

“7 Go thy way, eat thy bread with joy, and drink thy wine with a merry heart; for God now accepteth thy works. 8 Let thy garments be always white; and let thy head lack no ointment. 9 Live joyfully with the wife whom thou lovest all the days of the life of thy vanity, which he hath given thee under the sun, all the days of thy vanity: for that is thy portion in this life, and in thy labour which thou takest under the sun. 10 Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest.” (Ec 9:7-10)

As you know, over the past several weeks, I have been trying to preach sermons on the theme of the Christian shining as a light in the world. Jesus said, “Ye are the light of the world,” and Paul restated and applied it to every Christian in Philippians 2: “12 Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. 13 For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure. 14 Do all things without murmurings and disputings: 15 That ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world;” (Php 2:12-15)

This theme has opened up a flood of ideas in my mind, which I believe should be understood and practiced by all Christians everywhere. Scripture is inexhaustible, there is always more to think, always more to meditate, always more to seek to apply to our life; More to pray about and more to live in the world.

Solomon’s theme in this great book is “Vanity of Vanities, all is vanity.” That is the text that he takes at the beginning of chapter one and he develops it through this book. In chapter two, Solomon comes to hate all the work that he did: he said that a man works all his life and leaves the result of his labor to someone else, and who knows whether that man will be wise or a fool? There are other men who labor with wisdom, skill, and knowledge, and leave everything to someone who didn’t labor for it. “So what good is it all?” He asks, and says, “There is nothing better for a man, than that he should eat and drink, and that he should make his soul enjoy good in his labor. This also I saw, that it was from the hand of God.” (Ec 2:24)

What was this incredible insight that Solomon received from the hand of God that enabled him to endure the vanity of this world? It is simply this: the future of the child of God is not in this world, but in the new world that will be created when this one is dissolved with fervent heat and all is destroyed, as Peter tells us. Here we have no continuing city, but we seek one which is to come. Jesus said the same thing when He said for us not to lay up treasures on earth, but to lay up treasures in heaven. We are to be future oriented people, but not with respect to this world. Jesus said specifically:

“Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? 32 (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. 33 But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. 34 Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.” (Mt 6:31-34)

So now we come to our text; How are we to live in this present evil world of vanity and vexation of spirit. Solomon begins to draw his conclusions:

“7 Go thy way, eat thy bread with joy, and drink thy wine with a merry heart; for God now accepteth thy works. 8 Let thy garments be always white; and let thy head lack no ointment. 9 Live joyfully with the wife whom thou lovest all the days of the life of thy vanity, which he hath given thee under the sun, all the days of thy vanity: for that is thy portion in this life, and in thy labour which thou takest under the sun. 10 Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest.” (Ec 9:7-10)

I want to say several things about this text in the light of our theme: “Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your father which art in heaven” “Ye shine as lights in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation.”

- I. The counsel is to the justified, and to them alone.
- II. The counsel is to live life with gusto and energy and joy.
- III. The counsel can only be rightly applied by a man who loves Jesus Christ.

- I. This counsel is to the justified, to those whose works have been accepted by God.
  - A. Words addressed to one person might have great and beneficial results: the same words addressed to someone else might be deadly: For instance, if someone is looking for work, it is good advice to tell them to work as hard looking for work as they expect to work after they have found work. Unless: they don’t expect to work very hard after they have a job. Instance two: “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.” Is bad advice to the suicide prone, or self-destructive. There was a political machine in the East years ago which had this as a model. They were heavily supported by criminal elements and the politicians adopted the Golden Rule. We wouldn’t want our business meddled with, so we won’t meddle with yours.
  - B. The Bible is life unto life; but also death unto death. How your read it depends on what your heart is like. If you love Jesus Christ you will respond one way to Scripture; if you don’t, you will respond another way, a destructive way. “Jesus said

unto them, If God were your Father, ye would love me: for I proceeded forth and came from God; neither came I of myself, but he sent me.” (Joh 8:42) The problem with the Pharisees was this: they had no faith, and no sense of sin. So they skewed everything they read in the Bible. The only cure would be a new heart and a right spirit within them.

C. What works are accepted by God: that’s the question. We read in the HC 88-91

Q88: In how many things does true repentance or conversion consist?

A88: In two things: the dying of the old man, and the making alive of the new.

Q89: What is the dying of the old man?

A89: Heartfelt sorrow for sin, causing us to hate and turn from it always more and more.

Q90: What is the making alive of the new man?

A90: Heartfelt joy in God through Christ, causing us to take delight in living according to the will of God in all good works.

Q91: What are good works?

A91: Those only which proceed from true faith, and are done according to the Law of God, unto His glory, and not such as rest on our own opinion or the commandments of men.

D. So Solomon is addressing those who have repented, been converted, alive in Christ, with heartfelt joy in God, seeking to live for his glory. His works:

1. Proceed from faith; hence, from love.
2. Are according to the law—not his imagination
3. For the glory of God—not for self-glory to please himself, but to please God.

II. What is this counsel to the converted man, to live with respect to this world that God has created?

A. The world is a good place and everything was created good for the joy of man. “Go thy way, eat thy bread and drink thy wine.”

1. The unbeliever: “What other reason is there to live but to have pleasure,” says the ungodly. We should be happy. But we should be “enlightened about it.” This means education, to get the best jobs, meet the best people, enjoy the best things. Selfishness might be bad because what goes around comes around, and the best pleasures are self-esteem, self-worth, and self-gratification. Be useful and give something back to the world. His portion is in this world, and this world is his inheritance: hence, his life is filled with frustration, illusion, and vanity, bitterness and strive, for he is seeking to get from the world that which can never satisfy his soul.
2. The Justified: My joy is in Christ, not in pleasure and self-indulgence. I learn how to both suffer want, and to enjoy plenty, and both are acceptable to me if in the will of Christ. I belong to Christ, and my rejoicing is in Christ. I have learned in whatsoever state I am therewith to be content. It God causes me to enjoy creature comforts, then I am thankful: I can enjoy a glass of wine, for there is nothing evil in bottle, and all creatures of God are good. But it is not evil to abstain, for my joy does not depend upon the creatures. If God takes away the creature comforts, I am still thankful, for He has only taken away that which will perish anyway. He is preparing me a place far greater and enduring than this world of vanity. This world is not my home, for I do not yet see the face of Him my soul loves.
3. The Christian, therefore, will always be a paradox to the unbeliever. The unbeliever cannot understand what makes the believer tick, for he always believes the Christian is motivated by the same things he is. Unfortunately, sometimes this is true, for not everyone who names the name of Christ lives in purity of heart. But the believer understands the unbeliever, for he once lived and thought as the unbeliever, and still sees sinful impulses in himself. I have a sign that I used to post in my classroom: “Old folks know more about being young and young folks know about being old.” It could also be said, “Believers know about unbelief; unbelievers know nothing about faith.” We can say to the world, “We understand. We were once as you are. We understand.”

B. The best state in this present world is the married state.

1. The unbeliever will agree in principle, but he will be dominated by the pleasure principle: it is the best state if it gives me what I am looking for; otherwise, I will dump this partner and find another. Marriage certainly supports society and gives stability to man, for the health of our nation depends upon it, and there will be less delinquency and lawlessness if we have good homes. I will keep trying until I get someone who will give me the happiness I deserve. There is no reason why same-sex marriage cannot provide these things, for love is what is important, as Solomon said. It is incredible that Solomon had so much wisdom.
2. The believer has a different take and will think differently. It is God’s will that a man and a wife live together for a lifetime, all the days of his vanity. It is God’s portion and inheritance. The purpose is the kingdom of God, to promote the preaching of the Gospel and to train children in righteousness and godliness. Divorce is a disruption of the divine order, and involves hardness of heart and rebellion. Husbands are to love their wives and wives are to love their husbands. This involves an act of the will and obedience to God, and is the result of the love of Christ; for the home is a pattern of the love Christ has for his church and the love and reverence that the church gives to Christ. Therefore, my great desire is that my home be a pattern of gospel love and light; that it be an instrument for the shining forth of the gospel in my church and in my community. Hence, my family will support the church of Jesus Christ; we will be faithful in attendance, work to advance the mission of the church, give tithes and offerings, and resist the darkness of this world, which seeks its reward and pleasure in this world and not in the kingdom of God. I will prepare early in life for marriage, building a strong foundation so that I can be a good husband or a good wife for the love of Christ and the Gospel. If already married, I seek to bring my life into conformity with the will of God so that the

Gospel will not be brought into shame by my selfishness and rebellion. As in all things in this world, marriage does not exist for its own sake, but for the pattern of heavenly things and for the glory of God.

- C. A man should have joy and gusto in the work of his hands, doing all to the glory of God, with energy, joy, and good will, whatever his state in life.
1. Again there is a vast difference between the way the unbeliever looks at work and the way the believer looks at it. The unbeliever will look at Solomon’s counsel as a formula for success in the world. The unbeliever sees everything in terms of pleasure and selfishness. The plowing of the wicked is always sin, for he seeks not the glory of God. At the best he will look at work as an extension of his own ego and pleasure. He has pleasure in a job well done, for this is the gift of God, but he has no sense of thankfulness to God or the glory of God. He will seek the praise of men and will become bitter if not appreciated. The world has rich rewards for those who “play by the rules” Business has its rewards; entertainment has its; education has its; politics has its; and even religion has its rewards. Those who seek the rewards of this world may be richly rewarded for their efforts. Those who do not receive the recognition and rewards that they think they deserve become bitter and destructive. Benedict Arnold conspired with the British to betray the revolution and the fortress at West Point because he thought he had not received the recognition he deserved for his victory over British General Burgoyne at Saratoga.
  2. The believer has a different perspective. He never works for men, but always for God, even if he is a slave. Because I belong to Jesus Christ, I must never waste my gifts or my talents. I must not bury my talent because the world is unfair, but continue to work with my might at the place God has given me to labor, for I do not know the reason for my labor, only that I must do all to the glory of God. I must use every resource I have to advance the truth of the Gospel and the light of Jesus Christ, but I must not allow anything I have or do to be used against the truth of Christ or the love of Christ. I am not my own, but I belong to Jesus Christ. Therefore, I will do the best I can, for His glory and for His truth, for I must give account finally only to Him, who is my master and my Lord. His glory and His truth are the most precious things to me, for He is precious to me, for I love the Lord Jesus with all my heart.
- III. We are now ready to look at the third thing and sum up: this counsel can only be rightly applied by a man who loves Jesus Christ, who has been justified by faith, and has received the Spirit of God.
- A. If any man loves not the Lord Jesus he has the curse of God upon him and none of his works are accepted of God. He is cursed in his pleasures, in his house, in his work; His pleasures become his god; his house is his god; his work is his god, and he can never get things in order until he repents his idolatry and begins to serve the Lord in all these things.
  - B. There is the curse of God: Cursed be he that continueth not in all things written in the book of the law to do them; the only way to escape the curse and the bitterness and the agony is to believe that Jesus Christ was made a curse for you and have your heart awakened to the love of God in Jesus Christ through the forgiveness of your sins and the gift of the Holy Ghost.
  - C. There is the curse of Christ: “What shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world and lose his soul; or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?”
  - D. There is the curse of the Holy Spirit, through Paul: “If any man love not the Lord Jesus, let him be anathema, or cursed.”
  - E. The world to come is the place of reward, rest, peace, and comfort. You cannot get those here. The opportunity for faith, love, and work, and wisdom is not; not in the world to come. Live your life fully now; not being grumpy over its vanity; not going around with a long face, for your reward awaits in the next world.

But to those who love the Lord Jesus, who work in faith, obedience, and for the glory of God: these words will enable you to be a light in the darkness and vanity of this world:

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Amen and Amen  
God bless you.