

Ecclesiastes

“The words of the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem”

I. Review

- A. Ecclesiastes is a logical argument posited by Solomon (*Qoheleth*), the Shepherd-King of Israel.
 - 1. Argument unfolds in four divisions.
 - 2. Each division builds upon the preceding one.

- B. First division: “Satisfaction is not within Man’s power.” (Eccl. 1:2-2:26)
 - 1. Conclusion: “There is not a good [inherent] in man that he should eat and drink and tell himself that his labor is good. This also I have seen, that it is from the hand of God. For who can eat and who can have enjoyment apart from Him? For God gives wisdom and knowledge and joy to a man who is good in His sight; but to the sinner he gives the work of gathering and collecting, that he may give to him who is good before God. This also is vanity and grasping for the wind.” (Eccl. 2:24-26)
 - a. God gives to believer and unbeliever alike - Common grace.
 - b. God does not allow Man to enjoy himself apart from Him.
 - c. God gives only the believer the capacity to enjoy this life of vanity.
 - d. Ecclesiastes leads us into a profound cheerfulness.
 - 2. There is nothing within man that enables him to understand the realm of vanity.
 - a. ‘*Hebel*’- vapor
 - b. Inscrutable repetition
 - c. Solomon’s experiences
 - 1) Turned (2:12)
 - 2) Looked (2:13)
 - 3) Considered (2:15)

- C. Second division: “God is sovereign.” (Eccl. 3:1-5:20)
 - 1. A Confession of Faith. (3:1-15)
 - 2. Objections Addressed. (3:16-4:16)
 - 3. Living Under the Sovereignty of God. (4:17-5:17)
 - 4. The Second Conclusion. (5:18-20)

II. “God is Sovereign.” (Eccl. 3:1-5:20)

- A. The Second Conclusion. (Eccl. 5:18-20)

“Here is what I have seen to be good and fitting (beautiful): to eat, to drink and enjoy (see good) oneself in all one’s labor in which he toils under the sun during the few years of his life which God has given him; for this is his reward. Furthermore, as for every man to whom God has given riches and wealth, He empowered him to eat from them and to receive his reward and

rejoice in his labor; this is the gift of God. For he will not often consider the years of his life, because God keeps him occupied with the gladness of his heart.”

1. Elaboration, intensification, and clarification of his themes.
 - a. No good [inherent] vs. good and fitting
 - b. Hate the fruit of one’s labor vs. enjoy the fruit of one’s labor
 - c. Vexation of spirit vs. the gift of God-our ‘lot’
2. Another purpose: To accept life as a gift from God and accept his limited place without fretting over an attempt to pry into God’s secret purposes which remain hidden from him.
3. God is sovereign.

B. A Confession of Faith (Eccl. 3:1-15)

1. A Time for Everything (3:1-8)

- a. Solomon’s premise. (v. 1, *but can also go through verse 8*)
- b. The focus is on the activity of God.
- c. Luther quote: “You should understand this [Eccl. 3:1-8] as follows: All human works and efforts have a certain and definite time of acting, of beginning, and of ending, beyond human control. Thus this is spoken in opposition to free will. It is not up to us to prescribe the time, the manner, or the effect of the things that are to be done; and so it is obvious that here our strivings and efforts are unreliable. Everything comes and goes at the time God has appointed. He proves this on the basis of examples of human works whose times lie outside the choice of man. From this he draws the conclusion that it is useless for men to be tormented by their strivings and that they do not accomplish anything, even though they were to burst, unless the proper time and the hour appointed by God has come....So the power of God comprehends all things in definite hours, so that they cannot be hindered by anyone.” *Luther’s Works* 15 [Concordia Publishing House], 49.
- d. Behind all of man’s activity is the all-encompassing plan of God.
- e. The list of “times” in 3:1-8 is not exhaustive, but it is representative of every season.

2. Eternity in Our Hearts (3:9-15)

- a. The question: “What profit is there to the worker from that in which he toils?”
 - 1) Seen - with the eyes of faith.
 - 2) Task - Business, ado (see 1:13)
 - a) Given by God
 - b) To occupy men
- b. He has set eternity in our heart. (v.11)
 - 1) We have a desire to know “The Big Picture.”
 - 2) We cannot see from God’s eternal perspective the reasons He has for assigning the times and seasons.
- c. He has made everything appropriate (beautiful) in its time. (v.11)
 - 1) The answer to the question in v.9 is that all of the labor of man cannot alter the plan of God.

- 2) God's works remain forever. (v. 14)
- 3) God does it so that men might fear him. (v. 14)
- 4) Solomon turns from the consideration of the toil of men to the work of the Almighty.
 - a) God's labor is not vapor.
 - b) God can and does 'shepherd the wind.'

3. Living by Faith

- a. By both teaching and example, Solomon is telling us that we must live by faith.
- b. Solomon has no argument for this confidence from observable

data.

- c. The irony of eternity set in our hearts is still a gift from God.
- d. Solomon expresses two personal certainties:
 - 1) "I know that there is nothing better for them than to rejoice and to do good in one's lifetime; moreover, that every man who eats and drinks sees good in all his labor-it is the gift of God." (Eccl. 3:12-13)
 - 2) "I know that everything God does will remain forever; there is nothing to add to it and there is nothing to take away from it, for God has so worked that men should fear Him." (Eccl. 3:14)
 - a) To fear God is to trust Him.
 - b) Solomon is challenging us with the question: "Who is your LORD?"
- e. The sufficiency of God.