

Final Authority and Advice

Ecclesiastes 12:8-14

Ecclesiastes 12:8-14 - *“Vanity of vanities,” says the Preacher, “All is vanity.”⁹ And moreover, because the Preacher was wise, he still taught the people knowledge; yes, he pondered and sought out and set in order many proverbs.¹⁰ The Preacher sought to find acceptable words; and what was written was upright—words of truth.¹¹ The words of the wise are like goads, and the words of scholars are like well-driven nails, given by one Shepherd.¹² And further, my son, be admonished by these. Of making many books there is no end, and much study is wearisome to the flesh.¹³ Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is man’s all.¹⁴ For God will bring every work into judgment, including every secret thing, whether good or evil.*

Background Notes

One view of Ecclesiastes is that it is only the human reasoning of Solomon, and not necessarily true. In this view, Ecclesiastes is like the reasoning of Job’s three friends. They were definitely wrong in most of their reasoning, but the whole dialogue was recorded for our learning by divine inspiration. That is, the record of the dialogue is accurate and **divinely inspired**, even though their reasoning and the many of words they spoke were not correct.

This same approach to the book of Ecclesiastes is known as the “partially theistic” viewpoint. In other words, the entire book is divinely inspired, but the thoughts contained in the book are only the **inspired record** of what Solomon concluded, with his natural and human reasoning. Since human reasoning is apart from divine revelation, therefore what he wrote in the book was often not correct. In this “partially theistic” viewpoint, the book of Ecclesiastes rises to the level of divine revelation only at the end of the book, in the final conclusion.

By now you should have realized that, in our Talks from Ecclesiastes, we have not taken the “partially theistic” viewpoint of the book! We have presented the entirely theistic viewpoint – that is, that Ecclesiastes is not only the inspired record of what Solomon reasoned, but that his reasoning is accurate and correct as long as we understand the context from which Solomon is speaking. And Solomon, the inspired writer, was careful to give us that context.

Sometimes Solomon, the inspired writer, wrote from the “under the sun” viewpoint – that is, how things appear to be if we don’t have divine revelation. And sometimes Solomon, the inspired author, wrote from the “above the sun” viewpoint, and told us the way things really are when God and His Word are taken into account.

As Solomon began his final conclusion of the book, he again stressed the theme that he began with: “*Vanity of vanities,*” says the Preacher, “*All is vanity*” (v8). “Under the sun,” without divine revelation, life is meaningless and futile.

The wisest man who ever lived, the man who could have whatever he wanted, and the man who experimented with life in any way he chose, finally concluded that without God and His revelation of truth, life under the sun is one big zero.

How many of you would agree? If you didn’t have divine revelation and divine insight from “above the sun,” life would just be a big zero. That’s exactly what Solomon said, when he was speaking from “under the sun.” And in that sense, it’s more than the inspired record of what he’s thinking. It’s completely accurate! It’s truth, because without God in the picture, all really is vanity.

But with divine revelation and with God in your life, Solomon concluded throughout the book that the believer can live life joyously - even though life is short, and even though God has not revealed everything about the future to us.

Beginning with verse 9, Solomon gave us his authority for the entire book and some final advice.

Doctrinal Points

1. Ecclesiastes concludes with the author’s authority.

Verses 9: “*And moreover, because the Preacher was wise, he still taught the people knowledge; yes, he pondered and sought out and set in order many proverbs.*” Verse 9 is another indication that King Solomon is the “Preacher,” the author of Ecclesiastes. This wise man pondered, and sought out, or arranged many proverbs in order. If you would like to see his wonderful work, read the book of Proverbs, also written by King Solomon. We’ve seen some proverbs from Solomon here in Ecclesiastes as well.

Notice what Solomon claimed for his writing in verse 10: “*The Preacher sought to find acceptable words; and what was written was upright—words of truth.*” Claiming that his words were truth doesn’t sound like just the human reasoning of a natural man, does it? Remember, it was Solomon, the inspired writer, who was making this claim.

In verse 11 Solomon claimed that these proverbs were like goads and prodding sticks in life: “*The words of the wise are like goads, and the words of scholars are like well-driven nails, given by one Shepherd.*” These wise sayings gave stability to life, like well-driven nails.

But these saying were not just the words of wise men - they were given by “one Shepherd.” Who is the one Shepherd? Solomon was not a shepherd. And if he was claiming, as king, to be the “shepherd” of his people, he probably would not have used the term “*one Shepherd*” - especially when he referred to wise men (plural) at the beginning of the verse. No, the “one Shepherd” is a reference to the Lord Himself. Most translations indicate this by capitalizing the “s” of Shepherd. So, Solomon definitely claimed divine inspiration in this verse.

In verse 12, Solomon contrasted his inspired writing with other books that were not inspired. In fact, he warned about the content of other books. If Ecclesiastes was only the faulty results of Solomon’s natural reasoning, we would have to be warned about Ecclesiastes as well. But we are not warned about Ecclesiastes, because Ecclesiastes is true. Ecclesiastes concludes with the author’s authority.

2. Ecclesiastes concludes with some final advice.

Verses 13-14: *“Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is man’s all. For God will bring every work into judgment, including every secret thing, whether good or evil.”*

In these verses, as part of the overall conclusion of the book, Solomon gave some final advice to his readers. We should accept the life that God has given us, and live it joyously. We should make the most of every opportunity, but in doing so, we should fear God – that is, we should honor Him, and revere Him, and serve Him.

And we should keep His commandments – the easy ones and the hard ones, the ones that we like and the ones that we don’t like. We should also remember that God Himself will judge our lives, including the hidden things we thought no one would ever know about. Notice, by the way, that judgment is for the good things as well as the bad, so rewards for believers are also in view here.

Further revelation in the New Testament Scriptures backs up Solomon’s conclusion, and gives us further details. Ecclesiastes concludes with some final advice.

Practical Applications

1. Base your life on goads and nails.

Why would we ever want to do that? It is because *“the words of the wise are like goads, and the words of scholars are like well-driven nails, given by one Shepherd.”* They are not just the words of wise men - they are the inspired words of wisdom. They are words from God Himself, the one true Shepherd.

What are the “goads” and “nails”? Goads were long poles, about 8 feet long, with pointed ends. They were used for prodding oxen. Why would God’s word of wisdom be like “goads”? Because one purpose of the Word of God is to prod us into right action!

It’s often been said that the Word of God not only “comforts the afflicted, but it afflicts those who are too comfortable.” Just as an ox goad was used to prod oxen to go in the right direction, and encourage them to pull their load, so the goad of Scripture prods us to stop sinning. It motivates us to go in the right direction, and to pull our share of the load. The best way to motivate fellow believers to “grow in love and good works” is to use appropriate Scriptures.

The words of wisdom of Scripture are also likened to well-driven nails. They give stability to life. They hold life together. If you construct your life on Scripture, your life will not fall apart. The word of God is sufficient for all that you need. 2 Timothy 3:16-17 says, *“All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the person of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.”*

It goes without saying that well-driven nails must be driven into something that is solid and secure, and Scripture is just that. It is the very words of God. It’s not just the words of man about God, but it’s the word of God to man. The Bible is the true, reliable, inerrant, authoritative, inspired word of the Living God.

Base your life on the goads and nails of scripture.

2. Read critically.

Use careful judgment when deciding what you read and how you read it. In view of verse 12, this is a must: *“And further, my son, be admonished by these. Of making many books there is no end, and much study is wearisome to the flesh.”* How many of you have experienced the last part of this verse first hand? If you haven’t, try going through graduate school, or writing a Ph.D. thesis – and you’ll see!

Solomon’s point in the first part of verse 12 is that we should be warned when we read many of the books that are available today. Just because a book has a title that “sounds Christian” doesn’t make it safe and worthwhile reading.

Read critically; don’t believe everything you read. Constantly compare and test what you read with the truth of Scripture, whether it’s in the area of philosophy, or science, or morality. There’s a lot of falsehood and a lot of trash on the market today, so be warned!

Read critically.