

An Appropriate Time for Everything

Ecclesiastes 3:1-13

Ecclesiastes 3:1-8 - *“To everything there is a season, a time for every purpose under heaven:*

² *A time to be born, and a time to die;*

A time to plant, and a time to pluck what is planted;

³ *A time to kill, and a time to heal;*

A time to break down, and a time to build up;

⁴ *A time to weep, and a time to laugh;*

A time to mourn, and a time to dance;

⁵ *A time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones;*

A time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing;

⁶ *A time to gain, and a time to lose;*

A time to keep, and a time to throw away;

⁷ *A time to tear, and a time to sew;*

A time to keep silence, and a time to speak;

⁸ *A time to love, and a time to hate;*

A time of war, and a time of peace.”

Background Notes

Is the main idea in these verses that there is a predetermined time for all events of life? Or is the main idea that there's an appropriate time for all the events of life? Both ideas are true, according to the rest of Scripture, because God is completely sovereign. He is in control of everything. As Ephesians 1:11 says, God *“works all things after the counsel of His will.”*

The Bible certainly teaches that there is an appointed time for everything, and because God is totally sovereign, those times are predetermined. This fact, by the way, does not deny or negate human freedom or human responsibility. However, I believe the main point in Ecclesiastes 3 is more than just the truth that everything is predetermined. The main point is that there is an **appointed** time and an **appropriate** time for everything. In fact, some translations use the word “appropriate” in verse 11: *“God has made everything appropriate in its time.”*

In the list of the fourteen pairs of “times” given in these verses, notice that nothing inappropriate is mentioned, such as “there is a time to lie” or “there is a time to cheat,” or “there is a time to steal” - even though God is sovereign over those sinful events as well. All of the activities listed here have appropriate times.

Doctrinal Point

There is an appropriate time for everything.

“There is a time to be born, and there is a time to die” (v2). God appoints both the day of birth and the day of death of every person. Therefore, we must never take the life of the unborn, and we should be cautious about using extraordinary measures to prevent God from taking a life at its appointed time to die. Preserve life – yes; precipitate death – no. But we must be careful that we do not “play God” in (perhaps inappropriately) preventing natural death.

“There is a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted” (v2). This can be applied not only to agriculture, but to other areas as well. For example, there is a time to support churches and ministries - but there is also a time to withhold support from churches and ministries that have turned away from the Lord or that water down His Word.

“There is a time to kill, and a time to heal” (v3). What would be an appropriate time to kill, or to take a life? Capital punishment would be one example. In a “just war,” the limited taking of life would be right. Thankfully, our country has followed this biblical guideline for the most part, in its national and international policies.

“There is a time to weep and a time to laugh; a time to mourn and a time to dance” (v4). Weddings and funerals, for example, are occasions that involve different attitudes and appropriate emotions.

“There is a time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones” (v5). It’s appropriate to clear a field of stones before plowing and planting. And gathering stones is an appropriate activity when building a home.

“There is a time to embrace, and a time not to embrace” (v5). The Bible is very clear on its standards for sex: that time is appropriate only within marriage. There are other applications as well, such as appropriate times for the public display of affection.

“There is a time to gain and a time to lose” (v6). So, don’t get upset when the stock market goes down - expect it!

“There is a time to keep, and a time to throw away” (v6). Anyone who has ever cleaned out an attic, a basement, a shed, or a closet can appreciate how practical this truth is!

“There is a time to tear, and a time to sew” (v7). In the culture of that day, tearing a garment was a sign of mourning or grief. So this verse indicates that a time for grieving is appropriate - and there’s also a time to mend the torn pieces, and carry on with life.

“There is a time to speak, and a time to be silent” (v7). This verse has many applications, and all of us can recall at least one such event from our own experience, either positive or negative – and probably both. How many would agree that sometimes you’ve spoken inappropriately, and wished you could take it back? And were there other times when you should have spoken up and said something - but you didn’t? It’s in the Bible.

“There’s a time to love, and a time to hate” (v8). We should hate sin, and we should hate the practice of evil.

“There’s a time for war, and a time for peace” (v8). Notice the Bible does not take a “pacifist” position - does it?

In verse 9 the rhetorical question is asked again: *“What profit has the worker from that in which he labors?”* The same question was asked in chapter 1: *“What profit has a man from all his labor in which he toils under the sun?” (v3).*

In verses 10-13, Solomon essentially came to the same conclusion that he came to at the end of chapter 2, only now with more insight and understanding. Verses 10-13: *“I have seen the God-given task with which the sons of men are to be occupied. ¹¹ He has made everything beautiful in its time. Also, He has put eternity in their hearts, except that no one can find out the work that God does from beginning to end. ¹² I know that nothing is better for them than to rejoice, and to do good in their lives, ¹³ and also that every man should eat and drink and enjoy the good of all his labor—it is the gift of God.”*

As Solomon considered all these appointed and appropriate times in life, he realized that God, in His divine wisdom and sovereignty, allows these times in our lives so we will think about life, and occupy ourselves in searching for the meaning of life (v10). Considering the meaning of life is good, because it forces us to bring God into the picture.

Furthermore, God has *“set eternity in our hearts.”* Verse 11: *“He has made everything beautiful in its time. Also He has put eternity in their hearts...”* God has given us a desire to know the meaning of life, and consider what is beyond the grave, and think about how the events of our lives fit in with God’s eternal plan. But - *“no one can find out the work that God does from beginning to end.”* In this lifetime we will never understand all of earth’s mysteries, because God has not revealed everything to us (v11).

With Solomon, we too can conclude that God has His perfect reasons for all the events of our lives. And since God is sovereign, and He is in ultimate control of everything, we can rejoice in the life that He’s given us. Verses 12-13: *“I know that nothing is better for them than to rejoice, and to do good in their lives, and also that every man should eat and drink and enjoy the good of all his labor—it is the gift of God.”*

There is an appropriate time for everything.

Practical Applications

1. Think soberly.

Romans 12:3 says, *“For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith.”* Romans 12:3 indicates that we should soberly consider how to live our lives for the Lord, in view of the spiritual gifts and talents the Lord has given us, and in view of the world system all around us. To think soberly, and to use sound judgment in the way we live out our lives for the Lord, would certainly be a good and right application of Ecclesiastes 3:1-8.

There is an appropriate time for everything. Let's not be silent when we should speak up, and let's not speak when it would be better to be silent. Think soberly.

2. "Do good" - and enjoy life!

Verses 12-13 once again: *"I know that nothing is better for them than to rejoice, and to do good in their lives, and also that every man should eat and drink and enjoy the good of all his labor—it is the gift of God."* These verses are Solomon's conclusion of what life and labor are all about. "Under the sun" - without God in the picture - life is meaningless and futile. However, with God in the picture, life and labor have ultimate meaning. And believers can live joyously!

"...every man should eat and drink and enjoy the good of all his labor." Verse 13 is not advocating a hedonistic lifestyle - far from it! It's saying that we can rejoice in life! We can enjoy the results of our work and labor – it's part of God's good gifts to us.

But – don't forget the words *"do good"* in verse 12! We can enjoy a good steak dinner, but we must also remember to "do good" to the hungry, and help to meet the needs of the poor who can't afford a good dinner. We can enjoy skiing and golf and appropriate vacation time, but we must also remember to help people who don't have the opportunities that we may have.

I love Ecclesiastes! It gives us the biblical way to live life - with a balanced lifestyle. Our Lord lived a balanced lifestyle. In fact, in Luke 7:34 the Pharisees even wrongly accused the Lord of eating and drinking too much! *"The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and you say, 'Here is a glutton and a drunkard!'"* (By the way, a tangential thought here: this verse (and several others) are hard for "teetotalers" to explain, when they're attempting to defend their idea that the "wine" mentioned in the New Testament was only "good grape juice.")

Ecclesiastes 3 teaches us that there will be appointed times for grief and appropriate times for weeping - during war, or the loss of a loved one, or natural disasters. However, the norm of believer's life and lifestyle is to enjoy the life that God has given us - while not forgetting to do what is right and good.

Life is a gift from God! Do what is good - and enjoy life!