

## THE VANITY OF HUMAN WISDOM

### 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. Human Wisdom Falls Short (Ecclesiastes 7)
  - A. In this section of the book (chapters 7 – 11), Solomon writes of things learned by wisdom.
  - B. However, he is considering human wisdom alone – without the revelation of God.
    1. Thus, there will be many wise statements, good words, and powerful truths declared.
    2. However, in the end, his wisdom always falls short and leaves questions unanswered.
  - C. Sorrow is a better teacher than happiness (7:1-6).
    1. One’s name (reputation) is of greater value than earthly riches.
    2. Sorrow at the house of mourning causes one to reflect upon somber and serious facts – such as the brevity of life and one’s eternal destiny.
    3. Being rebuked by one who is wise can cause needed contemplation.
    4. Are these statements of absolute truth?
  - D. Honest, patient wisdom is a defense against adversity (7:7-14).
    1. Tyranny and bribery cause wrath in the hearts of the righteous.
    2. Patience allows one to reach the end before making a judgment.
    3. Uncontrolled anger will lead to foolish actions.
    4. Longing for the “good ole days” is unwise.
    5. Wisdom is better than an inheritance of wealth.
    6. Yet, in spite of all of this, Solomon declared that God will send joyful times and adversity into every life – and there is nothing that can be done about it.
  - E. Balance is needed in the ups and downs of life (7:15-18).
    1. Sometimes the wicked prosper and the righteous suffer.
    2. So, one should not be “overmuch righteous” and destroy himself.
    3. Nor should one be “overmuch wicked” and die before his time.
    4. Those who fear God will come forth safe and sound.
    5. Does this sound like godly wisdom?
  - F. Wisdom is noble, but insufficient (7:19-29).
    1. One wise man is of greater benefit than ten mighty men.
    2. Still, no one is sinless.
    3. For all of his searching with man’s wisdom, there were still things that could not be known or understood.
    4. Wickedness is folly, yet man still sins.
    5. Worse are those who entice others to yield to temptation and sin.
    6. Out of 1,000, he could find only 1 honorable man and no noble women.
    7. Man continually and cleverly rebels against Jehovah.
  - G. Thus, for all its good, human wisdom still falls short.

**Ecclesiastes 7 – 11**

- II. Human Wisdom Follows Fear (Ecclesiastes 8)
- A. Submission to man can save one from death (8:1-8)
  - B. Death is the great equalizer (8:9-13).
  - C. Life should be enjoyed because it cannot be understood (8:14-17).
  - D. Thus, human wisdom does not overcome man's fears, but submits to them.
- III. Human Wisdom Forsakes Hope (Ecclesiastes 9)
- A. No man can control the events and happenings of life (9:1-2).
  - B. And, at the end, there is death for all (9:3-6).
    - 1. Verse 5 does not teach the doctrine of "soul sleeping" or "annihilation."
    - 2. The dead are not aware of what happens on earth, but they retain their personalities and memories (cf. Luke 16:19-31; etc.).
  - C. Thus, one should live and enjoy life before death comes and takes it (9:7-12).
  - D. Wisdom is of great value, but often ignored (9:13-18).
  - E. Human wisdom cannot see beyond the grave and forsakes the hope of eternal life.
- IV. Human Wisdom Forgets Priorities (Ecclesiastes 10)
- A. The priority of one's reputation (10:1-3)
  - B. The priority of one's righteousness (10:4-7)
    - 1. Remember Daniel (1:8)
      - a. First, it was eat the king's food.
      - b. Next, it was bow down to the king's image.
      - c. Finally, it was pray to the king's god.
    - 2. "We ought to obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29).
  - C. The priority of one's heritage (10:8-10)
  - D. The priority of one's speech (10:11-14)
  - E. The priority of one's community (10:15-20)
    - 1. Note that the motive in verse 20 is purely human – fear of getting caught.
    - 2. This emphasizes that Solomon is discussing human wisdom, not true wisdom from God.
  - F. Thus, human wisdom forgets the true priorities of life by focusing on what is best for here and now.
- V. Human Wisdom Finishes Empty (Ecclesiastes 11)
- A. The motive for giving is the hope that others will give back (11:1-2).
  - B. The motive for working is the hope that it might be prosperous (11:3-6).
  - C. The motive for living is the hope that there may be a few days of light in the midst of terrible darkness (11:7-8).
  - D. Thus, at the end, human wisdom provides no real, substantive answers to life.

**Conclusion:**

- 1. Man needs the wisdom of God!
- 2. Man needs the word of God!