

"Counsel on Religion and Money"

Ecclesiastes 5:1-26

Introduction

1. What does a man do without the Bible as his only rule for faith and practice? He has but one option: himself. That is what this book is all about. It records the efforts of Solomon to find satisfaction aside from the revelation which God has given.

2. It is not altogether secular and divorced from God, for God's name is mentioned some 40 times in this book. Furthermore, his concluding remarks (12:13; 14) offer some intent to demonstrate that his personal observations and expressions are bankrupt.

3. But, Solomon does run the gamut of human endeavor to find satisfaction. He speaks of the emptiness of human history (1:4-11); education (1:12-18); amusements (2:1-11), wisdom and employment (2:12-26); fatalism (3:1-13), the bleakness of the afterlife (3:14-22), and such sundry items as oppression, rivalry, miserliness, and popularity (4:1-16). What more can be said?

4. The present section deals with the spiritual and physical side of a man. Both have little to offer for sound satisfaction. Nonetheless, counsel is given to show that even these have their problems. Note his argument:

1. RELIGIOUS practices--not adequate vv. 1-7.

a. Prayers do not satisfy vv. 1-3. Although a spiritual exercise is not to be denied, even this has its problems. Hence, when prayer is made, it is:

1) To be watched v. 1. Words must not be allowed to move ahead of thoughts. Listening is better than talking.

2) To be controlled v. 2. The tongue should not be given a full rein. God is infinitely exalted and a few well chosen reverential words are appropriate, but not much more.

3) To be compared v. 3. Labor makes a man weary and this results in dreams. So, many words spoken in prayers lead a man to folly.

b. Vows do not satisfy vv. 4-7. Like prayers, vows also have difficulties. But when made, they should:

1) Be paid v. 4, 5. Whatever is spoken should be made up (Deut. 23:22-24). To say a vow and not fulfill it is worse than to have made one in the first place.

2) Be reckoned v. 6. A vow can easily lead to sin in the body. An inconsiderate vow before a priest is also

a troublesome item. God inflicts judgment.

3) Be evaluated v. 7. Just as dreams (v. 3) are like many words--folly, so vows can easily turn out to be the same. The whole is one big emptiness (1:2).

2. MONEY possessed--not adequate vv. 8-20.

Although Solomon has dealt with the possessions of a man (e.g. 2:1-11), this section takes a look at some of the problems relating to money in one's hands. What happens?

a. It causes hurt vv. 8, 9.

It may well be that two systems of government are in view here: the one tyrannical (v. 8) and the other monarchial (v. 9). In any case, where government officials take advantage of those beneath them, it is over money (v. 8). The king (monarchial) must acknowledge that he too lives from the land and be equitable (v. 9). All must be served.

b. It creates avarice vv. 10-12.

Coveteousness by its very nature is insatiable (v. 10). With abundance comes increased consumption, so the rich man can only look at what he owns (v. 11). In the end, a laborer (slave) is better off. He can sleep while the rich man loses sleep over his riches.

c. It courts insecurity vv. 13-17.

The words "sore evil" designate a morbid evil, a deep hurtful one. There is a sudden loss of what a man has carefully accumulated (v. 13). It is so sad that his son is left nothing (v. 14). It is a life--for the rich man--that starts with nothing and ends the same way (v. 15). How miserable is the life which leads to nothing (v. 16). Hence, a rich man who has lived on prison fare and deprived himself of a comfortable room and light, now ends up deceased in mind and body over his nothingness (v. 17).

Conclusion With a quick survey of religious practices and money held, Solomon concludes that a cheerful enjoyment of life is advised. It is not possible in the ordinary means of life's treasures, but it is a special gift of God. The one who does not think of his days of life but finds that God answers to all of his needy heart--that man is right. The torment of the transitoriness of life would be gone. May God help us to grasp the lesson here and refer our hearts to His Word (2 Cor. 4:16-18).