

# Vanity Demonstrated by Mankind's Lack of Progress

📖 Ecclesiastes 1:3-11

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Last time we introduced and gave the background to the Book of Ecclesiastes. This is a very unique book that the Jews placed in the third section of the Hebrew canon, known as the Kethubim, which means, "the Writings." "The Writings" contain wisdom literature and so books like Psalms, Proverbs and the Song of Songs are contained in this section. Verse 1 tells us that these are "The words of the Preacher." The Hebrew translated "the Preacher" is *qohelot* and this is a professional title that should really be translated "the Teacher." He was one who addressed the assembly of Israel with wisdom. Verse 1 also tells us he was "the Son of David, king in Jerusalem," and there is only one "son of David" who fits this criteria, as well as all the other criteria that we gather from the contents of the book, and that son is Solomon. He was "king in Jerusalem" from 971-931BC. In his early years Solomon was a very godly man. He asked the Lord for wisdom and the Lord granted Him wisdom as well as fame and wealth and honor. He solved difficult problems, studied trees, birds, animals, fish, wrote poetry, composed songs, etc...so that there had never been anyone as wise and never would be until the Messiah. Word of his wisdom spread so that people from all over the world travelled to Israel just to hear his wisdom and see the glory of his kingdom. And by this methodology the God of Israel was making himself known to the nations that surrounded Israel. And it was during these early years that Solomon composed many songs, one of which was the Song of Songs, the greatest love song ever written. During his middle age years Solomon wrote many proverbs, and we have preserved for us just one book, the Book of Proverbs. And sometime during his later middle age years Solomon's heart was turned aside from the Lord by his many wives and he went after other gods and he tried to find meaning and satisfaction and fullness of life without God. After those years he wrote Ecclesiastes in his old age. And this book is a report of those years of trying to live life without God. And therefore, the theme of the book is vanity. As Solomon says in verse 2, "Vanity of vanities...All is Vanity." This is the Hebrew word *hebel* which refers to something which appears to have substance, but is really empty or transient. One of my mentors described it as warm breath on a cold morning. The warm breath condenses into a smoky appearance and then simply disappears. There is nothing lasting. One author described *hebel* as going out and blowing bubbles, and when the bubbles pop, what is there? There is nothing. Solomon is saying that at the end of life there really is nothing; no meaning, no fulfillment, no satisfaction. He uses three expressions to capture that idea in Ecclesiastes; first, he says life is a "chasing after the wind," which is a rather unsettling

prospect, second, there is “no advantage,” which is rather disheartening, and third, there is “no profit,” which is downright depressing. Of course, young people don’t think that way at all, but as they grow old they begin to think that way more and more. And because this theme is repeated *ad nauseum* by Solomon, many Christians have come away from this book quite depressed and puzzled. Why would even such a book be contained in Holy Scripture? But this is a failure to understand a second theme, and that is that this book looks at life from the vantage point of “under the sun.” In other words, from the human view point, without God in mind, when you are living in the energy of the flesh. When you live life that way then all is vanity because He is the key of life and there’s no significance to anything apart from Him. And therefore, when Solomon says in verse 2, “All is vanity,” that has to be qualified by verse 3, when he describes life “under the sun?” And when the two themes are put together we learn that life without God at the center is vanity. Solomon knows. Solomon tried it. He was a believer and tried to enjoy life without God at the center, and no matter what he pursued, whether it was fulfillment in work, pleasure in sex, satisfaction in wealth, joy in academics, and any number of other ventures, it did not satisfy, it was vanity. People tell you that if you believe in Jesus your life will be perfect. That is a bunch of baloney. Solomon was a believer and Solomon’s life was far from perfect. And the reason is because being a believer is not sufficient. You also have to live by the Spirit of God. Solomon wasn’t doing that and he was miserable. So don’t believe that phony propaganda about believing in Jesus and having your life problems solved. Now Ecclesiastes is a lot of teaching by negative example, but it is valuable because it doesn’t say life can’t be enjoyed; it simply says, life can’t be enjoyed without God at the center. And through this we should come away with several important lessons. First, we should learn what life is like for an unbeliever in all his pursuits. He is trying to find happiness, trying to find satisfaction, trying to find meaning. But since he pursues all these things as if God is not there, he only finds vanity, no lasting satisfaction, all is fleeting, and we can understand why the older they get the more cranky and cynical they become. Second, knowing what life is like for unbelievers should motivate us to give them the gospel. That way they learn that life can be fulfilling, when God is put at the center. Third, we learn that life for a carnal believer is just like it is for an unbeliever. Believers can live like unbelievers, but if we do God won’t allow us to find satisfaction, meaning or joy in life either. So there are many lessons *Qohelet* teaches us, but they all boil down to one and the same: if God is not placed at the center of man’s pursuits, if man does not live by the Spirit of God, there can be no lasting enjoyment in life, all is a vanity, a striving after the wind.

Now we didn’t deal with the outline, or structure very much, and this has been much debated, probably because we are trying to follow the thoughts of the wisest man in history until Jesus Christ. And I really did not know what I was getting into trying to follow this man’s thought. Because of this some have concluded that there is no structure to Ecclesiastes, that it is just a series of sayings, like Proverbs. Others, however, have concluded that there is a structure to Ecclesiastes, and they have attempted to follow Solomon’s argument and outline it accordingly. I agree with the latter. There seems to be an argument Solomon is making. But understand what Hubbard wrote, “. . . it is no exaggeration to say that there may be less agreement about the interpretation of

Koheleth than there is about any other biblical book, even the Revelation of John."<sup>1</sup> So we will do our best to follow the argument. That there is an argument is evidenced by the four conclusion statements Solomon makes throughout the book. Added to this are the opening words, the prologue and the closing words, the epilogue. That makes six sections of the book. We are going to try to follow Solomon's arguments in these six sections in our outline to the book. First, the book begins with a Prologue, in 1:1-11, these are the first words. Solomon states his theme that all is vanity under the sun and uses illustrations to prove the theme. Second, we have Solomon's Search for Meaning in Wisdom, Hedonism, Prudent Living, and Labor in 1:12-2:26. And his conclusion is that no one can find enjoyment without God. Third, we have Solomon's Search for Meaning in Business in 3:1-5:20. He concludes that life is a gift of God to be enjoyed. Fourth, we find Solomon's Search for Meaning in Wealth in 6:1-8:15. His conclusion is that it is good to eat, drink and be merry through life's toils. Fifth, Solomon's Search for Ultimate Meaning in Various Sources in 8:16-12:7. His conclusion is that men should find God before they die. And sixth, the Epilogue in 12:8-14, these are the after words which repeat the theme of vanity under the sun and draw the final conclusion of the book, that man should fear God and keep His commandments in order to enjoy life. This is a very important book for our time, and the reason should be clear. There are believers everywhere who are trying to find meaning and happiness in every place you can imagine except in God. They think if they have the right girl or guy they will find satisfaction. They think that if they have money they will be happy. They think that if they have a good job and make some progress they will find fulfillment. And we have a lot of them that walk right through these doors and sit down and listen to the word of God and after a short time they walk right out these doors. And the reason is very simple, they want happiness and fulfillment in life apart from God and His word. They want a private pen of happiness that is reserved for me, myself and I. This is a very self-centered generation and every generation is the same, this is not a new phenomenon. And they are people, believers and unbelievers, who are in rebellion against God. They'd just assume He's not there. He's messing up there play day. And if that's their attitude then they are just like Solomon during this phase of his life. And I don't want you to think like Solomon. I don't want you to think that God and His word won't satisfy, because the moment you are thinking that you will go right out the door on a search for meaning and fulfillment and that will lead you right over an edge. And we know this because here is the report card of a man who tried to find it, and he never could.

So what I hope to communicate with this series is that you can enjoy life. That's what all this negative example is about, the most you can do is just enjoy life, so you might as well find out how! But the only way is to walk in fellowship, abide in Him, live by means of the Spirit. All those phrases are essentially identical, they mean that God is at the center of your thinking and your behavior, and when that is the case then the result is enjoyment.

Tonight let's look at the Prologue in 1:1-11. We've already explained verses 1-2. Let's review briefly. 1:1 reveals the author and his vocation. There is only one son of David who ruled as king in Jerusalem, and that is Solomon. He is given the title of "the Preacher", which is the Hebrew *qohelot*, which means a convener of assemblies, which is how it came to be translated "the Preacher," but I prefer "the Teacher," and yet some think that the

word relates to debating, and it's depicting Solomon debating within his own soul these positions and coming to certain conclusions. But either way, Solomon is most certainly looking at life in the fallen world while living in the energy of the flesh. And he is our Teacher for how not to live out of fellowship, because if you do it's going to be a bore and a drudgery and depressing.

1:2 is this theme, which is vanity. He uses it five times in one verse to make the point that as far as he can tell "all is vanity." But he wrote this after he had lived life out of fellowship for years and finally repented. So he's writing this in hindsight, and so he made sure we understood that the "all" must be qualified by the phrase in verse 3, "under the sun." That way we don't come away with the stupid conclusion that life in fellowship with God is vanity, because it's not, it's only life out of fellowship with God that is vanity. Andy Woods agreed saying, "His thesis statement is that life is a vapor among vapors *absent God's point of view*. Not only is life itself fleeting but capturing its meaning is equally fleeting from the human vantage point."<sup>2</sup> Absent God's point of view, you always have to stick that in there or you won't understand the book.

In 1:3-11 Solomon sets out to prove his thesis that "all is vanity. The structure is poetic. That's why the words are indented in much of your OT, whereas it's rarely that way in the NT. The reason is because we are looking at Hebrew poetry. And his argument is that while I was out of it, living by the flesh, I evaluated the world and I concluded that the whole thing is meaningless, there is nothing that we can do that lasts.

In 1:3-4 he begins his proof by evaluating all the work of the human race. The Teacher asks, **What advantage does man have in all his work Which he does under the sun? A generation goes and a generation comes, But the earth remains forever.** Now note the contrast. Part of the struggle of this book is following the argument Solomon is making, and that requires understanding the relationships in the sentences and that means you have to look closely at the conjunctions, because conjunctions connect and show relationships. Here the conjunction **But** shows that the relationship of verse 3 to verse 4 is a contrast. And the contrast is between verse 3, man and his work and verse 4, the earth which remains forever. Verse 4 is easy to understand, **the earth remains forever**, so we know that what man accomplishes by his labor does not last forever in *qohélet's* view. And so what man's labor does accomplish is fleeting, temporary, momentary and passing away. That's the big idea of verse 3.

Now, there's a question about who is in view here in verse 3 under the term **man**. Notice that Solomon does not say, **What advantage does a man have in all his work**. But he says **What advantage does man have in all his work**. And also note in verse 4 that the word **generation** is used and that has a corporate focus, not an individual focus. So at this point in the argument, it seems that Solomon is not looking at the individual man and all his work, he'll do that later, but here he is looking at corporate humanity, all of mankind, and all of mankind's work. And so we have this Hebrew word translated **man** in verse 3, which is *Adam*. And who was *Adam*? On one hand you can say *Adam* was an individual man. But on the other hand you can also say that *Adam* was corporate humanity, all of mankind. Why can we say this? Because all mankind was in *Adam*, and all mankind derives from

*Adam*. Put in genealogical terms, there has never been a human being that could not trace his lineage back to *Adam*. The whole human race was genetically in him. And that means evolution is a false religion because evolution most certainly does not believe that the whole human race came from the one man *Adam*. And so we have cleared up the first hurdle in these verses, and that is that the question under investigation is **What advantage does mankind have in all his work?**

Now the second issue is the term **advantage**. In the English this word communicates the idea of having an edge, and that sort of captures the intent of this Hebrew word. The word is *yitron* and it means "something that remains over, some gain" as in some net gain being made. And since mankind and his labor is in view then the thing Solomon observed is this, after all is said and done, I look at mankind's labor and I see the results and I wonder, is there any net gain? Is there really anything that mankind produces that gives an advantage to the next generation of mankind? And his obvious conclusion is, no. And the reason is because what a generation produces is fleeting. Take for example cars, the generation of Henry Ford invented cars, a wonderful invention that gets you from point A to point B. Well, those cars may outlast your generation, but the cars invented by that generation won't last much longer, there's only a few left and they're going to decay. And so what net benefit really outlasted that generation? Nothing really. What mankind produces is temporary, it's fleeting. Now probably the one thing that mankind has produced that has lasted the longest is the pyramids of Egypt, and you might make an argument that the Hebrew slaves produced those as slaves in Egypt, but even they are falling apart.

Now all that may seem depressing, but note at the end of verse 3 that Solomon is looking at mankind's work from the perspective of work done **under the sun**. That is work and its production looked at merely from the earthly perspective. It's not including looking at from the heavenly perspective. And so when we conclude tonight we'll look at it from that perspective so that we have the total perspective. But from a merely earthly perspective, man's labor produces all this stuff and then within a generation it's gone, it's temporary, it decays, it rots and it disappears.

In 1:4 Solomon continues and gives us the contrast **A generation goes and a generation comes, But the earth remains forever**. Isn't this the way it looks? **One generation** dies, they go off the scene and another **generation comes** on the scene. What's Solomon saying? Even mankind comes and goes. Even mankind is temporal and fleeting. So it's not only the things mankind produces that come and go, but the men who make them come and go. As goes the greater, so goes the lesser. **But the earth remains forever**, and there's our contrast, that helps us understand what aspect of man's labor Solomon is scrutinizing. He is scrutinizing the lasting value of man's labor. And the lasting value is quite apparent. Men produce empires with their businesses and then they hand it over to their kids and it sails along for a while and then goes caput. So what lasting value is there? None really. Whatever man does it eventually falls apart. It's vanity. And he's saying this to prove his thesis of verse 2, that "all is vanity."

So the conclusion of verses 3-4 is that all of mankind's labor is fleeting, it may outlast your generation, but it will still only last a little while, and therefore it is depressing and it cannot give meaning to life. All mankind's labor, therefore, is "vanity."

Now in 1:5-7 Solomon wants to add something. We see another conjunction, the word **Also**. And it probably means "and then" or "in addition to." So he wants to add something further that he observed about mankind's labor. He already observed it is fleeting, now he observed something else. And the way he came to observe this was by observing nature. And he concluded that what he observed in nature was also true of man's labor. The first thing he observed in nature is verse 5, **Also, the sun rises and the sun sets; and hastening to its place it rises there again**. He's looking at the cyclical rising and setting of the **sun**. Solomon was a student of astronomy. He gazed at the heavens. And, of course, he saw what all of us saw, **the sun rises** every morning **and the sun sets** every evening and then it **rises...again**. But his observation is more interesting than that because of the Hebrew word translated **hastening**. This word means "panting," like you're out of breath. It's as if once the sun goes down it is racing to just come up again and do the same exact thing again. That is the way it is with mankind's labor. Mankind gets up and goes to work and goes home and goes to bed and by the time you fall asleep the alarm goes off and you're back at the same exact thing again. It's a never ending cycle of work. The work is never complete where we can just sit back and say, "Well, there's nothing more to do." No. There's always more work to do. The home is full of these never complete tasks. You wash the dishes and three minutes later there's another cup in the sink. You finish the laundry and another sock shows up. The workplace is full of these never completed tasks as well. You finish one project and another one is already on your desk. You finish one Bible lesson and you start on another one. It's just a never ending cycle of weariness. And Solomon observed this cycle in the sun rising and the sun setting and he said, that's the same as mankind's labor. It's just the same thing over and over and over and over and it never gets finished and then you die. And if that's your attitude toward it, then the conclusion is quite obvious; you are living in the energy of the flesh, that's why you're thinking like Solomon. You're not getting any joy out of life. So his point is "all is vanity." That's the thesis he is trying to prove; but hopefully you'll see that thesis cannot be proved in a total sense, but only when you are living in the energy of the flesh.

Now also in 1:6 he observed this in nature. **Blowing toward the south, Then turning toward the north, The wind continues swirling along; And on its circular courses the wind returns**. He's looking at wind currents. Solomon was a student of meteorology. He followed weather patterns. And he noticed that the wind would blow one way, **toward the south**, and then it would blow another way, **turning toward the north**, and if you tried to track this you couldn't. No meteorologist can predict the wind patterns perfectly. It's one of the few jobs where you can be wrong most of the time and still get a paycheck. It sounds from the translation **circular courses** that Solomon is saying the wind went around in circles, and in a way it does, but not predictably. The Hebrew for **circular courses** means "continually turning, or wherever it turns." No one knows where the wind is coming from or where it is going. Here's one of the charts meteorologists put together of predicting a hurricane.

This is the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and Solomon observed this 3,000 years ago. You can't tell where the wind will blow. All he could conclude was that **the wind returns**. And that's obvious, because it keeps blowing. So Solomon observed this randomness in the wind and he said, that's the same as mankind's labor. There are unpredictable things that happen in your labor. You get up in the morning with your plan of what you're going to do that day and then something unpredictable happens and that plan is ruined. So there is this cycle of monotony, but at the same time there is this chaos thrown in and so what you thought you were going to accomplish doesn't get accomplished. So "all is vanity." At least that's the perspective of the flesh. And if you feel like every day is just this monotonous chaos like Solomon then there's a big hint that you are living by the flesh. That's what Solomon is trying to show you.

Also in 1:7, Solomon observed something else in nature. **All the rivers flow into the sea, Yet the sea is not full. To the place where the rivers flow, There they flow again.** He observed the water cycle. Solomon was a student of hydrology; the study of water flow, evaporation, condensation, precipitation and back to water flow. He was very modern in his observations. He observed **rivers flow into the sea**, and **Yet**, strangely enough, **the sea is not full**. Most humans don't think of this. And if you did think about it, you would initially think that if water is flowing into an object it would fill it up and overflow. But when **rivers flow into the sea** they don't do that. Instead Solomon calculated that somehow the water in the **sea** was evaporating and then condensing and falling as precipitation, so that the **rivers flowed again** to the same **sea**. So he noticed this cycle. But not only that, it seems like nothing is accomplished. Solomon is teaching that the water cycle repeats itself over and over and over and yet nothing is accomplished, and he noticed that mankind's labor is the same. We work day after day after day and there's always just more work to do and nothing gets accomplished. And if that's your perspective then you're not living by the Spirit of God, you don't have the divine view point. So Solomon's point is, again, "all is vanity."

So the conclusion of verses 5-7 is that, in addition to all of mankind's labor under the sun being fleeting, it's also monotonous, the same thing over and over and over, like the sun rising and setting, and it's also riddled by unpredictability, like the wind currents, and nothing ever seems to really get accomplished, like the rivers flowing into the sea. Therefore, "all is vanity," a chasing after the wind.

Now in verses 8-11 Solomon draws some conclusions to the vanity of mankind's labor. In verse 8 he says, **All things are wearisome**. If this is the way it is, generation after generation labors with no net gain, then it's exhausting. It is so exhausting that **Man is not able to tell it**. He can't speak about it because to speak about it would be depressing. Instead he talks of the great advances that man has made. About how we've evolved both physically and socially. And the only reason he believes in those ridiculous notions is because it's too hard to face reality. For the unbeliever this is reality, there really is no progress, socially or physically, we're a weak people just like the people who lived before us. But we don't want to admit it. We can't tell it. That's too depressing. Then Solomon says, **The eye is not satisfied with seeing, Nor is the ear filled with hearing**. The **eye** continually

wants to **see** something new. It is never **satisfied** with what it has seen. The **ear** is never **filled with hearing**. This is why TV, movies, the internet, radio and talk shows are so addicting. People are hoping by them to satisfy their eyes and fill their ears by seeing or hearing something new. But they are never **satisfied** and **filled** so they keep watching and listening, watching and listening hour after hour, day after day, year after year, hoping to be satisfied. But they never are. It won't happen. It's all the same thing, there is no end to the monotony. Solomon says this is frustrating and **wearisome**.

In verses 9-10 Solomon speaks about how boring it is being here. **That which has been is that which will be, And that which has been done is that which will be done. So there is nothing new under the sun. Is there anything of which one might say, "See this, it is new"? Already it has existed for ages Which were before us.** People talk about things that are **new**, especially young people, but really there is nothing **new**. Wiersbe said, "The only people who really think they have seen something new are those whose experience is limited or whose vision can't penetrate beneath the surface of things. Because something is recent, they think it is new; they mistake novelty for originality."<sup>3</sup> Take something like the tire. The Goodyear tire was not something new. It was a chemical modification fitted on a wheel. They accomplish the same function as all other wheels, they roll. Is it a better one? In some environments. But it is not really new, it is just a modification of something which had already been seen long before. Some would say that the internet is something new, but it is nothing new at all. It is just another method of doing what has been done before. It presents a new way to communicate with others, by e-mail, rather than by phone or by letter, but seen in that light, it really is not new. Marketing products by web pages was once done by magazines and newspapers and word of mouth, so it really is not new. There are no ideas that are new. Every idea of modern philosophy was already thought about by the Greeks before the time of Christ. Socrates, Aristotle and Plato. Alfred North Whitehead said the whole of Western Philosophy is a footnote to Plato. There are no new ideas. Thomas Edison remarked that his inventions only brought out the secrets of nature that were already there, so that they could be enjoyed for the happiness of mankind. So in the area of science there is nothing new. Edison admitted that what he invented was already there in nature, it was not something he had created, it was something he had discovered and discovery, by definition, is finding something that was already there. So everything that people think is new is really nothing but a modification of something old. And the reason we can't see something new is because we are not the Creator but the creature and we live in His creation. As creatures we can only modify and combine things that already exist. That is what Solomon observed and so while we want to see something new there really is nothing new to see. And all the generations before us did and saw the same basic things as us. And that is his point and it is that all is vanity.

In verse 11, Solomon says not only is there nothing new, but verse 11 says people don't remember. **There is no remembrance of earlier things; And also of the later things which will occur, There will be for them no remembrance Among those who will come later still.** In fact, this is why people think they have seen something new. They forget that all these things have already been seen. People don't know their history and the history they do know is so limited that they really do not know much. And frankly, there is really too much to



keep up with anyway. Humans are extremely limited. But if someone has been around for a while and thought about it, they realize that every generation of mankind saw the same things they did and that there really is nothing new under the sun.

Now we want to summarize these verses and then question Solomon's conclusions. In summary, in 1:2 Solomon states his theme as "all is vanity" and in 1:3-11 he sets out to prove this theme. In 1:3-4 he asks, "What net gain does mankind have in all his labor, Which he does from an earthly perspective? A generation of mankind goes and a generation of mankind comes, but the earth remains forever." Man's toil under the sun does not give one generation an advantage over another. Every generation has to work but by the end of it that generation dies and what they produced barely lives beyond them before it falls apart. In 1:5-7 Solomon adds that his observations in nature are true in his observations of mankind's labor. In 1:5 he observed that the sun rises and the sun sets; And it pants to its place and rises there again. Mankind's work is the same way. We work and work and work and there's still work to do and you never get done and then you die. In 1:6 Solomon observed that the wind is blowing this way and that way and in all different directions and then it returns to where it began. Mankind's work is the same way. We go to work with a plan and before we know it unpredictable things happen and we can't tell what is going to happen and it's just frustrating. In 1:7 Solomon observed that all the rivers flow into the sea but it never fills up and then the water returns to the river where it flows into the same sea again. Mankind's labor is the same way. We go to work over and over and over and in the end we don't accomplish much. It's very wearying. And that's verse 8. All things are wearisome, they're exhausting, what's the point! Man is not able to talk about it because it's depressing to realize that the human race really hasn't made any progress. So they talk about progress as if there has really been some. But in all this the eye is never satisfied with what it sees and the ear is never filled with what it hears. We always want to see something new or hear something new. But it's all just the same thing over and over. In 1:9, That which has been is that which will be, And that which has been done is that which will be done. So there is nothing new under the sun. Is there anything of which one might say, "See this, it is new"? Already it has existed for ages which were before us, so don't think you're really seeing something that will satisfy. It's all just the same thing over and over. No generation ever produced anything new, not one. They're all just the same. And 1:11 says the only reason generations think they have seen something new is because "There is no remembrance of earlier things." And guess what, the next generation is not going to remember either, or the one's after that. So they are all the same.

Now that is a pretty depressing message, so now we want to remember that this is life viewed from under the sun, which is simply from the human view point, down here and only here. But what if we were to view all these things from beyond the sun, from the divine view point. First of all, is there any benefit or net gain that we can enjoy from our labor? Verse 3 said there was not. But the NT doctrine of rewards says there can be. Turn to Col 3:23-24. In this passage written by the apostle Paul, he says to the believers at Colosse, "Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men," But why? Why do that if there is no gain, no benefit to the work? But there is. Verse 24, we work, "knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the

inheritance. It is the Lord Christ whom you serve." You see, our labor done down here under the sun as to the Lord who is beyond the sun will be rewarded in the world to come. So there is an eternal net profit. But Solomon couldn't see that, Solomon was living out of fellowship with God, in the flesh. But Paul is talking about living by the Spirit, working for the Lord. But when you are living by the flesh like Solomon then your analysis of mankind's labor will be his analysis and that will mean you are not enjoying life. And to make sure we understand what is being said, Solomon wasn't wrong in his analysis, Solomon was simply telling us what life is like when we are living out of fellowship with God, and he is correct. But if you live in fellowship with God then there is eternal net gain in the form of eternal rewards. So we want to learn the lesson. A second thing we might consider is whether there is anything new under the sun? Verses 9-10 say there is not. But the NT doctrine of regeneration says that there is. Turn to 2 Cor 5:17. Paul again, this time to the Corinthians, and he has this conclusion. "Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come." So here is something new. Those in Christ are something new; new creations. There was the old you; there is the new you. The old you was in Adam; the new you is in Christ. But you are not the author of this new thing. God is the author. He is the Creator. He regenerated you at the moment of faith in Christ. And so there are things that are new, contrary to Solomon's limited view from the human view point. Let's close with these excellent words from Dr Wiersbe, "When, by faith, you receive Jesus Christ as your Saviour, and God becomes your Heavenly Father, you no longer live in a "closed system" of endless monotonous cycles. You can gladly sing, "This is my Father's world!" and know that He will meet your every need as you trust Him (Matt. 6:25-34). Christians live in this world as pilgrims, not prisoners, and therefore they are joyful and confident."<sup>4</sup> So as we go from this place, let's go with an attitude that we are going to put God at the center of all of our thoughts and activities this week, so that we can enjoy life.

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<sup>1</sup> Tom Constable, *Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible* (Galaxie Software, 2003), Ec 1:2.

<sup>2</sup> Andy Woods, *Qohelot (Ecclesiastes) Argument*, p 13, 2007.

<sup>3</sup> Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Satisfied, "Be" Commentary Series* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), 28.

<sup>4</sup> Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Satisfied, "Be" Commentary Series* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), 26.