

Ecclesiastes 4: 12; “A Cord of Three Strands”, A Bible Study
Prepared for the Evening of August 27th, 2017,
And delivered at the Rendall Home.

I have intentionally slowed down, going through this section, because of the significance of our coming to understand the value of Christian companionship. The text, from verses 9 to 12 speaks in more general terms. It does not confine itself to Christian companionship, but to the value of companionship in general. But in reading and understanding the book of Ecclesiastes we need to take all the general statements which are made by Solomon regarding his conclusions about things that he has observed; of things “under the sun”; and inject healthy doses of New Covenant grace and truth into them. “Two are better than one” is a good statement if it is assuming that the two who are doing these things together are pursuing righteous things. “Two lying down to keep warm together” is good if they are keeping each other warm in a righteous way. The principles of what is true and what is personally helpful and profitable, must be governed by what are the right things to do.

In this book Solomon often speaks from an existentialist viewpoint in order to show us the vanity and meaninglessness of life under the sun, but in doing so, it permits us who have all the benefit of a completed canon of Scripture to be able to take the great principles of truth which are being enunciated here, and to apply them to ourselves spiritually. The great truth which Solomon is enunciating is this. All earthly endeavor without a God orientation will only be done in vain. It will not last. It will not bring us the lasting meaning and satisfaction which we would like to have. After all of the greatest works we have done are completed; even those attainments will only bring short satisfaction. The principle of truth which this leads us to, as New Testament Christians, is this. “Only one life; too soon is past; only what’s done for Christ will last.” Would you have your works last and be established forever? This can only be done through finding Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. It can only be done when the glory of God is your highest motive in doing what you do. John Chapter 3, verse 21 says, “But he who practices the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be manifested as having been wrought in God.” (NASV) There is wisdom to be pursued, and wisdom to be found; but it is godly wisdom and not worldly wisdom. It is the wisdom of what Christ would have us do with our time and with our strength.

Now this final verse on companionship, which is found in verse 12, is speaking about having the wisdom and the strength to be able to withstand being overpowered by the arguments or strength of another person, who we will assume is not right in their arguments and not righteous in their trying to overpower the Christian. The verse is speaking about that strength which we need to prevent our being overpowered, as being likened to a threefold cord, or a cord of three strands. The strands and the cords being spoke of, are other Christian people. It is extremely helpful that we have other godly people around us who we can intertwine our life with theirs and thus be stronger. And so we want to see from this verse that the value of Christian companionship is that God will often use the means of one, or two other Christians, working together in unity to bring about a good return for their labor, and to withstand the sinful schemes of the Devil or evil men who would try to oppress them in some way, to keep them from doing the will or the work of the Lord. This is how I believe that we need to understand these verses; we who live in the time of the New Testament Church. So this is how I want to look into this subject at this hour. 1st – We will look and see that there is wisdom in having a few godly friends. In wisdom there is safety. And 2nd – We will look and see that there is power in having a few godly friends. In that power, we can better take our stand for righteousness and truth.

First, there is wisdom in having a few good friends.

“A three-fold cord is not quickly broken.” There are many things of lasting value which are established by having a godly friend. Turn with me to Proverbs Chapter 27, verses 9 and 10.

“Ointment and perfume delight the heart, and the sweetness of a man’s friend gives delight by hearty counsel.” “Do not forsake your own friend or your father’s friend, nor go to your brother’s house in the day of your calamity; better is a neighbor nearby than a brother far away.” Ointment and perfume strengthen, comfort, and refresh. They inform us of the love and care of another person towards us; in this case, a man’s friend is one who give delight by hearty counsel. As Matthew Henry says, “The sweetness of friendship lies not in hearty mirth, and hearty laughter, but in hearty counsel and faithful advise.” Let me ask; do you have someone like this in your life? Do you have a close friend who you can go to in the time of your calamity and sit down with them and tell them what is going on with you? Have you found someone to be your friend who can give you delight through their spiritual wisdom which they convey to you on a regular basis? Sometimes people call this mentoring. But friendship is more than mentoring. I think that mentoring is a word which is insufficient for what we are talking about here.

What we are talking about here is not simply someone who will instruct you in the principles of truth, but it must also be someone who will share with you the experiential secrets of how they left off foolishness and came to be wise, in whatever subject you are discussing. In godly friendship there is more that is shared than information. There is sympathy and kindness and conversation which encourages and strengthens and builds up your faith or your friend’s faith. And there is real wisdom in praying that this person who will become your friend will be someone who is close by; not far away; that they will be there when you really need them. Many times even Christian people become overwhelmed with discouragement, frustration, or fears of various sorts because they have no one to be able to share their troubles with. I am speaking of a human friend, of course. The believer has a friend, the Lord Jesus Christ; who sticks closer than a brother.

Now the remedy for this is to pray to find a friend who is wise and godly. Find a friend who will be able to give you hearty counsel. This will not necessarily be counsel that would give you a false peace or false assurance that all is well with you when it really is not. It is rather the counsel of Biblical wisdom coming from someone who truly cares for you and for your welfare. Verse 10 is saying that you ought not to forsake your friend; a friend like this who will tell you what is good for you; and yet one who will sympathize with you in the struggles you are having; to do what is right. Take notice of your godly father’s friend, and go to him for counsel and advise. Don’t simply go to friends of your own age; but go to those who are experienced and wise in the ways of the Lord. Your father’s friend is older, and he probably is wiser than all of your friends. If you are younger, it will be a good thing if you can seek out your father’s friends who are wise.

Take a look at Proverbs 27: 17. “As iron sharpens iron, so a man sharpens the countenance of his friend.” Whereas the former verse talked about sweetness; this one speaks about sharpening. Our thinking on many subjects needs this kind of interaction with a friend. I am talking about holy and wise conversation. It is the kind of conversation which goes back and forth trying to make good and true points and then trying to draw the right conclusions from what has been said concerning the truth of a certain subject. This will be conversation using Biblical principles to determine what would be wised and right actions. It produces a sharpening of our mind; gives us a keener edge to the way that we look at things. Matthew Henry says, “Men are filed, made smooth and bright, and fit for business who were rough, and dull, and inactive, by conversation (with each other).” “This is designed, first to recommend to us this expedient for sharpening ourselves, but with a caution to take heed whom we choose to converse with, because the influence upon us is so great either for the better or for the worse.” “And secondly – To directs us what we must have in our eye in conversation, namely to improve both others and ourselves, not to pass away time or banter one another, but to provoke one another to love and good works and so make one another wiser and better.”

A cord of three strands seems to imply that it is better still if we can have two godly friends who we can speak with, about the concerns of our heart and soul. The reason for this is found in the confirmation of truth. It is on the basis of two or three witnesses that every fact shall be established. Deuteronomy Chapter 19, verse 15. “A single witness shall not rise up against a man

on account of any iniquity or any sin which he has committed; on the evidence of two or three witnesses a matter shall be confirmed.” There is real strength in this. What one person might see or understand as true concerning you spiritually, should be verifiable by another person's perception of you. The testimony of the truth of what we are like and what we have done should be verifiable by more than one witness.

Those who are our closest friends, if we have at least two of them should be able to testify consistently to us of what we are like if they are faithful. Proverbs 27: 6 – “Faithful are the wounds of a friend, but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful.” A faithful friend will tell us what we are really like and whether we need to change, to repent, or to learn something new. This is particularly true if we are a person who likes to argue with others to get our own way in things. We need to see that sometimes others see more clearly than ourselves what we are really like. But when we are able, by the grace of God, to be bound together with at least two other people in the bonds of the truth of the Word of God, it really is a very powerful witness. “A cord of three strands cannot easily be torn apart.” There is wisdom in having a few godly friends.

2nd – There is power in having a few godly friends. In that power, we can better take our stand for righteousness and truth.

“Though one may be overpowered by another, two can withstand him.” “And a threefold cord is not quickly broken.” The picture is of one person being overpowered by another person who is trying to attack them. The verse is saying that it will be possible to withstand the attack if there are others to stand with you. There is power in more than one strand making up the cord of living out the truth of the Word of God. Turn with me to 2 Corinthians Chapter 13, verse 1. “This is the third time that I am coming to you.” “Every fact is to be confirmed by the testimony of two or three witnesses.” (This, you see, is the cord of three strands.) “I have previously said when present the second time, and though now absent I say in advance to those who have sinned in the past and to all the rest as well, that if I come again, I will not spare anyone, since you are seeking for the proof of the Christ who speaks in me, and who is not weak toward you, but mighty in you.” “For indeed He was crucified because of weakness, yet He lives because of the power of God directed toward you.” “Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith; examine yourselves!” “Or do you not recognize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you—unless indeed you fail the test?” “But I trust that you will realize that we ourselves do not fail the test.”

Are you the friend of Christ? What is the friend of Christ like? I believe that the friend of Christ is the one who is loyal to Him and humble enough to serve Him and not think of themselves as great. You can see this if you will turn over to Luke 22, verse 24. “And there arose also a dispute among them as to which one of them was regarded to be the greatest.” “And He said to them, ‘The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them, and those who exercise authority over them are called ‘Benefactors.’ “But not so among you; on the contrary, he who is greatest among you, let him be as the younger, and he who governs as he who serves.” “For who is greater, he who sits at the table, or he who serves?” “Yet I am among you as the One who serves.” “But you are those who continued with me in My trials.”

You see; this was a great encouragement to the Lord Jesus; that these disciples had continued with Him in His trials. Oh, I know that He knew that they would not have the strength to continue with Him all the way to the cross. They would not have the spiritual strength and fortitude of mind and heart to be able to endure that; as of yet. But He knew that because of His willingness to go to the cross for them, that they were bound together in a cord of the strands of His making. They were sanctified by His will, and His will was to humble Himself to the point of death, having obeyed all the commandments of God fully, while He was here upon the earth. By His dying, He would bind them to Himself with cords of everlasting love. It would be the 3-fold cord of righteousness, and sacrifice, and love. As the prophetic language of Psalm 118, verse 27 says, “Bind the sacrifice with cords to the horns of the altar.” “You are my God, I will exalt You.” Through His death and by His resurrection from the dead, all those whom the Father had chosen would become His Church. They all had the same purpose, even then; which was to glorify God. But they couldn't

become a cord of three strands until He was bound on the altar of the cross and His body broken for us. Then, all those believing in Him would become, as members of His Church, the cord of three strands which would not easily be broken.

These disciples didn't realize just how much they needed to change until they came to the point where they saw Jesus go to the cross. He was trying to teach them godly humility and they were trying to figure out who was the greatest among them. They didn't understand, but they soon would. And the reason that they would understand was because the Lord Jesus had bound them to Himself with cords of love. They would be His witnesses and confirm the truth of His perfectly godly life. Since the time of Jesus' resurrection, the major thrust of God's intention of a Christian's seeking to have a few godly friends, is so that they will have greater power in connection with the advancement of the truth of the gospel, and in having the power to deal with the problems which are greater than one Christian can face alone.

Turn with me to Matthew Chapter 18, verses 15-19. "Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone." "If he hears you, you have gained your brother." "But if he will not hear, take with you one or two more, that by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established." "And if he refuses to hear them, tell it to the church." "But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector." "Assuredly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven." "Again I say to you that if two of you agree on earth concerning anything that they ask, it will be done for them by My Father in heaven." "For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them." The cord of three strands is the Church gathered together in the name of Jesus Christ. If they agree on anything prayer, in the name of Jesus; which means anything which is in accordance with His will in the Scriptures, and His will of His purposes and plans for what will glorify Him according to that purpose; it will be done for them by the Father in heaven.

This is the binding and the loosing power which this cord of the Church of Jesus Christ has. Power to discipline offending unrepentant members. Power to agree to see the unrepentant offender as a heathen and a tax-gatherer. Power which is established in the Church by Christ being in the midst of them. It is the power of truth, and as it says in 2 Corinthians 13: 8, "For we can do nothing against the truth, but for the truth." This is the cord of three strands. A holy Christ loving sinful men to death to establish their salvation. A people sanctified by that will of Christ to die for them. And third, it is the power to spread the truth of the word of God, knowing that because of Christ, it is strong and powerful to do a great work in people's lives. It will save them from their sins if they believe it. And since He has bound them to Himself, it enables them to pray and to ask the Lord that He would give them others to help them by being their godly friends.

If we do not presently have these godly friends, then let us pray that the Lord will provide them. Then we can minister to each other and the church will become stronger. I like what it says in 2nd Corinthians 8, verse 1. "Moreover, brethren, we make known to you the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia: that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded in the riches of their liberality." "For I bear witness that according to their ability, yes, and beyond their ability, they were freely willing, imploring us with much urgency that we would receive the gift and the fellowship of the ministering to the saints." "And not only as we had hoped, but they first gave themselves to the Lord, and then to us by the will of God." That is the pattern of Christian friendship and Christian companionship.