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Vanity Of Vanities: All Is Vanity

By David Crawford

Even if you are only casually acquainted with the Bible, you know that the title of this article is from the Old Testament book of Ecclesiastes. In these few paragraphs I want to consider the general context and overall import of this unusual book.

The book contains literally hundreds of lessons, but one main lesson in particular. It seems that the only possible heading for such an endeavor as this would have to be, "Vanity of vanities; all is vanity;" because this is the theme of the wise man who wrote this composition. Solomon, sitting in peaceful security on the throne David had built, with riches, honor, splendor and power was the one man in all the world whom men would have called happy. Yet his unceasing refrain in this rather strange book is, "All is vanity." The word 'vanity' (meaning unprofitable, empty or worthless) occurs thirty seven times in the twelve chapters that make up the book.

The fact that Ecclesiastes has always been a favorite Bible book with atheists comes as a surprise to us. It is said that Voltaire, the well-known French Atheist, appealed to it in support of his philosophy. Obviously then, this book has been sadly misunderstood and abused by some. I hope to bring to light the true purpose of Solomon in writing this book as you read my comments. I will divide this endeavor into three main divisions, namely, the problem the book deals with, the experiment, and the conclusion.

THE PROBLEM DEALT WITH

The book of Ecclesiastes is actually a sermon in print, the text of which is chapter one, verses one through three, which state, "The words of the preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem. Vanity of vanities, saith the preacher, vanity of vanities; all is vanity. What profit hath a man of all his labour which he taketh under the sun?"

Some books of the Bible cannot possibly be read with profit and understood unless the key to their study be found. Perhaps no portion of Holy Writ more needs such a key than Ecclesiastes. Here is the key: 'Life apart from God can have no meaning for God alone can give human existence meaning.' Even those things which are good and praiseworthy within themselves becomes

meaningless and vain when pursued for their own sakes and not for God's glory.

In a world where everything passes away and fails to satisfy, Solomon sets himself to answer the question, "What is the solution to life in such a world?" We may consider the book as an inquiry into that most important question, "What is the sovereign good of man?" God gave Solomon wisdom and unparalleled opportunity to observe and to explore every avenue of earthly life. Solomon saw earthly life at its best, not as a whim but he could gratify whenever he desired to do so. And he seems to have made it his chief business in life to see how good a time he could have. This book is the result of Solomon's experiences. It was written during his apostasy from God in his old age. I almost entitled this article, "Under the Sun:" because this expression occurs twenty-nine times in the book. Other key phrases are: "Upon the earth," occurring seven times, and "Under the heaven," which occurs three times. Thus four key phrases give us insight concerning the scope of the book. The problem Solomon wrestles with is: "How to be happy without God." In Eccl. 2:3 he wrote, "...Till I might see what was that good for the sons of men which they should do under the heaven all the days of their life." This is the problem the book deals with, "How to be happy without God."

THE EXPERIMENT

The experiment of Solomon takes up the majority of the book, beginning at chapter one, verse four, and continuing through chapter twelve, verse twelve. This division is called "The experiment;" because in it the wise man experiments with various things in searching for happiness apart from Jehovah. He sought satisfaction in science, but noted a horrid sameness in nature. He then searched for meaning in human wisdom and philosophy, but all to no purpose. He explored every avenue of fleshly pleasure: mirth, drinking, building, great possessions, wealth, and music, but found all of these pursuits empty. He tried religion (without God) only to be sadly disappointed. He sought for satisfaction in great wealth, but without satisfaction. Finally, he tried morality. Here he was in

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I'm The Church Budget

By Jason Frizzell

I'm the church budget, not just paper, words, and figures, I'm the church's assistance in teaching God's word. Little children appear with smiling, happy faces because of me. They have the opportunity to sing, "Jesus loves me" because of me. I care for the homeless children, I help furnish good food and clothing to keep those in need warm. I assist in supplying a warm bed for those so unfortunate that no one seems to care or give a kind and loving hand. I help supply some assurance to someone that needs love and care. I'm a helping hand that outstretches to the elderly who can no longer care for themselves. I'm a gentle loving hand that leads them across some of their troubles as they walk into the sunset of life. I'm a second chance and a brighter tomorrow for the downtrodden. A powerful program for training young men to become elders and gospel preachers, ministering to and bearing one another's burdens within the church congregations, the building of Christian homes, guidance and comfort to those who face difficulties and problems, and who seek the will of God for their lives.

I'm a personal work program to lead others to Christ, a program to assist our young people to overcome harmful influences that beset them on every hand, the improvement of the local facilities to accommodate our needs for growth for the present and for future years, and the thousand and one things that would not be done if our congregation did not exist. Yes, I'm an effort to a candle in a world of sin and darkness. I'm a joining of hands and hearts to build a better world, and by hope, to make heaven our home after this natural life has ended.

I'm an expression to God for the sacrifice he made through his Son, Jesus Christ, without whose love and grace, we would have no hope of the life to come. I represent eternal values, what you give to me, you save.

I'm the investment accounts of the world's oldest savings and loan institution. Life is only a loan from God the Father. He saves us in the church. Compare the interest rates with any other institutions. Search your hearts, don't you think I am worthy of your support? How prosperous are we as Christians? Have I examined myself and supported the church budget as I have prospered?

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and Harold Turner

Identification of A Christian

By Lavern Stewart

One man that Paul preached to was almost persuaded to be a Christian (Acts 26:28). What was Paul trying to persuade him to become? What are the marks that identify one as a Christian? We need to know this because by wearing the name 'Christian' we glorify God (1 Peter 4:16).

Here are some marks by which one can identify himself as a Christian: (1) He is a disciple (Acts 11:26). A disciple means a learner, and then a follower of his teacher, Jesus is our teacher, so we must follow him (John 8:31-32). (2) He is not merely a learner of Jesus, but also a believer of what he learns (Romans 10:17; John 8:24). One must not only believe in the existence of God, but also believe what God says (Acts 27:25). (3) He is one who has heard and learned, believed what he has heard, and also obeys what the Lord tells him to do (Luke 6:46). Jesus said, "Why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?" Obeying is a sure sign of loving Christ (John 14:15-23). (4) He is one who has come out from that which is unclean and sinful, see 2 Cor. 6:17-18; therefore, being a saint, he tries to keep his body under control (1 Cor. 1:2; 9:27). (5) He lives a daily life of self denial for the Lord (Luke 9:23), which involves living for his fellow man also (Matt. 25:34-40). (6) Finally, a Christian is one who does as commanded in 1 Peter 1:13, "Wherefore girding up the loins of your minds, be sober, and set your hope perfectly on the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ."

"You are only young once, but you can be immature indefinitely."

The Meaning of Anti-Christ

By Clovis Ragsdale

The apostle John uses a very unique word in his first epistle which is not found anywhere else in the Bible. He uses the word 'antichrist' to describe brethren who had become false teachers, and who were no longer in fellowship with John.

The meaning of the word 'antichrist' is one who is against or who opposes Christ. There are many ways that one can deny Christ. The Jew opposes Christ with the belief that he is an imposter, who claimed to be the Son of God, but was not. The wise men of this world admit that he was a great teacher and philosopher, but that he was only a man and not divine. Many who claim to believe on him change his teachings to meet their own whims and opinions, and others who wear his name do so in such a manner as to bring dishonor and shame to the very name 'Christian'.

In 2 Thess. 2:3-4, Paul speaks of an individual who is called the son of perdition, who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped, so that he as God, sitteth in the temple of God showing himself that he is God. Nearly all Bible scholars of the protestant world interpret this passage of Scripture to refer to the one who holds the office of the papacy. They believe that the pomp and ceremony, the changing of doctrines, and the many additions and changes in the New Testament pattern of worship to be a prime example of an antichrist; because it opposes the simple way of worship that Christ taught.

The wicked emperors of Rome, such as Nero, would qualify as an antichrist. The Pharisees, Sadducees, Gnostics, and other Jews of Christ's day, were typical antichrists. The apostle Paul, before he saw the light and changed his way, was a powerful antichrist. So anyone who opposes the spirit of the gospel, and opposes the church, which is the body of Christ, is a genuine antichrist, no matter where or among whom he is found. The false teachers mentioned by John were the antichrist of that time. As there have been false teachers and opposers to Christ in every generation of the past, so we today can expect antichrists to be found among our society, and can expect many more in the future.

Everyone should take inventory of himself to see if he is in any way opposing Jesus Christ. Christ said that we will either be for or against him; there is no middle ground.

Notice the reading of 1 John 4:1-3, "Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try

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Forgive Me, Son, I Knew Not

Listen, Son, I am saying this to you as you lie asleep, with one little paw crumpled under your cheek, and the curls sticking wet on your damp, dirty little forehead. I have stolen into your room alone. Just a few minutes ago, as I sat reading my paper in the living room, a hot stifling wave of remorse and shame crept over me. I could not resist it. Guiltily I come to your bedside to ask your forgiveness.

These are the things I was thinking, son: I had a tough day at the office, I had been cross with you, scolded you as you dressed for school because you gave your face merely a dab with water and left all the dirt on the towel. I took you to task for not cleaning your teeth. I called out angrily when I found you had left some of your things on the floor.

At breakfast I found fault too; you spilled things, you would not eat the things that are good for you, you put your elbows on the table, you poured more syrup on your plate than you ate, you would not sit erect in your chair; as you started off to play, and I made for the car, you turned and waved a little hand and called "Goodbye, Daddy," and I frowned and said in reply, "Hold your shoulders back."

Then it began all over again in the late afternoon. As I came up the road I spied you down on your knees playing in the dirt. There were holes in your good clothes - I humiliated you before your friends by making you march to the house and take off your good clothes. "Clothes are expensive" and "If you had to buy them you would be more careful." Imagine that! Son, you remember, later, when I was reading, how you came in timidly, softly, with a sort of hurt look in your eyes? When I glanced up over my paper, impatient at the interruption, you hesitated at the door, "What is it you want now?" I snapped.

You said nothing, but ran across in a plunge and threw your arms around my neck and kissed me, again and again, and your little arms tightened with an affection that God has set blooming in your heart, and which even neglect could not wither - and then you were gone, pattering to your room.

Well son, it was shortly afterward that my paper slipped from my hands and a terrible sickening fear came over me. Suddenly I saw myself as I really was, in all my horrible selfishness, and I felt sick at heart.

What has habit been doing to me? The habit of complaining, of finding fault, of reprimanding - all of these were my

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Knowing The Truth

By Harold Turner

There is a growing tendency in many religious circles to accept the idea that one cannot know for sure that he is right religiously. It seems that more and more, the truth is being supplanted by sincerity. While Jesus said, "Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free," men are saying, "Whatever one believes sincerely, it will be acceptable to God." This concept has almost destroyed the need to question doctrines and practices, for, after all, if one cannot know the truth for sure, why should he question any practice? Satan has worked most effectively in convincing men that the words of Jesus, "Ye shall know the truth," are just not true. The seeds of doubt and uncertainty are being sown into the minds of multitudes at a rapid pace. And men who once had strong convictions about their faith are no longer sure what they believe, or why they believe it.

In 2 Thess. 2:10 Paul shows that Satan is effective in deceiving those who do not "Love the truth, that they might be saved." Our salvation depends on our knowing, believing, loving, and practicing the truth. If truth cannot be known, men cannot be saved. How, then, can we know the truth?

There are several requirements that must be met before one can know the truth. (1) The blinding force of Satan that convinces one that sincerity is all that is needed to please God must be abandoned. (2) One must approach the Scriptures with a spirit of reverence. (3) One must have a desire to both know and do the will of God. (4) One must be honest in the study of God's word. (5) And one must lay aside all preconceived ideas as he studies.

Another important requirement to knowing the truth is knowing how to determine the authorization for a practice. Some have suggested that if the Bible doesn't specifically condemn a practice by a "Thou shalt not" the practice is or will be approved. Can you imagine what all could be practiced by this type of reasoning? This idea is ridiculous. There are three ways we may determine the approval for a practice: by direct command, approved example, and by necessary inferences. Let's notice how each of these three principles are to be employed.

AUTHORIZATION BY DIRECT COMMAND

When this principle is applied we must remember that there are two types of commands: specific and generic. When a generic command is given one may obey the command by employing any of the

means or methods within this generic class. For example, in Mark 16:15, Jesus said, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature." The command to "Go" is generic. There are many ways one may go. One may obey this command by employing any method of going. However, if the command had been "Walk" then only this method of travel would have been approved. When a specific command is given, only the thing specified may be used or done. For example, God instructed Noah to build an ark of "Gopher wood." In that God specified the type of wood to be used, no other type would have been acceptable.

This principle is generally understood, however, there are some cases where it is ignored. The most popular seems to be regarding the type of music used in worship. Music is a generic word embracing both singing and playing an instrument. However, without exception, every reference to the music used in worship is "Sing." God has specified the type of music he approves. While we may prefer hearing an instrument, we must remember that it is God we are to please. Do we really desire to know and do the truth?

AUTHORIZATION BY APPROVED EXAMPLES

When Considering authorization by approved examples, we must remember that examples are not commands. There are two types of examples: optional and illustrative. For example, in Acts 2:45; 4:34 we have an example of some in the church selling all their property, and bringing it to the apostles to distribute to the needy. This is an optional example, in that there was no command for doing this. The Lord did teach us to help the needy. This example shows us how some obeyed this teaching. And while there is no command to sell all that we have, and give it to the needy, we could do so knowing that such would be within the realms of God's approval, yet we do not have to do this to meet God's approval.

Many of the examples in the New Testament are designed to illustrate previously given commands. In Acts 8:35-39 we have an example of Philip teaching and baptizing a man. This example illustrates the teaching of Matt. 28:19, Mark 16:15-16, Rom. 6:3-6, etc. This is the most common type of example.

Care must be used when considering examples that we do not make them into commands. Some have taken an example of some generic command, and determined that this is the only possible way the command can be obeyed. A good

example of this is seen in the use of the contribution of the church. How may it be used? We have Bible examples where such was used to support preaching the gospel (1 Cor. 9:14, and 2 Cor. 11:8), and we have examples where it was used to help the needy (Acts 4:35, 1 Cor. 16:1-3). The details of its use are not spelled out. What then are the limitations? In Acts 4:35 it is stated, "And distribution was made unto every man according as he had need." The need determines the limitations.

AUTHORIZATION BY NECESSARY INFERENCES

Inference means deriving a conclusion by logical induction or deduction. Where the command does not spell out the specific methods, wisdom must be used to appropriate the command by the best means available.

We are commanded to "Do good to all men..." And we have the example where "Distribution was made unto every man according as he had needs." If a person is sick, it is necessarily inferred that medical assistance is needed. We have no example of a person being taken to a hospital and the church paying his medical bills. Can such be done scripturally? If there is the need, must we not meet that need? Therefore, while a thing may not be spelled out in detail, some means or methods are necessarily inferred.

Again caution must be used. The means or methods used must not add to, take from, or alter a command in any way. We must be honest in dealing with the Scriptures, rather than trying to justify something for selfish reasons.

CONCLUSION

God has instructed us in all that he demands of us. Some commands are detailed for us, while others are given that optional means or methods may be used to obey them. Wisdom and great care must always be used in employing the methods. The proper attitude coupled with a diligent and honest study of the Scriptures will eventually lead one to a knowledge of the truth. May we ever seek to "Prove all things, hold fast that which is good." 1 Thess. 5:21.

"A lot of church members want to reach the promised land without going through the wilderness."

"There are many people who are not actually liars, but they keep a respectful distance from the truth."

"A friend whom you can buy can be bought from you."

The Meaning of Anti-Christ (Cont.)

rewards to you for being a boy. It was not that I did not love you son. It was that I expected so much of youth. It was measuring you by a yardstick of my own years.

There is so much that is good, and fine and true in your character. You did not deserve my treatment of you. The little heart in you is as big as the trunk of an oak - all of this was shown by your spontaneous impulse to rush in and kiss me goodnight. Nothing else matters tonight, son. I have come to your bedside in the darkness and have knelt here choking with emotion, and so ashamed.

It was feeble atonement, a poor apology - I know you would not understand these things, had I told them to you in your waking hours, yet I must say what I am saying. Here in your bedroom I make free confession, and I have prayed to God to strengthen me in my new resolve. Tomorrow I will be a real daddy! I will chum with you, I will play with you, and fish with you. I will suffer when you suffer, and laugh when you laugh. I will bite my tongue when impatient, cross words come. I will keep saying as if it were a ritual: "He is nothing but a boy - a little boy."

I am afraid I have visualized you as a man, yet as I see you now, son, crumpled and weary in your little bed, I see that you are still a baby. Yesterday you were in your mother's arms, your head on her shoulder. I have asked too much, too much of you, my son.

Dear boy, dear little son, a penitent kneels here in the darkness. I kiss your dirty little fingers and your damp forehead, and ask you, "Forgive me, son, I knew not."

Forgive Me, Son, I Knew Not (Cont.)

the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world. Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God: and every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that spirit of antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world."

"Prayer should be the key of the day, and the lock of the night."

"What you did yesterday creates today's circumstances."

"If a man is too busy to worship God twice on Sunday and on Prayer Meeting night, he has more business than God intended he should have."

The Significance of Baptism

By Ted Mountjoy

What is the significance of baptism? Many suggest that baptism is simply an outward sign of an inward change or feeling. But what does the Bible say when we let it speak on the purpose for baptism?

The Bible teaches the purpose of baptism is: (1) for the remission of sins, and to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38) "Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost." (2) to wash away sins (Acts 22:16), "And now why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord." (3) to put the believer into Christ and His death (Romans 6:3), "Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death?" (4) to put on Christ (Galatians 3:27), "For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ." (5) and to save us (1 Peter 3:21), "The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us, (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God,) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ." These Scriptures teach that baptism is a very important part of our salvation.

It can also be seen that baptism is a necessary part of our salvation by studying each of the examples of conversion in the book of Acts. Examine the following references: Acts 2:14-41; 8:5-13; 8:26-40; 16:11-15; 16:25-34; 18:5-11; 19:1-5; 22:3-16.

Baptism is for those who have been convicted of their sins, who have placed their trust in Jesus as God's Son, and who have repented of their sins. It is for those who want the cleansing blood of Jesus applied to wash away their sins, and who are willing to be immersed by faith into the death of Christ, where his blood was shed (John 19:33-34). This burial and resurrection pictures the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ (Romans 6:3-6). When one is buried by baptism into the death of Christ, he is then resurrected to "Walk in a newness of life." (Rom. 6:4). It is in this act that the Lord adds each to his church (Acts 2:41-47).

Baptism is a part of the sinner's response to the cross of Christ. Until this act is completed, the sinner is still unforgiven of his sins. Jesus authorized baptism, and in so doing, made it equally as essential to our salvation as believing (Mark 16:16) "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved . . ."

Vanity of Vanities (Cont.)

a purer atmosphere, on a higher platform, but even morality did not satisfy.

THE CONCLUSION

Solomon stands before us, by turns, as a man of science, the man of pleasure, the fatalist, the materialist, the epicurean, the stoic, and the moralist, with this conclusion: "Let us keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil." (Eccl. 12:13-14)

This is the same great truth that our Lord once emphasized to a Jewish lawyer, in a little different wording, saying, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment." (Matt. 22:37-38)

We may contrast Solomon's retrospect of life with the one whose aim it was to fulfill the law of God. Jesus said, "I have glorified thee on the earth, I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do." (John 17:4) Without God, "Vanity of vanities; all is vanity."

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