

Ecclesiastes Resumed (Part Twenty-Six)

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I am picking up where we left off in the previous sermon with a small amount of review added so that we can regain the flow of thoughts as we look into the confessions of the religious philosopher.

One of the most basic conclusions Solomon reached in his search for wisdom is that there are very few truly living righteous lives. He brought attention to that when he noted that he found only one man in a thousand but not one woman among the same figure. Notice the stream of thought as he moves toward his overall conclusion to this section, (verse 29).

First, in verses 23-25, he says, "I will be wise but it was far from me." Learn from this, wisdom does not yield its fruit easily, it must be worked at. Even Solomon had to work at it! He searched thoroughly and long to reach this conclusion, while at the same time being confident that what he concluded was accurate.

Second, verse 26 inserts an illustration of how mankind is assailed by temptations to commit evil, thus making more difficult and exceedingly so if he does not resist them. The use of the metaphor that the temptress' heart is snares and nets and her hands are fetters, is really vivid. They paint a picture of a temptation that has a multitude of devices of allurements as to imprison one like a bird caught in an entangling snare after being fascinated by the attraction and anticipation of the fulfillment of his desire.

He is inferring there that when a person is caught up in a temptation it is almost as if the person is enchanted, being drawn into it, and somehow he lacks the will to fight it. It was here in that previous sermon that I inserted Proverbs 7 as an example of how temptations from without, and also from within, our own hearts appealingly direct us, urges us, to fulfill our desires.

The desire to error is not limited to adultery and fornication, such as that illustration in Proverbs 7 showed us, because we can be tempted by all kinds of things to be drawn aside from God's way: drugs, smoking, alcohol, people love adulation. Evelyn and I watched Entertainment Tonight for the first time in history. I told her I came to the conclusion that all of those people were playing up to the camera. It is almost as if they were trying to lure it in their direction.

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

All of these people are entertainers, they are singers, they are in the movies, band leaders, and so forth. Their life is surrounded by adulation and they play every card they possibly can to get people's attention to them. They are tempted by that. It was so easy to see that that was what their appeal for the camera was. It almost seemed as though they were preening before it all of the time, men and women regardless.

The temptation process that leads to sin is similar in most cases regardless of the area of life the temptation is attempting to seduce us in. The desire is like a siren song putting the pressure on by giving one reason after another as to why it would not be so bad to fulfill that desire only one more time, and all too often the one lusting becomes evermore willing to fulfill his desire until he caves in because he no longer endure the sacrifice of denying himself.

The cold reality is that we argue ourselves into crashing and doing it, like the young man in Proverbs 7 illustration. We deliberately travel in the temptation's direction. It sets a pattern because rather than fighting the direction and doing what Joseph did—run and get out of there—he went right along the road and the first thing you know he was conversing with the seductress, and he was as good as gone by that time.

Despite the Bible's counsel regarding wisdom being so valuable, when we crash it has not at that point done us much good if at all. It did not matter enough that we resist completely. Though we may intellectually agree that sinfulness is folly, foolishness, or even insanity, as Solomon mentions right here in Ecclesiastes, we all too often find ourselves pulled in that direction, and in an overall sense, what Solomon found was what we might label the overwhelming general sinfulness of mankind. But overall mankind shows little wisdom and that was his conclusion.

That conclusion worded another way is that, sinfulness is not rare, it is not hard to find, it is everywhere, we are almost flooded by it, it is universal. And the flip side of that coin is this: it is righteousness, purity, and wisdom that are hard to find. This is a truth right out of the book of Ecclesiastes and that is where we are to aim our life at. It is *always* wisdom to keep God's commandments. By that I am not talking about the Big Ten, I am talking about what God has commanded us at any time through the multitudes of examples that He gives in His Word.

It is intriguing that Solomon began his findings by listing first the prostitute, because of teaching one finds in other portions of the Bible. It reminds me that she is very likely being used in three different ways.

First, is the specific one that we went through in Proverbs 7, to illustrate the way of the

street walker. That was done to make it clear that temptation is right out there.

Second, is the possibility that the prostitute might illustrate any of the powerful but unlawful desires working within us for anything that we have a yearning for. Not just the use of a prostitute but the use of the pleasure that we get from fulfilling an unlawful desire.

Third, is that the temptress symbolizes the entirety of mankind being lured by the spirit of this world, and this is the way that God characterizes Israel's conduct before the world in other places in the Book. This is overall the one most dangerous to Christians, even as it was to Israel, the world.

I Kings 11:1-6 But King Solomon loved many foreign women, as well as the daughter of Pharaoh; women of the Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Sidonians, and Hittites, from the nations of whom the Lord had said to the children of Israel, "You shall not intermarry with them, nor they with you. For surely they will turn away your hearts after their gods." Solomon clung to these in love, and he had seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines and his wives turned away his heart. For it was so, when Solomon was old, that his wives turned his heart after other gods; and his heart was not loyal to the Lord his God, as was the heart of his father David. [His loyalty broke down in the face of his temptations and God was turned aside from and Solomon was no longer keeping His commandments.] For Solomon went after Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians, and after Milcom the abomination of the Ammonites. Solomon did evil in the sight of the Lord, and did not fully follow the Lord, as did his father David.

So Solomon did not follow his own advice, he was snared by many foreign women. This word 'foreign' does not just pertain to ethnicity, it also pertains to who they worshipped. It was a foreign god, not the God they should have been worshipping. Thus the prostitute symbolizes the world and its gods to the Christian. This is why I say, it is the world that is our biggest problem outside of ourselves. It has so much to offer our desires.

In Proverbs 5 is the kind of advice that Solomon did not follow and it came right out of him. We can almost hear him saying, "Do as I say, not as I do."

Proverbs 5:3-6 For the lips of an immoral woman drip honey, and her mouth is smoother than oil; but in the end she is bitter as wormwood, sharp as a

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

two-edged sword. Her feet go down to death, her steps lay hold of hell. Lest you ponder her path of life—her ways are unstable; you do not know them. [They are more alluring than you can ever think if one is tempted by these things.]

The world may be enticing to the senses but it is deadly to one's relationship with God. This is portrayed in movies so often, at least the principles, not with God's involvement. But, a guy and a gal are dating and things are going along alright and another gal comes along or another guy comes along, and they prove to be a temptation and the original relationship is damaged. This is the kind of thing that God is talking about, He is referring to, He is thinking about with our relationship to the world and the many opportunities that it has for us out there to be loyal to it, because we desire what the world can give us.

The world and its temptations enters the relationship between us and God and no good can come from that. Look what it did with God's relationship with Israel. It destroyed Israel's relationship with God completely, totally, until He sent her away and scattered her all over the world.

Those lessons are there and we do not face them in the magnitude that God faced them with Israel. We do not even come close to the magnitude that Solomon faced in his lifetime, because we do not have his position, we do not have the gifts that he was given, we are not being held accountable to the same degree that Solomon was, but the principle is the same in our relationship with God. We cannot afford to let the gods of this world filled with foreign gods, to come between us and our relationship with God, because it will build no good into the relationship with God, and it is a possibility that it will destroy it.

Proverbs 7:1-5 My son, keep my words, and treasure my commands within you. Keep my commands and live, and my law as the apple of your eye. Bind them on your fingers; write them on the tablet of your heart. Say to wisdom, "You are my sister," and call understanding your nearest kin, that they may keep you from the immoral woman, from the seductress who flatters with her words.

The seductress is not the prostitute, the seductress is the world. The world issues its commands, along with its appeals. God has issued His commands and so He is making us remember that we are to be loyal to Him. The instruction here is this, say to wisdom,

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

“You are my sister.” He is talking to a son. Why does he relate wisdom with a sister? I think you are aware that a brother and sister are more closely related than a parent to a child. That is how close God is calling this relationship.

Our individual relationship has to be like a brother or a sister—that close. Along with wisdom is understanding, if we have understanding then the chances of having wisdom also in our mind is increased because the two go together. Proper understanding leads to the conclusion as to what is wise and then if we really have the wisdom and the fear of God, we will put it into practice regardless of the sacrifices needed to keep God's commandments.

We already saw in the book of Proverbs—trying to tie all of these things together so that we see where wisdom comes from, and what our relationship with it has to be, and how we have to make use of it in order for it to be really be helpful to us.

Ecclesiastes 7:18 It is good that you grasp this, and also not remove your hand from the other; for he who fears God will escape them all.

We will put this together. We got instruction from Proverbs 7 that God says wisdom has to be close enough to us, along with understanding, as if it is our brother or our sister. Those are the closest relationships in family life. It has to have things added to it that will be helpful. We get one of them here.

Do you know what really caused Solomon to fail? He had the knowledge, he had the wisdom, and he knew better. He did not fear God, he did not respect God, he did not have enough faith to resist. He lacked every part of the equation that God is giving us here to fight the temptation so that we have enough resistance to bear up under the sacrifice that resisting the temptation needs for it to be overcome on our part.

Faith, the fear of God, wisdom, and understanding—using these things we are acting with a good grasp of why we have to do this, why we have to make the efforts. This is where so many fail, and that is why Solomon had such a hard time finding even one man in a thousand, and no women in a thousand, who were really living righteous lives.

There is an additional piece of help that you are well aware of. I will go back to it simply because of the way it is worded in the New King James.

I Corinthians 10:13 No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted

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

beyond what you are able but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.

I want to pick up on the word temptation. It fits right into the context of Ecclesiastes 7 and what Solomon is talking about. Faith begins the process of resisting the temptation, to know that God is on His throne, and knows what is going on in your life, so that we will be reassured that He is faithful, and will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able. That young man who fell before the prostitute should have known this.

How many times did Solomon give into his temptations? I do not know, but we know that it was his faith and his lack of the fear of God that got him into trouble. He had the intellectual knowledge and understanding, he has the wisdom in his mind, but he could not put it into operation because, the faith was weak and his fear of God was not there either.

God is faithful. He will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation He will also make a way of escape that you may be able to bear it. There is the promise. There is no temptation that God will allow us to get into in which we are over our head.

If understanding and wisdom are as close to us as a brother and sister, we will take the advice, and God will give us a way of escape so that we are able to bear the temptation.

What we have to be controlling is to not allow the intensity of the impulses to give in, to build to the place where we are in grave possibility of losing. Before we allow ourselves to think that Solomon was a sexist pig as a result of his writing about women, we might want to rethink that a bit.

I do not think that Solomon was totally down on women, he was the problem, it was not the women. I think he later came to figure that out. Solomon speaks positively of women in many other places in the books that he has written. I think that God allowed a small bit of Solomon's personal experiences and their results into His Word because his personal experiences overall were not positive despite of all his natural gifts, his wealth, and his powerful position. Perhaps we can find some wisdom for good use from a bad example.

Further along in regard to Solomon's experiences and attitude toward women are verses 27 and 28.

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

Ecclesiastes 7:27-28 “Here is what I have found,” says the Preacher, “Adding one thing to the other to find out the reason, which my soul still seeks but I cannot find; one man among a thousand I have found, but a woman among all these I have not found.”

These are especially interesting in regard to women. They are directly labeled as personal experiences—I have done this, I have done that—so they came right out of his life. It may seem as though he was actually counting. Could they be generalities? That is a possibility, because several commentators in my searches believe that they are simply general statements similar to what we might use in our time. We may have even heard it stated that such and such a person, male or female, was one in a thousand, indicating that they were unique. It was simply a common use idiom indicating an unusual person.

In fact the one in a thousand figure, if it is taken as true, stating that a man is but one of a thousand, do you realize that such a person was only one hundredth of one percent better than the woman?

Taken as a whole, it seems to me that the Bible has much more to say about sinful men than sinful women, overwhelmingly. Sin is an equal opportunity employer. Solomon directly said, in verse 20, there is not a just man on earth who does good and does not sin. The emphasis in that verse is on a man as contrasted to a woman. The reality is, even the good one that he did find was still a sinner who needs to be saved by grace.

It should be no surprise to us that in Solomon's personal experiences being king, that an awfully high number of the women that he had contact with were usually royalty and bitter spoiled brats accustomed to getting what they wanted all of their life. I think he figured that out but a deal is a deal.

When we take into consideration things like Solomon's writing of the Song of Songs and Proverbs 31, he generally had good things to say and a balanced approach to women, and like men, even righteous women were still sinners who need to be saved by grace just like the men. Overall I would have to say that his experience with women was not good.

Verse 29 is very interesting because this is the conclusion of this beautiful chapter. This is what he found from his search for wisdom. “Truly, this only have I found, that God made man upright but they have sought out many schemes.” This is especially interesting because it is an Old Testament statement that contains information regarding mankind being created in God's image, and what the world calls original sin.

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

This verse makes very clear that God did not create man for the purpose of sinning. God made man upright. Sin is mankind's fault, and we have to have this in our mind because it was men who fell before Satan, and it was men, including the women, who ruined things—it was not God! He made man upright. Do you realize that when Adam and Eve were created they did not have any sin within them, they were righteous, pure, and innocent.

This is helpful to know because mankind through millennia of time has had the persistent and strong proclivity for blaming God for all of his troubles. It is true that we are created in the image of God. Does God have any sin in Him? No, not at all. When they were created in His image they did not have any sin within them either. They were given a spirit, and we have a spirit too, and we have the ability to understand and harness many of the powers that God placed within our nature, and in our environment.

At first Eve was deceived, but man, specifically Adam, and then all of mankind, including women, *deliberately* chose to sin. God has not tempted you or me one iota. He has never twisted our arms and said, I want you to sin. We have all done it on our own, before the temptation that Satan places before us. We cannot just pass it off that somebody else is guilty, not in the least. God will not buy that.

How does sin get in us? We were given a spirit, and we have the ability to understand and to harness many of the powers that God place within our nature, and in the environment. Ecclesiastes 7:29 records the deliberateness. Notice the way it is worded, “We have sought out many schemes.” *We are looking for ways to sin.*

Time and history have proved over and over again that we do not always do things constructively but self-centeredness for personal gain, and shortsightedness, seems to rule our choices. We seem to pollute everything we touch and create new problems, each generation, for ourselves the overwhelming majority of which we cannot solve. And potential problems exists now that could, except for God's mercy, wipe life itself right from the face of the earth! Is life serious or what?

We could loosely interpret that verse 29, “God has made man upright but man has defeated himself by his own schemes.” We strive to do things our way—we go to so much trouble to make trouble for ourselves instead of reading His Book, believing it, and submitting to it.

I have an interesting example from Mark Twain. He was highly respected as a writer, but I have read of him written by people who knew him well, that he was really sarcastic with a cynical personality. Throughout his life he managed to hide his hatred for God,

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

and Christianity itself, from the public. He is one who openly blamed to his friends that God is responsible for all of mankind's troubles. In fact near the end of his life he wrote a book which he titled, *Letters to Earth*, blaming God for everything. The book so offended his daughter because she feared that the book would ruin his reputation, she made sure that it was never published until thirty years after his death, and she herself was also close to death.

Mark Twain said this about Adam, "Whoever has lived long enough to find out what life is, owes a deep debt of gratitude to Adam. He was the first great benefactor of our race. He brought death into the world." He managed to hide himself through his books like *Tom Sawyer*, and especially *Huckleberry Finn*. In those books is really a tirade against Christianity and Christian people, but you have to read between the lines, because he was a clever writer. Huckleberry and his friend Jim, were constantly running these people down. That was Mark Twain speaking.

My thought was, after reading that about him was, thank God that there is also a last Adam! Because of the virtue of his sinless life, atoning death, and resurrection we can receive, by God's grace, the quality of life God intended from the beginning.

We do not have the wisdom to solve all the deep mysteries of life, but we should be wise enough from our experiences to look within ourselves and see that deadly sin in our own heart and ask God to be our Savior through Jesus Christ. Before we move on, I think it best to look more thoroughly at some of the things touched on by verse 29. It is, at one and the same time, a summary statement of why life is the way it is, and it provides a smooth bridge into the subject beginning in chapter 8. But even more important is that it is a fairly clear statement, an Old Testament statement, refuting some of what the Catholic Church teaches in its original sin doctrine.

Very briefly this doctrine, among other things, falsely teaches that man's sinful nature is passed on through procreation, much in the same way as physical DNA. This teaching eventually reaches out and includes the declaration that Mary, Jesus' mother, was a chosen vessel miraculously kept free of this contamination by God.

Their claim is that Mary's conception was an immaculate conception. Thus she was a worthy vessel to carry within her the God-child, and give birth to Him, and she would not pass on sin. Thus they make the claim that she was truly virginal in every way, and this is totally untrue. She never had a child before, and she was a virgin in that way, but immediately this doctrine puts a wrong slant on marriage and the sexual act itself. It manages to taint the great blessing of marriage and procreation within it as being a curse rather than being a great blessing. It is as though sin enters us through this

means.

Marriage is indeed involved to a degree, with the passing on of human nature, and sin being a part of our life, but not in that way. We need to understand a few things about sin. Sin is a spiritual matter. Sins are definitely committed through physical acts, but the source of sin is in the heart. It is the heart that generates the physical acts, whether it is illicit sex, stealing money from the bank, murdering, it comes from the heart.

This is simply confirmed by Jesus' statement that, out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. Jesus was not merely teaching that speaking sins are generated in the heart, *all* sin begins in the heart, and we do not actually have to perform an act of some kind to sin—we can think it. It does not even have to leave our body in any kind of a physical act, it is already there, in the heart. It is in the mind, and so we are capable of doing it at any time without even a physical act being involved at all. It is dwelling there in the heart, in the mind, of all persons.

Romans 3:10, 23 As it is written: "There is none righteous, no, not one. [that included Mary]. . . . For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. [Mary was not immaculately conceived.]

Any human being that God ever used, in any aspect of His purpose on earth, at any time except for Jesus, has been a sinner. That includes Mary. How does it get into us? I think the Bible pretty clearly shows how it gets into us. I will give you the answer in eight words, Sin enters us, it comes from contact with a sinful source. It is that simple.

Originally it came from contact with the very personification of sin, from Satan, his hordes of demon spirits, and the world they have created. A clear physical example is that Adam and Eve did not sin until they came in contact with Satan. That tells you, with a snap of a finger, where sin comes from, it comes from contact with a sinful person. We have a spirit, they have a spirit. It is though our spirit reaches out to say, now I have sin in me too. It is not quite that simple but that is where the contact is made—through the spirit of the individuals involved.

I will read you some scriptures that really have a message, before I finish this off. It comes from contact with a sinful source, a proof of this is, as long as God held Satan at bay and did not permit him into their presence, they did not sin. Their spiritual innocence continued within the righteousness they shared within the Garden of Eden with God their Creator, and their companion. As long as they were in His presence, and nobody else was around, they stayed as pure and innocent as the day that God breathed right

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

into their nostrils the breath of life, because they has no contact with sin whatever.

Can you see what a world is coming when Satan is gone, when the demons are gone, and nobody is sinning? God, their Creator was their companion. We will broaden this reality with another different reality. That is, we have to remember all of the time that God is absolutely, totally, completely, always righteous in every category of life. There was no possibility of contact with sin by them as long as He was their only companion.

Ephesians 2:1-3 And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others.

This gives us an overview of how we came in contact with Satan. It is accomplished by means of contact with an absorption and transference of his spirit and then compounded and more firmly entrenched by the practice of his attitudes and his thoughts. It is a simple process. This is why I said earlier, the world is the most dangerous place on earth for God's children, because it is out there that we come into contact with the very ones who are motivating sin within us. So we have to be very careful.

In this world we are surrounded by an almost swimmingly influence of Satan's mind. This may seem unfair to some but it is nonetheless what God has now willed that we must face. God willed in His creation of mankind that we must deliberately and voluntarily choose which way we shall go—will it be Satan, or God? Which will it be, even in the face of temptation? The temptations are going to be there.

Remember earlier I gave you advice from Solomon, understanding that wisdom, faith, and the fear of God will lead a person to escape them all. So which will we be loyal to? That is our calling. In the scripture that I gave you at the beginning out of the book of Romans, and then went on to expound, God is judging whether we are loyal to Him and the keeping of His commandments. So which way will we be loyal to? Our loyalty must be demonstrated by the manner in which we live our life even though faced by the temptations of wayward influences.

I will give you another brilliant truth regarding this.

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

I Corinthians 15:33-34 Do not be deceived; “Evil company corrupts good habits.” Awake to righteousness, and do not sin; for some do not have the knowledge of God. I speak this to your shame.

The Revised English Bible reads that first line in this way; “Make no mistake. Bad company ruins good character.” That is pretty blunt. You can simplify this picture to yourselves. Adam and Eve, pure as the day they were created, came in contact with bad company and boom! He was part of them. When Adam and Eve were communicated to by Satan, their spirit homed in on his spirit, and succumbed to its influences. Even though instructed they did not put up their defenses to resist his communication.

Spirit is the term indicating an invisible power and influence. The same word is used in both Hebrew and Greek for wind, and breath. We find in I John 5 what we face here in our conversion.

I John 5:18-20 We know that whoever is born of God does not sin; but he who has been born of God keeps himself, and the wicked one does not touch him. We know that we are of God and the whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one. And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us an understanding, that we may know Him who is true; and we are in Him who is true; in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life.

I will ask you a question. Understanding this and understanding that Satan's spirit is involved in everything in this world, is it any wonder that Solomon is teaching us that *everything matters*? That calls for us for being alert. It does not mean we withdraw from life. It does not mean that we are terribly afraid of the world.

It does mean that we go about with our mind closed to the temptations of the world and that we are ready to resist it so that we do not get drawn into something that is over our heads. God will not permit that, so we do not have to be terrified of the world, we just have to be very careful about what we permit ourselves to do that comes out of that source.