



"Men are qualified for civil liberty in exact proportion to their disposition to put moral chains upon their own appetites."

—Edmund Burke

**05-Nov-10**

## **Wisdom for the Young (Part Three)**

Ecclesiastes 2 records what Solomon experienced when he was a young man in the prime of his wealth and power. Because [God](#) inspired this narrative to be included in His Word, we can conclude that Solomon went through this for us so that we do not have to repeat it in our own lives—there is no need for us to keep reinventing the wheel. Solomon already lived the wild side, considered it deeply over the years, and reported on it. If we will just listen to what he says, we can avoid all kinds of heartache.

The king of Israel writes in [Ecclesiastes 2:1](#), "I said in my heart, 'Come now, I will test you with mirth; therefore enjoy pleasure'; but surely, this also was vanity." He gives us his conclusion immediately, so that, if this is all we read, we know the lesson of his attempt to satisfy himself through enjoyment. He describes it as "vanity," as being like grasping for the wind (see [Ecclesiastes 1:17](#)). It was futile, useless, unprofitable. In the end, it left him with nothing. He was empty, with nothing to show for his time or expended energy.

He continues in [Ecclesiastes 2:2](#), "I said of laughter—'Madness!' and of mirth, 'What does it accomplish?'" The "high life" that so many young

people think is so cool and worthwhile Solomon calls "madness"! Pursuing pleasure for pleasure's sake is insanity, mental illness! After he came to his senses, he looked around him and realized he had accomplished nothing. It was a total waste of precious time!

Thus, he decided to do an experiment, using his life as a laboratory, to see if various pursuits would bring him lasting satisfaction and well-being. In verses 3-10, he lists all the activities he pursued with his wealth and power, and they cover the gamut of human experience:

I searched in my heart how to gratify my flesh with wine, while guiding my heart with [wisdom](#), and how to lay hold on folly, till I might see what was good for the sons of men to do under heaven all the days of their lives. I made my works great, I built myself houses, and planted myself vineyards. I made myself gardens and orchards, and I planted all kinds of fruit trees in them. I made myself water pools from which to water the growing trees of the grove. I acquired male and female servants, and had servants born in my house. Yes, I had greater possessions of herds and flocks than all who were in Jerusalem before me. I also gathered for myself silver and gold and the special treasures of kings and of the provinces. I acquired male and female singers, the delights of the sons of men, and musical instruments of all kinds.

So I became great and excelled more than all who were before me in Jerusalem. Also my wisdom remained with me. Whatever my eyes desired I did not keep from them. I did not withhold my heart from any pleasure, for my heart rejoiced in all my labor; and this was my reward from all my labor. ([Ecclesiastes 2:3-10](#))

He lived life to the hilt! He drank gallons of wine and partied until the cows came home. He did many foolish things. He spent money profligately on whatever came to mind. He planned, engineered, built, gardened, raised livestock, bought and sold, and acquired rare and novel items. Enjoying good music as his father did, he found the best singers and musicians and brought them to Jerusalem to perform for him. We know he collected wives and concubines by the hundreds! He lived life to the full, and there was no one to restrain him in his pursuit of any desire of his heart.

In verse 11, however, he takes a hard, cold look at where all his unrestrained living and frenzied labor had led him: "Then I looked on all the works that my hands had done and on the labor in which I had toiled; and indeed all was vanity and grasping for the wind. There was no profit under the sun" ([Ecclesiastes 2:11](#)).

Even having all of the best of everything and being considered "great" by everyone near and far, when he looked at these accomplishments objectively, he found it all to be futile and useless. In the end, what had he gained? What advantages did he have in the things that really matter? It is as if he stood on a high place in Jerusalem and gazed on all the buildings he had built, all the gardens he had made, and all the unusual and excellent things he had collected, and concluded, shaking his head, "Whoop-dee-do! These things mean absolutely nothing."

Notice that Solomon reports that his wisdom remained with him while he was conducting his experiment in materialistic living. God must have worked this out so that he could convey his conclusions to us. Otherwise, it is difficult to understand how he could have done all of these things and retained his wisdom. God had given Solomon his understanding ([1 Kings 3:5-14](#)), and He left it with him all of his life, no matter what Solomon did.

Grimly, Solomon repeats his conclusion in verse 17, "Therefore I hated life because the work that was done under the sun was distressing to me, for all is vanity and grasping for the wind." Everything he did produced only sorrow. Life is pointless, he says, for all that he did achieved nothing. He was back to square one. Nothing had changed!

Why? The answer is simple: Everything he had accomplished was useless because he had done it without God. It is God who makes a difference in life; He puts real meaning into pleasure, work, accomplishment, growth, and beauty. If He is absent, these things become essentially worthless and will perish in due time. In [Ecclesiastes 2:24-26](#), he comes to this conclusion and gives some advice:

Nothing is better for a man than that he should eat and drink, and that his soul should enjoy good in his labor. This also, I saw, was

from the hand of God. For who can eat, or who can have enjoyment, [*without Him*, margin]? For God gives wisdom and knowledge and [joy](#) to a man who is good in His sight; but to the sinner He gives the work of gathering and collecting, that he may give to him who is good before God. This also is vanity and grasping for the wind.

A person who lives uprightly, who tries to do what is right and good, will have wisdom and knowledge and will experience true joy in life—well-being that is enjoyable and lasting—not just ephemeral pleasures that must be renewed with something more edgy to feel the same thrill. The sinner, however, will merely labor in futility, and instead of enjoying the fruits of his labors, see the righteous benefit from them.

Therefore, the only satisfying way of life is one lived under the guiding hand of God. Any other way of life is useless and unproductive. Those who truly understand what life is all about will live a godly life. If we can grasp this truth while we are young, it will save us a whole lot of wasted time and grief.

- Richard T. Ritenbaugh

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## **From the Archives: Featured Sermon**

### **[Ecclesiastes and the Feast of Tabernacles \(Part 1\)](#)**

by John W. Ritenbaugh

Love for this world will inevitably bring disillusionment. Realizing that the world is passing away, our priorities should be on fearing God and keeping his commandments. The temporary booths (short lived and quickly deteriorating) at the Feast depicts our temporary and impermanent, often unpleasant and disappointing earthly pilgrimage, contrasted with the permanence of Christ's rule and our future eternal life. Without living for God's purpose for us, this life is absolutely meaningless.

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## **From the Archives: Featured Article**

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by David F. Maas

One of the most widely occurring metaphors in the Bible involves eating. David Maas contends that it is not just what we ingest spiritually that is important, but that we also develop the ability to feed ourselves properly.

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