

## THE VANITY OF HUMAN WISDOM AND PHILOSOPHY

### Introduction:

1. The book of Ecclesiastes records the “wisdom” of Solomon as he sought for meaning and purpose in life without the wisdom of God.
  2. It was the great experiment of his life – and serves as a powerful warning to all mankind.
  3. Without God, all is vanity and vexation of spirit...
- I. The Examination of Human Wisdom and Philosophy (Ecclesiastes 1:12-18)
    - A. Solomon was King over Israel – in a perfect position to investigate the thoughts and ideas of men from all nations and cultures.
    - B. Solomon gave his heart (applied his mind) to both seek and search out the philosophies of men.
      1. “Seek” means, “To tread, frequent, or follow; thus, to enquire or seek with care.”
      2. “Search out” means, “To meander about; to explore; to find out how to do something; to make a reconnaissance.”
    - C. He wanted to know what men thought about all that is done “under heaven.”
    - D. He declared that this is an engrossing yet distracting occupation that God has given to men.
      1. This is the first time the word “God” is used in the book (*Elohim*).
      2. It reveals the author’s view of God as mere spectator or even a hindrance.
    - E. It is viewed as ‘travail’ because man alone can never arrive at a satisfying solution – it is like striving after the wind.
      1. That which is ‘crooked’ (bent, falsified, perverted) in the world cannot be made ‘straight’ (equal, ordered).
      2. That which is ‘wanting’ (lacking, deficient) cannot be ‘numbered’ (counted, assigned, appointed, supplied).
    - F. Solomon had been blessed with great wisdom – and he reminded himself of this fact.
    - G. He applied his wisdom to understand both human wisdom and its companions, madness and foolishness.
    - H. This, too, was like feeding on wind – empty and vexing.
    - I. An increase in human wisdom and knowledge only brings greater grief and sorrow (cf. Gen. 3:7; 2 Tim. 3:7).
  - II. The Folly of Human Wisdom
    - A. Note the important contrast between “experience” and revelation (1:13).
    - B. Human wisdom produces contradiction and hypocrisy (Matt. 11:18-19).
      1. Modern-day relativism claims that even contradictory beliefs can be equally true based on the circumstances of the believer.
      2. This is the cry of “unity in diversity.”
    - C. Human wisdom produces discouragement and despair (Acts 17:16-34).
      1. The Epicureans sought happiness through pleasure obtained by controlling one’s circumstances to meet his needs.
      2. The Stoics sought happiness by suppressing one’s emotions to bear the circumstances of life, whether good or ill.
      3. None of these human philosophers had the hope of the resurrection.

**Ecclesiastes 1**

- D. Human wisdom produces idolatry and corruption (Romans 1:18-25).
    - 1. Modern thought is that the Bible adopted beliefs from various religions.
    - 2. In fact, idolatry is a corruption of God's Truth!
  - E. Human wisdom produces error and division (1 Corinthians 1:18-31).
  - F. Human wisdom undermines Christ and His Gospel (Colossians 2:16-23).
  - G. Human wisdom produces envy and strife (James 3:14-16).
- III. The Harmony of Philosophy and Scripture (Proverbs 6:6-8; 30:18ff)
- A. Philosophy is the love of wisdom and, as Aristotle stated, all men are philosophers.
  - B. However, true philosophy is guided by God's wisdom rather than man's folly.
    - 1. All human wisdom, beliefs, ideas, and theories must be viewed through the lens of Scripture.
    - 2. This proper perspective must be maintained.
  - C. "So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts to wisdom" (Psalm 90:12).
  - D. "Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom: and with all thy getting get understanding" (Proverbs 4:7).
  - E. "And wisdom and knowledge shall be the stability of thy times, and strength of salvation: the fear of the Lord is his treasure" (Isaiah 33:6).
  - F. Human wisdom declares that the crooked cannot be made straight (1:15); yet, God's wisdom stated: "Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low: and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain" (Isaiah 40:4).
  - G. God's wisdom alone can supply that which is lacking in the world of sinful man.