person. It is interesting that the word that is used in Hebrew is the word “nephel” and translated as an untimely birth, an abortion or miscarriage. The Latin word used here in the Vulgate is “abortivum.” In God's sight the child in the womb is not just a blob of tissue like secular man tries to tell us, but is a human being.  The one place mentioned in our text seems to refer to ‘all those who live under the sun’ rather than only to the stillborn child. In other words, a man who lives like this eventually will die and go to a vanity for eternity. So what difference does it make if he lives a thousand or even 2000 years - what does he gain from the good life under the sun?   Jesus tells us in Matthew 16:26: "What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul?" The thought that comes out here is that the greatest commodity that Jesus has given us is "time." If we live our life "under the sun" to gain all that the world has to offer, but do not enjoy it and in the process lose our soul for all eternity, what do we really gain? The right answer should be obvious to any thinking man.  However, the problem is that because of mankind fell into sin our thinking has become twisted and so we find ourselves powerless to escape from the snare of the things in this world. In other words, we need help from above, "the heavens." "But when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption to sonship." Galatians 4:4-5  Solomon is bringing out the need for a Biblical worldview. A worldview is how we screen everything that comes our way in this life. To be a true worldview it must be able to answer three questions. First, where did this universe come from and why is man different from the rest of creation? Secondly, why are we in such a mess? Thirdly, what is the answer or solution? The Biblical worldview is the only right worldview. It would seem that Solomon is trying to get his son set in his thinking with the right worldview in order that when Rehoboam takes over from his father he might govern righteously.   WEEKLY LETTER #24 - ECCLESIASTES  Ecclesiastes 6:7-9 “All man's efforts are for his mouth, yet his appetite is never satisfied. What advantage has a wise man over a fool? What does a poor man gain by knowing how to conduct himself before others? Better what the eye sees than the roving of the appetite. This too is meaningless, a chasing after the wind.”  Again we see Solomon in describing life under the sun that it consists of toiling and eating. However, Solomon is also showing that this does not satisfy man because of the simple fact that man has eternity in his heart. They know that there is something more that they have been made for.  I remember at the age of 18 when a brother and sister died in a horrible car accident having questions and wanting to know if this is all there is. Up to that time my life consisted of toiling and eating and what pleasure I could seek in life “under the sun.” There was a sense within me that there was something more. It was a longing within me, hoping that there was something more to life than what I had seen and experienced in those 18 years of life.  If there is nothing more to life than toiling and eating, like Solomon is saying, what advantage does a man of wisdom have over a fool? Yet we seem to know that wisdom is better than foolishness, but without bringing God into the equation we cannot really account for it. Through this type of reasoning Solomon is trying to bring his son Rehoboam to see and embrace the wisdom of God. “Do not answer a fool according to his folly, or you will be like him yourself. Answer a fool according to his folly, or he will be wise in his own eyes.” Proverbs 26:4-5  We need to understand the truth of Ephesians 2:10 "For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do." We know that we have been created to do good works that He has prepared for us, and it is imperative that we discover what they are because what God has ordained for us is that which has lasting eternal value.  Solomon is showing his son as well as us the logical outcome of life “under the sun.” In other words, if this is the way that we want to live, here will be the outcome of such a life: It will not make sense. If you talk with a man/woman their advice is “eat, drink and be merry.” That is all their life consists of.  When we begin to look and ponder this type of worldview “under the sun” we see those vital questions that we have like who am I, what am I here for, what does my life consist of, etc.? We find that there is no answer that is adequate.  Could verse 9 indicate that Rehoboam’s problem was that he was coveting his father’s wealth, fame and power? Could it be that covetousness is Rehoboam’s problem? It is said that covetousness is the gateway for all types of other sin. This is what James is referring to in James 1:13-15: “When tempted, no one should say, ‘God is tempting me.’ For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.”  Solomon, who had gone through everything in “life under the sun” would want his son not to make the same mistake. Paul in writing to his spiritual son Timothy said something similar. “But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that. People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.” 1 Timothy 6:6-10  Man apart from God will never be satisfied or content. It would seem that this lack of contentment should persuade them to begin to look and ponder the question why and perhaps lead them to the Truth, but the enemy of our souls knows that if man has time to think and ponder he might come to the Truth so he keeps them as busy as possible through entertainment, food, etc.  The one thing that I am seeing over and over again with Ecclesiastes is how the Biblical Worldview is the only right worldview. Without it we go off into many hurtful and harmful side roads that will leave us spiritually, emotionally and intellectually bankrupt.  Also along with this thought is the need for us (the church) to be making disciples to where they are able to think critically, Biblically. Through this we will begin to see the culture change, because the thinking is changing.  WEEKLY LETTER #25 - ECCLESIASTES  Ecclesiastes 6:10-12 “Whatever exists has already been named, and what man is has been known; no man can contend with one who is stronger than he. The more the words, the less the meaning, and how does that profit anyone? For who knows what is good for a man in life, during the few and meaningless days he passes through like a shadow? Who can tell him what will happen under the sun after he is gone?”  “Whatever exists has already been named,” says the Teacher. In other words, what he is telling us is that everything in existence had its unique nature and purpose before man came on to the scene. Why? Because God is the Author of all Creation. We read in the Book of Genesis that God created and gave meaning and purpose to all things, including man.  Everything that exists is there to serve God’s purpose according to His Word. “Your word, O Lord, is eternal; it stands firm in the heavens. Your faithfulness continues through all generations; you established the earth, and it endures. Your laws endure to this day, for all things serve you.” Psalms 119:89-91  Paul went on to say, “And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.” (Romans 8:28) We need to realize this and accept all of life as a gift from God.  This morning I was sharing with others locally, but also on Skype with ones in different countries that we need to find ‘rest’ in the midst of the battle. This is a ‘rest of faith’ that recognizes God as Sovereign over His Creation. He is working all things out for His eternal purpose and real meaning in life comes from knowing Him. “He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty.” (Psalms 91:1) If we are not ‘resting’ could it be that we are not ‘dwelling?’  No man can contend with one that is stronger than himself. Yes, we are made in the image of God, but we are the creature and He is the Creator and in one sense it is futile to try and argue with someone who is stronger than us. Only the fool would try and do so. We need to take to heart: “Thy will be done here on earth as it is in heaven,” in our Lord’s prayer and like Jesus said in the Garden, “Your will, not mine be done.”  In Solomon saying, “The more the words, the less the meaning,” it makes me wonder if there was more than just a monologue from Solomon here. Perhaps Rehoboam was coming out with his explanation, argument, reasoning, justification, etc. until finally Solomon cries out: “The more the words, the less the meaning.”  When it comes to eternal things we need revelation not speculation. We are good at speculating how someone else ought to live, or what they should do, but what do we really know except for what the Lord has revealed to us through His Word. So often we rely upon the speculations of man and not the revelation of God’s Word and we do so to our own hurt.  This is why the Word of God is so important. We need God’s words not man’s word. I have mentioned before that in every culture we have what we call the “opinion makers.” These are men/women who use words to make a living. They form the opinions of a society. We need those who have the Word of God and are not silenced by the “spiral of silence” and are willing to speak the truth with boldness and love. God is ready to reveal to us His Word (revelation), but are we ready to take the time to listen?  Since there is no ultimate truth, we find here in the West a situation similar to what Isaiah was faced with: “Truth has stumbled in the streets, honesty cannot enter. Truth is nowhere to be found, and whoever shuns evil becomes a prey.” (Isaiah 59:14-15) What is the result? No justice and we find good becomes evil and evil becomes good. We find this in the homosexual debate. If we say homosexuality is sin we have become hate mongers, etc.  Man “under the sun” is bound by his own human perspective and understanding and unless we have revelation from God we will not know anything beyond the grave or this material and temporal existence that we have “under the sun.” However, as believers we do know because of the revelation of His Word. Might we spend more time in listening to what God has to say through His Word.  WEEKLY LETTER #26 – ECCLESIASTES  Ecclesiastes 7:1-4 “A good name is better than fine perfume, and the day of death better than the day of birth. It is better to go to a house of mourning than to go to a house of feasting, for death is the destiny of every man; the living should take this to heart. Sorrow is better than laughter, because a sad face is good for the heart. The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning, but the heart of fools is in the house of pleasure.”  I have to admit that it is not easy to follow some of Solomon’s thinking. It is a time like this that I would like to be able to sit down with Solomon and ask what is he talking about here. For example, he says in verse 3, “Sorrow is better than laughter, because a sad face is good for the heart,” but then I read in Proverbs 15:13: “A happy heart makes the face cheerful, but heartache crushes the spirit.” Or, in another translation: “A cheerful heart brings a smile to your face; a sad heart makes it hard to get through the day.” (from THE MESSAGE)  Solomon is trying to get across to his son to focus on things that last in saying that, “A good name is better than fine perfume.” We might have a lot of things of great value (costly perfume), but a good name has lasting value. A good name here brings out the idea of who a man is with his memory, his legacy, how he dealt with others and what he leaves behind.  We know that Solomon is trying to teach his son Rehoboam not to make the same mistakes that he (Solomon) made and that is to not think about himself, but others. It would seem that Solomon is trying to bring out here that what is needed is compassion, learning to see the suffering of others rather than being occupied with one’s own concerns.  For us today this would mean to imitate Christ, “who being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death — even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ.” Philippians 2:6-11  Rehoboam was going to be king in his father’s place. Solomon is telling his son, from past experience, how to be a wise king. We too are kings and priests and Jesus is showing us how we should govern ourselves. (1 Peter 2:9) So what Solomon is talking about in this passage of Scripture is not a call to being morose, but compassionate for others who are going through difficult times.  Solomon is also bringing out the same thought with the idea of death. Not only is he talking about his death, but the death of all men. We all will die. Like someone said the two things that are certain are death and taxes. Because we know that all will die the question is: are we concerned? I know that when I die I have eternal life and it is like Paul said it is better to be absent from the body and present with the Lord. But what about those that do not know the Lord like family members, neighbors, people groups in the world where there is no church, no witness? They all have eternity in their heart; they all have longing for something more than what this life has to offer. Do we have compassion for them?  Just a quick reading of the Gospels shows how often Jesus had compassion when He saw the multitudes. With Jesus, and it must be with us as well, His compassion was not just a feeling, but a call to action. He saw the multitudes and He had compassion and He preached, He healed, He taught and He prayed, and we are told to do likewise.  We see suffering all around us. We see the suffering on TV, but rather than being moved to action we seemed to have become callous and, I am afraid, hard of heart. This is a dangerous place to be.  WEEKLY LETTER #27 - ECCLESIASTES  Ecclesiastes 7:5-10 “It is better to heed a wise man's rebuke than to listen to the song of fools. Like the crackling of thorns under the pot, so is the laughter of fools. This too is meaningless. Extortion turns a wise man into a fool, and a bribe corrupts the heart. The end of a matter is better than its beginning, and patience is better than pride. Do not be quickly provoked in your spirit, for anger resides in the lap of fools. Do not say, ‘Why were the old days better than these?’ For it is not wise to ask such questions.”  In verses 5-7 it would seem that Solomon has Rehoboam's friends in mind. We know that when Solomon dies and his son takes over he goes to his friends that he grew up with to get counsel and to make decisions rather than the elders. The result was catastrophic and divided Israel.  A friend of mine who has a tremendous ministry as an evangelistic coach told me that he sensed that there was real discrimination against the elders (older people) in the church here in the USA. I never thought much about it because most of my ministry was in other parts the world where older people were much appreciated. However, upon reflection I think this brother has a point. So often we see with the young, especially today, looking to their friends for advice and counsel - rather than the parents or their elders.  We too need to keep in mind like Solomon is saying that extortion or a bribe can also turn a wise man into a fool. We might not bribe with money, but with flattering words, promises, etc.  Solomon is trying to get his son, as well as us, to take a long view towards life. It is not how we start, although that is important, but how well do we finish. President Bush said on the six-month anniversary of 9/11 the following: “You will be remembered for how you finished a job not how you started.” This I believe is what Solomon is trying to get across to his son.  The older I get the more I see how impatience is a problem with leaders as well as a lot of people. Often in the Psalms we read the word "wait." How often we are counseled to wait upon the Lord and be content. I have been working on a particular project, now going on for six years, and one of the biggest problems that I have faced is impatience. Looking back over 50 years of ministry in many different countries of the world my biggest mistakes have come, because of a lack of patience. "Be still and know that I am God." How important that is, especially in the area of leadership. Do not allow anger to provoke you into making decisions. Paul said: "In your anger do not sin; do not let the sun go down while you are still angry.” Ephesians 4:26-27  There is a time to be angry when it comes to injustice and other structures of sin that we find in our society that are keeping people in bondage and prison. But when it comes to individuals we must take to heart the scriptural teaching of not allowing the sun to go down on our anger.  One of the vows that I have taken is to "live one day at a time." I found this to be very important when I was traveling abroad. I miss my family and my home and in actuality I really wanted to be there with my family instead of where I was. What this did was that it made me begin to think ahead when I would be there and miss the opportunities that God was giving me for the here and now, the present. I needed to see that every day and all it brings is a gift from God.  It would seem from this passage as Scripture the two things – pride and anger – are the complete opposite of patience. One of the reasons is that it deals with our own "self." Not everything centers around "self." Pride and impatience is a manifestation of the self-life. Perhaps Solomon was reflecting back to chapter 2 with the many references to himself and his achievements.  What is the answer to the self-life? 2 Corinthians 5:15 states: “And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.” To me this is one of the most wonderful versus in the Bible. Christ died that he might deliver me from myself.  WEEKLY LETTER #28 - ECCLESIASTES  Ecclesiastes 7:11-18 “Wisdom, like an inheritance, is a good thing and benefits those who see the sun. Wisdom is a shelter as money is a shelter, but the advantage of knowledge is this: that wisdom preserves the life of its possessor. Consider what God has done: Who can straighten what he has made crooked? When times are good, be happy; but when times are bad, consider: God has made the one as well as the other. Therefore, a man cannot discover anything about his future. In this meaningless life of mine I have seen both of these: a righteous man perishing in his righteousness, and a wicked man living long in his wickedness. Do not be over-righteous, neither be over-wise — why destroy yourself? Do not be over-wicked, and do not be a fool — why die before your time? It is good to grasp the one and not let go of the other. The man who fears God will avoid all [extremes].”  Solomon is very mindful that what he is leaving his son, Rehoboam, is a vast inheritance. Will Rehoboam have the wisdom to not only govern well, but also to leave wisdom for his children? Is this not a lesson for us? Are we not to pass on to our children our heritage, wisdom, our love for God and the desire to serve Him? Should we not expect to see our children standing on our shoulders to go beyond what we have done or at least do what we have done? "The student is not above the teacher, but everyone who is fully trained will be like their teacher." Luke 6:40  We know that even with Solomon in leaving wisdom behind, that Rehoboam seems determined to live life as “under the sun.” This too will be true with many other children as well. Why? Because no matter their upbringing they can still make their own decisions for good or bad, just like we see with Rehoboam. They can choose to live life “under the sun.”  Solomon is also trying to show his son Rehoboam that wealth can blind people, and between wealth and wisdom we ought to make sure that we get wisdom. We see how Proverbs speaks about this. If we had a choice between wealth or gold and silver which one would we choose? "How much better to get wisdom than gold, to get insight rather than silver!" (Proverbs 16:16) Solomon was young man when he took over from his father David and the thing that he asked God was wisdom and because of that wise request God gave him everything else. Solomon knew at the end of his life that wealth does not make one happy, but being a wise man does. Can we learn from the experience of others or do we have to learn going through the hard knocks of life?  We can ask the question: How does wisdom protect us? First, wisdom can help us to avoid traps and stumbling blocks that so many people fall into to their hurt, not only physically but also their eternal destination. Secondly, we see what wisdom accomplishes in the book of Proverbs. "Wisdom will save you from the ways of wicked men, from men whose words are perverse." Proverbs 2:12  Proverbs 2:16 "Wisdom will save you also from the adulterous woman, from the wayward woman with her seductive words." Proverbs 4:6 "Do not forsake wisdom, and she will protect you; love her, and she will watch over you." Proverbs 9:11 "For through wisdom your days will be many, and years will be added to your life." Proverbs 24:3 "By wisdom a house is built, and through understanding it is established." Proverbs 28:26 "Those who trust in themselves are fools, but those who walk in wisdom are kept safe."  What comes out here is that all other things will perish, but wisdom will last - like the kingdom of God. "But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well." (Matthew 6:33) Another reason why wisdom is so important is because verse 13 when we "consider the work of God" we realize that the world works the way God intended for the world to work. Wisdom is what brings us into alignment with the work of God. Many great scientists looking at the creation and the works of God came up with the inventions. They studied how the world works according to God's pattern. For our life to function properly we must work the way God intended. Wisdom is what brings it about. We need to stick to the Divine plan.  Because we have discarded the Word of God we have become foolish; like how foolish our politicians’ decisions have been in my country (USA). It reminds me of what Paul said in Romans: "For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools.” (1:21-22) The truth of Scripture is not meant just for believers, but for all men.  With this thought in mind we must learn to speak God's truth wisely, but with boldness. We must learn how to bring the truth of God's Word into our everyday conversations - in the work place, schools, media, entertainment, politics, etc. One of the first ways to do this is to be ourselves saturated with the Word so that its principles easily flow out of our mouths in a natural way. “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God.” (Colossians 3:16)  I am not sure what is going through Solomon's mind when he said in verse 14, "When times are good, be happy; but when times are bad, consider: God has made the one as well as the other. Therefore, a man cannot discover anything about his future." But, it could be that he was sensing that his son was looking forward to a future of wealth, prestige, comfort, etc. Solomon is bringing out that there will be good times, but also bad times as well. Be ready! God made one as well as the other. A Finnish writer described the importance of dark colors and contrasting hues in a painting as absolutely essential to bring out the brighter highlights and giving depth to the artist’s painting.  I am reminded of a quote from Alan Redpath, a well known British Bible teacher of the last century: "There is nothing, no circumstance, no trouble, no testing - that can EVER touch me until first of all it has gone past God and past Christ, right through to me. If it has come that far, it has come with great purpose, which I may not understand at the moment. But as I refuse to panic, as I lift my eyes up to Him and accept it as come from His throne for some great purpose of blessing to my heart, NO sorrow will disturb me, NO trial will ever disarm me, NO circumstance will cause me to fret. For I shall rest in the joy of what my Lord is; that is the rest of victory."  In the last few verses Solomon is bringing out that a man caught in the snares of sin, living apart from God will not be able to know the joy of the Lord that gives us the strength to push on not only in the midst of the good days, but also the trials and tribulations that will come. |

WEEKLY LETTER #29 - ECCLESIASTES

Ecclesiastes 7:19-24 "Wisdom makes one wise person more powerful than ten rulers in a city. Indeed, there is no one on earth who is righteous, no one who does what is right and never sins. Do not pay attention to every word people say, or you may hear your servant cursing you - for you know in your heart that many times you yourself have cursed others. All this I tested by wisdom and I said, “I am determined to be wise” - but this was beyond me. Whatever exists is far off and most profound - who can discover it?"

This is another passage where I would like to sit down with Solomon and pick his brain to fully understand just what he's getting at here. It would seem that God is communicating through Solomon in pithy proverbs something about life's experience. What can we learn about life's experience through this passage of Scripture?

First of all we need to understand that we do not have all the answers to life experience. There are things in life that I do not fully understand why and how God would allow certain things to happen. I remember in the early days of Operation Mobilization ship ministry how hard it was to pray in the different crew members: captain, first officers, chief engineers, etc., to help run a ship. These were men/women who were qualified, willing to come without pay and raising their own support.

I remember one of our captains and his pregnant wife who came to our ship. He as well as his wife loved the ship which was a great bonus. They loved the ministry and we're happy in it. Their first child was born without a nose. They had to leave the ship and the ministry to move on shore so the child could receive plastic surgery to reconstruct the nose.

Here was a professional that we so desperately needed long-term for the ship ministry. Then this thing happened regarding their daughter. I had a hard time trying to understand what God was doing. Didn't He knit together that little girl in the womb? Didn't God know how we have been praying for a captain who would be committed to serve in the ship ministry long-term? In other words I had many questions, but no real answers. No, we cannot figure everything out, but we can trust the One Who does know everything. And we know that He does all things well.

I believe that eventually I will have answers to some of the things that I now don’t understand. Perhaps one of the reasons is to keep us from pride, being arrogant. We know that pride leads to destruction. God resists the proud, but He gives grace to the humble.

When it comes to sin the apostle Paul echoes the words of Solomon: “We cannot become complacent regarding sin. As it is written, ‘There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands; there is no one who seeks God. All have turned away; they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one.’” Romans 3:10-12

Another thing that we could learn from in this passage of Ecclesiastes is that God has a variety of ways of communicating His truth to us. We see this with Solomon in Ecclesiastes and the book of Proverbs as he communicates especially through life experiences, through pithy quotes and the poetic language in Proverbs. We can learn to be a good communicator of God's truth. God reaches out to us in a variety of ways and so too we must do likewise.

Paul said, "Though I am free and belong to no one, I have made myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible." (1 Corinthians 9:19) We must learn how to communicate God's truth in this generation. I remember my first time preaching in Great Britain, I was given a dictionary of words that I should not use in England. Those were words that I could use in America but would communicate the wrong thing in England. This is true of every culture that I have been in over the years. We need to learn to effectively communicate in these different cultures and to this present generation. Might we learn to be great communicators of God's truth for his glory!

WEEKLY LETTER #30 - ECCLESIASTES

Ecclesiastes 7:25-29 "So I turned my mind to understand, to investigate and to search out wisdom and the scheme of things and to understand the stupidity of wickedness and the madness of folly. I find more bitter than death the woman who is a snare, whose heart is a trap and whose hands are chains. The man who pleases God will escape her, but the sinner she will ensnare. ‘Look,’ says the Teacher, ‘this is what I have discovered: Adding one thing to another to discover the scheme of things - while I was still searching but not finding - I found one upright man among a thousand, but not one upright woman among them all. This only have I found: God created mankind upright, but they have gone in search of many schemes.’”

It would seem from this passage of Scripture that one of Solomon’s main problems was failing to keep watch over his own soul. This is a problem that many of us face. Solomon wanted to be wise and to understand God's ways as well as the folly of sin. But it would seem that he went too far and found out through life experiences something of the madness as well as folly of sin especially regarding wanton women. It is amazing when one stops to think that with all the wisdom that Solomon had, still fell into the snare, and now he is warning his son.

What is our weakness? Sex, alcohol, drugs, or perhaps wanting to have center-stage – are some of our weakness. Solomon seems to indicate that whatever our “snare” is, it will remain with us. T.M. Moore (Director of the Chuck Colson Center for the Centurion Biblical Worldview school of thought) brings out that the word "find" in “I find more bitter than death the woman who is a snare,” has the meaning: "I continue to find." The principle that comes out here is to know our "snare" and stay away from it. A recovering alcoholic wants to stay away from alcohol. Person given over to sexual slavery wants to stay away from places of temptation, etc.

Paul tells Timothy: "But you, man of God, flee from all this, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness."(1Timothy 6:11) These snares come from the world, flesh and of course the devil. We have different ways of fighting these snares and keeping them at bay.  
When it comes to the flesh we need to do like we read in 1Timothy 6:11: "We flee!"

The way we fight the world and the snares that it brings is like Paul said in Romans 12, that we are "not to be conformed to this world." The way we are to fight the Devil is like Peter says:"Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that the family of believers throughout the world is undergoing the same kind of sufferings." 1 Peter 5:9

So often the battle is in our minds. It has been said 'we cannot stop the birds from flying over our heads, but we can stop them from making their nest there.' Life is like the two sides of the same coin. Rather than having the tossing of the coin to see which side it falls on, we can choose which side we want. Will we recognize the temptation, resist it and grow through it or will we yield to it and eventually fall through it into sin?

No matter what the snare is we must recognize it and make sure that we do not put ourselves into a place to be captured by it. We must never allow ourselves to think with pride that we can handle it because, "Pride goes before a fall." Proverbs 16:18

When we look at the problems in the world it easy to see what is wrong, but do we fully understand that we too bring our own sin into the world? We are responsible to rein in that sin or we too will be adding to the ills of the world. I often think of D.L. Moody when he was praying for revival. He drew circle on the ground and then stood in the center of the circle and prayed: “O! Lord send a revival in everything within the circle.”

Solomon was not blaming the women in his life for his downfall, but his own sin. When we point the finger at someone we need to keep in mind that there are four fingers pointing back at us.

We, the church, need to strive more to be a holy community, One body before the Lord and to see godly character develop within ourselves, family as well as the family of God. It is easy to look at the faults that we see in the world and miss our own.

Yes, there are problems in our countries, the world and we, the church, have the answers. But we need to keep in mind 2 Chronicles 7:14: “If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land.”

What is the solution to the ills of the world? We have the answer. We are the people called by His name. We are the answer, but we must humble ourselves, pray, seek His face and turn from our wicked ways. Then God will hear, will forgive and will heal our land.

WEEKLY LETTER #31 – ECCLESIASTES

Ecclesiastes 8:1-6 “Who is like the wise man? Who knows the explanation of things Wisdom brightens a man's face and changes its hard appearance? Obey the king's command, I say, because you took an oath before God. Do not be in a hurry to leave the king's presence. Do not stand up for a bad cause, for he will do whatever he pleases. Since a king's word is supreme, who can say to him, ‘What are you doing?’ Whoever obeys his command will come to no harm, and the wise heart will know the proper time and procedure. For there is a proper time and procedure for every matter, though a man's misery weighs heavily upon him.”

Solomon is constantly trying to to get through to his son Rehoboam the importance of wisdom. Verse 1 is almost like a cry of frustration, whether Solomon's son is listening or not. Wisdom, though it seems unimportant to most when it comes to wealth or having fun, is something that can transform a man/woman and make his face shine.

The other day I was listening to my daughter in a conversation as she related an experience that she had with another person. In the conversation she had brought in several Biblical principles. She did not quote the Scripture verbatim, but the principle. I mentioned to her how important that was and also how pleased I was to hear her quoting Biblical principles in her everyday conversation.

Psalms 119:98-100 “Your commands make me wiser than my enemies, for they are ever with me. I have more insight than all my teachers, for I meditate on your statutes. I have more understanding than the elders, for I obey your precepts.” I mentioned to my daughter how we need to be so saturated with the word of God so that Biblical principles will come forth in everyday conversation. And like the Scripture verse above says it will show that we are wiser than our enemies, our teachers, and even the elders.

One finds that in going through life that the wise man will be the only one able to deal with the problems, frustrations, tribulations, etc. that come with life "under the sun." All the gold and silver cannot help when these problems are staring you in the face. It might give relief for the time, but ultimately it takes wisdom to find a final solution.

One is able to see in a wise man's face the confidence, hope and peace whereas with the fool living his life "under the sun" is in despair and he does not know which way to turn. Our life is made up of decisions that will have to be made and wisdom will help us make the right ones.

Solomon is doing his best to try to communicate to his son, Rehoboam what is important in life. Rehoboam will soon be king and Solomon is trying to get him to see the mistakes that he had made and not to follow in those same footsteps. It would seem from this passage that Rehoboam is probably getting tired of hearing his father mentioning some of these things.

I do not know if Rehoboam was getting tired of listening to his father – the King, but there is a warning not to just walk away. Yes, Solomon made mistakes, but at the end he got back on the right track and he was no one to be trifled with.

Did Rehoboam see his own rebellion? Was he honoring his father – the King? Is there a hint within this passage of Scripture that Solomon might appoint someone else who would follow in his footsteps? Does Rehoboam know that going against the words of the King will bring trouble and frustration? The point in this passage seems to be that if you do not listen to the King’s will and take advantage of his suggestions things might not work out like you hope.

Rehoboam, as well as we, need to understand that rebellion against the governing body that God has set up is rebellion against God Himself – whether in the religious or civil order. When the children of Israel rebelled against Moses and rejected him God said that He – God - was the One being rejected.

Rehoboam was learning that rebellion against his father – Solomon was not something to be trifled with and we too must understand that rebellion against God and His will is a dangerous thing.

In this passage of Scripture an important principle does come out regarding obeying the government that we have. In Acts 4 when Peter and John were told by the governing body – the Sanhedrin – not to speak anymore in the name of Jesus the answer was: We need to obey God and not man. Martin Luther King during the civil right movement in the 60s said, "An unjust law is no law at all."

However, the danger with Rehoboam, and I believe with many in our society today, is that we have a tendency to reject the wisdom, understanding and the laws that have been put in place for our self preservation and in so doing we are in fact rejecting God's will.

WEEKLY LEETER #32 - ECCLESIASTES

Ecclesiastes 8:7-9 “Since no man knows the future, who can tell him what is to come? No man has power over the wind to contain it; so no one has power over the day of his death. As no one is discharged in time of war, so wickedness will not release those who practice it. All this I saw, as I applied my mind to everything done under the sun. There is a time when a man lords it over others to his own hurt. Then too, I saw the wicked buried — those who used to come and go from the holy place and receive praise in the city where they did this. This too is meaningless.”

In a general sense we who know the Lord, know that we have eternal life. However, life here on earth, under the sun, we cannot tell what tomorrow will bring any more than having the power over the wind to contain it or even the day of our death.

Jesus told us in His famous “Sermon on the Mount” that “we should not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself.” Each day has enough trouble of its own. Over the years the one thing that the Lord has been teaching me is to learn to live a day at a time. There is nothing I can do about yesterday because it's already gone. Tomorrow has not come. However, today will be ‘yesterday’ tomorrow, and by living for today I can affect my yesterdays. Does that make sense?

Moses told us in Psalms 90:12: "Teach us to number our days a right, that we may gain a heart of wisdom." It is interesting that he tells us to number our days and not our years. That’s another reminder to live a day at a time and to make each day count for eternity.

Again Solomon is trying to get across to his son that because we cannot know what tomorrow might bring any more than we can control the wind, or know the day of our death or even be deferred in time of war that we need to learn patience.

The point being made here is that you cannot get away with doing evil. We need to remember, God is the one who waits to punish every act of disobedience. The Bible says, "Be sure your sin will find you out," and so it will. Just because sin is not judged immediately does not mean that God has forgotten or that He did not see. It just means that God is slow to move from the mercy seat to the judgment seat, but move He will if sin is un-confessed.

Solomon is bringing out what life is like without God. He has seen it all. Selfish people will be striking one another and they will lie, cheat, steal, oppress, deceive and take advantage of one another.

After they go through all of this they then die. And like most funerals it will be nice enough. We give the person his due, his loved ones will weep, his friends will say that he will be missed, they will bury him and then everyone forgets him. Like Solomon says: "It is meaningless." But God has not forgotten.

WEEKLY LETTER #33 - ECCLESIASTES

Ecclesiastes 8:10-15 “Then too, I saw the wicked buried — those who used to come and go from the holy place and receive praise in the city where they did this. This too is meaningless. When the sentence for a crime is not quickly carried out, the hearts of the people are filled with schemes to do wrong. Although a wicked man commits a hundred crimes and still lives a long time, I know that it will go better with God-fearing men, who are reverent before God. Yet because the wicked do not fear God, it will not go well with them, and their days will not lengthen like a shadow. There is something else meaningless that occurs on earth: righteous men who get what the wicked deserve, and wicked men who get what the righteous deserve. This too, I say, is meaningless. So I commend the enjoyment of life, because nothing is better for a man under the sun than to eat and drink and be glad. Then joy will accompany him in his work all the days of the life God has given him under the sun.”

It would seem from this Scripture passage (verse 10) that Solomon gets upset when he sees active wickedness that is condemned by all but is subject to appeals by lawyers endlessly and no justice seems to go forth. Young people can often see this and think that justice is a joke and that evil can be profitable.

Even at the writing of this, we had the massacre in Aurora, Colorado theater where a lone gunman came in and randomly started shooting killing 12 and wounding 60 others and nine others are in critical condition. Reading some of the things that came out on the Internet about this it is sad that some thought this gunman seemed to be a hero.

When justice is not carried out swiftly it seems to encourage others to follow in their ways with the result that wickedness proliferates among men. But verse 13 brings out that there is a God in heaven and evil men whose life is long and wickedness is kind to them that eventually they will find that God has no compassion for the unrepentant. Those who fear God need not fear death, because God will make sure that all is well with them. It would seem from this passage of Scripture that Solomon is telling his son that he in his rebellion against God may be getting away with a lot of foolishness now but it will not last. Augustine wrote that for those who live a good life – a good life "under the heavens" in the fear of God, there is no such thing as a bad death.

One of the things that come out here in the book of Ecclesiastes is that Solomon is keeping the pressure on his son - and us - that fearing God or not fearing God is a life and death matter. There is a tendency to conclude, like Solomon is bringing out here in this passage that the righteous seem to go through painful, exasperating days while the wicked ones seem to be wealthy, happy and content. Solomon is saying that even this is vanity. This formula to live it up here while you can and enjoy as much of life as you can grab, to enjoy the lust of the flesh will be the only ‘heaven’ that they will know, because soon eternity without God will be before them.

In our evangelical circles today we seem to have forgotten that Hell is real and when we reject the grace of God that this will be our eternal destiny. God has no pleasure in the death of the wicked. He longs to see all men saved.

Solomon who has gone through it all in experiencing the pleasures of this world is now trying to communicate to his son Rehoboam that it is all vanity and though it seems to give a thrill for the moment eventually it leaves a person high and dry.

Jesus was teaching His disciples the same thing when He said, “What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul?” Matthew 16:26

When we read the Gospels we see that so much of Jesus’ teaching is asking questions to cause us to reason and think through and then come up with the proper answer.

So, if we live for the pride of life, the pleasures of this world and the lust of the flesh, then what will we have at the end of our life when we stand before God?

WEEKLY LETTER #34 - ECCLESIASTES

Ecclesiastes 8:16,17 “When I applied my mind to know wisdom and to observe man's labor on earth — his eyes not seeing sleep day or night— then I saw all that God has done. No one can comprehend what goes on under the sun. Despite all his efforts to search it out, man cannot discover its meaning. Even if a wise man claims he knows, he cannot really comprehend it.”

It has been said: “The history of philosophy is the record of the best thoughts of unbelieving men being rejected by the generation that succeeds them, which has its own views rejected by those who follow after.” ‘Under the sun’ men can’t figure out the scheme of things with any kind of lasting satisfaction. God will not allow them to because they have turned away from Him. Solomon is warning Rehoboam that, if he persists in sailing against the wind of God, he will only end up frustrated, defeated, and dead.

Could this be what Paul was referring to in Romans 1:21 “For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened.” I asked my Kanarese translator in Karnataka, India what the word ‘futile’ meant in his language and he said it meant ‘zero,’ ‘nothing.’ Without God our thinking becomes zero, nothing.

Isaiah tells us that God’s “thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways.”(Isaiah 55:8) God’s ways are mysterious and they do not make sense to an unbeliever. But for those of us who believe we know that His ways are just and righteous and that He does all things well. Our calling is to trust in Him and to follow whole heartedly wherever He leads us knowing that His will is good and perfect.

Just in my life time we have gone from one philosophy to another; humanism to modernism and now postmodernism. Because of this we find confusion in the world. We create our own truth and our own reality and then we wonder why nothing seems to make sense regarding the universe that we live in. Could this be one of the reasons why there is such a high suicide rate today, especially among our youth?

We see our foundations crumbling, especially here in the Western world. The Psalmist cries out in Psalms 11:3, “When the foundations are being destroyed, what can the righteous do?" We see the abortions, alternative life styles being advocated, redefining of marriage, etc. and it is easy to just give up fighting for what is right. What can we do?

This is a good question that desires an answer. What can the righteous do?

**Pray**: 2 Chronicles 7:14 "If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land."

**Speak the truth with boldness**: 2 Corinthians 4:13 "It is written: ‘I believed; therefore I have spoken.’ Since we have that same spirit of faith, we also believe and therefore speak."

**Preach the gospel**: Man needs to be changed from within and only the gospel of Jesus Christ can do that. Mark 16:15 "He said to them, “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation." Rom.1:16 “I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power (dynamite) of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile.”

**Disciple – train**: 2 Timothy 2:2 "And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others."

**Stand with those who are taking a stand**: I think of the three men in Daniel 3. “But there are some Jews whom you have set over the affairs of the province of Babylon-Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego — who pay no attention to you, O king. They neither serve your gods nor worship the image of gold you have set up." (Daniel 12:3) There must have been at least 500 Jews in Babylon at that time, but where were they? Worshipping the image of gold?

We need to know that what we believe is true and right, and the stand with those who are standing on that same belief.

WEEKLY LETTER #36 - ECCLESIASTES

Ecclesiastes 9:5-8 “For the living know that they will die, but the dead know nothing; they have no further reward, and even the memory of them is forgotten. Their love, their hate and their jealousy have long since vanished; never again will they have a part in anything that happens under the sun. Go, eat your food with gladness, and drink your wine with a joyful heart, for it is now that God favors what you do.”

It would seem that Solomon in this passage is bringing home to Rehoboam that the living still have hope no matter what is happening. They know that they are going to die but while living they can prepare for what lies ahead. I ended last week's weekly that while we are still living we can make right decisions.

Those who have already died so have their sad and hard existence. The memory of them is swept away; their love, their hate, their vision, their aspirations and their zeal - has all perished with them.

So because their life "under the sun" is rife with disappointment, Solomon says to make the most of it while you are alive. Drink up, enjoy your bit of foolishness and try to be content with it. This is what we see with so many in our society today: “Eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow we die,” so they say. Even with the eating, drinking and trying to be merry there is an emptiness within that none of these things can ever fill.

Paul brings more understanding to this in Ephesians 2: “As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath. But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions — it is by grace you have been saved.” Ephesians 2:1-6

Paul is bringing out what life is like for people "under the sun." First, he says they are dead; they are incomplete. There is something missing and nothing can fill that emptiness except God Himself. We can know God in our spirit through Jesus. Secondly, he is like a puppet and the puppeteer is Satan himself who pulls the strings that makes him follow the ways of the world and the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient.

To me one of the greatest words in the Bible is the word “BUT.” It brings out the other side. Yes, we are dead; we are being manipulated by the ways of this world and the Prince of the air, and there seems to be nothing we can do. BUT GOD has stepped into this scenario and “because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions — it is by grace you have been saved.” Ecclesiastes 2:4-5

However, like Solomon is saying to his son Rehoboam, so we are also told to make the right decisions. Make the right decision by making Christ the center of your life. The choice is yours.

WEEKLY LETTER #37 - ECCLESIASTES

Ecclesiastes 9:8-12 “Always be clothed in white, and always anoint your head with oil. Enjoy life with your wife, whom you love, all the days of this meaningless life that God has given you under the sun— all your meaningless days. For this is your lot in life and in your toilsome labor under the sun. Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might, for in the grave, where you are going, there is neither working nor planning nor knowledge nor wisdom. I have seen something else under the sun: The race is not to the swift or the battle to the strong, nor does food come to the wise or wealth to the brilliant or favor to the learned; but time and chance happen to them all. Moreover, no man knows when his hour will come: As fish are caught in a cruel net, or birds are taken in a snare, so men are trapped by evil times that fall unexpectedly upon them.”

The Preacher is bringing out the gifts that God has given us "under the sun" is to look sharp, smell nice, impress your colleagues, take life in stride and give your love completely to the darling woman of your dreams. Do not gripe and moan your life away. Learn to relax and appreciate what God is giving you because life is short. The grave awaits us all, because when you're dead that's it. Whatever we do, try to make the most of it, because in Sheol or Hell, where everybody who refuses to submit to God are going, there is nothing more to be said or done.

Solomon seems to apologize to his son that he seems to be judging the way the son is living but he is trying to get across that life is short and that when you live apart from God you will lose. He goes on to bring out that he knows his son is filled with doubt and that a lot of things that happen here "under the sun" do not make sense.

For example, it seems that everything is completely the opposite of what it should be – the swift do not win the races, the good do not strike it rich, the strong fall to the weak, the wise go hungry, the ones who seek advantage in great learning fail and time and chance catch up to everybody.

It would seem that this is what David is describing in Psalm 73: “For I envied the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. They have no struggles; their bodies are healthy and strong. They are free from the burdens common to man; they are not plagued by human ills. Therefore pride is their necklace; they clothe themselves with violence. From their callous hearts comes iniquity; the evil conceits of their minds know no limits. They scoff, and speak with malice; in their arrogance they threaten oppression. Their mouths lay claim to heaven, and their tongues take possession of the earth.” Psalms 73:3-9

It is only when David entered the sanctuary that he began to understand what life is all about, and Solomon is trying to tell his son Rehoboam that when you live your life apart from God you will lose. We cannot make sense of what is happening around us without consulting Him.

Also, we do not know the time of our death. When I was talking with my brother and saying that we have longevity on both sides of our family and that we had a long life ahead of us, little did I realize at that time that just one week later he would be dead at the age of 26. His girlfriend was 21, my sister was 14 and her girlfriend was 13.

How then should we live? Since I gave my life to the Lord I want to follow three vows that I have made – **live a day at a time, repent quickly** of any sin that the Holy Spirit has convicted me of and **praise God continuously**.

Let us make **right** decisions.

WEEKLY LETTER #38 - ECCLESIASTES

Ecclesiastes 9:13-18 “I also saw under the sun this example of wisdom that greatly impressed me: There was once a small city with only a few people in it. And a powerful king came against it, surrounded it and built huge siege works against it. Now there lived in that city a man poor but wise, and he saved the city by his wisdom. But nobody remembered that poor man. So I said, ‘Wisdom is better than strength.’ But the poor man's wisdom is despised, and his words are no longer heeded. The quiet words of the wise are more to be heeded than the shouts of a ruler of fools. Wisdom is better than weapons of war, but one sinner destroys much good.”

In this passage as well as the chapter Solomon is referring to “things under the sun,” Solomon uses the phrase “under the sun” 29 times and like T.M. Moore says: “It always refers to man’s attempt to make his life make sense apart from God.”

In this particular passage we see how wisdom that was given by a poor, but wise man delivered a city. However, eventually his wisdom was not listened to and acted on and his wisdom along with the man was soon forgotten.

Another phrase that Solomon uses is “under heaven.” This is a phrase that would seem to refer to life as under the tutelage (guidance, protection and support) of God and His will. In this passage we see how people who are living “under the sun” often disregard the wisdom from heaven.

James brings out the two types of wisdom that would be "under the sun" and the wisdom "from heaven." “Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show it by his good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom. But if you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth. Such wisdom does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, of the devil. For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice. But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere. James 3:13-17

How true it is that we often find a poor, humble man not born into nobility, yet wiser than today’s so-called "elites" who are setting the agenda for us all. What is the difference? One is operating with wisdom "under the sun" and the other is operating with wisdom "from heaven." Putting it into modern-day language one is operating under a humanistic, postmodern worldview whereas the other is operating from a Biblical worldview.

Solomon talking to his son Rehoboam tried to bring out that wisdom is superior to strength. Yet, in this passage we find that the poor man's wisdom – Biblical worldview – is thrown out and a worldly wisdom is brought in. It reminds me of 1 Kings 12:1–16 where Rehoboam, instead of listening to the advice of the elders (wisdom from heaven), listened to the advice of the ones that he grew up (the wisdom of the world) and the result was a kingdom that divided.

So often with our political leaders we find that the wisdom from above is despised and laughed at and they instead try to rally the people by empty promises in order to gain victory and the result is slavery instead of freedom.

We see this today especially here in the Western world where the "wisdom under the sun" has been followed. No weapons can prevail against the sound advice of the true wisdom only found in Heaven with God. No matter how hard we work, no matter how good our plans seem to be, if they have not been devised with God's advice eventually our plans will fall and fail.

WEEKLY LETTER #39 - ECCLESIASTES

Ecclesiastes 10:1-4 “As dead flies give perfume a bad smell, so a little folly outweighs wisdom and honor. The heart of the wise inclines to the right, but the heart of the fool to the left. Even as he walks along the road, the fool lacks sense and shows everyone how stupid he is. If a ruler's anger rises against you, do not leave your post; calmness can lay great errors to rest.”

In this chapter Solomon is showing us that the blessings of common sense compared to the assertions about life “under the sun” far outweighs the latter and that seeking God and His wisdom is far better and preferred to the way of a fool who does not acknowledge God.

From past weekly letters we see that Solomon learned the hard way about injecting a little folly in his quest for wisdom. He is now trying to protect his son, Rehoboam from making the same mistake. It seems to me that he is saying to his son: “Son, learn from my mistakes. I have tried it all and that is not the way to go.” How often we find parents trying to convince their teenager not to make the same mistake that they did, but they did not listen and we had to work with them through the folly that they committed. How much better it would have been if they only would listen.

The fool in Scripture is not someone who is mentally retarded, but someone who says that God does not exist, one who thinks that he/she can get by without believing in God. “The fool says in his heart, "There is no God." They are corrupt, and their ways are vile; there is no one who does good.” (Psalms 53:1) The problem is that man is naturally inclined to go his own foolish ways which he begins to think to be more valid than God’s ways. No wonder God says that His ways are higher than ours. "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, **neither are your ways my ways.**” Isaiah 55:7

Folly will ruin everything that is beautiful and incline our hearts increasingly in the wrong direction. It is interesting, but in many cultures the ‘left’ is equated with evil; as the heart of the fool being drawn to the left. (Ecclesiastes 10:2)

Right now here in the USA we are soon having our presidential elections. We have just finished the Republican convention and at the time of this writing are just finishing the Democratic convention. They decided to leave God out of the Democratic platform and after a fire storm from those who want to keep God in, decided to put God back into their public dialogue, but needed a 2/3rd vote for it to be ratified. The chairman asked for those who wanted God back in the platform to say “yea” and those who did not to say “nay.” I could not believe it, but after three tries it seemed to me that the yeas and the nays were evenly divided, But, the chairman decided on the yeas and then the rest of the people booed.

The lesson we can learn from Solomon is not to see how much folly we can get away with, but how much folly we can get rid of. In his last days Moses warned the children of Israel that folly will find you out**.** “It is mine to avenge; I will repay. **In due time their foot will slip**; their day of disaster is near and their doom rushes upon them." Deuteronomy 32:35

In previous weeklies I have stated that because God is slow to move from the ‘seat of mercy’ to the ‘seat of judgment’ we might think that He has forgotten. But this is not the case. It is just that He is slow in wrath, but quick in mercy.

It is not certain if all these proverbs are Solomon’s. They could have been some of the proverbs of that day compiled together like we have today. Every culture would have their sayings and proverbs that carry an element of truth within them. For example: One that I have heard often when growing up was: “Play with fire and you will get burned.” I am sure that we can think of many more wise proverbs that we have each received in our lifetime.

In closing, I like Philips’ translation of 2 Timothy 1:7: “For God did not give us a spirit of fear, but of power and **sanctified common sense.”**

WEEKLY LETTER #40 - ECCLESIASTES

Ecclesiastes 10:5-9 “There is an evil I have seen under the sun, the sort of error that arises from a ruler: Fools are put in many high positions, while the rich occupy the low ones. I have seen slaves on horseback, while princes go on foot like slaves. Whoever digs a pit may fall into it; whoever breaks through a wall may be bitten by a snake. Whoever quarries stones may be injured by them; whoever splits logs may be endangered by them.”

It seems that Solomon is bringing out here that a fool is a fool whether he is on the throne or not. In other words being a ruler or in a place of authority does not protect one from being a fool. So whether a person in authority blows up and plots revenge or person in authority plays the fool both are an evil that should not be. However, this often is what it is “under the sun,” and we see the damage done by it. It would seem that Solomon is telling his son that being on the throne will not protect him from being found out for his folly.

Secularism seems to be on the rise and faith in God is on the decline here in the West (remember what I said in my last weekly about the democratic convention where they brought God back into the platform and there were loud boos from the crowd). Folly and fools are cropping up all over the place. Often we have seen efforts to pass laws that make absolutely no sense what so ever.

This seems to be what Solomon is bringing out here when he mentions a slave on horseback and the king walking, etc. It makes no sense. The foolishness seems to be spreading like a disease and is beginning to affect our institutions and governing body. Laws and decisions are being made that are going to have catastrophic consequences. We already see this in the Western world with millions of babies being aborted under the disguise of being pro-choice, evil pervading our pop culture, the collapse of our economy and the corruption in the business world. Rehoboam was blinded by his folly and this seems to be the Western world today.

However, just as Solomon did not give up on his son, we must not give up either. We need to stand on godly principles and not be cowered into silence even if someone in authority gets angry. We cannot just walk away from that which we know to be true and right. We need to learn to be firm and convincingly put forth our case and to work towards justice and righteousness. We cannot be overawed by those in authority and be indifferent to bad laws; we cannot continue to have fools in places of authority when there are good able men/women available. We cannot allow the “spiral of silence” to keep us from speaking out. Paul said, **‘I believe therefore I speak.’** This must be our motto as well.

However, we must make sure that there is no folly in our lives. Perhaps we need to meditate on Psalms 139:23,24: “Investigate my life, O God, find out everything about me; Cross-examine and test me, get a clear picture of what I'm about; See for yourself whether I've done anything wrong — then guide me on the road to eternal life.” (THE MESSAGE: The Bible in Contemporary Language)

WEEKLY LETTER #41 - ECCLESIASTES

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| Ecclesiastes 10:8-14 “Whoever digs a pit may fall into it; whoever breaks through a wall may be bitten by a snake. Whoever quarries stones may be injured by them; whoever splits logs may be endangered by them. If the ax is dul land its edge unsharpened, more strength is needed but skill will bring success. If a snake bites before it is charmed, there is no profit for the charmer. Words from a wise man's mouth are gracious, but a fool is consumed by his own lips. At the beginning his words are folly; at the end they are wicked madness — and the fool multiplies words. No one knows what is coming — who can tell him what will happen after him?”  Solomon is trying to convey to his son, Rehoboam that wisdom can save us from pain in risky work like cutting down trees or cutting stones. So we take precautions in work that is risky and in the long run it saves us time. If our axe has lost its bite or sharpness we want to sharpen it rather than trying to keep on working with brute strength. This is just common sense.  Sin has touched everything here on earth and has distorted that which God called “good” when He made it. How often man has taken that which was good and used it in a destructive way. Even the systems that have been set in place for our safety and well-being have been upset and perverted by the folly of men.  For example: Bernie Madoff taking advantage of people through a good system, but using it in a harmful way. (Bernie Madoff had a billion dollar “ponzi scheme” criminally cheating people and getting their money). We see how good gifts that God has given have been taken captive by Satan and used in a destructive way. For example, when drunken drivers killing innocent people and other guilty sex criminals all getting a light sentence because of a sinful notion of what true justice is and that sex between a man and a woman is only “good” inside of marriage; else it is perverted.  It would seem that what Solomon is trying to get across to his son that in the midst of all of this twisted culture that ‘sanctified common sense’ is needed to steer clear of the traps that are there to trip us up. Wisdom is needed. In the Proverbs Solomon often referred to wisdom as being more important than silver and gold.  If we would only stop and ponder in traversing through this life we would realize the importance of wisdom just like we know that a sharp axe will get more work done than a dull one.  The central theme running throughout Proverbs and Ecclesiastes is Solomon’s appeal that in all of our getting - we ought to get wisdom. He is also showing us that wisdom can be found everywhere, but we must look for her (wisdom from heaven), study, meditate and take time to pursue and embrace godly wisdom. The opposite of wisdom is folly and we see what folly has done in the world and even often in the church itself.  Jesus told us that out of the abundance of our heart the mouth speaks and it is often through the words being uttered that the fool betrays his/her true character. We often see the difference between the words of a fool and the words of the wise. The words of the wise will enlighten and give life, but the words of the fool will lead only to more folly and death. Rehoboam would be in a place of leadership as the king and using words, but how would the words spoken by the king affect his followers? Would they leave the followers mocking or admiring him? I think of our public servants today. How do we view them?  Like I have said before, every culture or society has what we call “opinion makers.” These are people who use words to make a living like politicians, lawyers, newspaper reporters, teachers, judges and preachers. The question is: Will the words coming forth be words of wisdom or folly?  How we should take to heart the words of Solomon: “The proverbs of Solomon son of David, king of Israel: for attaining wisdom and discipline; for understanding words of insight; for acquiring a disciplined and prudent life, doing what is right and just and fair; for giving prudence to the simple, knowledge and discretion to the young — let the wise listen and add to their learning, and let the discerning get guidance — for understanding proverbs and parables, the sayings and riddles of the wise.” Proverbs 1:1-6 |

WEEKLY LETTER #42 - ECCLESIASTES

Ecclesiastes 10:15-20 “A fool's work wearies him; he does not know the way to town. Woe to you, O land whose king was a servant and whose princes feast in the morning. Blessed are you, O land whose king is of noble birth and whose princes eat at a proper time — for strength and not for drunkenness. If a man is lazy, the rafters sag; if his hands are idle, the house leaks. A feast is made for laughter, and wine makes life merry, but money is the answer for everything. Do not revile the king even in your thoughts, or curse the rich in your bedroom, because a bird of the air may carry your words, and a bird on the wing may report what you say.”

Coming to the end of this chapter we need to be reminded that Solomon’s intent is to show us that the blessings of common sense compared to the assertions about life “under the sun” far outweighs the latter and that seeking God and His wisdom is far better and preferred to than the way of a fool who does not acknowledge God.

Solomon is bringing out that the life of folly is exhausting to the whole man - physically, spiritually and emotionally and a man keeps on going until he drops. Solomon was a testimony to this and he is the one who said, “All things are wearying.” At the end of a life of folly one should look back and think: What a sad and awful waste!

We learn from Isaiah that a sign of judgment on a nation is that ‘real leadership’ is taken away and folly begins to reign supreme in the land by leaders who know what to do to line their own pockets and secure their own power base. But happy is the land when there is real wisdom in leadership. However, we need to keep in mind that the beginning of wisdom is the fear (reverential trust) of the Lord. “Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord, and the people whom he hath chosen for his own inheritance.” Psalms 33:12

Fools in leadership will think of themselves first and the people they serve last. Rehoboam will do great damage to the nation if he does not understand this teaching from his father. We know from history what happened because of the negligence of Rehoboam - the nation was divided. I think of my own country (USA) of how we are a divided nation today and unless God gives us men/women of good leadership with good wisdom we will soon go the way of many other nations into the dust bin of history.

The two great commandments, Jesus said, are: "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.’” (Matthew 22:37-39) If we are to love our neighbor it requires us to get rid of folly and sin as much as possible because sin and folly hurt not only ourselves, but our neighbors as well. We never sin alone because we will impact others as well. Wisdom, however, will bring blessings to others.

In Proverbs as well as Ecclesiastes Solomon brings out that it is better to get wisdom than gold, silver, bread or wine. Is he right? After more than fifty years in the ministry and traveling to many different countries I would say emphatically YES. One only has to look around him at those who do have the gold, silver, bread and wine and see the emptiness in their lives. Not that we cannot have money, bread and wine, but we recognize the importance of wisdom and we do not neglect it.

We read in Colossians 2:3: “Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” and should realize that to be more like Christ should be our goal; this is wisdom. In Colossians we see that Christ upholds all things through wisdom and through wisdom we too will hold things together - our relationships, marriage, families, etc. Through wisdom we will escape the basic principles and philosophies of this world that do untold damage and tear down the basic structures of our society and culture. Solomon admonishes his son and us: “Get wisdom, get understanding; do not forget my words or swerve from them.” Proverbs 4:5

WEEKLY LETTER #44 - ECCLESIASTES

Ecclesiastes 11:5-8 “As you do not know the path of the wind, or how the body is formed in a mother's womb, so you cannot understand the work of God, the Maker of all things. Sow your seed in the morning, and at evening let not your hands be idle, for you do not know which will succeed, whether this or that, or whether both will do equally well. Light is sweet, and it pleases the eyes to see the sun. However many years a man may live, let him enjoy them all. But let him remember the days of darkness, for they will be many. Everything to come is meaningless.”

We do not know all that Rehoboam is saying to his father, Solomon, but we can gather from what Solomon is saying to his son that the son is coming across as somewhat of a know-it-all. This is probably why Solomon is saying that there are many things you do not know like the path of the wind, how the body is formed in the mother’s womb, etc.

How often we have found our children coming back at us with the same attitude when trying to give them some advice. I am sure if we look back at our own life we probably came across to our own parents in the same way. However, we all soon find out that there are many things in life we do not know, that there are many mysteries in life that even the most intelligent men cannot fathom.

Like I said in previous weeklies, any fool can learn through experience, but it takes a wise man to learn from the advice and mistakes of others. Solomon was not only a father, but he was a man who had 'been there and done that' and to take his advice would have been a wise thing for Rehoboam to do. It would be a wise thing for us to take his advice as well.

There will be many uncertainties, unpredictable circumstances coming our way and many times we will have to cast ourselves completely on God to sort it out. The problem is that if we have not learned to listen to wise counsel then the chances are we will not listen to what God has to say either.

One of the many problems that sin has brought is that we do not like to be told what to do or not do. We do not like the thought that we might not be as smart as we think we are. Take for example an atheist who insists that there is no god. We know that he is a fool because this is what Scripture (God’s truth) says.

Does this atheist know everything? Could it be possible that in this vast universe that he knows very little about that there might be the possibility of God? It is like someone said that if he is not willing to admit the possibility of the existence of God, then he does not know the limits of his knowledge. In other words, there are many mysteries in life that he will never understand and yet he will have to accept them by faith. But faith in what? Chance? His own experience? Human authorities? Chance, one’s own experience and human authorities are a rather shaky foundation to build one’s life on.

Solomon goes on in this passage of Scripture to tell his son that a willingness to work and prosperity go together. God’s command to Adam was to work - tilling the garden. I do not know what was in Rehoboam’s mind, but it seems that there might be the thought that being king was not really a matter of work. In other words a king gets others to work for him. However, we know that is not the case. Serving in public office is hard work.

A good question that we might ask ourselves today is: how do we view work? Answering this question is important because no matter what we do it will require work. To build a strong marriage involves work; to build a strong foundation in our children’s life involves work; to build a business, keeping our property, writing a book or anything else we do will involve work. So one can see how important it is to answer the question: How do we, I, view work?

We read in Scripture that God worked six days and rested on the seventh. It is important for us to see that ‘God worked.’ Work is ordained by God. It is not a necessary evil and we need to approach work with the right attitude. It is important to find out what we are called to do, what He has gifted us for and work at what God has called us to do.

After being gone from my culture for many years I found that many of my peers were talking about retiring. For a time I was taken back because I never really gave it much thought let alone prepare for it. It bothered me so I took it to the Lord.

A question that came up was: What is retirement? I explained it by saying it is when we can quit doing what we don’t want to do and start doing what we want to do and have the finances to do it. So the Lord asked me what I wanted to do? I went through my litany of things that I would like to do: travel, preach, strategize, write, etc. When I got through with my list the Lord asked me another question: What are you doing now? I went through my list: traveling, preaching, writing, strategizing, etc. When the Lord brought me through I saw that according to my own definition of retirement (not what someone else gives me) that I have been retired since I was 21 (this is when I found the Lord). So, yes, work is important, but it is also important to find the work that God has fitted us for.

I am not sure what ‘days of darkness’ is referring to, but it could be referring to death. Days of darkness will come to us all. What do we leave behind? It would seem that what Solomon is counseling his son and us is to make the most of every day. What did the Psalmist say? “This is the day the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.” Psalms 118:24

So considering how we look at work we can ask the question: How do we view each day? Is it a day where we hate to wake up in the morning, drag ourselves out of bed and go to work grumbling and complaining? Or is it a day where we have new opportunities to serve the Lord and meet and talk with Him. Do we see the day with joy and gladness seeing all that the Lord has for us. Even when things do not work out the way we might want we still know that ‘He does all things well.’ Amen?

WEEKLY LETTER #45 - ECCLESIASTES

Ecclesiastes 11:9-10 “Be happy, young man, while you are young, and let your heart give you joy in the days of your youth. Follow the ways of your heart and whatever your eyes see, but know that for all these things God will bring you to judgment. So then, banish anxiety from your heart and cast off the troubles of your body, for youth and vigor are meaningless.”

It seems that Solomon is using sarcasm here with his son. If the son refuses to listen to wise counsel and still wants to go his own way then it would seem that Solomon is saying then go all the way. Make the most of it. Whatever your heart desires and your eyes see - go for it.

**But** (this is the other side of the coin) there will be a consequence; there will be a day of reckoning. God says: "But if you fail to do this, you will be sinning against the Lord; and you may be sure that your sin will find you out.” (Numbers 32:23) We have seen that God is slow to move from the seat of mercy to the seat of judgment, but move He will. Romans 1:18-32 shows us that His wrath is even now being poured out on those who are determined to follow their “under the sun” way of life.

It is important in witnessing to let people know what the consequences are in rejecting the Truth. Solomon is bringing out to his son, and to us, truth and if we reject it there will be judgment. God will judge those who reject the Truth.

Solomon blurts out in verse 10 out of his desire for his son Rehoboam to repent of his sin and folly. He is saying to his son and to us, especially to the young to lay aside foolish ideas and practices of youth and think ahead. Think of your future not only for the rest of your life here in earth, but for all of eternity. Satan is very clever in getting us so wrapped up in the daily things that we do not think or plan ahead. This was true in Solomon’s days and it is true for us as well.

In one sense what Solomon is saying to Rehoboam and to us is that we cannot live “under the sun” and “under heaven” at the same time. We must choose; so choose wisely. We cannot serve two masters. If we try we will find that the world, folly and sin will win at the end.

Today most Christians are trying to straddle the fence. It cannot be. The writer of the Hebrews warns us about this in Hebrews 2:1: “We must pay more careful attention, therefore, to what we have heard, so that **we do not drift away.”** The greatest danger we have is the danger of ‘drifting.’ To drift we do not have to do anything. We can just go along with the flow and the flow (the world) will carry us along, but it will be the way of death.

To keep from drifting we have to be alert, diligent and like writer of Hebrews says: “We must pay more careful attention, therefore, to what we have heard.” We have many Old Testament examples of godly men/women drifting from what the Lord wanted.

Take David and Bathsheba for example. It was a time for kings to go forth to war, but where was David? He was back in the palace; he was idle and he was not careful and it led to drifting into sin.

Samson was a mighty man, a warrior and a Nazarite. There were certain things that a Nazarite could not do, but we find that Samson breaks all God’s rules and eventually winds up losing his sight, his strength and his service. Why? He did not pay attention to what the Lord had said to him.

We are told in Corinthians (10:6 and 11) that these things were written for our benefit, examples that we might learn and not make the same mistake. This is what we have in Ecclesiastes with Solomon telling his son not to walk the same path that he went down and to instead learn from his father's mistakes. This is good advice not only for Rehoboam, but for us as well.

In all of this we need to understand the grace of God. When there is real repentance there is forgiveness although there will be the aftermath of the consequence. David repented and God forgave although the sword entered David’s house and he had to pay back fourfold.

We see Samson repenting and at the end God gives him a great victory over his enemies, but it cost him his life. Lot was another man who not only drifted, but at the end was spared when Sodom and Gomorrah was destroyed. However, he lost his testimony and property, but was spared as if by fire.

How much better it would be if we could only take to heart what has been written and act upon it to save ourselves a heap of trouble. Moving into the last chapter of Ecclesiastes we need to “pay more careful attention, therefore, to what we have heard, so that **we do not drift away.”**

WEEKLY LETTER #46 - ECCLESIASTES

Ecclesiastes 12:1 “Remember your Creator in the days of your youth, before the days of trouble come and the years approach when you will say, "I find no pleasure in them.”

Solomon is bringing his arguments to a conclusion and calling upon his son Rehoboam and us to consider our Creator and devote ourselves to Him entirely showing that this is the only way.

In these last two weekly letters dealing with Ecclesiastes I want to emphasize two words: ‘remember’ and ‘Creator.’

The word ‘remember:” zakar: to remember, to recall, to call to mind. It brings out the idea of ‘paying attention.’ We brought this out in weekly letter #45 that the writer of the Hebrews is bringing the same thought out in Hebrews 2:1 “We must **pay more careful attention**, therefore, to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away.”

In 1 Corinthians 10:6 and 11 we are told that what has been written (in the Old Testament) has been written for our examples. The whole book of Ecclesiastes has been written for our example and we need to pay attention to it. We are without excuse. But, we also have individual examples of how they did not pay attention and we see the results. I mentioned them in letter 45, but I would like to spend a little time in looking at them in detail to see how they ‘drifted away’ from what God wanted because they did not pay attention to what was said.

Lot was Abraham’s nephew (Genesis 12:5). He went with Abraham to the land that God would show Abraham. He must have heard and known all that the Lord was showing his uncle Abraham with the vision as well as understanding all that God was doing as it was being revealed to Abraham. Because of the blessing of the Lord and the increase of life stock they decided to part company. Abraham said that whatever direction Lot would choose he would go in the opposite direction (Genesis 13:8-9). It is interesting to observe the drifting that took place in Lot’s life.

We read in Genesis 13:10 “**Lot looked up and saw** that the whole plain of the Jordan was well watered, like the garden of the Lord, like the land of Egypt, toward Zoar. (This was before the Lord destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah.)”

The first thing that we see with Lot’s drifting is that ‘he saw.’ Often this is where the drifting begins. We see something through the eye gate and it takes us off course. The next step is Genesis 14:12 where we find that Lot is living in Sodom and finally in Genesis 19:1, before Sodom was destroyed, we find that Lot was sitting in the gateway of the city as a leader, a man of standing in this ungodly community. He did not pay attention or remember, and we find him off course. The end result was even though he was spared, he lost his personal testimony, family (except for two daughters) and personal possessions.

The second example is Samson. He was to be raised a Nazarite. This means that he was not to touch anything dead, drink strong drink and not cut his hair. Judges 13:5 “Because you will conceive and give birth to a son **no razor may be used on his head.** The boy is to be a Nazirite, **set apart to God from birth,** and he will begin the deliverance of Israel from the hands of the Philistines." But, like Lot he did not pay attention and in the end with his head in the lap of Delilah his hair is cut and when he heard that the Philistines were upon him he aroused himself to fight, **but he did not know that the Lord had departed**. (Judges 16:20) Because he did not pay attention he lost his sight, strength and service. Yes, at the end there is repentance and God honors him at the last when he takes revenge upon the enemies of God.

One last example is David, king of Israel, a man after God’s own heart and the writer of most of the Psalms that have been a blessing to millions down through the ages. But, we find David drifting. We find David idle when it was a time when kings went out to war. 2 Samuel 11:1 “In the spring, at the time when kings go off to war, David sent Joab out with the king's men and the whole Israelite army.” Where was David? Back at the palace and what happened? He saw a beautiful woman and committed adultery with her.

He tried to cover it up through deceit, lying, etc., but the Bible says: “Be sure that your sin will find you out.” (Numbers 32:23) David when confronted by the prophet Nathan judges himself when he says the man must pay back fourfold in response to a parable that Nathan told. The sword never left David’s house and he paid back fourfold. Yes, David repented (we see this in the Psalms (Psalms chapters 32 and 51) and through God’s grace we find that David became a man after God’s own heart. He fulfilled God’s will. (Acts 13:22)

Solomon is trying to get his son, Rehoboam and us, to remember to pay attention and not make the same mistakes, the same blunders. Let us learn from the mistakes of others so that we might go on to newer heights for the Lord.

WEEKLY LETTER#47 - ECCLESIASTES

Ecclesiastes 12:1,13 and 14 “Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth. 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.”

We are told to remember our Creator. Is there something significant about this? We are not told to remember that He is God Almighty or Lord (although He is), but Creator. What is the significance in remembering Him as Creator? Remembering Him as Creator means that we go back to the beginning (Genesis 1 and 2) to a time when God made men upright to fulfill His original intent. “This only have I found: God made mankind upright, but men have gone in search of many schemes." Ecclesiastes 7:29

I would like to mention several things that come to my mind. First, recognizing that He is the Creator makes me understand that I am the creature - the created one. If I am the created one then I have been created for a purpose and it is imperative for me to know what that purpose is and fulfill it.

“For we are God's workmanship, **created in Christ Jesus to do good works,** which God prepared in advance for us to do.” Ephesians 2:10

In going through the twelve chapters of Ecclesiastes it would seem that Solomon is trying to get across to his son and to us - this important truth. Let us remember this in our youth and learn to fulfill the purpose God has for us. In my early years of fatherhood I used to ask my two daughters what they wanted to be and of course they came through with many things that the world had to offer. I soon learned that I was asking the wrong question and was why I was getting the wrong answer. I then began to ask them what they thought God wanted them to do - letting them know that they have been “**created in Christ Jesus to do good works.”**

The thought or idea of God as the Creator has almost been eradicated from our daily conversation, especially in our universities. He has been replaced by ‘chance,’ ‘time’ and ‘matter,’ etc., but by so doing we have not been able to develop a frame work for our own existence: “why am I here,” “where did this universe come from” and “why am I different from the rest of creation?”

I believe every one of us at one time will ask these questions and perhaps not in the same way, but wondering what life is all about. I began to ask these questions when I was young (18 years of age) when a tragic accident in my family took a brother and a sister in death. However, it was not until I was 21 before I earnestly began my search and said to my Creator, “What would you have me to do?” But, because God as Creator has been replaced by a Darwinian framework our day is becoming more characterized by violence, oppression, uncertainty, despair and depression that has led many young people to commit suicide.

Lastly, by Solomon referring to the “Creator” and pointing his son and us back to the beginning, we can begin to lay out a Biblical worldview (framework) to build our lives on that will sustain us and not only in our youth, but like Solomon says, “…when the keepers of the house tremble, and the strong men stoop, when the grinders cease because they are few, and those looking through the windows grow dim; when the doors to the street are closed and the sound of grinding fades; when men rise up at the sound of birds, but all their songs grow faint; when men are afraid of heights and of dangers in the streets; when the almond tree blossoms and the grasshopper drags himself along and desire no longer is stirred. Then man goes to his eternal home and mourners go about the streets. Remember him — before the silver cord is severed, or the golden bowl is broken; before the pitcher is shattered at the spring, or the wheel broken at the well, and the dust returns to the ground it came from, and the spirit returns to God who gave it.” Ecclesiastes 12:3-7

What is that framework? Every philosophy and religion must be able to answer three questions:

1. Where did we get this universe and why is man different from the animals?

2. Why are we in such a mess - with violence, war, death, etc.?

3. What is the solution, the answer?

The fact that there is a “Creator” brings us back to the beginning where we see laid out a Biblical framework that answers these questions and keeps us on the right path in the midst of a world filled with deception and falsehood. Like Solomon said in Proverbsm “There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death.” Proverbs 14:12

Look at some of the ways of man in the 20th century that seemed right like communism, statism, Nazism, socialism, humanism, but that led to death. It is stated that in the 20th century our governments put to death over 150 million people.

Bottom line: “Fear God, and keep his commandments; for this is the whole duty of man.”