

Ecclesiastes Resumed (Part Eighteen)

John W. Ritenbaugh

Given 02-Aug-14; Sermon #1225

We are going to continue on in Ecclesiastes 7. It is another of those comparison chapters very similar in its framing to chapter 4, stating that this is better than that. Recall that these comparisons are not to be taken as absolutes and that is why the term better is used rather than a directly stated dogmatic command given.

Why should it be arranged this way? Because sometimes in the course of one's life, conditions alter cases. A clear illustration of this might be understood from Solomon's treatment in chapter 7, verse 1: the day of one's death is better than the day of one's birth. It should be that way, but in real life it is not always that way.

The implication of Solomon's thought is that that is the way it should be, and steps can be taken by those who believe God Word for the conclusion of one's life to be that way. Thus whether one's life ends as Solomon says, largely depends upon the choices that one makes in life as it is being lived.

Chapter 7 also begins right on the heels of the five questions that ended chapter 6, as though what is written in chapter 7 has some thoughts relative to those questions. It does, but just to a minor degree, so we will not go into that aspect of this chapter. Also chapter 7 begins three consecutive chapters in which wisdom is frequently mentioned.

Because wisdom is so frequently mentioned in these chapters, I want to briefly review some points regarding it. The ancient Hebrews associated wisdom with our modern term, skill. I do not mean that they are exactly synonymous with one another, but the English word skill does illustrate what the Hebrews meant by wisdom.

People may acquire many skills in life, but a practical definition of biblical wisdom is that it is skill in living. It is not skill at repairing an automobile, it is not skill as being an electrician, it is not skill in farming, it is not skill in plumbing, being a surgeon; it is skill in living, the actual carrying out of one's life given to him by God.

Biblical wisdom is unique to those who are truly in a relationship with God. The thought regarding skill is reinforced from the fact that biblical wisdom is a gift from God, this is why we can have it and why it is narrowly associated with life. James 1:5 says it so clearly.

Ecclesiastes Resumed (Part Eighteen) by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

James 1:5 If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him.

It is clear that we do not have it by nature, we have to get it from God. I am talking about this specific kind of skill that we call wisdom and God calls wisdom, so He will generously give it. He does caution us right in the same context to be patient because God gives it through the processes of life.

James 1:3-4 Knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect word, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.

You know that life does not, in one sense, happen fast. Forty-five, seventy-five years are not over in a blink of an eye. Every year has 365 days, so we live them one at a time and now we understand clearly that wisdom is going to be given by God but it is going to be given stretched out over a period of years and it is going to be directly tied to the experiences that we have in life, so that we do them better.

As we move toward death, just about the time we get smart, is about the time that we die. That is the way we have to understand, when we ask God for wisdom. It is going to be given through the experiences that we have with Him and He will help set our life so that what we ask for is made available to us. So it is going to take time. Do not expect that suddenly you are going to wake up and have all kinds of wisdom.

Wisdom is given to make the very best practical uses of all the other gifts God gives, and thus enabling us to glorify Him by our life. As it is used it also displays some characteristics that are very similar to the fruits of God's Spirit.

James 3:15-18 This wisdom does not descend from above, but is earthly, sensual, demonic. For where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing will be there. But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy. Now the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.

You compare that with Galatians 5 and the fruit of the Spirit and you will see that there are similarities, only in this case they are the product of wisdom. So you know what will

Ecclesiastes Resumed (Part Eighteen) by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

come from the wisdom that God gives are the fruits of His Spirit.

Back in thought to Proverbs once again. It is very important again regarding wisdom that we tie it with the book of Proverbs, because the very purpose of the book of Proverbs is given in chapter 1.

Proverbs 1:1-7 The proverbs of Solomon the son of David, king of Israel: To know wisdom and instruction, to perceive the words of understanding, to receive the instruction of wisdom, justice, judgment, and equity; to give prudence to the simple, to the young man knowledge and discretion—A wise man will hear and increase learning, and a man of understanding will attain wise counsel, to understand a proverb and an enigma, the words of the wise and their riddles. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge but fools despise wisdom and instruction.

Let me condense that all down to this statement. Proverb 1:1-7 helps to show that this skill in living consists of such other godly characteristics as knowledge of God. This is not knowledge *about* God, this is godly knowledge of God Himself. Skill in living also consists of the fear of God, understanding, discernment, discretion, prudence, justice, judgment, equity, and more—all of which is melded together and used to produce a skill in living that is in alignment with God's purpose and way of life. This is important to understand, because the biblical wisdom is confined to supporting the way of God and living it.

There is no doubt that there are some people who are worldly-wise, but biblical wisdom and worldly wisdom are not the same skill. Biblical wisdom is to be understood as that spiritual skill in alignment with and to support God's purposes. Though it may help provide some worldly success, that is not its primary purpose. Its purpose is to support the way of God and to make headway in it.

Ecclesiastes 7:1-4 A good name is better than precious ointment, and the day of death than the day of one's birth; it is better to go to the house of mourning than to go to the house of feasting, for that is the end of all men; and the living will take it to heart. Sorrow is better than laughter, for by a sad countenance the heart is made better. The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning, but the heart of fools is in the house of mirth.

I am reviewing these verses because of their focus on heart, death, mourning, sorrow,

Ecclesiastes Resumed (Part Eighteen) by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

and mirth. All of these elements are involved in the comparisons that are made there in verses 1-4. Solomon very clearly comes down on the side of sorrow and mourning as being the more important term in terms of wisdom, in this case.

I am sure that they are to be preferred, because mourning motivates us to sober contemplation of our own mortality, remember death was mentioned there, and therefore tends to more effectively and positively effect the wellspring of our thoughts, words, and our conduct. The wellspring is our heart, that is the key word in that grouping.

How do we change the heart? How do we make the right move in order to make sure that the wellspring of our conduct is in good condition? Our heart is truly the center of our being in terms of our thinking, acting, and feeling.

Mark 7:21 “For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, licentiousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within and defile a man.”

Our Savior said that because He wants us to see where our conduct, our words, and our feelings are generated from. So it is very easy to conclude that there is a great deal of evil residing in our hearts.

We will tie this in to Proverbs 7, and that first comparison in verses 1-4. From Solomon’s conclusion, it can be clearly seen that sorrow has more positive affects on one’s heart than does mirth. Sorrow has more positive affects on one’s heart for changing one’s heart for the good, than mirth. Mirth is so much fun, but does it really affect positive changes in the human heart from which is generated all those terms, those actions, that we saw? Jesus said that are generated from the heart.

Suffering is painful, suffering brings sorrow. It seems then that when we are suffering, a sufficient measure of pain that makes us most uncomfortable, that we are most likely to seriously think about taking steps to never get in that shape again. The conclusion that Solomon reaches is clear. He concludes that sorrow has more positive benefits than mirth.

Death is rarely ever a time of rejoicing. Death produces sobering thinking. Death is also mentioned very clearly in those first four verses. Death is deeply involved in this paragraph and therefore I want to take this opportunity to search out and to reinforce

Ecclesiastes Resumed (Part Eighteen) by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

some very important truths regarding death, and its direct connection to our heart and thus our conduct in life.

There was a book titled, *The Denial of Death*, a number of years ago. The book won a Pulitzer prize as the best of nonfiction in a certain category at that time. In it the author, Dr. Ernest Becker, made this telling comment on page 9 of the introduction that confirms what the Bible clearly states, he said, "The idea of death, the fear of it, haunts the human animal like nothing else. It is the mainspring of human activity."

This guy figured this out. I know he was not converted, yet this is essentially what God says in the Bible. Still quoting Dr. Earnest Becker, "Death is the mainspring of human activity, activity designed largely to avoid the fatality of death, to overcome it by denying in some way that it is the final destiny for man."

Why should an unconverted man have to say that? But that is what God says right in the Book. Here in Ecclesiastes, Solomon is subtly urging us to take steps to confront the truth of death's influence on our overall conduct in life because the Bible clearly reports that the specter of death effects everyone.

There are some people in which the specter of death is so dominate that their lives are virtually destroyed by it and the activity that they devise is as firmly focused on avoiding death and to overcome it by denying it in some way that it is indeed the final destiny for man.

According to Dr. Becker, these people are really downers in their effects upon other people. However, on the other hand, many people do not while living prepare for death's obvious reality. Solomon is urging us to take steps in a balanced way to confront this issue by means of God's truth. He is doing this because he understands perhaps as well as anybody ever did, that making efforts to seek to laugh, as he shows in chapter 2—they had all kinds of entertainment, best singers, musical players, he had wine in abundance but he never lost his sense of what is right. But you can tell that the man loved to be in enjoyable circumstances, everybody does.

In a way this drive to be in enjoyable circumstances works against us if we do not at other times seek out something that is really going to change us. Solomon says, at the end of chapter 2, it is no good, seeking mirth is sheer vanity, it produced nothing of profit.

All that time he spent on all of this entertainment was profitless, but he had the wherewithal to do it, and those were the conclusions that he came to. He also shows by

Ecclesiastes Resumed (Part Eighteen) by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

his own circumstances that working to be in an enjoyable circumstances for everybody is easy compared to sorrowful circumstances. He came to the conclusion it is rarely ever useful regarding leading one to a profitable life.

We have to be virtually forced to deliberately seek out involvement in sorrowful circumstances. However, paradoxically, death and sorrowful circumstances has far more to teach us what is valuable to a well lived life, compared to mirthful laughter which is a “here today and gone tomorrow” reality.

It is real and we laugh our way through it but the next day, did it really change us for the better? The chances of it doing that are small. I am not going to go to the point to say it is no use whatever because God wants us to laugh and enjoy life as well, but it has to be kept within the right standards.

In verse 2 of chapter 7, Solomon mentions a house of mourning, I am sure that in those days, in fact right on up to my childhood, people very often displayed the dead family member in their home. They held the funeral service there also, and sometimes at the grave sight. Today it is routinely done at a funeral home.

My first memory of witnessing a dead person in a casket was in that dead person’s home. It was my first grade teacher who died during the school term. She lived less than a block from the elementary school that I went to and the school principle gathered us all together and we went down the street to her house and saw her lying in her living room, in her casket. That was my introduction to seeing dead people. That was the first dead person I ever remember seeing—it was in somebody’s house, and it was my teacher.

Author Susan Sontag wrote this, “Death is the obscene mystery, the ultimate affront, the thing that cannot be controlled, it can only be denied.” That is what Dr. Becker said. There are large numbers of people who spend their entire life denying death. They are living a lie, but it shows up in our language, our language shows people’s attempts to soften, to hide, or even deny death by using euphemisms such as calling the dead person the departed, or by saying that they passed away, or they are not with us anymore. All this is done in order to avoid saying the word death or dead.

The way God deals with it in His Word is through showing us that it is best do deal with it directly in order to understand more fully that death is indeed the way of all flesh, and to lay it to heart thus shifting the balance of our thoughts regarding it toward more serious thinking, because it cannot be avoided. That is the reality.

Ecclesiastes Resumed (Part Eighteen) by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

God wastes no time confronting the issue in His Word. He mentions death halfway through Genesis 2 as though to emphasize its meaningful importance to us. In addition, the first literal death occurs as a result of murder, before chapter 4 ends. The word die, died, death, or ghost (you know, gave up the ghost), appears 891 times in the Scripture. That is no small amount! God confronts it directly and He is doing it for our well being.

Psalm 90:12 So teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom.

That dovetails exactly with Proverbs 7:1-4. Wisdom can come from a proper, right, balanced understanding of death. What Moses is asking God here, as a response to his prayer (he uses the term to number our days), to help us, God, to put them in order. Numbers appear 1, 2, 3, 4, 5. They follow in order. So the metaphor that he is using here, he is asking God to put our days in order so that we make the best use of the time that you are allotting us and if we put everything in order, we are going to seriously think about life and making the very best use of the time that God allots to us. That is coming from a man who lived for 120 years. He asked God for help in putting things in order.

Everybody dies, and that is a reality but not everybody prepares for death. Martin Luther made an interesting comment by saying, "It is good for us to invite death into our presence when it is still at a distance and not on the move." My comment is, the time to learn rock climbing is not when you are hanging from the edge of the precipice but *before* you start up the cliff. That is basically what Martin Luther said.

Again, from Dr. Becker's book, it seems that he found out in his research that there are many people who live life doing things on the spur of the moment. That is not good when comparing it to what Moses said, especially when it concerns something that no one escapes. We know it is coming. Are we prepared for it?

At least with a clear understanding that we have accepted it is our lot in life and God does not intend it to get us down. Everyone of His great servants died, even His own son died. He had to go through that. So did Paul, so did John, so did all of the apostles, prophets, everyone of them had to prepare for that time when God was going to take their life from them. Everybody sins and the wages of sin is death. It never varies.

As we are learning, going through Ecclesiastes, everything in life matters. Life is serious business. God wants us to pick up on that and make the best use of the time that He has given to us.

Solomon says a couple of very helpful things in verses 3 and 4. He says, "Sorrow is better than laughter, for by a sad countenance the heart is made better, the heart of the wise is in the house of mourning, but the heart of fools is in the house of mirth." Attending one good funeral does one more good than a whole year's worth of parties, because of the serious thinking that we do in relation to that period of time when we are confronted by a sermon that is covering over the issue of death as seen from God's point of view.

Verse 3 is better understood if it is translated in this way, "Sorrow is better than laughter," but modern translations translate it this way, "By sadness the heart is made better." The point is not so much the gladness mentioned in the first line, but rather the soundness of the heart that results from honest thoughtfulness one engages in as a result of sorrow is going to produce positive changes. God is clearly saying that sorrow tends to make us into better people.

A very important sorrow is one that is named by the apostle Paul in II Corinthians 7. I want you to turn to this because of what he says in relation to sorrow.

II Corinthians 7:8-11 For even if I made you sorry with my letter, I do not regret it; though I did regret it. For I perceive that the same epistle made you sorry, though only for a while. Now I rejoice, not that you were made sorry, but that your sorrow led to repentance. For you were made sorry in a godly manner, that you might suffer loss from us in nothing. For godly sorrow produces repentance to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death. For observe this very thing, that you sorrowed in a godly manner: What diligence it produced in you, what clearing of yourselves, what indignation, what fear, what vehement desire, what zeal, what vindication in all things you proved yourselves to be clear in this matter.

In this one brief paragraph, four verses, he used the word sorry, sorrowed, or sorrow seven times in order to emphasize the positive effects that sorrow can produce. So why is it important? Because godly sorrow produces repentance, it produces change, it helps to change the mind, it helps to change the heart, and therefore the conduct that is an improvement over what preceded and brought on the sorrow.

What Solomon is clearly inferring is that while worldly mirth is attractive on the surface and gathers our focused attention because we love to laugh, it leaves a person unchanged, unimproved in conduct. After just a few moments, it begins to recede into the background of one's life without changing a thing.

I am not going to say that laughter—mirth—never produces good. It is a comparison to, sorrow is better than mirth. What is the answer? Why is it better? Because sorrow really effectively changes a person's mind, the heart.

Combined with II Corinthians 7, as compared with Proverbs 7, it begins to become clear that by God's design, the discipline of sorrow tends to lead to improvement of conduct. Thus there are times when God Himself afflicts us in order to produce sorrow in hope that the pains and their accompanying sorrows make the heart tender and we will change.

What happens when a child is rightly and in measure, spanked by a parent? Is not the pain accompanying sorrow inflicted ?

Proverbs 22:15 Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child, but the rod of correction will drive it far from him.

Proverbs 13:24 He who spares his rod hates his son, but he who loves him disciplines him promptly.

Proverbs 19:18 Chasten your son while there is hope, and do not set your heart on his destruction.

So how frequently do the Proverbs tell us to spank our children and why? Is it not to produce two effects at one and the same time? There is the sting of a timely slap across the butt, combined with the painful sadness of separation in the child from the one that he loves, his parents. The effects of those two, is to produce change.

God does not say when your child does something wrong tickle him, make him laugh. He said make him feel some pain and separation from you. The two together produce sorrow and sorrow then is what leads to the change of the child's conduct.

God is saying through Solomon that sorrow penetrates and influences the heart, the very center of our being from which conduct flows in a morally beneficial way in which laughter cannot. So important is godly sorrow, we will turn to II Corinthians 7:10 again.

II Corinthians 7:10 For godly sorrow produces repentance to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death.

Ecclesiastes Resumed (Part Eighteen) by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

So a knowledge of death contains a central truth that we must know and believe if we are serious about not sinning and thus glorifying God. Knowing and believing what God says is essential to our life of faith.

I am going to go into something regarding death. It is a basic thing, we have gone through it before, but I want to go through some things here, so maybe we can appreciate how seriously God wants us to be prepared for death. This is going to be a long digression but these statements regarding death here in Ecclesiastes are so meaningful to our overall life of faith, I believe that perusing more about death that the timing here is appropriate. We are going to go back to the book of Hebrews 2.

Hebrews 2:14-15 Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is the devil, and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.

Notice how all-encompassing the fear of death is, “who through fear of death were all their life time subject to bondage.” A knowledge of death affects everybody there is. The truth that there is in all of us some measure of a vague apprehensive awareness of death because it is a mystifying aura. This fear impacts all of us to some degree whether intensely or feebly because this particular fear has a spiritual source. That is important.

Notice that verse 15 says that through the fear of death, we are all held in bondage through all of our lifetime. He does not mean a never ending dread, but rather a very definite nagging uncertainty wrapped within a measure of hopelessness because one does not fully believe God-given truth regarding death.

God does not put people in bondage the way Satan does, and thus with a bit of understanding we know the source of this fear. Everybody has it and many horrible lies regarding death are believed by most in this world. The living fear thoughts of people shrieking in an ever-burning place that allows no spot of respite from fearsome pain. Others think of death as endless unawareness, others of endless wandering in the vast emptiness of space always detached and never comforted by God or man.

The reality is that mankind is certainly aware of death, but it does not stop people from sinning because the overwhelming majority do not make a thought for believing the connection that their own sins are actually the direct cause of death, and of Satan being their spiritual father, even as Jesus told the Jews. I wonder how many people who read

the Bible really believe that.

The result of that is that they are held in bondage to this deceptive Satan-induced ignorance that they carry around in their minds. As long as death seems far in the future, mankind generally does not pay much attention. However, the fear of it still resides in their minds, because of the lack of truth, and thus they do not fear sinning all that much, except for social embarrassment. Why is this so? I believe it is because they do not make a clear, knowledgeable, believing connection between their personal sins as being the cause of their own death.

Even Eve when she sinned did not believe it even though it came directly out of God's mouth. Even Adam, when he sinned, did the same thing. He really did not believe it. If they really believed it, they would not very likely have sinned. We will add to this that verse 14 tells us that Satan still has the power of death.

Hebrews 2:14 Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil.

Satan has that power. We will see that God gave it to him; He gave Satan the power to take peoples lives. Satan is a living personality and most people do not fear him either, in fact very many of them do not even believe that he exists but that ignorance does not negate the fact of the bondage. So they are not aware who their jailer is, but he is a person and he has a name. Now let us look at some foundational scriptures and see if we can make clearer sense out of verses 14 and 15.

The purpose in this section of Hebrews is to provide us with a foundation of truth as to how we are freed from what these verses have stated with our conditions before we were called, converted, made Christians, and part of God's Family. The scriptures that we are going to look into here are biblical expounding of Genesis 3:15.

Hebrews 2:9-11 But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than angels, for the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor that He, by the grace of God, might taste death for everyone. For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things and whom by all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to make the author of their salvation perfect through sufferings. For both He who sanctifies and those who are being sanctified are all of one, for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren.

These are key verses to introduce the solution, the teaching that is given to you and me so that we understand where we stand in relation to death. Jesus is the means by which we, the many sons that are mentioned there in verse 10, are made perfect, that is brought to completion, brought to holiness that is acceptable to God. In order for us to be made free from this bondage to Satan, Christ first had to become completely identified with us, that is human.

This is very important because Jesus is the means by which we are not only made free and holy at the beginning of our conversion but who keeps us free throughout our conversion, because we can lose it if we really mess up. Those who are truly holy by God's standards are those who will escape death. The holiness or the sanctification is not a static unchanging state, but a growing lifelong continually forming one.

John 8:31-36 Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, "If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." [even free from death] They answered Him, "We are Abraham's descendants, and have never been in bondage to anyone. How can you say, 'You will be made free'?" Jesus answered them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, whoever commits sin is a slave of sin. And a slave does not abide in the house forever, but a son abides forever. Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed."

The son of those five verses there, is the Son who sets us free. A key element is the word abide, it is very important. Abide means to live, to continue, to go on. This bondage will be released on those people who continue, those who go on. That warning has to be given because Christ can set us free and then we have the awful ability to lose it, if we do not go on. We *have* to continue on.

Recall Romans 5:10. It confirms this, stating that we are saved by Jesus' life. He is our living High Priest who said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you," and because of this, the author, who is probably Paul, says that with Jesus we are one. That is very important because we are lifted as it were, to the same level as our Savior in order for us to be saved. This is a fulfillment of John 17:19-21.

John 17:19-21 [Jesus' final prayer. He said] "And for their sake I sanctify Myself, that they also may be sanctified by the truth. I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word. [That is you and me, the emphasis is on the word believe—strong enough for us to continue.] That they all may be one as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You;

Ecclesiastes Resumed (Part Eighteen) by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me.”

Are you beginning to get the picture? We escape the death penalty because we are one with Jesus Christ, and that we faithfully continue along the way with Him side by side, bound together as one. That one is pointing out that we are in the same group, in a sense we are equal with Him and that is the Family of God. We are one with Him in that Family. We are not totally one yet, but in terms of mind and forming character within us, we are one with Him.

Jesus is stating, our Savior, that we are His brothers and sisters, and all belong to the same Family now. Do not forget that Jesus stated that in order to be completely identified with us, He became a mortal man, but He escaped the death penalty because He never sinned, and so He was able then to completely and fully occupy Himself with paying the penalty in our stead. So nothing less than the death of our sinless Creator, as a man, could suffice to pay the penalty to get us completely out from under Satan's bondage.

He accomplished that and thus qualified to die for the sins of all mankind. Thus what He accomplished by doing so was that Satan, who has the power of death, was defeated because he lost the struggle to induce Jesus, the second Adam, the beginning of the new creation, to sin. It was a struggle that He won over Adam and Eve, and all of their children. Jesus took the weapon of death right out of Satan's hands, and because we are one with Christ, his weapon no longer hangs over us.

We will clarify this a little bit further. We are going to go all the way back to Genesis 2. These are technicalities but they are important technicalities for our well being.

Genesis 2:15-17 Then the Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to tend and keep it. And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, “Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.”

First I want you to note that God was the one who originally pronounced the curse of death if sin is committed. I am going to remind you of a scripture, John 8:44, where Jesus said that Satan was a murderer from the beginning. When was the beginning? It had to be whenever God created human beings, whose life is in their blood, who are

Ecclesiastes Resumed (Part Eighteen) by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

subject to death if they sin. That did not occur until Adam and Eve were created and thus when they sinned it was the beginning of death and Satan was their slayer.

Genesis 3:13 And the Lord God said to the woman, “What is this you have done?” And the woman said, “The serpent deceived me, and I ate.”

We will tie this to John 8:44, because she is referring to her sin, and it is what made Satan guilty of murder. His weapon was what? Did he stab her with a sword? He did not have to do that, he used deceit, his weapon was deceit, words, attitudes that came from him and it encouraged her to sin. She did not completely overlook her respect for God, but she did discount it enough that she gave into Satan's persuasion on the strength of her desire fueled by the combination of her lust for pleasure of eating the forbidden fruit, but even more so, to fulfill the lust to become wise. Knowledge is power and she was already learning that she wanted the power of knowledge.

She was not going to use it to glorify God, she was going to use it on vanity to build up herself, and she got caught in it, and the weapon was deceit. Then Adam, though not deceived as Eve was, also discounted God's counsel in order to make sure that he did not displease Eve. His sin was worse—he was guilty of idolatry, he put her before God.

What does knowing these things accomplish? It shows that even though death did not occur immediately, God had delivered the power of death through the means of deceit, at the very least even before Satan induced her to sin. The power of death had already been given to him, and he used deceit as his weapon.

Satan used this means to murder them, and he uses this means all the way up to this very day, and incidentally beware Jesus clearly indicates in the Olivet Prophecy and in Revelation, that we will witness a rise in the intensity of deceit just prior to Christ's return. His major weapon is *lies*. God did not intervene to stop either Satan or Adam and Eve from following their desire. They had a test to pass, and unless one is converted and under Christ's blood, Satan continues to hold this power even to this day. We are not so defenseless, we have Christ help in us to fight this battle.

God says He will never leave you, nor forsake you, I will always be there, and He usually will do it by reminding us of something. Then we feel so small. Sorrow comes and we change our minds. Do not be misled. Zechariah 3:1-4 shows us that Satan stands ready to take the life of Joshua the priest through a valid accusation against Joshua because he was guilty as his witness there by his filthy robes.

Ecclesiastes Resumed (Part Eighteen) by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

We find in Job 2:5-6 a concise statement that Satan still has this power and those examples there in Job show that even though Satan still has this power, he is still subject to God and Satan can execute that power only on those God gives him permission to kill.

Always remember this. Satan's presence surcharges this earth with a sense of death that creates a fear, thus we have the assurance that God is overseeing our life and insuring that we do not get in over our heads. You will find that in I Corinthians 10:13.

Hebrews 9:27 And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment.

Everybody dies, including believers. I will make this clear in the sermon at the feast why believers die even the first death. It says we are appointed and God means it exactly. Everybody, including believers, die that first death. Perhaps one's first thought is that Satan has supreme rule since everybody dies and every human loses, however do not forget Christ's death on the cross. Christ's death wiped out the curse of death hanging over us because we sinned even as Adam and Eve and he remains our faithful High Priest. So we read in Colossians 2:11-15 that he wiped out the charges that were held over our head that was claiming our life. He wiped that out by His death. He paid the penalty that we do not have to pay. Please turn to Revelation 1:18. A comforting thought is put in here.

Revelation 1:18 "I am He who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore, Amen. And I have the keys of Hades and of Death."

Do you know what He is saying there? That ought to be comfort to everyone of us. He holds the keys of life for His brothers and sisters. Satan no longer holds them, He does. So he has no power to just arbitrarily take our life away from us, Christ will not let him.

Hebrews 2:14 Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil. [He has completely pushed him aside as having power over our life], and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.

These two verses are telling us that Christ died for us in order to break the hold Satan

Ecclesiastes Resumed (Part Eighteen) by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

has on us through any fear of eternal death. Remember we still have to face Hebrews 9:27, everybody dies the first death, and so the death that we escape is not Hebrews 9:27, we escape eternal death. Keep that in mind. As long as we remain with Him, abide, continue on, so that we do not die the hopeless second death. The unconverted are still held to that but we are free to voluntarily turn to God choosing to submit in obedience to Him. The sum of this is, we do not have to sin in face of Satan's powers. We can tell him "the Lord rebuke you, get out of here, you are not going to treat me that way."

We may still do sin, but Satan is no longer our father, he is no longer our master, and we can look forward to an ever-growing liberty to obey God with all of our hearts, our soul, and mind. These are the kind of thoughts that Solomon is encouraging us to be soberly and yet joyfully filled with even in the house of mourning because these realities and their promises are our hope.