

## **Counsel to the Old and to the Young about Death**

Ecclesiastes 11:7-10; Hebrews 9:27

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Reflection upon one's death is not for many people the most pleasant matter to contemplate even though it is a most necessary matter to contemplate. Death is inevitable, for it is appointed unto man once to die (Hebrews 9:27). No one can reschedule or miss that appointment with death. Dear ones, the grave brings an end to this present earthly existence. All that is familiar to your seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, and touching will be gone. These earthly bodies will become cold, lifeless, and will be laid in the grave to await the final resurrection on that Last Day ("for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return" Genesis 3:19). Earthly loved ones and friends will pass from your grasp. Earthly possessions will slide through your fingers as grains of sand that cannot be held. All that you have trusted in, hoped in, and cherished in this life will be left behind ("For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out" 1 Timothy 6:7). It brings an end (at least for the present time) with all those you have loved and known here upon the earth. As death approaches, you will come to see (in a way you have not seen up to this point) the utter vanity and emptiness of this vanishing world APART FROM JESUS CHRIST. It is only Jesus Christ that gives meaning and purpose to everything that you possess, everything that you do, and everything that happens in this world. For you who trust in Christ and His righteousness alone for your eternal salvation, that grim picture of death takes on a different perspective, for the fear is subdued by means of the substitutionary death and glorious resurrection of your Savior (whose resurrection we celebrate this Lord's Day as we do every Lord's Day). Because Christ lives so shall you who are united to Him by faith alone. Death for the Christian who clings to Christ and His righteousness is not simply the door that closes this life to him/her, but the door that opens everlasting life and the glories of heaven to him/her. Let us today take to heart the sage and wise counsel given to us by inspiration of the Holy Spirit from the wisest mere man to ever live. The main points from our text this Lord's Day are the following: (1) Counsel to the Old about Death (Ecclesiastes 11:7-8); (2) Counsel to the Young about Death (Ecclesiastes 11:9-10).

### **I. Counsel to the Old about Death (Ecclesiastes 11:7-8).**

A. In the previous section of Ecclesiastes 11, Solomon had focused his instruction on our duty before God to meet the legitimate needs of others rather than making lame excuses as to why we are unable to do so. Dear ones, taking seriously your duty to care for those in need strikes at the very foundation of your faith in Jesus Christ: for you cannot love God whom you cannot see if you don't love your brother/sister whom you can see.

B. As we approach our text today in Ecclesiastes 11:7-10, Solomon has not quite arrived at the conclusion (in Ecclesiastes 12:8), but he certainly is preparing us for the conclusion (just as Solomon prepares us for the conclusion of our own life). Is there a more important matter to discuss with the congregation of Israel (and with you and me) than the inevitable darkness that shall pass over all our eyes as we look upon the light of this present world for the last time? Is there a greater event in this life to motivate you out of your careless, apathetic, self-serving life style than a fresh recognition that this life is temporary and is passing away. Every year that you live seems to pass quicker than the one before it. Before you have finished one birthday, you are celebrating the next one. Your children and grandchildren are growing at a pace with which you find it hard to keep up. In previous sections of Ecclesiastes, the inspired Preacher has addressed the matter of death (as in Ecclesiastes 3:19-21). There is no way to slow down time. Thus, there is no way to slow down your Divine appointment with death. Are you ready for death? Are you making preparation for death? Or is death rather sneaking up on you unaware like a thief in the night? The counsel of Solomon (speaking by

inspiration of the Holy Spirit) is not to allow perhaps one of the most important events (if not the most important event) in your life to catch you by surprise—to catch you unaware and unprepared. You cannot properly enjoy the life God has given to you in this world if you do not properly prepare for death. Avoiding the subject of death is like trying to avoid nightfall because you have a fear of the dark. Death is an enemy, but it is a conquered enemy to the child of God who knows that God uses death now in his/her life to bring about sanctification and growth in Jesus Christ through the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ.

C. Let us consider our first main point (“Counsel to the Old concerning Death” as found in Ecclesiastes 11:7-8). Solomon first addresses the subject of death to those who are mature in years in Ecclesiastes 11:7-8 before addressing those who are young in years in Ecclesiastes 11:9-10. Our inspired writer first addresses life in verse 7 and then moves on to the subject of death in verse 8.

1. Carefully note the figurative language that Solomon uses in Ecclesiastes 11:7 to speak of this earthly life and the comforts God has given in this earthly life: “Truly the light is sweet, and a pleasant thing it is for the eyes to behold the sun.” By using the words “light” and “sun”, Solomon uses a common manner of speech found in the Scriptures in referring to this earthly life (Job 3:16; Psalm 56:13). In fact, “light” is used to mean “life” in various places of the Scripture (Job 33:28-30; John 8:12). Because heaven is where life is most glorious, it is described as a place of glorious light (Revelation 21:23). Solomon paints a picture of an elderly person who according to verse 9 lives “many years”. This particular person lived to be a ripe old age, and has experienced the sweetness of light, even the light of the sun during his many years. This elderly person has enjoyed the sweetness, comforts, and blessing of good health, sufficient wealth, and close relationships with family and friends. This elderly person has enjoyed so many of the pleasant comforts of this earthly life that God graciously bestows upon mankind with little pain, heartache, and sorrow to accompany it. Here is the kind of earthly life that mankind in general desires to live—many comforts and few heartaches. Here is the so-called “good life”. Here is the kind of life the world strives to have and to enjoy.

a. Not that it is wicked to enjoy the comforts God gives to you in this life as we have noted on many occasions (1 Timothy 6:17). The question is whether you believe you enjoy these comforts as undeserved gifts from a most gracious and loving Father, or as deserved payment for your own hard work or good life? The question is whether you enjoy the undeserved gracious gifts more than you enjoy the Giver of those undeserved gracious gifts? The question is whether you glorify and honor God with all of the undeserved gracious gifts you have, or whether you glorify yourself?

b. So here is this elderly person abundantly blessed with so much of the sweetness of light (life) and the pleasantness of the sun in the form of earthly comforts. Solomon speaks here specifically of such a one, but who among us (even if we don’t measure up to what others around us have by way of earthly comforts) has not been blessed with so much that we do not in the least deserve? And if you are complaining about what you don’t have, it is a most grievous sin which is due to your thankless heart and your discontentment. To varying degrees, we can all identify with the sweetness of light and the pleasantness of the sun in the undeserved blessings we have received in this earthly life. Have you stopped to thank the Lord today that you can see, hear, smell, taste, and touch? For many cannot. Have you paused to praise God that you can walk, talk, and think? For many cannot. Perhaps it would be good for you to walk around a day with your eyes closed to understand what a blessing it is to see. Perhaps it would be good for you to go a day without speaking and or hearing. Perhaps it would be good to use only one hand, arm, and leg for a whole day to see the blessed gift you have been given to have full use of your hands, arms, and legs. Have you given thanks to the Lord today for His undeserved kindness in providing the food you eat, the shelter over your head, and the clothing you have received, or are your words and thoughts more filled with complaint about the food not being to your satisfaction, the house not being as comfortable as you would like, or clothing not being stylish enough? Dear ones, an unthankful heart is actually atheistic. You would all cry out with loud voices that you are not atheists. “I believe in God and in Jesus Christ.” But when you complain in bitterness

and refuse to be thankful for the many blessings you have received from your gracious God, you forget the God who has freely and graciously given you all that you have and who could just as easily take it all away in a moment. A thankful heart is one of faith in Christ. A thankless heart is one of faithlessness in Christ.

2. Solomon now moves from the metaphor of “light”, which speaks of the comforts of earthly life to the metaphor of “darkness”, which speaks of the miseries of earthly death: “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” (Ecclesiastes 11:8). Just as we noted that the word “light” is used to mean “life” in the Scriptures, so the word “darkness” is used to mean “death” in the Scriptures (Job 10:21; Psalm 107:14; John 9:4). Just as the life of heaven is described as a place of glorious light, hell (or the second death) is described as a place of darkness (Matthew 25:30).

a. Here is the warning to all who are older and who enjoy the comforts of this life to such an extent that they have forgotten that death is just around the corner: “yet let him remember the days of darkness; for they shall be many” (Ecclesiastes 11:8). Don’t become so wrapped up during your latter years in enjoying the fruits of all your labor and your hard work that you despise your own soul and make little or no preparation for its eternal safety, which is far more valuable than anything you enjoy here upon the earth. Don’t be like the rich fool spoken of by Christ in Luke 12:15-21.

b. Dear ones, there are no second chances after death. Death is final. All opportunities to live a life for Christ in this world are gone. All opportunities to be a loving husband, wife, parent, and child in this life are ended. All opportunities to trust in Christ, to repent of sin against God and others, or to seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness are passed away. What’s done is done—nothing can be added to it nor taken from it. The final chapter of the book of your life in this world is written and is closed at death. What do you want that book of your life to say once that final chapter is completed? What will be most important to you as you walk through the valley of the shadow of death? Will it be the money you have made; the degrees you have after your name; or the applause of men you have received? Solomon says in light of many days of darkness that are to come to you, all that cometh is vanity and emptiness if you lived and died without Christ being your life and the reason for living and dying. “For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain” (Philippians 1:21). I hope this becomes the theme of your life and of your death. If Christ is the reason for living and dying, nothing will be vanity, but everything that happens to you in life and death will have meaning and purpose. Jesus Christ will make everything beautiful in His own time.

## **II. Counsel to the Young about Death (Ecclesiastes 11:9-10).**

A. Solomon now turns his attention to the youth in the congregation, for it is so often the case that when you are young, you feel healthy; you think quickly; you have no wrinkles; your muscles bulge; and death seems a million years away (if it is even considered at all). Dear young people, the beauty of youth is that your whole life is before you, so that you can learn from the sins and mistakes that we who are older have made, and so that your whole life can be lived for Christ. However, the danger of youth is that you become so wrapped up in your music, your video games, your work, your sports, your friends, your clothing, how you look, and your pleasures, that you take little or no thought of the vanity and emptiness of all these things in life (if Christ is not your life and your reason for living). For death is coming to you as well. It may or it may not be far away, but you (like those who are older) are here addressed by the wisest mere man that ever lived to live in light of the fact that you too will one day face death and the grave. And we who are older can tell you that your life (like ours) will pass like a night’s sleep—you go to bed and before you know it, you’re awake. Where did those 7 or 8 hours go? That’s what you will be saying (like us who are older): Where did the last 10, 20, 30, 40, 50 years go? It passed as quickly as a dream in the night. Therefore, dear young people, take heed, be warned that you do not forget Christ, that you do not forget His offer of salvation, forgiveness, and righteousness, that you do not forget that all of this in life will soon be gone and only what is done for Christ

will last. It is important that you never think that preaching is not for you or that God is not speaking to you in the preached Word every week. God is speaking directly to you in the preached Word. The only question is whether you are listening?

B. In addressing the youth here (in Ecclesiastes 11:9) in regard to the matter of death, Solomon uses a different mode of expression. It may sound as if Solomon is encouraging the youth to “let thy heart cheer thee all the days of thy youth,” and to “walk in the ways of thine own heart and in the sight of thine own eyes”, as if these were good things to do. However, this is not the case at all. Solomon is using a form of irony in his address to the youth. Knowing all too well how the hearts of young people are so predisposed to doing their own thing, following their own heart in pleasing themselves, Solomon (in effect) says, “Go for it and see what you get or see what you profit.” Rather than these words being an encouragement to follow your own heart, young people, Solomon is seeking to discourage you from following your own heart (which is the predominate theme in most music, magazines, and TV programs, and movies today). How often do you hear this theme in music and movies: “Follow your own dreams”; or “No one can tell you what is good for you, only you can know that.” You see, dear young people, if your heart is so inclined to tune the Lord Jesus out of your life or to just turn down the volume of Christ speaking to you, so that you can barely hear Him over all the really important chatter in your music and movies, then the Lord will turn you over to follow the desires of your own heart—He will not restrain you from the evil you desire to pursue—He will allow you to fall into one sin after another until you have fallen into a pit from which you cannot extract yourself.

1. This ironic manner of speech (wherein God is not condoning what is evil, but is actually warning those who want to do what is evil) is found in various places in Scripture: 1 Kings 18:27; 1 Kings 22:15; Matthew 26:45 (in light of verse 41).

2. Thus, young people, Solomon is actually warning you NOT to rejoice in your youth by way of seeking your own pleasures and following your own heart at the expense of faith and obedience to Jesus Christ and His commandments.

C. We see clearly that Solomon’s speech is ironic when we come to the latter part of Ecclesiastes 11:9: “but know thou, that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment.” Go ahead and waste your youth on your own pleasures, but be absolutely assured of this certain truth: God is not mocked, for whatever you sow that will you also reap. God will bring you into judgment for going your own way, following your own heart, doing your own thing, being your own person, pleasing your own self. And death (whether it comes sooner or later for you) will close the book on any reforms you have ever thought about making to your life. The Lord (through Solomon) is simply saying, “Now is the time to commit your life to Christ and to lay hold of His forgiveness and righteousness. Now is the time to stop playing games with the Lord before it is too late. Why have a lifetime of regrets as you lay on your death bed and await the grave and the judgment when you can have a lifetime of service to Christ in which to rejoice and for which to praise God for His abundant grace in your life even from your youth. You, young people, can make a difference in your families as you take up your cross, deny yourselves, and follow Christ. You can make a difference with your friends. You can make a difference in the church. Think of those young people in the Bible that made a difference (Samuel made a difference, David made a difference, the little servant girl to Naaman the Syrian Captain who had leprosy made a difference, Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego made a difference, Timothy made a difference.) You, young people, can make a difference.

D. How can you make a difference? Solomon says in Ecclesiastes 11:10: “Therefore remove sorrow from thy heart, and put away evil from thy flesh: for childhood and youth are vanity.”

1. Solomon is not saying that sorrow for your sins is wrong and that you are to remove that, but rather the sorrow that is to be removed is that sorrow and disappointment that comes from not having all the earthly desires of your heart realized. Remove from your heart the disappointment over not

having a boyfriend or girlfriend and realize that the popular view of boyfriends and girlfriends is built upon the vanity of popularity, being accepted by others, and sinful passions and lusts, rather than becoming a godly young man or godly young woman yourself and praying for God to send you a godly partner whom you may court and get to know without all of the empty vain things that soon pass away once you are married (like popularity, beauty, or money). What will make a marriage last is a godly commitment of your life to Christ and to wait for that person that likewise evidences that same godly commitment to Christ and a love, honor, and respect for you and his/her own family.

2. Solomon warns that evil be put away from the flesh. In other words, that you flee youthful lusts. Purity of body and mind is a most gracious gift. Save yourself and present yourself to your husband and wife pure and undefiled. O the responsibility that rests upon us as parents to love, to protect, and to provide safe boundaries and accountability, so that lines are not crossed in these sexual matters. It is not all childhood and youth that are vanity, but such childhood and youth that follow their own hearts that are vanity and emptiness; for death and judgment are ignored and forgotten in exchange for present pleasures.

3. However, do not despair if living for yourself has been the life you have lived thus far. Turn in faith to Christ. Trust Him as your only hope of forgiveness of sins, and eternal life. Remember, “where sin abounded, grace did much more abound” (Romans 5:20).

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