

## Resuming Ecclesiastes (Part Two)

### Overview of Chapter 1

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I am going to begin where I did last Sabbath in Deuteronomy 30. I want us to see this in light of things that were said in a previous chapter, but I will read Deuteronomy 30 first just to remind you of what it says.

**Deuteronomy 30:19-20** " I call heaven and earth as witnesses today against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both you and your descendants may live; that you may love the Lord your God, that you may obey His voice, and that you may cling to Him, for He is your life and the length of your days; and that you may dwell in the land which the Lord swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give them."

Do you know what precedes two chapters before this “choose life” statement by God? It is the blessings and the curses mentioned in Deuteronomy 28. The setting of this verse immediately follows the blessings and curses given by our Father in Heaven during which he clearly sets out the alternatives in our relationship with Him. It is almost as if He is saying that in our relationship there is no middle ground. It is a prelude of what Jesus later said about “he that is not with Me is against Me.”

In Deuteronomy 29, we have a clarification of the covenant so that everybody knows: This is God; this is the people; and this is their responsibility to Him. We will read Deuteronomy 29:10-15:

**Deuteronomy 29:10-15** "All of you stand today before the Lord your God: your leaders and your tribes and your elders and your officers, all the men of Israel, your little ones and your wives—also the stranger who is in your camp, from the one who cuts your wood to the one who draws your water—that you may enter into covenant with the Lord your God, and into His oath, which the

Lord your God makes with you today, that He may establish you today as a people for Himself, and that He may be God to you, just as He has spoken to you, and just as He has sworn to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. "I make this covenant and this oath, not with you alone, but with him who stands here with us today before the Lord our God, as well as with him who is not here with us today.

I think that you can begin to see that we are building toward the statement there in Deuteronomy 30 where He says, "You are going to have to choose." There is life on one hand and there is death on the other hand. God's charge in Deuteronomy 30 is to each one of us, individually, of our responsibility. What is that? We finally get to it there in Deuteronomy 30: Do not choose the curses; choose LIFE!

I am going to tie this to Ecclesiastes. Ecclesiastes is showing us in broad strokes, through Solomon's lecture, where choosing the curses leads. Choosing the curses produces a meaningless life, a life that when it is over has a value no greater than the thin scum of a soap bubble after it bursts.

Therefore, we are people of faith; and we are to use our faith, our belief in God and His Word, as we make our choices in daily life. Our calling is that simple. It is not complex at all. Our responsibility is to choose life, but that is not always simple. There are times when we face grave difficulties in making that choice.

Until God calls us, we know some things, perhaps many things, about God, but we really do not know Him. When He calls us, we are introduced to a relationship with Him. Within that relationship, He begins and continues educating us to His way of life and to what He expects of us. He also shows us somewhat of the way He reacts to our choices within our relationship, and thus slowly we begin to know Him.

Most of us, I am sure, are going to find that God is not overbearing at all. Though we learn He greatly desires righteousness, He gives us a great deal of rope regarding the making of our choices, and the purpose of that great

deal of rope is that we must learn to govern ourselves by faith. The key there is ‘govern ourselves,’ without Him having to force the issue. That is the best way.

It is for this reason at the beginning of last week’s sermon that I gave you a number of clear examples of men who made right choices while at the same time someone closely related or associated with that person made a bad choice. I repeatedly said, “and God let them.” This is what I mean about God not being overbearing. He is not pushing down on us all the time. He is allowing us plenty of room to make mistakes. They do not just pass Him, but the choice has to be made, over and over and over again. By Him giving us a great deal of rope, God is able to get a clear understanding as to whether He and His way is really part of us and whether we love Him and His way to such a degree that we voluntarily choose the right alternative. We neither choose grudgingly, nor out of sheer terror, but out of love for Him.

I think you all understand where this preparation is heading. It is heading toward a marriage, so that we understand the metaphor that is being used here. An even closer relationship with God is coming, but Christ will not marry someone who does not love Him. That love has to be expressed in our submission to Him. This presents quite a challenge to us because the world, with all of its attractions, is very near and very attractive to human nature; and thus it is very easy for us to attempt to satisfy our desires in and through it, and God will let us, because we must choose.

The overall purpose of Ecclesiastes is to give us a clear picture of the meaninglessness of life in this world *apart* from a relationship with God. God does not force us to choose the relationship with Him, but He educates us to clearly see the differences and voluntarily govern ourselves to choose the right. Sometimes, to choose the right requires a sacrifice and sometimes that sacrifice is quite serious.

Understanding Ecclesiastes 1 is essential to understanding the purpose of the entire book’s theme. It acts as a sort of launching pad by providing a foundation for thinking and choosing. Practical, Christian living by faith is Solomon’s desire for all who read his conclusions from his experiences. What I mean by this is to pay particular attention to the close of each and every chapter because conclusions are reached there that are made in such a

way that we should be able to discern what Solomon is saying is right and wrong.

This world has a very strong pull on human nature, but Solomon clearly summarizes in chapter 1 that allowing what it presents to dominate our thinking and decision-making is sheer, never-fulfilled vanity. We heard about some of this in the sermonette that David gave about people trying to fill the void that is within them by all kinds of means, but what truly fills the void is a relationship with God ["Filling the Void"]. Therefore, we want to build that relationship, expand upon it, and make it stronger; and we do that by showing Him we love Him by submitting to Him.

We clearly understand that our life is lived in time, but it is given to all men once to die; and therefore, everyone's life is limited and none of us knows how long we will live. That thought produces a very clear principle. We all know that we pass through only once and we must make the most of that one pass. For the son's of God, this is that one time.

We saw that God purposely subjected the physical creation to vanity and it affects us, and therefore all this vanity that appears in life is in reality good for our preparation for the Kingdom of God. Apparently, God decided that we first have to see and experience the emptiness of life without Him so that our choice will really be clear to us—almost in black and white. This vanity will thoroughly disillusion us with everything that the world has to offer in order to make a clear determined choice to throw it off and depart from it. The frustration it imposes helps us make a true assessment of the value of His grace and goodness, and thus zealously commit ourselves to Him and His purpose.

In chapter 1 of Ecclesiastes, Solomon is laying a foundation, without ever directly saying it, and that foundation moves one toward concluding to seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness. If we allow Solomon to convince us by the truth and the logic of his arguments, vanity will not have the last word. That is a promise from God.

There are three key terms in chapter 1, they are "vanity," "profit," and "under the sun." We have spent a great deal of time on the first word, "vanity," and we are through with it, but the second key word "profit," in

Hebrew is *yitron* which literally means “that which is left over.” Though it is used only six times in Ecclesiastes, its placement right at the beginning of Solomon’s writing adds great weight to its use. Thus Solomon is asking, “If so much in life is vanity, is it really worth living?” Is it really worth going through all of life’s challenges? What is one going to gain? There is no doubt that life requires the expending of a great deal of time and energy, and with it comes a great deal of stressful uncertainty, fear, and dealing with pain; sometimes physical, but a lot of times it is emotional.

What does one get from it? Because on the surface, life appears to be just running in never-ending circles. Solomon gives illustrations through the repetitious cycles of earthly things. The waters running to the seas but they are not filled. The sun going up and down every 24 hours. The winds blowing sometimes from the north and sometimes from the south. In addition to that, even humanly the eyes and the ears are never satisfied. Again, we heard that in the sermonette. They, too, are never fulfilled in doing what they are created to do. They always want to see more and to hear more. We see generation after generation living and dying on the earth. At the time that we are living, we are dying, but as we are dying, another generation is coming up to take our place.

Meditations of this sort work to make an individual person appear so insignificant against the backdrop of the immensity of time, of earth’s population, and of their movements, that the insignificance of a single individual cannot be adequately expressed as anything but useless. In one sense, if we look at these things, we are nothing more than a rock, a stone, or a pebble, dropped in a pond. We make a ripple, the water smooths out, and the rock is gone.

It is helpful to understand that Solomon’s question regarding profit is asked in a rhetorical sense in order to stimulate thinking and especially asking questions at this point in time. Remember, we have not even left the first chapter yet. He is still laying the foundation and this foundation is going to be the base of his thinking as he goes through and drags us along with him so that we eventually, ultimately, reach the same kind of conclusions that he does.

He wants to persuade us with the truth and logic of what he is saying. Solomon already knows the final answer, and that is one reason why in the last sermon I began at the end of the book. I showed you the conclusion he reached: “Fear God and keep His commandments.” That is the whole person. This is what makes life so it is not meaningless and not vain. A person who will do that has the purpose of God in mind, and so he is going to conform to what God wants, and that is not vanity, even though at times it might require a great deal of sacrifice.

Solomon already knows the final answer, but he is attempting to get his listeners and readers to think life is meaningless, is not profitable, if viewed from the perspective Solomon has described to this point. As I keep reminding you, we are not even out of the first chapter yet.

We find that a different, far, far better perspective is obtained if one understands what Solomon means by the third term “under the sun.” By using this term, he is stating that the perspective from which he is viewing life most of the time, in all of its vain and frustrating complexity, is literally where the sun shines. His perspective, then, for the most part and especially at this point within his lecture does not include what is above the sun: God and heaven. To see things under the sun is to look at life’s events from ground level, and thus, that is not God’s view at all.

Under the sun is to take an earthly point of view. It is to look at things carnally, leaving God out of the picture for a period of time as his lecture unfolds. Solomon’s purpose at this point is to bring us to where we begin to fear that vanity is all there is to life, and all too often we forget to remember that God and His purpose is in the crush of life’s events. When we do this, we are right back under the sun, once again, looking at things carnally. We can get dragged and influenced in that direction so easily because human nature is so attached to thinking of things under the sun.

Ecclesiastes is not just about meaninglessness; it also opens up 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. The vanity plays a major role in God’s purpose, helping to form us into what He wants.

The vanity, when rightly understood can, if we allow it, motivate cooperation. It can make us say, “I don’t want that!” That is what He wants us to understand by allowing us (as we are aging) to see that everything that we have done in the past fits right into the mold of the meaninglessness of life and to make us want to get out of it, to run and flee from Babylon, as it were. That is just another way of putting it, because that thing is going down the tubes and so is this entire world. Vanity, when rightly understood, can motivate cooperation. One way to see this is to take all the repetitious things that make life seem so dreary and wearisome and see what a difference it makes to bring God back into the picture.

Why not take God and these repetitious things into the Holy of Holies when you pray? Some people who wrote the Psalms did do that. A very well known psalm is Psalm 19, where David says:

**Psalm 19:1-5** The heavens declare the glory of God; And the firmament shows His handiwork. Day unto day utters speech [he means the sun, it is as though it is talking], And night unto night reveals knowledge [the heavens, the moon, stars]. There is no speech nor language where their voice is not heard. Their line has gone out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world. In them He has set a tabernacle for the sun, which is like a bridegroom coming out of his chamber, and rejoices like a strong man to run its race. Its rising is from one end of heaven, and its circuit to the other end; and there is nothing hidden from its heat.

I do not think David was thinking of the sun coming up and heading west every morning as a vain repetition of nature. In this Psalm, he looks at the sun as a wondrous creation of God made for our benefit. This is taking a godly look at what Solomon said was a weary repetition. This illustrates how the carnal look at circumstances, while the godly look at them with a different perspective altogether. In Matthew 5:45 Jesus says,

**Matthew 5:45** ...that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.

What does the sun mean to you? Without the sun, there would be no life on earth. Life on earth for everything is dependent upon the sun. How many gifts of life are related to the sun? How about warmth and rain for starters? God makes His sun to rise on the evil and the good and sends rain on the just and the unjust. God shares it with everybody, whether they are for Him or against Him. He still shares this wonderful creation that gives us the possibility of life. Jesus was not thinking of them as repetitious illustrations of vanity either.

The point is that perspective can make all the difference as to whether you are looking at things above the sun or below the sun. If we are concentrating on what is beneath the sun, we risk being drawn into depression.

Just like President Obama depresses me because I see what he represents, and I see that it is headed in a direction that I do not like at all. That direction is counter to God and what God would have, if I could put it that way. If we were going to have righteousness.

I believe Psalms 113 is written by a different psalmist than David, but he looked at it the same way David did. God's creation is awesome and good and though things work vainly and repetitiously, there is a positive to it as well. We read in Psalms 113:1-9:

**Psalm 113:1-9** Praise the Lord! Praise, O servants of the Lord, praise the name of the Lord! Blessed be the name of the Lord from this time forth and forevermore! From the rising of the sun to its going down the Lord's name is to be praised. The Lord is high above all nations, His glory above the heavens. Who is like the Lord our God, who dwells on high, who humbles Himself to behold the things that are in the heavens and in the earth? He raises the poor out of the dust, and lifts the needy out of the ash heap, that He may seat him with princes—with the princes of His people. He grants the barren woman a home, like a joyful mother of children. Praise the Lord!

Compare these thoughts with what we saw in Ecclesiastes 1, where Solomon had quite a bit to say about the repetitious weather patterns. The only

difference is the perspective of the writers and even the repetition that we see in nature is a testimony of the goodness and the orderliness of God. He can be absolutely depended upon, and He teaches us through things like nature. The regularity of the world shows the constancy and the faithfulness of God. He upholds all things by the Word of His power.

In Job 36, we have a speech by Elihu as he was teaching Job:

**Job 36:22-33** "Behold, God is exalted by His power; who teaches like Him? Who has assigned Him His way, or who has said, 'You have done wrong'? "Remember to magnify His work, of which men have sung. Everyone has seen it; man looks on it from afar. "Behold, God is great, and we do not know Him; nor can the number of His years be discovered. For He draws up drops of water, which distill as rain from the mist, which the clouds drop down and pour abundantly on man. Indeed, can anyone understand the spreading of clouds, the thunder from His canopy? Look, He scatters His light upon it, and covers the depths of the sea. For by these He judges the peoples; He gives food in abundance. He covers His hands with lightning, and commands it to strike. His thunder declares it, the cattle also, concerning the rising storm.

The wind blows at His bidding, and the waters flow at His command. All of this is not just repetitious nature, it is a blessing to every creature. God operates His creation for the good of man.

Although there is vanity involved, it is in reality intended for our good. We have to be thinking about it, though not involved in it, we must learn from it and be able to use it to motivate our understanding and submission to the great Creator God who is working all these things within this envelope of vanity that surrounds us. We have to use our faith within the midst of it and not look at these things as curses. Looking above the sun can give us an entirely different perspective on our experiences.

Is there anything new under the sun? Solomon said there was not. That is a true statement, but the God who rules over the sun is always doing something new. To give you an idea, there is a New Covenant, a new life that came from out of the tomb to which we look forward to having; a new

heart that God gives to those who repent and by faith believe in the blood of Jesus Christ, a new self that arises from the baptism by the Holy Spirit, and there is a new creation by which we are being formed into the image of Jesus Christ. In Isaiah 43:18-21 we break into the midst of a long period of new things that God is looking forward to bringing to this earth.

**Isaiah 43:18-21** "Do not remember the former things [He is saying, "Do not look backward. If you are with me, look forward"], nor consider the things of old. Behold, I will do a new thing [what is He talking about?], now it shall spring forth; shall you not know it? I will even make a road in the wilderness and rivers in the desert. The beast of the field will honor Me, the jackals and the ostriches, because I give waters in the wilderness and rivers in the desert, to give drink to My people, My chosen. This people I have formed for Myself; they shall declare My praise.

This is coming, and God is working toward that period of time when He rescues Israel, His people, from what they are involved in. We can go far beyond this time in II Peter 3:11-13. This is far into the future, but it is coming. It is a new thing. He has not done it yet, but He will do it, and we must keep our eyes on the future.

**II Peter 3:11-13** Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved [all of this vanity is going to be dissolved], what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness [if we have the right perspective this is what we will be looking toward and this is what we will be using our time on this earth for], looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat? Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.

If this is our aim in life and we want to get away from the vanity, this is going to be our perspective. Do you see the way it is with God? His perspective is not on the past, it is not even on the present, it is on the future. In a sense, it is as if He is trying to drag us along with Him, but we must do it willingly and leave the vanity behind.

**Revelation 21:5** Then He who sat on the throne said, "Behold, I make all things new." And He said to me, "Write, for these words are true and faithful."

Turn now to I Corinthians 2:9:

**I Corinthians 2:9** But as it is written: "Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him."

It requires some effort for us to exercise power over our carnal nature and to make what God is preparing for us dominate our perspective on all things. We must make the effort to see in our mind's eye what He is doing or our life can become overwhelmed by the vanities of life as they are perceived and lived by most. What we have just read is why everything matters. I have mentioned this numerous times because it is a theme that comes through in Ecclesiastes. God is moving toward a new creation, and it is He who has ordained that we must live in this vanity-filled world, and it has to be overcome. We must resist its draw upon our nature, and a great deal of this will come from the perspective that we have in life. Our perspective cannot be on the vanity of this world; it must be on what God is doing.

You and I are involved in a new creation. That is where He is heading. He has determined that we need to show Him that we really understand and care about what He is putting us through so that the right things are created within us. Because of what lies ahead, it is why we cannot allow the vanities of this world to satisfy our desires. It is why God commands us to choose life. The vanities of this world are death.

The time is coming when our senses are going to be saturated by the mind of God. This is something to remember whenever we are frustrated, angry, sad, or disappointed with everything in life that is getting broken, falling apart, and going wrong. Life is not vain for us because we are the new creation. We are being formed, created for a different world—a world that is not subject to vanity. This vain and weary world should serve as a reminder to prompt us to turn our perspective to the right one.

Is there profit in what we are experiencing? Getting back to the thought that triggered all of this...turn to Matthew 16:24-27:

**Matthew 16:24-27** Then Jesus said to His disciples, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me [this is the cost of leaving this vanity filled world]. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it. For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul? For the Son of Man will come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and then He will reward each according to his works.

This is what Ecclesiastes is all about. Solomon is saying, "You have this choice or that one. This is what I experienced, and this is what it produced. Therefore, I do not want you to have to learn the way I did. I want you to make the choice in your own life to follow the same path that Jesus Christ did." As I said earlier, the choice for Christians is really simple.

There are only two ways; there is God's way and there is the vain way; vain meaning useless, meaningless, worthless. The choices of what we allow to dominate our perspective are ours to make. We can either believe God or believe those whose lives are meaningless, such as the atheists and the evolutionists. The choice lies between submerging ourselves in chasing the unconverted's dreams or submitting to what God has revealed. That, along with God's merciful grace, is where the issues of life will be decided.

Our pilgrimage across our spiritual wilderness to come out of this world continues on. There is no reason why we should not make it, but the reality is that we have not completed it yet. We are not fully prepared, and that is why it is not completed yet.

We do not want to fail like the Israelites did. They failed because they did not believe God, and thus they made a lot of bad choices. As long as one's perspective regarding life is under the sun, that person will be limited to carnal perspectives regarding the events of life. Solomon has not mentioned God to the point that we have reached in Ecclesiastes 1, but he will shortly.

He names God 40 times in his lecture, always using the same term “Elohim,” and that name is primarily used as an indicator of the Creator. I think there is a little hint there that God is creating. Anyone to whom God has revealed himself is not limited to that “under the sun” perspective. However, even these blessed people must choose to include God in their perspective and therefore their choices in life.

“Vanity,” “profit,” and “under the sun,” are the key words in the first chapter. I also mentioned the phrase “everything matters” several times during this last week’s sermon. I believe we should keep this phrase in mind since Ecclesiastes has the reputation of showing that life is meaningless which, unfortunately, is a very poor evaluation of the book by people who do not get it. The true reality that Solomon teaches is that everything does matter, and that God’s children need to be aware regarding making right choices in life or life will be meaningless.

The gift of being given the responsibility to make choices in life is great. The gift of life from God is precious. The gift of God’s calling and the revelation of Himself and His purpose is priceless. Solomon is lecturing us to make the most of what we have been graciously given because of these three realities. The unconverted do not have the array of choices that we have. I would not go so far as to say that their lives are meaningless to the extent that Solomon seems to illustrate, but it is nonetheless true that they do not have the breadth of the spiritual choices that we have been given.

So far, we have only read 11 verses, and as I mentioned before, this book is jam-packed with information that is vital to Christian living. Turn now to Ecclesiastes 1. We will read verses 12-18, and I will begin to expound on them. Here, beginning in verse 12, we see that he has reached some conclusions:

**Ecclesiastes 1:12-18** I, the Preacher, was king over Israel in Jerusalem. And I set my heart to seek and search out by wisdom concerning all that is done under heaven; this burdensome task God has given to the sons of man, by which they may be exercised [interesting term] I have seen all the works that are done under the sun; and indeed, all is vanity and grasping for the wind. What is crooked cannot be made straight, and what is lacking cannot be

numbered. I communed with my heart, saying, "Look, I have attained greatness, and have gained more wisdom than all who were before me in Jerusalem. My heart has understood great wisdom and knowledge." And I set my heart to know wisdom and to know madness and folly. I perceived that this also is grasping for the wind. For in much wisdom is much grief, and he who increases knowledge increases sorrow.

I repeat here that chapter 1 is foundational to the entire lecture. It sets the platform upon which the rest of his analysis sits. These seven verses that I have just read are Solomon's conclusion to the foundation and the conclusion to his survey in chapter 1 is two-fold. The first is to understand that God is to some measure responsible for the way things are in the world. The term translated "exercised" is important here. In Hebrew it is phonetically pronounced *aw-naw'*. It can indicate chastisement, humbled, afflicted, depressed. The use of this term may reflect the curse that God pronounced on Adam and Eve following their sin.

Go back to Genesis 3. Recall when we looked in Romans 8:20 when Paul was personifying the physical creation as though it was alive, almost as if it were a person, and Paul said "for the creation was subject to futility" (that is vanity), "not willingly, but because of him who subjected it in hope." That can be only one Person. God subjected the physical creation to vanity and Paul is saying that God did not do it willingly. He did not want to do it, but it is as though He had no recourse except to do it. I think that it is pointing back here to Genesis 3:17-19.

**Genesis 3:17-19** Then to Adam He said, "Because you have heeded the voice of your wife, and have eaten from the tree of which I commanded you, saying, 'You shall not eat of it': "Cursed is the ground [here comes the subjection to vanity, why?] for your sake [in other words, His cursing of the ground is going to be good for them. It may not show up right away, but it is for their good that He is cursing the ground]; In toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life. Both thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you, and you shall eat the herb of the field. In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for dust you are, and to dust you shall return."

To me it is clear that it was God who subjected the creation to the vanity that we see all around us. This is why I said earlier that in the long run vanity would prove to be a benefit to mankind, serving as a painful and frustrating reminder of what sin produces. Sin produces pain, frustration, disappointment, discouragement, and meaninglessness to life because sin produces death. Once they sinned, death was a foregone conclusion and leading up to death would be an awful lot of frustrating time. What you are looking at here is a spanking of massive proportion that is not only affected Adam and Eve, but all of their progeny as well. The overall lesson here is that the effects of sin must be paid.

Another effect is that whenever anybody commits sin, it is not done in a vacuum. There is no such thing as a sin that only affects one person. Its effects spread out and carry pain and frustration to other people as well, and that is why God chose to illustrate sin with leaven. It gets into something and it spreads and defiles, affecting the whole lump.

Here we are 6,000 years from the sin of Adam and Eve and the curse that God pronounced, not willingly. I think He wishes He could have done something else, but He had to do it and so His righteous standard must be met. We are suffering pain. We add to what Adam and Eve did, and by this time, we are suffering pain from our own sins. I think that is one of the answers as to why it says that the creation is subject to vanity, but because God is involved in this, in the long run it is going to do us good. Is this not the same thing a spanking does, as taught in the book of Proverbs?

The first conclusion of Solomon is that God is to some degree responsible for the way the world is, because He subjected it to vanity, and He has decided that we must deal with it, overcome it, and make choices that will take us away from it. It is a good test.

Solomon's second conclusion is that what is crooked cannot be made straight. What is lacking cannot be numbered. Recall that this is instruction for you and me. He is not speaking physically as of straightening out a steel bar that is bent or a plank that is warped. He is speaking of the vanity of life

in this world as being crooked. He is saying that the world is so full of problems created by human nature under Satan's influence that as long as conditions are as they are, Christians are not going to be able to fix them.

Every once in a while you will see an e-mail that someone writes in, no doubt full of sincerity, and they will say something like, "If everybody would just keep the Ten Commandments, everything would get straightened out." It is a wonderful suggestion, but it conflicts with what Solomon is saying here. It cannot be fixed. The way things are right now, it cannot be straightened out. Why is that? Because fixing them has to wait until God is ready to proceed, and that will not occur until Satan is bound, and God's Kingdom is established by Jesus Christ on earth. It is not just one thing, everything has to be put into alignment so that all, from the top on down, are working in the same direction to produce the same basic thing.

I mentioned in my commentary ["A Step Into the Pit"] that we are going to have to wait. This is just an additional thing that I think you know, but I am going to remind you of it again. I want you to recall that God forbids His children from becoming involved in the governments of this world. We are, first of all, legally part of His Kingdom—Philippians 3:20:

**Philippians 3:20** For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ,

Our citizenship has already been registered in His Kingdom, therefore, we are of a different government altogether. A second reason is that we have already been adopted into God's family. That is in Romans 8:15:

**Romans 8:15** For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, "Abba, Father."

We are of a different family of beings. In addition, Jesus said to Pontius Pilate in John 18:36:

**John 18:36** Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I

should not be delivered to the Jews; but now My kingdom is not from here."

Thus, from God, we have no legal standing to change things. Events are moving according to God's order and He is perfectly organized. The governments of this world are so corrupt that although we greatly desire to change them, no revolution, no matter how noble the cause, will really change anything; and the history of the world shows this conclusively. It will not be until the root cause, Satan and his demons, are completely set aside, that solutions will be effective.

It is interesting that the term used for people who are consistent lawbreakers, especially those dealing with money, is "crooked." Solomon said, "What is crooked cannot be made straight." We use that term in describing corrupt people. When I was a boy, and I do not know if the saying is still in use, but we used to say, "That guy is crooked as a dog's hind leg." That used to be a common expression that was applied to corrupt politicians and businessmen.

On the other hand, we termed those of good character as being "straight." I bet there is hardly a person who knows that came right out of the Bible: crooked and straight. Sometimes we call people "upright," but "straight" is a term commonly used for a morally sound person.

Then there is another area of life that this touches upon. Sometimes we can become involved in situations, not necessarily because we want to become involved, but things just happen and there is probably no immorality involved. This occurs when offenses arise and people get bent out of shape, and they resist all efforts to straighten their attitudes. We suffer arguments at home, conflicts in the church, wrongs that are done in the workplace, financial troubles, physical disabilities, and our own moral failings as Paul shows in Romans 7.

The list could go on and on. There is much on a personal level that cannot be straightened out. Why? Sometimes it is just a lack of understanding. I gave a sermon not long ago in which I brought this up. We do not have the discernment to know exactly where a person stands, where their understanding is, whether God has revealed things to them or not, but we may make very nasty judgments of those people and create offenses that are

not really fair, because in a way, they cannot help it if God has not revealed something to them.

If you will read I Corinthians, especially, you will find a whole congregation that was just loaded with problems of this sort. One of Paul's solutions, besides the big one of these people learning to love one another, was in I Corinthians 6:7 where in modern terminology, he stated, "Why do you not just accept the mistreatment, move on, and get over it." I got this right out of the Living Bible. That is the way they translated it. It is a good translation and is exactly what Paul meant. Some things are beyond being solved.

Overall, what is Solomon saying with these conclusions that he gives at the tail end of chapter 1? He is saying to focus your energies on God's Kingdom, because that is not vanity. We cannot straighten everything out. There are some situations we just have to accept, and what is crooked may not be capable of being straightened out. We have to wait until God is ready to straighten them out, and we must somehow work around them with our perspective being on striving for the Kingdom of God and being prepared for when it comes. This is very important to our understanding that everything is moving toward, metaphorically, a wedding, a marriage between Jesus Christ and His bride. Turn to Revelation 19:7, and we will see what it says about her:

**Revelation 19:7** Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready."

The wife mentioned here is us. Hopefully, we will all be part of that. What has she done? She has made herself ready.

At the end of chapter 1 in Ecclesiastes, what is Solomon saying? First of all, he says that he wants us to understand that God is in some way responsible for the vanity that we see on earth. He imposed it, and therefore everything He does: every decision, judgment, the imposition of vanity on this world is from Him and therefore having to face it and avoid it through submission to Him within a relationship with Him is how it is done. It is for our good.

As I said earlier, if we really see this world and its meaninglessness, then our mind really becomes set and motivated not to let it touch us or hinder our advancement toward the Kingdom of God. We must have our focus on what is above the earth, above the sun, on the Kingdom of God, on God and pleasing Him.

Secondarily, even though God is somewhat responsible for this vanity that is here for our good, we must understand we cannot straighten everything out. It simply cannot be done. Especially, we cannot straighten other people out. Their responsibility is to God. Our responsibility is to God. Therefore, what we must take care of is what we can and that is to make ourselves ready.

When I say we cannot really change another person, this does not mean that we avoid altogether trying to help somebody out, but just understand how much change is actually able to be accomplished in that other person's character. What does Paul say? Get over it, move on, pray for the person, love the person, treat them kindly, be a blessing to them; because if you want to be like God, God makes his sun to shine on the evil and the good. That is going to be the way the sons of God are. They are going to accept people the way they are and treat them with kindness, fairness, judgment, and do what they can to do the right thing.

Without directly saying it, Solomon is saying we have to focus our faith in Christ and God-given vision and energies in the right direction or we may remain forever in the vanity-producing, natural earthly cycles that cannot be fixed.

He adds one thing to that which I got out of the Living Bible referring to things being crooked. The Living Bible provides an interesting translation:

**Ecclesiastes 1:15 (TLB)** What is wrong cannot be righted. It is water over the dam. There is no use thinking of what might have been.

One more thought that is part of his conclusion, and we will end. It appears in verses 16-18 where he says,

**Ecclesiastes 1:16-18** “I communed with my heart, saying, "Look, I have attained greatness, and have gained more wisdom than all who were before me in Jerusalem. My heart has understood great wisdom and knowledge." And I set my heart to know wisdom and to know madness and folly. I perceived that this also is grasping for the wind. For in much wisdom is much grief, and he who increases knowledge increases sorrow.

This other conclusion in this opening chapter is worth mentioning because it involves wisdom. The wisdom he speaks of here is not godly wisdom, but rather it is the wisdom of this world. If it was godly wisdom, it would clear his mind, he would understand and it would not be frustrating at all.

However, this wisdom that filled his mind is what we would call common sense. It is a worldly, carnal wisdom and it is not bad, it is just incomplete. It does not have all the answers and that is why he became frustrated. Remember, he is still looking at things under the sun. This wisdom is a wisdom that is under the sun and so he is telling us that all of this high-falooting knowledge and wisdom that man is able to collect during his lifetime, and all the generations that came before, might be great but the answers are not there. There is still something missing in it.

Wisdom is mentioned quite a number of times throughout the book, so it is good to stop and consider what kind of wisdom he is speaking of. Godly wisdom most certainly would not be a chasing after wind. Godly wisdom is eternally good and it would give right and sound-minded answers. What Solomon is saying here is the wisdom that he accumulated resulted in too many dead ends that left him without satisfying answers or understanding.