



[Ecclesiastes 1:1-3](#)

(1) The words of the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem. (2) Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, vanity of vanities; all is vanity. (3) What profit hath a man of all his labour which he taketh under the sun?

King James Version

To those unfamiliar with the usage of this figure of speech, "under the sun" may be the most mysterious of the three significant terms in Ecclesiastes. This phrase accounts for much of why Ecclesiastes seems so pessimistic when first read. By using it, Solomon is stating the perspective from which he, and the overwhelming majority of mankind, views life in all of its vain complexities.

He is literally telling us that he is looking at these matters of life where the sun shines. For the most part, and especially at this point within his lecture, his perspective does not include what is above the sun—[God](#). To see things "under the sun" is to look at life's events from a carnal perspective. Life from God's perspective is not in view in such a case.

"Under the sun" is to think and act from an earthly point of view, to look at things carnally. Solomon is leaving God out of the picture for a time as his lecture unfolds. His purpose at this point is to cause us to begin to fear that vanity is all there is to life. All too often, in the busy crush of everyday events, we forget to remember God and His purpose. When we do this, even though we may be converted, we are back under the sun once again, looking at things carnally.

Ecclesiastes is not just about meaninglessness. It also opens the possibility of an "above the sun" perspective of life that can teach us that everything matters in spite of all the vanity we face. By being a means of helping Him to form us into what He desires, vanity can play a major role in God's purpose. We will learn as we continue through Solomon's lecture that an internal disgust of vanity can motivate cooperation with God and produce growth to maturity.

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We will also find that Solomon is not at all pessimistic about a life in which God is considered in all things. The [truth](#) is that he is teaching why everything matters and that God's children need to be aware of making right choices or life will be meaningless. The gift of life is precious, and the gift of having the responsibility to make many choices in life is wonderful. God's calling and the revelation of Himself and His purpose are gifts beyond calculation. Solomon is urging us to make every effort not to waste the gifts God has so graciously given.

Each of us has only one opportunity for [salvation](#). Life is not vain for us because we are being transformed, created for a different world. This vain and weary world should serve as a reminder to prompt us to turn our perspective to the right one, "above the sun."

Tremendous profit lies in what the called children of God are experiencing. We must choose to direct our lives to follow an "above the sun" perspective so that our lives are not meaningless. The choice lies between chasing the dreams of the unconverted or submitting to what God has revealed.

— John W. Ritenbaugh

To learn more, see:

[Ecclesiastes and Christian Living \(Part One\)](#)

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