

Joy without Regret

October 23, 2005GG

Dear Friends,

After following Solomon through his self-indulgent autobiographical account of pursuits and vanity "under the sun," we come to see the moral and ethical value of his honest and humble confession in his concluding lessons. A common refrain of youth is "I need to experience these things for myself." Solomon's autobiography rejects such self-indulgence. He tried it all and gave us the conclusion of such pursuits. They will bring pain, regret, and a life that sums up its views with "Vanity of vanities; all is vanity." Faith that is bold in its trust of God, joy that is vibrant and implemented in actions that never produce regrets; these are the evidences of mature and godly wisdom. May we study Solomon's life carefully and learn his lessons well. It is far better to learn at his feet than join him in rebellion against the very God who gives inhuman wisdom to each of His beloved children in the form of a law written in their hearts that leads them to actions that transcend human philosophy and insights that crumble in the trials and storms of life. "It is all about me" sums up far too many lives of professing Christians. Last week as I was studying these thoughts and passages a friend sent me the following poem that struck at my heart. It clearly illustrates the lesson that Solomon is trying to teach us in our study passage.

Six humans trapped by happenstance
In black and bitter cold
Each possessed a stick of wood,
Or so the story's told. Their dying fire in need of logs,
The first woman held hers back
For on the faces around the fire
She noticed one was black. The next man looking 'cross the way
Saw one not of his church
And couldn't bring himself to give
The fire his stick of birch. The third one sat in tattered clothes
He gave his coat a hitch,
Why should his log be put to use
To warm the idle rich? The rich man just sat back and thought
Of the wealth he had in store,
And how to keep what he had earned
From the lazy, shiftless poor. The black man's face bespoke revenge
As the fire passed from his sight,
For all he saw in his stick of wood
Was a chance to spite the white. And the last man of this forlorn group
Did naught except for gain,
Giving only to those who gave
Was how he played the game. The logs held tight in death's stilled hands
Was proof of human sin,
They didn't die from the cold without,
They died from the cold within.

May we follow Solomon's wise counsel and be ever-vigilant against the "cold within" our own souls.
God bless, Joe Holder

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Truly the light is sweet, and a pleasant thing it is for the eyes to behold the sun: But if a man live many years, and rejoice in them all; yet let him remember the days of darkness; for they shall be many. All that cometh is vanity. Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth; and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thine heart, and in the sight of thine eyes: but know thou, that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment. Therefore remove sorrow from thy heart, and put away evil from thy flesh: for childhood and youth are vanity. (Ec 11:7-10)

Paul wrote to the church in Corinth, "For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death" (2Co 7:10). His implication is that other kinds of sorrow exist that may well motivate a person to do or say things that later cause regret, but that godly sorrow (sorrow toward God) brings a quality of repentance that later will not require another act of repentance. Similarly Solomon develops his second practical conclusion in our study verses that direct us to a quality of joy that will not later cause regret. Paul will echo this refrain in [Php 4:4](#).

Scripture often uses the analogy of light and darkness. On occasion the analogy may refer to the literal state of life (light) or death (darkness), but often the analogy refers more to our attitude while we live. Paul described the young widow who abandons her faith as being "...dead while she liveth" ([1Ti 5:6](#)). During the course of our study of Ecclesiastes, Solomon has bruised our ego with a rather large volume of questions that we cannot answer—things that we do not, and cannot, know. Finally as he begins his conclusion, he leads us to specific conclusions that we may comfortably "know" and embrace. In the last study we examined bold faith. In this study we shall examine wise joy. His description of "light" uses two adjectives, "sweet," and "pleasant." If in fact Solomon's reference to light has to do with our attitude toward life—though "under the sun," but, if lived correctly, lived with the constant awareness of God, who is distinctly "above the sun"—then we may conclude that he affirms a bright, positive view of life when lived in fellowship with God and according to His teachings. While we should joyfully and eagerly embrace life as "sweet" and "pleasant," we shall surely face our seasons of storm and trial. Paul's Philippian admonition requires that we rejoice in the Lord "always," not just when the sun is shining on a beautiful spring day. The idea of a "pessimistic" Christian is something of an oxymoron, despite the sad fact that many Christians approach their faith and put it to practice in life with an attitude that conveys to those around them that a gracious smile borders on sin. "Rejoice, O young man..." is not a statement of license for young people to follow their youthful and fallen flesh into excesses of sin, something of the modern "Do your own thing." Rather it is sage counsel for the young to practice their youthful joy wisely so that they will not face regrets for youthful sins later in life. An old sacred harp hymn states the point concisely, "Let's live so in youth that we blush not in age." The young man's "heart" should be viewed as the changed and cleansed heart that hungers for God. Dr. James Dobson wrote a book entitled *Your Emotions: Can You Trust Them?* In which he wisely cautioned against following our emotions where ever they lead us. Our emotions are as trustworthy, or as fickle, as the higher moral character that trains them. We may teach our emotions to follow the low road of self-indulgence, leaving them sinfully flawed and wholly not trustworthy. We may also subject them to the moral and ethical disciplines of Biblical teaching, transforming them into a more trustworthy guide, actually a trustworthy follower of the guide of Scripture. I am amazed at times to see professing Christians who react to every emotion that surfaces in their mind, followed by incredible moral and mental gymnastics to rationalize and to justify their total lack of self-control. "...for all these things God will bring thee to judgment." We tend to follow a flawed stereotype of divine judgment that sees all events in God's judgment as negative and condemnatory. "Well done, good and faithful servant" is a judicial pronouncement from God to a faithful disciple! If we live according to the teachings of Scripture, we can look forward to God's judgment with joy rather than dread. It is likely that Solomon's point is to advise the young man to order his life with the conscious awareness that God

knows all about his thoughts and deeds, so he should make decisions and walk paths that he knows in advance will ultimately face God's judgment, not merely man's. "Therefore remove sorrow from thy heart, and put away evil from thy flesh." I have several King James Bibles produced by various publishers, along with a number of other translations (I distinguish a true translation from paraphrased Bibles or Bibles presented as translations that are heavily flawed by interpretations of the editors or translators.). Every text that I've checked includes a footnote to the word translated "sorrow." The literal meaning of the Hebrew word is rather broad. Its meaning ranges from grief or sorrow to anger and frustration. Rather than narrowly rejecting pessimism, Solomon here urges the young man to practice early a consistent and broad rejection of the various strong, and consistently destructive emotions of our sinful disposition. "I really gave him a piece of my mind" is usually spoken by folks who truly don't have any mind to spare! The prideful attitude revealed by this comment betrays the very attitude that Solomon urges the young man to "remove...from thy heart." Rather than boasting of its practice, Solomon rejects the heart attitude that permits such words to cross our lips. When you realize that anger or frustration are rising in your heart, it is time to be very silent, not at all the time to give full liberty to your tongue! If you speak at that moment, you will inevitably say things that are destructive, things that you will later regret. The greater problem that people have who vent their anger with devastating words does not relate to their lips as much as to their heart. Solomon goes to the "heart" of the matter by telling the young man to eliminate these inclinations at the source, "from thy heart." If we think that we can foster such strong and destructive emotions in our hearts, but restrain them from our tongues, we deceive ourselves. Whatever we cultivate in our heart will inevitably produce a crop in our mouths. The "young" man may well be an older person. Chronological age does not de facto produce spiritual or emotional maturity. David prays for spiritual maturity in Israel in [Ps 144:11-15](#). "That our sons may be as plants grown up in their youth" makes my point. Some folks grow up while they are young in age. Others develop slowly, finally growing up later in life. Ah, sadly there are some folks who slip into old age with the spiritual and emotional immaturity of adolescence. I can't recall the name of the disease, but there is a dreadful disease that causes a child's body to age rapidly, so that before the child leaves adolescence his/her body looks like a very old person. The anomaly of this disease is frightening and grotesque. Can we not equally appreciate the frightening and grotesque appearance of the professing Christian who, despite a mature chronological age, acts and speaks like a "baby Christian" still in spiritual adolescence? Solomon's point echoes his father's in [Ps 144](#). If we wish to learn God's lessons from life, we must grow up into spiritual maturity and live our life as spiritually wise and mature, not in the folly of sinful and undisciplined youth. Live life with optimism and joy as you live it according to God's pattern and not your own private and self-indulgent appetite. That attitude, my friends, displays Biblical and godly wisdom. Be wisely joyful in God.

Elder Joe Holder