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THE PROBLEM OF VANITY
IN ECCLESIASTES

Table of Contents

A Thesis Presented to	Page
The Faculty of Concordia Seminary	iii
Department of Old Testament Theology	
Introduction	1
I. All earthly things are vanity	5
II. Over against what vanity is placed God	42
III. What advice does Solomon give on how to live in this world of vanities?	74
Conclusion	113
Index of References	123
Bibliography	125

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Sacred Theology

by

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OUTLINE

Controlling purpose: is to solve the problem of vanity in Ecclesiastes, by first defining what $\int \int \int$ is, then placing the transcendent God over against this $\int \int \int$, and then showing, on the basis of the advice that Solomon gives, how to live in this world and find true happiness.

Table of Contents

	Page
I. All <u>Outline</u>	iii
A. <u>Introduction</u>	1
1. <u>I. All earthly things are vanity</u>	5
2. <u>II. Over against this vanity is placed God</u>	42
3. <u>III. What advice does Solomon give on how to live in this world of vanities?</u>	74
4. <u>Conclusion</u>	118
5. <u>Index of References</u>	123
6. <u>Bibliography</u>	125
7. <u>A recapitulation of what Solomon considers to be</u> $\int \int \int$	
B. <u>Words that aid to our understanding of</u> $\int \int \int$	
1. <u>$\int \int \int$</u>	
a. <u>Summary of findings</u>	
2. <u>$\int \int \int$</u>	
a. <u>Summary of findings</u>	
3. <u>$\int \int$</u>	
a. <u>Summary of findings</u>	
4. <u>$\int \int \int \int$</u>	
a. <u>Summary of findings</u>	
C. <u>Conclusion</u>	

II. Over against this "vanity" is placed God.

A. He is the supermundane, transcendent Creator.

1. He has made all things.

a. He has made every thing beautiful (3:11).

b. The earth is for all (5:9).

2. What God does is forever (3:14).

a. God orders events with a view to eternity.

b. The wise man humbly submits to this divine ordering.

3. Man cannot understand God's works (3:11c; 8:1.7; 11:5).

a. Man sees only minute parts of the great whole.

b. It is useless for man to contend with God (6:10).

B. He is the Preserver of the universe.

1. All nature moves according to His will (1:5-7).

2. He satisfies the immediate needs of His creatures (5:9a).

a. In a special measure man is the recipient of God's preserving love (5:18).

b. His love exceeds normal expectations (3:15c).

3. All things that He gives are gifts (3:13).

a. Even the power of enjoyment is a gift (9:7).

b. Man is not independent (11:6).

C. He is the Judge of the universe.

1. Man's fall into sin has made it necessary for God to act as Judge (7:29).

a. Every man is evil (7:20).

b. The justice of God demands an accounting.

2. There shall surely be a Judgment.

- a. The critics maintain the opposite.
 - b. The critics maintain that the doctrine was unknown at Solomon's time.
 - c. Solomon sees a definite difference between man and the beast (3:19-21; 12:7).
 - d. 3:17; 11:9b; 12:14 do not refer only to a temporal judgment.
3. There is an inescapable reason why man will be judged.
- a. "Eternity," which has been placed into his heart (3:11), differentiates him from the beast.
 - b. The living soul shall be judged.

III. What advice does Solomon give on how to live in this world of vanities?

- A. Solomon exhorts us to fear God (12:13).
- 1. This is not a slavish fear.
 - 2. God is entitled to this fear (3:15).
 - 3. There is nothing "pale and cheerless" about this fear.
- B. Solomon exhorts us to hear and do God's Word (5:1).
- 1. This includes both the Law and the Gospel (5:1).
 - 2. "Hearing and doing" are inseparable.
 - a. Man is to love God (12:13).
 - b. Man is to love his neighbor (11:1.2).
 - c. This is the whole duty of man.
 - 3. God helps us to hear and do His Word.
 - a. This is possible only by His grace (3:15).
 - b. Justification is presupposed.
 - c. Ecclesiastes preaches sanctification.

C. Solomon encourages us to enjoy what God has given (3:12.22; ch. 6; 9:7-9; 11:9-10).

1. Enjoyment is a gift of God (2:24-26; 3:13; 5:18-20; 9:9).
2. We are to enjoy the present with moderation and contentment.
3. There are cogent reasons for enjoyment of life.
4. Therefore, the following philosophies are entirely unwarranted:
 - a. Pessimism.
 - b. Fatalism.
 - c. Skepticism.
 - d. Materialism.
 - e. Agnosticism.
 - f. Sadduceism, Epicureanism.
 - g. Stoicism.

INTRODUCTION

Political expediency and diplomacy gradually displaced the fear of God. There is only one man in the Old Testament who bears the title of Preacher (Koheleth) - "The words of the Preacher, the son of David, King of Jerusalem;" - that is the introduction to the book of Ecclesiastes. We are not concerned with the question of authorship in this thesis, however. The writer of Ecclesiastes calls himself the son of David, King of Jerusalem; the book represents the experiences and moods of the wisest of the sons of men - rich King Solomon, as he is made known to us by history and tradition, a man of world renown, of great achievements, of marvelous successes, and of widely diversified experiences.

Ecclesiastes does not present merely the philosophy of life of a learned and cultured Eastern sage, but we have here wisdom from on high, Scripture given by inspiration of God, II Tim. 3:16.

As St. Augustine in his Confessions frankly confesses and repents of his life spent in service of sin so in Ecclesiastes, we hear Solomon in his ripe old age making a public confession, a public apology for all his past excesses and deviations from God's law. He publicly apologizes for his manifest idolatry and apostasy from the Lord in an effort to undo, to some degree at least, the great harm and offense which his sins had caused.

As long as Solomon had feared the Lord, peace and prosperity and unprecedented wealth had prevailed in his kingdom. But all of this turned his head, so to speak; his God-given wisdom, his fabulous riches, unparalleled successes, world fame gradually blinded his heart against God's grace, so that he became self-satisfied and puffed up with pride.

Political expediency and diplomacy gradually displaced the fear of God in his governmental dealings. For diplomatic reasons he married many foreign wives in order to effect binding alliances with the surrounding nations. These foreign wives seduced him to build altars for their idols, burn incense and make sacrifices to them - thus did Solomon permit himself to sink to this shameful depth of idolatry and apostasy.

Furthermore, instead of placing his trust in the living God, he multiplied horses, contrary to Deut. 17, and build many fortified cities to ward off sudden attacks, and placed his trust in these new fortifications and reinforcements. While his selfish object was to make Jerusalem a great city and himself the great King Solomon (IKings 10:26; 11:8; Eccl. 1:12; 2:10), yet all he finally succeeded in doing was to bring himself and his nation to the verge of ruin.

And now looking back upon his reign, which had been so auspiciously begun, what meets his eye? Instead of a happy, prosperous nation, he sees a dissatisfied people, chafing under the burden of exceedingly heavy taxes. Instead of a continued reign of peace, strife and warfare are beginning to mar the tranquility of the kingdom.

In these perplexing times, when the grim specter of death stares so many in the face, when confusing doubts harass the national mind, Ecclesiastes deserves our careful study, because it is intensely modern in spirit, is a veritable tract for our day and age. The eager questioning, the doubts, the tone of profound sadness that pervades it, the sense of weariness, coupled with the futility

and emptiness of life that breathes from every page - how large a place they hold in the world-picture today!

Ecclesiastes invites our study, not only because it is intensely modern in spirit and speaks to us with the voice of our own time, but because it deals with themes of the highest import, the great problems of life, of character, of destiny.

The Book of Ecclesiastes is the story of Solomon's quest for the chief good (the "summum bonum"), a story which has its counterpart in every life. As a matter of fact, this quest has taxed the minds of men from the beginning of time. However meager our opportunity may be compared with his, nevertheless the same eager desire is agitating our hearts, and we are all bent on the same search.

Let us follow Solomon and see how he fares on the broad highway of life. We shall notice how he proposed to himself various objects of desire and attained them one by one, only to find them, much to his chagrin, turn to dust and ashes in his grasp.

Upon them all he pronounces the sentence, "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity," - in fact, we are never quite away from that refrain of bitter disappointment and poignant sorrow.

Quite obviously then, Ecclesiastes deals with matters of common interest, with questions that clamor for ^{an} ~~our~~ answer in every age.

Solomon is represented as reviewing in his later years the events and experiences of a long, full life, recounting the high hopes and fond aspirations with which he set out on life's journey, the fruitless longings and strivings, the bitter disillusion and disappoint-

ment that followed in their wake, and the better way which he found at last.

In this weary and distracted world, burdened down with sin and sorrow, we naturally ask: "Is there anything worth seeking, worth having? anything that will still the cravings of the restless spirit within us, and bring peace and satisfaction to the troubled heart? What should be the chief object of man's desire and pursuit? To what end should life be devoted? Where does man finally go, i.e., what happens to him at death? Are all things really vanity?"

That is the problem which Solomon undertook to solve in Ecclesiastes -- he resolves all the foregoing questions under the category of "vanity."

In this thesis then let us see how he entered upon the task of solving the problem of vanity, what methods he pursued, what he learned to be true of "vanity," of God, and the godly solution to the problem he found at long last, and upon which he basés his advice.

These are pertinent questions and ones to which the correct answers must be found if the vanity problem of Ecclesiastes is to be satisfactorily solved. Here then a mere cursory reading of the book will be required if we are to find the true answers to the foregoing questions.

First, of course, comes a thorough investigation of all the passages in which "vanity" (*hebel*) occurs, plus an examination of all words and phrases that supplement and help us better understand "vanity." It is only in that way that we will begin to understand how

I. All earthly things are vanity.

A. How the term "vanity" is used in Ecclesiastes.

Therefore, the following method shall be employed in this investigation: First, the term "vanity" shall be treated, then this will be followed by an examination of those words and phrases that may be better understood by the meaning of these words and phrases as used in Ecclesiastes. It is pointed out that there is a large amount of material in the Bible, especially in the Old Testament, that is not understood by the average reader. The meaning of these words and phrases is often lost in translation. It is pointed out that there is a large amount of material in the Bible, especially in the Old Testament, that is not understood by the average reader. The meaning of these words and phrases is often lost in translation. It is pointed out that there is a large amount of material in the Bible, especially in the Old Testament, that is not understood by the average reader. The meaning of these words and phrases is often lost in translation.

"All earthly things are vanity." That is the sum and substance of Solomon's view of life. Off hand, that would appear to be saying too much. One can easily perceive that people in general are vain, vain in their motives, habits of living, dress, etc., but to go so far as to assert that all things in this habitable world are vain would seem entirely out of the question.

Is nature, in all its beautiful manifestations, vain? Is the marvelous harmonious working-together of the planetary system, vain? Are the ever-recurring seasons of the year, the soft-whispering of the wind, the brook slowly winding through the meadow, vain?

What, therefore, does Solomon really mean by this all-out condemnation of things earthly? Are we to take him literally? Or is the seemingly gloomy conclusion he arrives at the result of recurrent disappointments which beset all his endeavors? Or is it just the resigned pessimism of an old man disgusted with life?

These are pertinent questions and ones to which the correct answers must be found if the vanity problem of Ecclesiastes is to be satisfactorily solved. More than a mere cursory reading of the book will be required if we are to find the true answers to the foregoing questions.

That, of course, means a thorough investigation of all the passages in which "vanity" (שָׁוְיָ) occurs, plus an examination of all words and phrases that supplement and help us better understand "vanity." It is only in that way that we will begin to understand how

Solomon uses the term "vanity" in Ecclesiastes.

Therefore, the following method shall be employed in this investigation: First, שָׁוְיָ shall be treated. Then this will be followed by an examination of those words and phrases that help us better understand שָׁוְיָ ; the meaning of these words and phrases as used in Ecclesiastes shall be pointed out. Where a more acceptable translation in the Vulgate, LXX, Luther, or the various modern Bible Versions is found, it will be noted. This will be followed by representative passages in which the word or phrase occurs - a brief exegesis according to the immediate context will be given, and in each instance it will be shown how the word or phrase in question carries out Solomon's thematic concept of שָׁוְיָ .

All the passages where שָׁוְיָ appears will be looked into and the specific meaning of the term will be drawn out. Thus the concrete meaning of שָׁוְיָ will be unfolded in all its many manifestations, and as a result, the full content of the term will become apparent.

Ecclesiastes.

According to Gesenius, שָׁוְיָ means: "a breath, breathing." Often it is used for anything evanescent, transient, frail. Hence, the significance "vanity," i.e., something vain, empty, fruitless.

Similarly, the various Bible versions translate the word. The Vulgate renders "vanitas" (emptiness, nothingness); the Septuagint καταϊότης ; (vanity, emptiness); Luther "eitel" (void, empty); the Syriac and Aramaic "h'bal;" the Arabic "batilah." These last three versions are practically synonymous in their use of the word;

each conveys the idea of 1. The use of שָׁוְיָ , emptiness,

After announcing his name and official position, "The words of the Preacher (i.e., Solomon), the son of David, king of Jerusalem," the author sets forth the thesis which forms the subject of this treatise: "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity" ($\text{וָאֵלֶּיךָ שָׁוְיָ וְכָל־הָאֲדָמָה שָׁוְיָ}$).

The frequency with which the word שָׁוְיָ occurs in Ecclesiastes testifies to the importance of its study in examining the teaching of the book. שָׁוְיָ occurs 37 times in 32 passages. Some passages use the word two times, e.g., 8:14; 9:9. In two passages the word appears in this manner: "Vanity of vanities" (1:2; 12:8), both at the beginning and end. This is significant; the theme is carried out throughout the book.

First, however, we shall restrict ourselves to the use of the word as it appears by itself, with no phrase appended, such as "vanity and vexation of spirit," or "vanity and a great evil," or "vanity and a sore travail." שָׁוְיָ by itself occurs 22 times in Ecclesiastes.

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Similarly, the various Bible versions translate the word. The Vulgate renders "vanitas" (emptiness, nothingness); the Septuagint $\mu\alpha\tau\alpha\iota\omicron\upsilon\tau\eta\varsigma$ (vanity, emptiness); Luther "eitel" (void, empty); the Syriac and Aramaic "h^ebhal;" the Arabic "batilah." These last three versions are practically synonymous in their use of the word;

each conveys the idea of evanescence, fruitlessness, emptiness, worthlessness.

We shall now look into the immediate context of the 20 passages where $\text{V} \text{V} \text{V}$ occurs by itself, and attempt to determine what basic idea Solomon is trying to convey

Immediately in the second verse Solomon sets forth the theme of his treatise: "Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, vanity of vanities; all is vanity" (1:2). With this sweeping assertion Solomon places all things into the category of "vanity." He characterizes all human, earthly things as being unsatisfying, empty, fruitless, (similarly 12:8).

And now what are some of those things that fall under the head of "vanity"?

Regarding cheerfulness Solomon has this to say: "But if a man live many years and rejoice in them all; yet let him remember the days of darkness, for they shall be many. All that cometh is vanity" (11:8). In 11:7 Solomon had said that life is sweet and precious; now he adds that it is therefore man's duty to enjoy it; God has ordained that he should do so, whether his days on earth be many or few.² But he should remember, everything terminates in the long night of death. This world, with all it offers, is empty and futile in comparison with the eternal realities which await the true believer.³

Repeating his advice concerning cheerfulness, Solomon proceeds to inculcate early piety: "Therefore remove sorrow from thy heart, and put away evil from thy flesh: for childhood and youth are

vanity" (11:10). Youth ought to free itself from that which is injurious to the inner and outer man, and hurtfully affects it; for the time of youth, destined for and disposed to joy, is $\int \int \int$, i.e., transitory and soon passes away.⁴ The fact of the judgment must urge young people to keep God's Law, in order to remove sorrow from the hearts and evil from the flesh, for youth is vanity; other days of evil will soon be upon youth.

In 7:26 Solomon condemns women rather severely. But in 9:9 he recognizes the happiness of a home where the husband is blessed with a wife worthy of love. Therefore he advises: "Live joyfully with the wife whom thou lovest all the days of the life of thy vanity, which he hath given thee under the sun, all the days of his vanity: for that is thy portion in this life, and in thy labor which thou takest under the sun." Accordingly then, man is to enjoy life with his lawfully-wedded spouse during all the days of this transient existence.

However, Solomon found, indulging in sensual delights to be very unsatisfying. Being dissatisfied with the result of the pursuit of wisdom, he embarked upon a course of sensual pleasure, in an effort to find something more substantial and permanent - "I said in mine heart, Go to now, I will prove thee with mirth, Therefore enjoy pleasure: and behold, this also is vanity" (2:1). The enjoyment of sensual delights of every kind affords no true, lasting happiness.

In speaking of foolish acts, the boisterous laughter of foolish acts, the fool, in particular, Solomon makes this observation: warning for the covetous man: "He that loveth silver shall not be

"For as the crackling of thorns under a pot, so is the laughter of the fool: this also is vanity" (7:6). As thorns blaze up under a fire for a time with much noise and soon die away, so the fool's mirth is boisterous and noisy, but comes to a speedy end, and is spent to no good purpose. All this profitless mirth is again nothing but vanity.⁵

Likewise, he who makes much of dreams and entertains foolish fancies as to what God requires of him in worship, who rashly makes vows, and in prayer, thinks to be heard for his much speaking, displeases God and does not gain his desired purpose. There is nothing substantial in all such corruption; it is all vanity: "For in the multitude of dreams and many words there are also divers vanities; but fear thou God" (5:7). Rather, all vows should be performed to God alone and all worship directed to Him should be from the heart.

There are not a few passages in Ecclesiastes that speak of avariciousness and covetousness and the evils thereof. For example: "Then I returned and I saw vanity under the sun" (4:7). Reflecting again, Solomon concludes that all human efforts are useless. And what is that vanity under the sun? In this instance, it is avarice, with the many evils that accompany it, as the succeeding verse illustrates: "There is one alone, and there is not a second; yea, he hath neither child nor brother: yet is there no end of all his labour; neither is his eye satisfied with riches; neither saith he, For whom do I labour, and bereave my soul of good? This is also vanity, yea it is a sore travail."

Continuing in this same vein, Solomon has a word of warning for the covetous man: "He that loveth silver shall not be

satisfied with silver; nor he that loveth abundance with increase: this is also vanity" (5:10). The more a covetous person has, the more he wants. He who loves abundance derives no real profit or enjoyment from the luxury which it enables him to procure; rather it brings added trouble.⁶

What a somber, gloomy, seemingly pessimistic panorama of human experiences passes before our eye in Ecclesiastes in passages such as the following: "Seeing there be many things that increase vanity, what is man the better?" (6:11). In other words, what advantage is there to man to possess wealth and the means for enjoying sensual delights, when he has to constantly contend with many trials, dangers, and changes of fortune. All these recurring disappointments make men keenly aware of the unsatisfactory nature of labor and earthly goods.

In fact, grief seems to be the only result of all man's labor: "For all of his days are sorrows, and his travail grief: yea, his heart taketh not rest in the night. This is also vanity" (2:23). Therefore Solomon concludes that life is empty and vain, because all of man's days are filled with sorrows and troubles. At night his disappointments and plannings keep him awake. Not to him is the sweet sleep of the laboring man, who does his day's work and leaves his future in the hands of God.

But what about man's vaunted superiority? Can't he control life so that it works out to his advantage? Why, as for the outward physical life comes into consideration, the very same things happen to both man and beast, i.e., suffering and death: "For that which

befalleth the sons of men befalleth beasts; even one thing befalleth them: as the one dieth so dieth the other; yea, they have all one breath; so that a man hath no preeminence above a beast: for all is vanity" (3:19). Apparently there is no distinction between man and beast, for as far as the experience of man goes, both meet the same inevitable end. Both return to the dust from whence they came. Over against the power of death, man is vanity, a vapor.

As death befalls both man and beast, so death awaits the wise man as well as the fool. What's the advantage of possessing great knowledge then? After all, the same fate awaiting the wise man and the fool makes life vain and worthless. So laments Solomon: "Then said I in my heart, As it happeneth to the fool, so it happeneth even to me; and why was I then more wise? Then I said in my heart, that this also is vanity" (2:15).

"And who knoweth whether he shall be a wise man or a fool? Yet shall he have rule over all my labour wherein I have showed myself wise under the sun. This is also vanity" (2:19). Solomon here laments another circumstance of life that adds to his increasing disappointment with 'everything under the sun,' namely the fact, that he has to leave the fruits of a lifetime of labor to another. His bitter feeling is aggravated by the thought that he does not know whether his successor will be worthy or not.

Yes, with life filled with so much toil and grief, sickness, disappointment, emptiness and death, it seemingly would be better for man if he had not been born at all, for then he would be spared all of the foregoing: "If a man beget an hundred children, and

live many years, so that the days of his years be many, and his soul be not filled with good, and also that he have no burial; I say, that an untimely birth is better than he. For he cometh in with vanity, and departeth in darkness, and his name shall be covered with darkness." (6:3.4) The reference is to the still-born child. It has entered into a lifeless existence when its independent life should have begun. It is carried away in all quietness, without noise or ceremony. "With darkness" its name is covered, for it receives no name and is forgotten as if it had never been. Not having entered into a living existence it is spared the sight and knowledge of all the vanities and evils, the deceptions and sorrows under the sun.⁷

Perhaps if one were able to look into the future, he could so arrange his life so as to avoid some of the unpleasant vicissitudes of life. But God has hidden the future from him: "For who knoweth what is good for man in this life, all the days of his ~~vap~~ life which he spendeth as a shadow? for who can tell a man what shall be after him under the sun?" (6:12). All the days of man are vanity, i.e., they yield no good result, are full of empty aims, unsatisfied wishes.⁸ He flees as a shadow and leaves no trace behind him. He does not even know what the ultimate good in life is. Yet he wants to know the future, wants to arrange his own life. Rather, he should humbly accede to the fact that God has hidden the future from man and that his duty therefore is to acquiesce in the divine government.

Ecclesiastes presents many anomalies of life that Solomon of good and evil constitutes a part of the certainties and inevitabilities

found most perplexing, for instance, this one: "There is a vanity which is done upon the earth; that there be just men, unto whom it happeneth according to the work of the wicked; again, there be wicked men, to whom it happeneth according to the work of the righteous. I said that this also is vanity" (8:14). This is a circumstance which shows the emptiness of human life, namely, the seeming injustice in the lot of man; all this emphasizes the seeming futility of striving for righteousness, since there is so often no reward in this life and world.

Then again, consider this anomaly: "And so I saw the wicked buried who had come and gone from the place of the holy, and they were forgotten in the city where they had so done: this is also vanity" (8:10). A better translation is the one offered by Delitzsch: "And then I have seen the wicked buried, and they came to rest; but away from the holy place they had to depart, and were forgotten in the city, such as acted justly: also this is vain." The unequal distribution of destinies in life is also vanity - the wicked get an honorable burial and the godly are forgotten in the city when they die.

Not alone do many wicked receive an honorable burial, but it was Solomon's observation, that many are even permitted to live longer on earth than the righteous: "All things have I seen in the days of my vanity: there is a just man that perisheth in his righteousness, and there is a wicked man that prolongeth his life in his wickedness" (7:15). This anomaly concerning the dispensation of good and evil constitutes a part of the emptiness and transitori-

ness of life, seemingly contradicting God's promises. Judging from outer appearance it does not pay, it is futile vapor, to strive for a life of holiness.

2. Value of words and phrases appended to שְׁוֹשׁוֹת .
 a. "Vanity of vanities." שְׁוֹשׁוֹת , besides occurring 22 times in 20 passages, also appears elsewhere with various words or phrases appended to it. These words and phrases serve to re-emphasize and explain שְׁוֹשׁוֹת more fully. These so-called "appendages" are "vanity of vanities;" "vanity and vexation of spirit;" "vanity and a great evil;" and "vanity and a sore travail." What do they mean?

Let us first consider the expression: "vanity of vanities," which appears three times in two passages, 1:2 and 12:8.

1:2 - "Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, vanity of vanities; all is vanity." "Vanity of vanities," like "heaven of heavens" (I Kings 8:27), "song of songs" (Cant. 1:1), is equivalent to a superlative, most utterly vain. It is here an exclamation,⁹ emphatically stating the utter vanity of all earthly things. This is the theme of the book which is carried out in detail throughout the following chapters.

Again in 12:8 we hear this melancholy refrain: "Vanity of vanities, saith the preacher; all is vanity." Thus he ends his treatise as he began it - the vanity, the nothingness of all earthly things.

b. "Vanity and vexation of spirit."

The expression "vanity and vexation of spirit" (occurs seven

times) further illustrates Solomon's concept of "vanity," namely, the emptiness and unsatisfying nature of things in general and of human endeavor, in particular.

In 6:9 man is advised to enjoy the present instead of observing, ~~still more,~~ craving for what is distant, uncertain, and out of reach: "Better is the sight of the eyes than the wandering of the desire: this is also vanity and vexation of spirit." The insatiability of the soul is vanity and vexation of spirit, i.e., a "feeding on wind," empty, unsatisfying. The more man has, the more he wants, he is never satisfied, because earthly goods alone cannot satisfy, for even if man is able to satisfy the cravings and desires of the soul will that then bring him complete happiness? Listen to Solomon recount his experiences: "Then I looked on all the works that my hands had wrought, and on the labour that I had laboured to do: and, behold, all was vanity and vexation of spirit" (2:11). Solomon found that the possession and enjoyment of all earthly goods and pleasures resulted in a "chasing or striving after wind;" there was no lasting happiness in such possession and enjoyment. Therefore, it was vain and futile to earnestly strive after such.

"Again I considered all travail, and every right work, that for this a man is envied of his neighbor. This is also vanity and vexation of spirit" (4:4). If a man acts uprightly and has apparent success, he soon becomes the object of his neighbor's envy. Therefore, there is little encouragement to do good. This constitutes a part of the vain and empty system of human life - the "striving after wind," so to speak.

Seemingly, it makes no difference what a man does; it is just like "feeding upon the wind" - all of his best efforts result in vain, futile endeavor. Such was Solomon's experience: "I have seen all the works that are done under the sun; and behold, all is vanity and vexation of spirit" (1:14).

Another condition of life that is full of "vanity and vexation of spirit" is described in 2:26 - "For God giveth to a man that is good in his sight wisdom and knowledge, and joy: but to the sinner he giveth travail, to gather and to heap up, that he may give to him that is good before God. This also is vanity and vexation of spirit." What is vain? This striving after enjoyment in and of the labor - it is vain, for the purpose and the issue lie far apart; it is a "striving after wind," because that which is striven for, when one thinks he has it, only too often cannot be grasped, but vanishes into nothing.¹⁰

After Solomon had made his investigation of all things under the sun, life became not merely distasteful to him, but burdensome and hateful, both the life of the wise and the life of the fool. There was nothing in life worth pursuing, no period worth reliving. Life was as futile and empty as a "striving after the wind" would be. "Therefore I hated life," relates Solomon, "because the work that is wrought under the sun is grievous unto me: for all is vanity and vexation of spirit" (2:17). Although this passage (and the following, v. 18) sound like the voice of rankest pessimism, still it must be remembered that Solomon spoke this when he was estranged from God. In many other places (as will be shown in Part III of this thesis)

he repeatedly urges man to rejoice and enjoy life in the fear of God.

Vanity is also increased by wilfulness, in this case, wilfulness on the part of a king: "I considered all the living which walk under the sun, with the second child that shall stand up in his stead. There is no end of all the people, even of all that have been before them: they also that come after shall not rejoice in him. Surely this also is vanity and vexation of spirit." (4:15.16).

The adherents who flock around the youthful aspirant to the throne are numerous. Yet his popularity was not lasting. In spite of his cleverness and the favor with which he is now regarded, those of a later generation shall disregard his pretensions and forget his benefits. Therefore, this also is a vain striving after the wind.

In the foregoing we have seen how Solomon repeatedly uses the word "vanity" in connection with the phrase "vexation of spirit." We discovered that the phrase was not just a mere appendage or stylistic characteristic of the author, but the phrase actually explained ^{שָׂוְיָ} more fully, by showing

- a) the unsatisfactory nature of earthly goods - they cannot satisfy the cravings of the soul;
- b) the utter futility of possession and enjoyment - there is no lasting happiness in such;
- c) that the best efforts of man result in vain, futile endeavor.

Besides the phrase $\pi\text{-}17 \text{ } \lambda\text{-}17$ (vexation of spirit),

there are also two other instances in Ecclesiastes where the synonymous expression זַרְזוּרֵי רֵחַ (vexation of spirit) occurs. Both זַרְזוּרֵי רֵחַ and זַרְזוּרֵי רֵחַ are derived from the same root, זָרַז . Both mean desire, a striving, grasping after nothing.¹¹

Therefore the expression זַרְזוּרֵי רֵחַ (or זַרְזוּרֵי רֵחַ) would literally mean "a striving of wind," i.e., windy striving, which naturally would be, vain endeavor. Used in a metaphorical sense, זַרְזוּרֵי רֵחַ (זַרְזוּרֵי רֵחַ) would mean "feeding upon the wind," i.e., striving or grasping after something vain. cp. Hosea 12:2.¹²

Both the Vulgate and the French Bible versions miss the essential meaning when they translate "torment of mind" - *afflictio spiritus* (the Vulgate); "torment of spirit" - *tourment d'esprit* (La Sainte Bible). The Septuagint comes closest with it $\text{ἡ ἐπιλογὴ τοῦ πνεύματος}$ - choosing of spirit (wind); a "choosing of wind" certainly would be an empty choice, a striving without result.

The term זַרְזוּרֵי רֵחַ , in addition to being used with זַרְזוּרֵי רֵחַ twice, also occurs once in 2:22 in this form: זַרְזוּרֵי לֵב . Accordingly, we would translate, "the striving of his heart."

All in all, the expression "vexation of spirit" occurs nine times in Ecclesiastes. In seven instances the expression is used in connection with $\text{הִבְטִיחַ$, thus: "vanity and vexation of spirit;" those seven passages have already been looked into for their meaning. We shall now see how the remaining passages give fuller expression to הִבְטִיחַ :

1:17 - "And I gave my heart to know wisdom, and to know madness and folly: I perceived that this also is vexation of spirit

($\pi \cdot \eta$) $\eta \cdot \eta$). All of Solomon's earnest endeavors to know wisdom, on the one hand, and to know the foolishness of men, on the other, for the purpose of properly estimating them, resulted in "striving after wind," namely, futile effort.

4:6 - "Better is an handful with quietness than both the hands full with travail and vexation of spirit ($\pi \cdot \eta$ $\eta \cdot \eta$)." A small amount of this world's goods is better than a large measure of riches, for riches, if obtained only by anxious labor and retained only with care and sorrow, are a misfortune and cannot be conducive to happiness. It was this idea that Paul had in mind when he wrote to Timothy: "But godliness with contentment is great gain" (I Tim. 6:6).

Surely, the restless activity that usually accompanies the accumulation of wealth, is a vain chasing or striving after wind; such activity brings much discontent and no true joy.

The verdict Solomon pronounces upon anxious labor in the pursuit of riches, he applies also to all labor in general. In 2:22 he bitterly questions: "For what hath man of all his labour, and of the vexation of his heart ($\eta \cdot \eta$) $\eta \cdot \eta$), wherein he hath laboured under the sun?" In other words, what does man derive from the hard labor with which he applies wisdom and knowledge? What does all the striving, the effort of his mind to direct his labour to great ends produce?

The intended answer is: "Nothing!" Emptiness, fruitlessness is the lot of the laborer.

Thus it is quite apparent that the synonymous expressions squanders it; this is an evil all the greater in proportion to the

אִי־יָדָע and אִי־יָדָע, as well as the phrase וְיָדָע, אִי־יָדָע, not only strongly emphasize Solomon's thematic concept of וְיָדָע, but at the same time, give fuller explanation and meaning to the word. In the passages in which they occur,

- a) they point out how futile it is to "know wisdom" and to "know foolishness," for they do not bring man to the ultimate, satisfying goal in life;
- b) they point out that wealth, instead of being conducive to true happiness, brings much discontent, care and anxiety;
- c) they point out the utter emptiness and fruitlessness that is the lot of the laboring man.

C. "Vanity and a great evil."

Further expressions that amplify Solomon's concept of vanity are "vanity and a great evil;" "vanity and an evil disease." The first passage is 2:21 - "For there is a man whose labour is in wisdom, and in knowledge, and in equity; yet to a man that hath not laboured therein, shall he leave it for his portion. This also is vanity and a great evil." Previously (2:19) Solomon had complained that his successor might misuse his inheritance. Now his complaint is that this person shall reap what he has sown, without having expended any skill or toil on it. This evil condition generates dissatisfaction in Solomon, because that which one has gained by skill and good fortune falls to the lot of another who perhaps recklessly squanders it; this is an evil all the greater in proportion to the

labor and care bestowed on its acquisition. So in the light of this, it was quite useless for Solomon to labor so diligently all his life.

d. "Vanity and an evil disease."

The second passage is 6:2 - "A man to whom God hath given riches, wealth, and honour, so that he wanteth nothing for his soul of all that he desireth, yet God giveth him not power to eat thereof, but a stronger eateth it: this is vanity and it is an evil disease." A man may possess much earthly goods, and yet, because of sickness or oppression, cares, or other hindrance, may not enjoy anything of them. Possession and fruition are not necessarily joined together. This evil sickness can rightly be termed an "evil disease," for as a lingering illness deprives a person of physical comfort and joy, so wealth in itself, despite all its attractive features, does not guarantee its possessor happiness and peace of mind. This evil sickness to which 6:2 refers is aggravated by the fact that the possessor's great fortune passes to a person who is nothing to him. Such an evil condition as here described also contributes to the emptiness of human experience and existence.

e. "Vanity and a sore travail."

Still another expression that is used in connection with the word "vanity" is "vanity and sore travail."

The one instance of it we find in 4:8 - "There is one alone and not another; yea, he hath neither child nor brother; yet is there no end of all his labour; neither is his eye satisfied with riches;

neither saith he, for whom do I labour? This is also vanity, yea, it is sore travail." *good (1:14).*

Here covetousness and avarice are characterized. The man who is the center of his own existence; has neither wife, child, nor legal heir; and yet is as intent on getting money as if he had the largest family to provide for; nor does he only labor with intense application, but he even refuses himself the comforts of life out of his own gains.¹³ This an empty and useless performance. Certainly, a sad business he is engaged in, for he vainly imagines that living thus for himself, he will be free of all woe and domestic expenses, but he fails to realize that happiness lies outside oneself; his covetousness will only result in heaping up misery for himself.

3. A recapitulation of what Solomon considers to be שְׁוֵוֹ .

In going through these 32 passages where שְׁוֵוֹ occurs we cannot help but be overcast with an ominous sense of gloom. The picture that King Solomon paints of life is indeed not pretty. Everything seems to be so hopeless, so unsatisfying, so fruitless.

It may be well therefore to briefly recapitulate exactly what Solomon considers to be שְׁוֵוֹ . Thus his whole basic concept of the term will be brought into sharper focus and we will be able to get a clearer perspective of the all-inclusiveness of his great theme: "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity."

Accordingly then, what all does Solomon term "vanity?"

1. The entire human life in itself is empty and futile

(1:2; 12:8).

2. All of man's efforts to go forward bring about no lasting good (1:14).
3. Sensual delights afford no true happiness (2:1).
4. Possession and enjoyment of all earthly goods and enjoyments affords no lasting satisfaction and happiness (2:11).
5. Possession of great knowledge in itself is of little value - the same fate (death) awaiting the wise man and the fool makes life vain and worthless (2:15).
6. Fruits of a lifetime's labor must be left to another (2:19).
7. One who possesses wisdom and uses it wisely seems to be at a disadvantage. Another reaps what he sows (2:21).
8. Striving after enjoyment of labor is vain, for the purpose and the issue lie far apart (2:26).
9. Suffering and death - happens to man as well as beast (3:19).
10. The envy of others is a discouragement to the doing of good (4:4).
11. Avarice causes isolation and a sense of insecurity, and brings no satisfaction (4:8).
12. The hailing of a usurper - disappoints the expectations of the people (4:16).
13. Superstitions concerning dreams, rashly made vows, multiplying words in prayer, all unsubstantial and vain (5:7).

14. An abundance of one thing (e.g. money) brings no lasting satisfaction and happiness (5:10).
15. Possession and fruition are not necessarily joined together (6:2).
16. One born untimely is spared the knowledge of all of life's vanities and evils (6:4).
17. A restless and dissatisfied desire brings only misery (6:9).
18. Trials, dangers, and changes of fortune make men keenly aware of the unsatisfying nature of labor and earthly goods (6:11).
19. Inability to look into the future (6:12).
20. Fool's mirth is profitless (7:6).
21. The unequal distribution of destinies in life - wicked receive more honorable burials than righteous (8:10).
22. The commingling of human fortunes (8:14).
23. Man should enjoy life before the long night of death sets in (11:8). Cp. 9:9.
24. Youth, which is disposed to joy, is transitory and soon passes away (11:10).
25. All man's labor - grief seems to be the only result of it (2:23) Cp. 2:17.
26. Dispensation of good and evil - wicked permitted to live longer than righteous (7:15).

B. Words that add in our understanding of סְבִיבָה .

1. סְבִיבָה .

To make the study of סְבִיבָה complete, the usage of several different words must come in for consideration. One among these is the word "travail" (סְבִיבָה).

The Authorized Version does not render the Hebrew word סְבִיבָה as "travail" in every instance in Ecclesiastes. For example, in 5:3 (2) we read: "For a dream cometh through the multitude of business" ($\text{סְבִיבָה} \text{ גַּבְרַת} \text{ עֲשֵׂי$); similarly in 8:16: "When I applied mine heart to know wisdom, and to see the business ($\text{סְבִיבָה} \text{ עֲשֵׂי} \text{ מְאֹד}$) that is done upon the earth."

Conversely, the word rendered as "travail" is in the original not always סְבִיבָה , but in two passages it is the Hebrew word סָמַיִם (labor; wearisome, painful effort): 4:4 - "Again I considered all travail ($\text{סָמַיִם} \text{ - סָמַיִם} \text{ מְאֹד}$); 4:6 - "...than both the hands full with travail (סָמַיִם).

First, let us consider סְבִיבָה , which occurs eight times in Ecclesiastes. As we read along in Ecclesiastes we run across such phrases as: "sore travail;" "and his travail grief;" "by evil travail." I dare say these phrases are rather meaningless to the average reader; at most, they convey only a hazy picture in one's mind. It is only when we get at the original Hebrew derivation that we begin to obtain a clearer understanding of the word, and the various ways in which it is used in Ecclesiastes.

Sp. also 9:25 ("and his travail grief," i.e., grievous labor);

Ordinarily, "travail" in Ecclesiastes has the meaning of "labor, toil;" hence the meaning "business, employment."¹⁴ So in 1:13 we read: "And I gave my heart to seek and search out by wisdom concerning all things that are done under heaven: this sore travail (וְיָגוֹן), hath God given to the sons of men to be exercised there with." What is meant here is that the zealous searching, the steady and ceaseless endeavor to inquire into the works of men is a part of the difficult tasks laid upon mankind by the Lord in the process of acquiring knowledge. Resembling this interpretation are the renderings of the various Bible versions: the Vulgate - "evil business"; the Septuagint - "sore distraction"; Luther - "unhappy toil"; An American Translation - "wretched business." All these translations bring out the difficulty and troublesomeness involved in the labor of "searching out by wisdom concerning all things that are done under heaven;" in spite of full research, laborious tests, we do not arrive at a full understanding of the object of our search; consequently our search is disappointing, a sore distraction; particularly if we have sought true happiness or have attempted to solve the riddle of life apart from God, does our search become a wearisome, difficult, unhappy task. Furthermore, when Solomon refers to a particular kind of labor as an "evil business" (וְיָגוֹן)

he means to indicate that it is profitless; there is little good to be found in it.¹⁵ Therefore, since there is little good to be found in "a sore travail" we may rightly conclude that labor so termed is also וְיָגוֹן - empty and profitless.*

* "Sore travail," i.e., a sad business or vexatious employment; 5:10 ("the travail," i.e., task); 8:16 ("the business," i.e., employment - Vulgate: occupation).

* Cp. also 2:23 ("and his travail grief," i.e., grievous labor);

In places $\int' \int' \int'$, instead of the general meaning of "labor, toil," takes on a more specific meaning. A case in point is 5: 3(2) - "For a dream cometh through a multitude of business ($\int' \int' \int'$), and a fool's voice is known by multitude of words." Here the Vulgate translates 'multitude of business' with "many cares (*Multas curas*); similarly Luther: "much care" (*viele Sorge*). The Septuagint conveys a parallel idea: "multitude of trial" ($\epsilon\sigma\ \pi\lambda\acute{\iota}\theta\epsilon\iota\ \pi\epsilon\iota\rho\alpha\sigma\mu\omicron\sigma$). So when 5:3 states that "a dream cometh through a multitude of business," it is quite evidently referring to the known fact that cares and anxieties in business or other matters occasion disturbed sleep.

Another passage where $\int' \int' \int'$ has a very specific meaning is in 5:14 (13) - "But those riches perish by evil travail ($\int' \int' \int'$); and he begetteth a son, and there is nothing in his hand," i.e., the rich man loses his property 'by (some) evil event (circumstance),' "untoward accident, thus making it impossible for him to secure a fortune for his children, or founding a family, or passing on his inheritance to posterity. The Vulgate and Revised Version contain the same thought: "great calamity" (Vulgate); "evil adventure" (Revised Version). An American Translation is equally good here with its rendering of "unfortunate enterprise."

As noted before, the word "travail" is not always the English rendering of the Hebrew $\int' \int' \int'$, but in two passages from

2:26 ("travail," i.e., labor); 4:8 ("it is a sore travail," i.e., a sad business or woeful employment); 3:10 ("the travail," i.e., task); 8:16 ("the business," i.e., employment - Vulgate: occupation).

another word also meaning "labor" - לָבַד . The first passage is 4:4 - "Again I considered all travail" ($\text{לָבַד} - \text{לָבַד} \text{ וְכָל} \text{ עֲמָלִית}$), and every right work, that for this a man is envied of his neighbor. This is also vanity and vexation of spirit." The second passage is 4:6 - "Better is an handful with quietness, than both the hands full with travail" (לָבַד) and vexation of spirit." Since both of these passages have been considered previously, here we merely want to point out that לָבַד in both passages means "labor, toil." לָבַד will subsequently be treated at greater length.

a. Summary of findings.

Thus we see that לָבַד is flexible in its meaning. But whether it has the general meaning of "labor, toil," or a more specific meaning like "care," it, too, is another word which Solomon uses to amplify his לָבַד concept. For when he specifies something as "sore travail" he has in mind something that does not contribute to man's happiness, that makes life empty and vain for him, as for example:

- a) earthly wisdom and research - they only result in wasted effort, disappointment and added perplexity;
- b) cares and anxieties in business or in other matters that rob men of sleep;
- c) an unexpected calamity, which destroys fond hopes and ambitions.

labor to procure food to satisfy the appetite.

On the other hand, if a far-sighted man does conscientious-

2. שָׁמַד .

Next to שָׁמַד the word "labor" occurs most often in Ecclesiastes; in one form or another it appear 35 times. To be specific, as a noun (שָׁמַד) it appears 22 times; as a verb (שָׁמַד), eight times; as an adjective (שָׁמַד), five times; these words do not simply mean "labor," but include the idea of wearisome and painful effort, the misery, anguish, and sorrow usually connected with hard toil. We shall readily see how this oft-repeated term "labor" fits into and helps us to understand Solomon's category of שָׁמַד . The following are a few illustrative passages:

In 2:22 the question is asked: "For what hath man of all his labour (שָׁמַד) and of the vexation of his heart, wherein he hath laboured (שָׁמַד נִסְּוּ) under the sun?" Solomon means to ask: "What is to be the result to man of the hand work with which he applies wisdom and knowledge in all his transactions?¹⁶ All this striving and application of skill is fruitless for the laborer; it produces nothing (Cp. also 1:3).

Small wonder that this is the case when "All the labour (שָׁמַד) of man is for his mouth, and yet, the appetite is not filled" (6:7). If man's reason for toiling, his chief concern in this life is the satisfaction of his hunger and the sensual enjoyment of good, he will experience that the appetite is never filled, i.e., satisfied once for all; it always calls for more good and more labor to procure food to satisfy the appetite.

On the other hand, if a far-sighted man does conscientious-

ly work and save for the future, what good is there is that? His successor will only reap that which ^{he} has labouriously toiled for all his life. When Solomon reflects on such an eventuality, he is filled with disgust to think that he has gone to so much trouble to amass a fortune. Therefore the poignancy of his remark in 2:18 where he confesses: "Yea, I hated all my labour (שָׂרָף) which I had taken (שָׂרָף) under the sun; because I should leave it unto the man that shall be after me."

a. Summary of findings.

If one wants to observe שָׂרָף from firsthand experience, he need only look at his own laborious efforts to earn a livelihood. I think he will readily admit that at times he chafes under the task he must daily labor at in order to supply his never-ceasing wants. The Biblical curse: "In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread" is a truth that each succeeding day only too well impresses upon him. For when he honestly asks himself: "What do all my concentrated efforts produce that really is of lasting merit?" he must woefully confess: "Nothing!"

He can take nothing of the fruits of his labor with him when he dies, but must pass them on to his immediate successors. Very often the vicissitudes of life mar the enjoyment he would ordinarily derive from the fruits of his labor.

It seemingly is so futile to earnestly strive during one's life, when the net results are so empty and unsatisfactory. We can well sympathize with him and understand what he has in mind when he

says: "Therefore I hated life; because the work that is wrought under the sun is grievous unto me: for all is vanity and vexation of spirit" (2:17).

3. וְרָע.

Third in importance as far as frequency is concerned is the word וְרָע - "evil." 31 times it occurs in Ecclesiastes in one form or another. However, "evil" is not always the Authorized Version's translation of וְרָע. In seven instances וְרָע is rendered in these various ways: "grievous"; "wickedness"; "misery"; "mischievous."

וְרָע is the opposite of טוֹב, and as an adjective, means a) "bad, evil, worthless, in quality or essence" b) "bad, evil, i.e., causing evil, hurtful, harmful. As a substantive, it means 1) "ill, evil, i.e., a) evil one does b) evil which happens to one, adversity, calamity." 2) Evil, in a moral sense, wickedness, depravity."¹⁷

We shall not, as in the case of שָׂרָא, give a partial exegesis of each of the 28 passages in which וְרָע appears. Suffice it to say, that in the majority of instances, וְרָע is used as stated in the preceding paragraph, however with this noticeable exception - וְרָע does not often occur in Ecclesiastes in the moral sense.

So for the sake of brevity, we shall examine only those seven passages where וְרָע is translated by other than the customary

word "evil."

2:17 - "Therefore I hated life, because the work that is wrought under the sun is grievous (וְעָרִיב) unto me; for all is vanity and vexation of spirit." Solomon means to intimate that all the exertions of men pressed upon him like a burden, too heavy to bear. What made man's toil so oppressive to him was that it was so empty - just like chasing after the wind.

4:8 - "There is one alone and not a second; yea, he hath neither child nor brother; yet is there no end of all his labour; neither is his eye satisfied with riches; neither saith he, For whom do I labour, and brieve my soul of good? This is also vanity, yea, it is a sore (וְעָרִיב) travail." The friendless miser, without family or kin, who is propelled forward by an unquenchable desire for wealth, is surely engaged in a woeful, worthless employment; in fact, this selfish desire of his, is wickedness. (This is one of the few times where וְעָרִיב is used in the moral sense).

5:13 (12) - "There is a sore evil (רָעָה עָרִיבָה) which I have seen under the sun, namely, riches kept for the owners thereof, to their hurt ($\text{וְעָרִיבָה$) - Cp. 8:9). Here interestingly enough וְעָרִיב appears twice but the second time, in a different translation, i.e., "hurt." In reality, in both instances, וְעָרִיב has the meaning of "hurt." We might paraphrase the verse thus: "There is a hurtful sickness or weakness which consists in this - riches hoarded by their owner, only to bring their possessor additional grief and harm, when by some reverse of fortune he loses them. Consequently, it is futile to rely on riches to ward off any future contingency. (It being sinful and

translated as follows: "For the evil of the man is heavy upon him"

hurtful to hoard riches, gives to וְיָ in this instance a distinctly moral flavor). (See also from the preceding context), that "the heart of the wise" 7:14 - "In the day of prosperity be joyful, but in the day of adversity ($\text{וְיָ} \text{וְיָ} \text{וְיָ}$) consider: God also hath set the one over against the other, to the end that man should find nothing after him." The last part of this verse has come in for its share of varied interpretation. But Delitzsch, following Hitzig, offers the most plausible explanation. Solomon does not mean to say that man cannot investigate what lies in the future, but rather this, namely, God alternates the good and evil forces and events during man's life, so that he will not be forced to contend with adversity ("evil") after death. Accordingly at death the, man will have experienced both good and evil during his transient existence on earth.¹⁸

7:15 - "All things have I seen in the days of my vanity: there is a just man that perisheth in his righteousness, and there is a wicked man that prolongeth his life in his wickedness" ($\text{וְיָ} \text{וְיָ} \text{וְיָ}$). Why should this condition exist: why, since righteousness has the promise of long life and prosperity, should it meet an untimely death whereas some wicked men attain to a long life in spite of their wickedness, i.e., their moral depravity? Here is another instance where וְיָ is used in the moral sense.

8:6 - "Because to every purpose there is time and judgment, therefore the misery (וְיָ) of man is great upon him." There is a time for every purpose and every act; in due time everything will be brought to judgment. The rest of the verse should be translated as follows: "For the evil of the man is heavy upon him"

or "For the wickedness of man becomes too great" (Delitzsch), may mean (taking our cue from the preceding context), that "the heart of the wise man will see the time and the judgment of the ruler, laying to his heart the temptation to rebellion."¹⁹ On the other hand, "the evil" pressing heavy upon the wise man may be the despot's wickedness, which God soon will punish in his retributive justice. No matter which way we take this verse, this much remains certain: the wickedness of man will finally catch up with him. If he thinks he may escape its penalty he is entertaining but a futile notion.

10:13 - "The beginning of the words of his mouth is foolishness: and the end of his talk is mischievous madness (אִי־יָדָע־וְאִי־יִשְׁמַח). In the preceding verse the fool is characterized as 'swallowing himself up with his own lips.' Here the fool is further pictured according to his true nature; he does not stop after he has uttered folly, but even goes so far as to make statements that are worse than silly - he becomes frenzied and presumptuous in his language, so that anything he says may be discounted as being worthless and full of evil, sinful, wicked, leading to sin and wickedness.

The final word that must come in for consideration is אִי־יָדָע־וְאִי־יִשְׁמַח; it occurs in a. Summary of findings. This is the exact opposite of אִי־יָדָע־וְאִי־יִשְׁמַח, for on that very account the following Thus again we see how אִי־יָדָע־וְאִי־יִשְׁמַח adds to our understanding of אִי־יָדָע־וְאִי־יִשְׁמַח, how the oft-repeated word אִי־יָדָע־וְאִי־יִשְׁמַח re-enforces and emphasizes the author's theme of אִי־יָדָע־וְאִי־יִשְׁמַח, and how it focuses our attention on the conditions and forces in this world and pronounces upon them not

only the verdict of "vanity," but also "evil." It points out, in particular:

- a) that labor and toil are evil, are oppressive, because they are so empty; it is just like chasing after the wind;
- b) that a selfish desire for wealth is a worthless, wicked employment of one's energies. It is futile to rely on riches to ward off future contingencies;
- c) that evil and wickedness do not pay. If man thinks he may escape its consequences, he is entertaining a futile notion;
- d) that the words of the fool are worthless and full of evil.

but the excellency () of knowledge is that wisdom giveth life to them that have it." Wisdom as well as money is a shield and defence (literally, "shadow") to man. They are alike in this respect because he who has wisdom and money rests under a safe protection from material evils. But the excellency - the advantage of knowledge is that wisdom imparts new life and strength in the believer through the operation of the Holy Spirit.

4. } 17 7 .

The final word that must come in for consideration is } 17 7 . ; it occurs ten times in Ecclesiastes. While } 17 7 . is the exact opposite of } 7 7 , yet on that very account the following study of the passages in which it occurs will prove helpful to the understanding of } 7 7 .

The Authorized Version renders it in various ways: in five edge, then must be put to more strength; but wisdom is profitable (} 17 7 .) to direct" - literally: the advantage of setting right

is (on the side of) wisdom -. It is to be expected that an axe
 passages it is translated "profit;" in two passages "excellency"
 (in 2:13 "excellency" appears twice); in 10:10, "profitable" is the
 word; in 10:11, "bet^fer."

יִתְּרוֹ has two different meanings and both are used in
 Ecclesiastes. In the first place, it can mean "excellence, pre-eminence."²⁰
 2:13, 7:12, 10:10 are illustrative of this meaning.

2:13 - "Then I saw that wisdom excelleth (יִתְּרוֹ)
 folly, as far as light excelleth (יִתְּרוֹ) darkness." The
 meaning of Solomon's metaphor is obvious. Wisdom is as much superior
 to folly as light is more beneficial than darkness. Compared to
 wisdom, folly is vain and empty, dark and dreary.

7:12 - "For wisdom is a defence, and money is a defence:
 but the excellency (יִתְּרוֹ) of knowledge is that wisdom giveth
 life to them that have it." Wisdom as well as money is a shield and
 defence (literally, "shadow") to men. They are alike in this respect
 because he who has wisdom and money rests under a safe protection
 from material evils. But the excellency - the advantage of knowledge
 is that wisdom imparts new life and strength in the believer through
 the operation of the Holy Spirit. This is the knowledge which Ps.
 111:10 and Prov. 1:7 refer to, namely, the knowledge by which the
 fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, the knowledge of God and
 His Messiah. Wisdom brings eternal values to the believer, a result
 which money, a thing of transitory value, certainly cannot do.

10:10 - "If the iron be blunt, and he do not what the
 edge, then must he put to more strength; but wisdom is profitable
 (יִתְּרוֹ) to direct" - literally: the advantage of setting right

is (on the side of) wisdom -. It is to be expected that an axe will become dull after it has been used for some length of time. Thereupon if the axe is not sharpened, the user will be forced to exert more strength in order to cut the wood. But wisdom, Solomon says in contrast, is more advantageous, because it teaches one how to conduct matters to a successful end. For example, wisdom will prompt the laborer to sharpen the axe instead of using mere brute force to cut the wood. On the other hand, one who does not let wisdom guide his actions, is vainly relying on the impulse of the moment to carry him through - which is quite unreliable, to say the least.

In the second place, $\int\text{'}\text{'}\text{'}\text{'}\text{'}$ can mean "gain, profit, emolument, what one has over and above."²¹ Sufficient examples of this second use can be found in 1:3, 2:11, 3:9, 5:9 (8), 5:16 (15):

1:3 - "What profit ($\int\text{'}\text{'}\text{'}\text{'}$) hath a man of all his labour, which he taketh under the sun?" i.e., what does man have 'over and above' from all his hard toil? The answer is that there is no lasting value to be derived from man's fatiguing labor. The hardships connected with it place the mark of vanity upon his entire life (Cp. also 3:9).

2:11 - "Then I looked on all the works that my hands had wrought, and in the labour that I had laboured to do: and, behold, all was vanity and vexation of spirit, and there was no profit ($\int\text{'}\text{'}\text{'}\text{'}$) under the sun." Solomon carefully examined the results of his conduct and now gives his matured judgment. Much to his chagrin, he had found that in all of man's pursuits, there is no real gain,

no enduring happiness, nothing to satisfy the strivings of the soul.

5:9 (8) - "Moreover the profit (יִתְּרֵן) of the earth is for all: the king himself is served by the field." The last half of this passage makes it difficult for one to determine the meaning. The first half of the passage is readily discernible - the meaning is that the gain of the earth is for all.

The text of the original Hebrew would restrict the "profit" of the field to the king who loves and fosters agriculture: "But the profit of a land in all things is a king devoted to the field."

The idea of the Authorized Version is that the profit of the soil extends to everyone. Even the king must rely on the industry of his subjects and the favorable produce of the land. ²²

5:16 (15) - "And this also is a sore evil, that in all points as he came so shall he go: and what profit (יִתְּרֵן) hath he that hath laboured for the wind?" Man came naked and helpless into the world and in like manner shall he depart this world. And what is his gain for which he labors for the wind - Nothing! He toils with no result.

10:11 is another passage in which יִתְּרֵן occurs which is also very difficult to interpret: "Surely the serpent will bite without enchantment: and a babbl[er] is no better (יִתְּרֵן). The apodosis of the Authorized Version does not sensibly connect up with what immediately precedes. If, however, we take "babbl[er]" (which literally means "master of the tongue") to refer to the "snake-charmer," then we can see the point of the verse, namely, the uselessness of the person who comes too late. For if a man is bitten before he has

an opportunity to use his charm, it is no gain to him that he has the snake-charming secret; it is too late to employ it when the serpent has struck.³⁵ The rendering of ~~the~~ Septuagint brings out essentially the same meaning: "If a serpent bites when not charmed, then there is no advantage to the charmer."

a. Summary of findings.

Here again in the word וְהָיָה , by implication and inference, we get an illustration of how "vanity" manifests itself in the world. If a thing is not advantageous, it is of little value to the person who has it; it sooner or later reveals its transitory or useless nature. And if a person is honest with himself he will eventually admit that there is no real gain or profit to be found in all his earthly endeavors; there is no abiding happiness to be attained therefrom. For that reason we may conclude that all things of an earthly nature are truly וָהָיָה .

heaven and earth are not void neither the sun, nor the moon, nor the stars, nor our body. On the contrary, all these are very good. But what is vain is man's works, pomp, vain-glory. These are of man's own creating and not from the hand of God. They are vain because they serve no useful end; they are transient and empty and fruitless and worthless.

As the result of sin, all things are vain. Solomon realized this fact. He had experienced everything earth has to offer, and found this fact to be only too true. It was this that addressed

C. Conclusion

Thus Solomon tried wisdom and pleasure and labor and found that none of them was able to yield the peace and satisfaction that he earnestly sought. Upon each pursuit he writes the epitaph, "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity." He observed that the various conditions, strivings, and fortunes of men, and doubts and disappointment descended upon him.

Yes, the world was his, and he used it to the full, and saw all his endeavours and pursuits, as well as the endeavours and pursuits of others, end in vain, futile effort. Everything he found to be empty and bare to man's soul.

But is everything that is earthly really ^{65 57} as Solomon would have us believe? Is nature, for example, in all its beautiful manifestations, vain? Is it not the handiwork of the Almighty God? How then can we call it vain?

However, it is not the works of God that are vain. The heaven and earth are not vain! Neither the sun, nor the moon, nor the stars, nor our body. On the contrary, all these are very good. But what is vain is man's works, pomp, vain-glory. These are of man's own creating and not from the hand of God. They are vain because they serve no useful end; they are transient and empty and fruitless and worthless.

As the result of sin, all things are vain. Solomon realized this fact. He had experienced everything worth experiencing, and found this fact to be only too true. It was this that saddened

him as he looked back in retrospect over his misspent life.

So from this viewpoint we are to take Solomon literally. The vain activities of man penetrate into all corners of the world. Yes, God has placed the habitable earth here, but man has put the stamp of "vanity" upon it!

II. Over against this vanity is placed God.

A. He is the supermundane, transcendent Creator.

1. He has made all things.

Over against ^{5:7} the futility, the vanity, the incessant labor, the evil and wickedness, the transitory gain of earthly endeavors, is placed God, the supermundane, transcendent Creator, who is exclusively called by that title in 12:1 - "Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth." For it was He who made us. All we are and have has come from Him, our talents, capabilities, etc. Therefore as creatures of His, we are responsible to Him for the proper use of those faculties with which He has endowed us.

We are ~~not~~ special creatures of His, ~~creatures above all~~ ~~creatures of His, creatures above all creatures.~~ For in us, unlike the animal and fowl kingdom, He has placed ~~within us~~ "the spirit" (soul) which shall stand before God to all eternity. In Genesis we are told that God "formed man out of the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul" (Gen. 2:7), and in Ecclesiastes this momentous creative fact is verified when Solomon declares: "Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was;" and then Solomon adds this significant statement: "And the spirit shall return unto God who gave it" (12:7), there to be judged, either to be in His divine presence forevermore, or forever damned. The "lower" creation of animals, etc. has no such future hope. At death, their "spirit goeth downward to the earth" (5:21) to extinction.

When we contemplate the magnitude of the universe and all that is therein, we the finite, must stand in bewilderment and wonderment at the Infinite, and with Solomon confess that we "know not the works of God who maketh all" (11:5), and also with David joyfully declare: "I will praise thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made: marvelous are thy works; and that my soul knoweth right well" (Ps.139:14). And again in Ps. 19:1 - "The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament sheweth His handiwork."

God did not merely create all things, but at the same time "He hath made everything beautiful" (3:11). "He hath made everything beautiful," ($\overline{\text{y}} \overline{\text{d}} \overline{\text{r}}$). Here $\overline{\text{y}} \overline{\text{d}} \overline{\text{r}}$ is used, like in 5:17 ("...it is good and comely), in the sense of the Greek $\kappa\alpha\lambda\omicron\varsigma$, excellent in its nature and well adapted to its end, so as to fit harmoniously and beautifully into His plans and marvelous creation. God is a God of beauty. The world does not recognize this beauty (Cant. 5:9), but the believer, begins to know and understand it.¹ The fact that God is a God of beauty is evident from the very beginning, for when He had finished His creative activity on the sixth day, He looked about and "saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good" (Gen.1:31).

All around us there is ample evidence of this beauty. Take for example, the harmonious working of creation - the unfailing rising of the sun, and its setting; the wind moving according to its unchangeable circuits; the ceaseless flow of water toward the sea and its subsequent return. This is the unfolding of beauty in God's universe as we hear it described in the initial verses of the first chapter: "The sun also ariseth and the sun goeth down, and hasteth to his place

where he arose. The wind goeth toward the south and turneth about unto the north; it whirlleth about continually, and the wind returneth again according to his circuits. All the rivers run into the sea; yet the sea is not full; unto the place from whence the rivers come, thither they return again" (1:5-7).

Although Solomon's intention in these verses is to emphasize the everlasting sameness and repetition in creation, and thereby the "vanity" (futility) that we find in inanimate objects, still this much is also true, that there exists a visible beauty in all these manifestations of God's creative work.

Likewise in 3:11, when the statement is made that God "hath made everything beautiful in his time," the "everything" (כֹּל שֶׁבַח) does not ^{alone} altogether refer to God's original creation, ^{but also to} ~~as to~~ the "travail" (business) of the preceding verse ("I have seen the travail which God hath given to the sons of men to be exercised in it"). In God's providential design, ^{EVERY} ~~all~~ parts of this "business," (which includes the varied nature of man's experiences as mentioned in 3:2-8) has a beauty and a harmony all its own, its own reason and season for appearance and development.

The creator did not fashion all things after one model, but made it a point to introduce variety into His work. And so it was according to this principle that He arranged the program of man's earthly experiences. Just as the round orb on which we live would present a monotonous spectacle to us if it were not punctuated with hills and valleys, so human life would be quite uninteresting if it were composed of the same unvarying pattern of a few events.

more in detail this whole mysterious procedure: "Thou hast beset us

behind and before, and laid mine hand upon me... My substance was
 But thanks to an all-wise, kind Creator, this is not the case! There
 not hid from thee, when I was made in secret, and curiously wrought in
 are times of weeping and laughing, of loving and hating, a time to
 the lowest parts of the earth, thou hast seen my substance, yet
 be married and a time to die, etc. (3:2-8). In each life there is a
 variety of events that is quite unlike the succession of events that
 in continuance were fashioned when as yet there was none of them.
 another experiences.

(Cp. also Acts 15:15 and Job 28:3).

Furthermore, there is beauty in the order of human events.

There is not a single detail of man's life, in fact, for
 The affairs of man are not just the result of chance. Everything
 which God has not determined in advance, God does in due order
 that happens does so at a definite time appointed by the infinite
 wisdom of God, for in 3:1 we are told: "To everything there is a
 season and a time to every purpose under the heaven." The context
 harmoniously into God's great plan of governing the universe. "To
 plainly shows us that it is God who is the controller of these
 seasons ($\int \Delta \int$ - a point of time) and times ($\Delta \int$ - an appointed
 time).

(Cp. also Acts 15:15 and Job 28:3).

It is important that the fine distinction between these
 two Hebrew words be noted. $\int \Delta \int$ is a point of time (Zeitpunkt). It
 corresponds to the $\chi\rho\acute{o}\nu\omicron\varsigma$ of the Greek, the idea comprehending
 the "terminus a quo and ad quem," while $\Delta \int$ ($\kappa\alpha\iota\rho\acute{o}\varsigma$) is limited
 to the "terminus a quo." This latter designation of time has a two-
 fold idea embodied in it, (as Delitzsch points out - p. 255), namely,
 that "everything has its fore-determined time, in which there lies
 both a determined point of time when it happens, and a determined
 period of time during which it shall continue and (2) that every
 matter has a time appointed for it, or one appropriate, suitable."

So from the beginning of man's life to its very end, God
 arranges the appointed moment when events shall transpire, and
 determines also how long they shall endure.
 However, many of the circumstances enumerated in 3:2-8 do
 Ecclesiastes 3:2a ("a time to be born"), taken in connection
 with 3:1, shows, for instance, how God has predetermined and appointed
 the exact time of man's birth. Ps. 139:5,15,16 describes a little

more in detail this whole mysterious procedure: "Thou hast beset me

behind and before, and laid thine hand upon me...My substance was not hid from thee, when I was made in secret, and curiously wrought in the lowest parts of the earth. Thine eyes did see my substance, yet being imperfect; and in thy book all my members were written, which in continuance were fashioned when as yet there was none of them." (Cp. also Acts 15:18 and Job 14:5).

There is not a single detail of man's life, in fact, for which God has not determined the exact time. God does in time only what he has predetermined to do in eternity. All that happens in the world and in each and every individual life fits beautifully and harmoniously into God's great plan of governing the universe.² "To every thing," emphasizes Solomon, "there is a season (a fixed, definite portion of time), and a time (i.e., appointed time) to every purpose ($\int \int \pi$ - here: business, matter) under heaven:

A time to be born and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up that which is planted; a time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up; a time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance; a time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together; a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing; a time to get and a time to lose; a time to keep silence and a time to speak; a time to love, and a time to hate; a time to war; and a time of peace" (3:1-8).

So from the beginning of man's life to its very end, God arranges the approximate moment when events shall transpire, and determines also how long they shall endure.

However, many of the circumstances enumerated in 3:2-8 do not seem to harmonize with the inherent beauty of God's creation. Surely such actions as "killing," "hating," "warring," "the plucking

up of that which is planted," the phenomena of death, do not fit into the beautiful world-picture? But in a certain important respect they do! For if we keep in mind that here Solomon "is not pronouncing judgment upon the moral qualities of the actions he enumerates, but merely calling attention to their fitness for the times and seasons to which they have been assigned by God,"³ then the beauty of these actions is-so-far as they fit into God's world government will become more readily discernible to us. Of many of these actions, God of course, does not approve, but He nevertheless permits them to occur when the time of their occurrence is ripe and for all these He has His well-considered purpose, and He makes them fit into His plan of world government.

This earth that the Creator has fashioned does not exist merely in order that He might look upon it and take pleasure in the beauty that He has wrought, but it is to serve a utilitarian function as well - man is to dwell on the earth and to derive benefit from the soil. In fact, the earth is basic for everyone's livelihood and existence. Even the high and mighty must depend on the favorable produce of the land if they are to survive. Such is the earth that Solomon enumerates in 5:9 - "Moreover the profit of the earth is for all: the king himself is served by the field." By agriculture, by taking interest in agriculture, the king's interests are best served. The peaceable work of cultivating the land and increasing its productivity serve his interest far better than war and strife.

While Solomon knew that man has a free will, yet he also...

realized that 2. What God does is forever. man's. Man is powerless

to hasten or retard the destiny of God. Yet there are foolish persons

A second factor that characterizes God as the supermundane, who imagine they could have devised a better course of transcendent Creator is the fact that whatever He does is forever; He orders events with a view to eternity. That is Solomon's conviction in 3:14 - "I know that, whatsoever God doeth, it shall be forever: nothing can be put to it, nor anything taken from it." The unalterable character and eternity of God's counsels is likewise stressed by such utterances as in Ps. 33:11 - "The counsel of the Lord standeth for ever, the thoughts of His heart to all generations," and in Is. 46:10, where God says: - "My counsel shall stand fast, and all my will, will I accomplish." In view of the eternal decrees of God, it is to no purpose that we set our minds in opposition to them. We cannot change these decrees, therefore we should wholly cast ourselves into our Father's arms and entreat Him to have pity on us. In this connection, Luther reminds us that St. Paul admonishes the Romans in 9:16, saying: "It is not in him that willeth, nor in him that runneth, but in God, who sheweth mercy."⁴

Of God's counsels, however, the poet is incorrect when he baffle us, says, that, "Bound by the brazen laws of eternity, men accomplish the governing cycle of their existence." From without, the counsels of God are without a doubt unalterable, no creature being able to make any encroachment upon them; but they do not stand above and removed from God as a foreign power. Consequently, it is not our prayers, but our own puny workings that are useless.⁵

While Solomon knew that man has a free will, yet he also IN MANY THINGS PERTAINING TO THIS LIFE

realized that the will of God is superior to man's. Man is powerless to hasten or retard the designs of God. Yet there are foolish persons who imagine they could have drafted a better course of events for themselves than that done for them by God. But the wise man will submit himself to the ordering of events as done by His heavenly Father and trustingly admit that the Father's times are the best times.

3. Man cannot understand God's works.

A third factor that characterizes God as the supermundane, transcendent creator is the incomprehensibility of His works; man simply cannot understand them. At best man sees only minute parts of the great whole - "...no man can find out the work that God maketh from the beginning to the end" (3:11c). With the wise king Solomon he must humbly confess: "Then I beheld all the work of God, that a man cannot find out the work that is done under the sun; because though a man labour to seek it out, yet he shall not find it; yea farther, thought a wise man think to know it, yet shall he not be able to find it" (8:7). Not only does the harmonious working - together of creation baffle us, but according to this verse, men's actions too, and the governing hand of God in those actions. Man often cannot comprehend the work of men no matter how hard he tries, much less the work of God. Even the wise man must despair of gaining such understanding.

"Who is as the wise man?" questions 8:1, "and who (like him) knoweth the interpretation of a thing?" True, he understands the proper relation of circumstances better than the average person does, but even he cannot finally arrive at a rational explanation of God's

works and workings that is truly satisfying.

"That which is far off, and exceeding deep, who can find it out?" No one, not even Solomon in all his wisdom. The phenomena of nature, the facts of life - their causes, relation, and interdependence is entirely beyond the full comprehension of man. Surely we must exclaim with Job: "Canst thou by searching find out God? canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection? It is high as heaven; what canst thou do? deeper than hell; what canst thou know? The measure thereof is longer than the earth, and broader than the sea" (Job 11:7-9). As little as we can understand the essence of God, or His infinity, so little can we fathom His great creative works and dealings with men. As far as the heaven is from the earth, so far is our understanding removed from all these things. Since the hidden depths of divine wisdom extend far below the realm of the dead,⁶ who are we then to measure it with our finite understanding? If we chafe under the limitations placed upon our understanding and act so foolish as to judge God, then let us keep in mind this apt indictment of Job: "For vain man would be wise" (Job 11:12).

Mortal man, "knowest thou how the breath of life is infused into the embryo within a pregnant woman? or how the bones do grow in the womb of her that is with child: even so thou knowest not the works of God who maketh all!" (11:5).

Consequently, it behooves mortal man to resign himself to the fact that he cannot contend with the omnipotent God, the supreme Ruler of the universe. So asserts Solomon: "Neither may he contend with him that is mightier than he" (6:10b) i.e., God. Woe to him that

striveth with his Maker! Let the potsherd strive with the potsherds of the earth. Shall the clay say to him that fashioneth it, What makest thou? or thy work, He hath no hands?" (Is. 45:9).

Since everything that happens is known and fixed beforehand by divine decrees ("that which hath been is named already" - 6:10) it is useless for man to contend with God. Rather, he ought to recognize in all that happens the ordering of God and man's impotence. Then can he, with God's help, humbly submit himself to the divine Ruler of the universe and with a believing heart resign himself to this consideration: "Consider the work of God. For who can make that straight, which he hath made crooked?" (7:13). Why worry then and murmur and make hasty judgments? Leave all anomalies of life and difficulties that perplex us, in the capable hands of Him who is above all. In 9:1 Solomon reaffirms this: "For all this I considered in my heart even to declare all this, that the righteous, and the wise, and their work, are in the ^{hand} ~~hand~~ of God: no man knoweth either love or hatred by all that is before him," i.e., no one can tell beforehand who will be the objects of divine love or displeasure. Therefore the following admonition, although it has reference to prayer in particular, is also well in place in this connection of contending with the Almighty: "Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thine heart be hasty to utter any thing before God: for God is in heaven and thou upon earth: therefore let thy words be few" (5:2). Man must remember his place - he has but a small place on earth, whereas God rules over all in the heaven above. And man must remember, too, that while 'man proposes, it is God that disposes.'

It is of much comfort for us to know that God "creates all things and rules them in accordance with a well-defined plan which must work out to the salvation of man and the greater glory of God." So the thing for us to do then is to get the proper perspective of God's moral government of the universe with the eyes of faith. Then we will first realize and experience the actual truth of St. Paul's comforting words to the Romans whom he assures that "all things work together for good to them that love God" (Rom. 8:28).

There is a beauty in all that God does, but we must have the eyes of faith to seek and understand it. When that happens, we shall then behold God in all His transcendent glory and majesty. No longer will His eternal qualities and plannings prove a barrier to us. No longer will we be tempted to judge Him, but rather, in the words of David, thank and praise Him for His all-seeing Providence:

"Thou compasses my path and my lying down, and art acquainted with all my ways...Thou hast beset me behind and before, and laid thine hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain unto it. Whither shall I go from thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there; if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me" (Ps. 139: 3,5-10).

The clouds full of rain assist the sun in its work by emptying their contents upon the earth - 11:3; "If the clouds be full

B. He is the Preserver of the universe.

1. All nature moves according to His will.

Many rationalists would have us believe that God is an absentee God. They concede that He is the Creator of all things, but they maintain that after God had finished His creative activity, He went away and left the world to fare for itself. But that the very opposite is true is only too evident. The God of the Bible (and as the Book of Ecclesiastes, in particular, shows) is a personal God who knows, feels, wills, and holds intimate communion with His creatures.

While God's transcendence places Him high above the earth still He does not hold Himself coldly aloof from the earth. But He cares for His creation and particularly for the rational and sentient beings, He has brought into existence. For that reason we know God to be, not only the Creator of the universe, but also the Preserver.

We have only to observe the organic and inorganic parts of the universe to recognize at once the preserving hand of God. The planetary systems, the bodies of water, the wind, all move according to their designated courses (1:5-7) - there is no confusion; all is orderliness. Each part of creation helps the other and thereby serves a useful purpose. The vivifying rays of the sun promote growth on the earth (Cp. 11:7 where the sweetness and pleasantness of the sun is referred to; one of the things that makes the sun "sweet" and "pleasant" are the warm, invigorating, life-giving rays which it gives off).

The clouds full of rain assist the sun in its work by emptying their contents upon the earth - 11:3; "If the clouds be full

of rain, they empty themselves upon the earth." The law of nature according to which the clouds discharge their accumulated masses of water upon the earth, is fixed by God. Man has nothing whatsoever to do with it.

And just as God fixed the time and season for the rain to fall, so in like manner He oversees the proper time for seed that has been sown to spring up after the rain. So in accordance with the seasons appointed by God, there is "a time to plant" (3:2), and in due course also, a time comes for the harvesting of the seed that has been sown, God granting His providential blessing, of course.

God is good. It is not His wish that any of His creatures suffer material want. Therefore He looks after and satisfied their immediate needs, harnessing all the forces of nature for their sole benefit. Blessed indeed are His creatures! Well could David sing of the rich benefits of God in Ps. 65:9-13: "Thou visitest the earth, and waterest it: thou greatly enrichest it with the river of God, which is full of water: thou preparest them corn, when thou hast so provided for it. Thou waterest the ridges thereof abundantly: thou settlest the furrows thereof: thou makest it soft with showers: thou blessest the springing thereof. Thou crownest the year with thy goodness; and thy paths drop fatness. They drop upon the pastures of the wilderness: and the little hills rejoice on every side. The pastures are clothed with flocks; the valleys also are covered over with corn; they shout for joy, they also sing."

Through Solomon the Lord would have us know that "the

profit of the earth is for all" (5:9a). He loves all that He has created and therefore does not fail to show His love to things as well as to His rational beings. In a special measure, however, God demonstrates His preserving love to man, whom He created after His own image. He provides him with daily sustenance, food and drink, besides a manifold number of other temporal blessings to enrich his daily life and make it a life of joy. This is Solomon's observation in 5:18: "Behold, that which I have seen: it is good and comely for one to eat and to drink and to enjoy the good of all his labour that he taketh under the sun all the days of his life, which God giveth him: for it is his portion." God blesses man's labor so that the enjoyment of these temporal blessings may be his every day of his life. Earthly possessions in themselves afford no true joy. It is God who not only provides these blessings but gives man the power to enjoy them.

Martin Luther realized full well the preserving goodness of God the Father, when he enumerated in his explanation of the First Article, God's manifold blessings to us: "...He gives me clothing and shoes, meat and drink, house and home, wife and children, fields and cattle, and all my goods; He richly and daily provides me with all that I need to support this body and life." The well-known words of the 145th Psalm beautifully sum up Luther's explanation: "The eyes of all, wait upon thee; and thou givest them their meat in due season. Thou openest thine hand and satisfiest the desire of every living thing" (Ps. 145:15-16).

The extent of God's love exceeds normal expectations, penetrating into the cruel depths of life to rescue the persecuted

among mankind with comfort and consolation. God deliberately seeks out those harassed humans who have been driven into the background of the stream of life. In the words of the Authorized Version: "God requireth that which is past" (3:15), or correctly translated, "God seeks out him that is being persecuted." He seeks him out, lovingly (Not KATA Ges. Kaut.) attends to his needs, and in the midst of sorrow and persecution comforts and consoles him.

Yet, there are not a few, who totally overlook God's providential care or else brazenly disregard it as worthy of notice; who think that all their daily wants are supplied as the result of their own efforts and labor. They have the necessities of life and so they imagine themselves to be completely independent of everyone and entirely capable of securing their own happiness. But such proud people have never understood the full import of such passages as Ecclesiastes 3:13 - "And also that everyman should eat and drink, and enjoy the good of all his labour, it is the gift of God." The power to enjoy the fruits of one's labor must come from God; man is powerless to effect such enjoyment without the blessing of God. Again in 9:7 it is emphasized that the ability to enjoy that which one eats and drinks is a gift that comes from God and is to be received with joy and thanksgiving. And so the injunction by Solomon (this passages as well as the previous one - 3:13, does not inculcate a life of Epicurean pleasure, as will be adequately shown in the last part of this thesis) to: "Go thy way, eat thy bread with joy and drink thy wine with a merry heart; for God now accepteth thy works," i.e., the eating and drinking just mentioned, (9:7).

That success or failure for man in his labor lies in the hand of God is emphatically brought out in 11:6 - "In the morning sow thy seed and in the evening withhold not thine hand; for thou knowest not whether shall prosper, either this or that or whether they both shall be alike good." (The translation of the last half of this verse is made more understandable in Delitzsch's rendering: "...whether this or that, or whether both together shall well succeed" - Delitzsch, Commentary on the Canticles and Ecclesiastes. p. 397

Another gift from the preserving hand of God that Ecclesiastes names in particular (and as Luther expressly points out in his explanation to the First Article) is the precious gift of a wife and the resultant joy a husband should have while living out his earthly existence with her. 9:9 exhorts: "Live joyfully with the wife whom thou lovest all the days of thy vanity, which he hath given thee under the sun."

Since the preserving love of God is not restricted to rational creatures but reaches even the things in creation, it is highly improper for anyone to criticize God; in fact, to criticize Him in view of the abundant demonstration of His love, would be unjust to say the least. Rather, it would be a credit to us as thankful creatures, to give utterance to the thoughts that Solomon sets down in 2:24, that "there is nothing better for a man, than that he should eat and drink, and that he should make his soul enjoy good in his labour. This also I saw that it is from the hand of God." May we always realize that the power ^{to} enjoy the fruit of our labor depends

on the will of God. It is quite obvious then that we are far from independent. We depend for literally everything we need in life and for those things which we do not absolutely need, but which add to life's enjoyment, and even for the ability to enjoy God's gifts, on God, the Creator and Preserver of all His creatures.

This is the second thought that Solomon brings to our attention, when life and its vicissitudes become burdensome, when all we do and labor seems so utterly futile: There is God, the Preserver, the living Caretaker of His works. Look up to Him and trust that He has planned your life also for a purpose; realize that everything happens in accordance with seasons appointed by Him; recognize the goodness of God in providing for the immediate needs of His creatures; perceive that in a special measure God demonstrates His preserving love to man, and that this love exceeds even normal expectations, since it seeks out and lovingly attends to the needs of the persecuted. Surely then, man is not independent - success or failure lie in the hands of God. Even the power to enjoy the gifts of His bounty is from His hands, dispensed according to His will. Therefore trust and do not criticize Him.

C. He is the Judge of the universe.

Besides being Creator and Preserver, Ecclesiastes also characterizes God as the Judge of the universe; this Solomon does in no uncertain terms. To the young the ^awarning is given: "But know thou, that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment" (11:9b). Each person is to keep mindful of the all-embracing fact of an appointed time for judgment, where God the Judge alone shall hold sway - "God shall judge the righteous and the wicked; for there is a time for every purpose and for every work" (Ecc. 3:17); 12:14 emphasizes the all-inclusive nature of the judgment that the Judge is going to institute: "For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil."

To many, the fact that God is the Judge of the world, does not seem very believable and demonstrable. What they experience seems to speak against that fact. Because punishment does not always immediately follow an act of wickedness, they are inclined to doubt that God is actually the Judge. But Solomon warns against the error that because retribution is delayed or conflicts with their ideas of justice or their expectations, God takes no account of what His creatures do. Moral government does certainly exist and seeming exceptions are an indication to us that we cannot understand its course (11c), nevertheless, we must submit to its decrees, because we cannot contend with, or dictate to the Almighty God, 8:10. (Solomon frequently complains that moral government is not uniformly carried out, but in such passages

as 3:16-17, 8:16a, 11:9b, 12:14 - which shall presently be considered - he voices confidence in a future judgment, wherein all the seeming injustices and contradicting circumstances will be rectified. 8:12-13 is another passage that definitely proves that ^{government} moral does exist: "But it shall not be well with the wicked, neither shall he prolong his days, which are as a shadow; because he feareth not before God," 8:13; Cp. also 2:26).

1. Man's fall into sin has made it necessary for God to act as Judge.

If this question should be asked: "Why is it necessary for God to act as the Judge of the universe?" Is not love the very essence of God and is He not principally interested in demonstrating that love toward mankind? Does not His preserving love militate against the ominous idea of a 'judging,' a 'future retribution,' a 'final judgment, when the eternal decrees of God shall be executed?'

Did not God make man after His own divine image? "Lo, this only have I found, that God hath made man upright," declares Solomon in 7:29a. Why then should there be any need for a "judging"? The reason is immediately given in 7:29b, namely, men "have sought out many inventions." So although man was created morally good, patterned after the Almighty Creator Himself (Gen. 1:26ff), yet man permitted the Devil to tempt him to sin in the Garden of Paradise, and as a result, man fell from his high estate of original perfection. Man thus misused the free will with which he was endowed, and ever since has continually sought out and invented innumerable ways and devices for perpetrating

all manner of unrighteousness. Solomon knew from revelation that God originally had made man upright, but he saw only too vividly from experience that now man was evil.

Yes, every man is evil; there are no exceptions. Every human has strayed from the original path of righteousness. Therefore Solomon is justified in making the hard indictment that "there is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good and sinneth not" (7:20). And since man has sinned and come short of the glory of God, therefore the justice of God demands that man give an accounting for all of his "inventions" and deviations from the divine law. For that reason God as the Creator and preserver of the universe, must also exercise, in the cause of moral government, the prerogative of a Judge over His creatures.

2. There shall surely be a Judgment.

A careful study of Ecclesiastes shows conclusively that there shall surely be a final Judgment of all things. It proves that life does go on after death and that the soul of man is immortal. But as is the case with so much of the higher criticism that has been done in connection with the Bible, we are not surprised to find the "Black Sheep" of the Bible, the Book of Ecclesiastes, receiving the same negative treatment at the hands of the higher critics - only much more so. In the matter of Eschatology, the majority of critics strongly deny that Ecclesiastes knows of a life after death, much less of a judgment after death.

Adolph Lehmann, (in Bible Student and Teacher, pp. 19-20), bluntly states: "It is notable that in the Book of Ecclesiastes, there

is no hope of immortality, not a word about a future life. Death is the end, the extinction of man's existence. He dies as the beast dies. This is viewed as the evil of all evils - that reduces all of man's labour under the sun to vanity and a striving after nothing."

Similarly, it is the contention of Morris Jastrow, that "the most discouraging feature of Koheleth's attitude toward life is the constant undercurrent of 'one fate to all,' of the 'place to which all must go,'...man's end is not superior to that in store for the beast." (A Gentle Cynic Being the Book of Ecclesiastes, p. 177; 130).

Critics like the Frenchman Renan and the German Heine maintain that the central thought of the vanity of human affairs coupled with the summons to enjoy life, point to a disbelief in a present Providence and a future retribution.

Such passages that clearly teach a life after death - 2:26; 3:15; 3:17; 7:1; 7:18b. 26b. 29; 8:5.11-13; 9:5.6.10; 11:9; 12:1a. 7b. 9-11. 12-14 - are usually regarded by most critics, (E.g. Driver, Oesterley-Robinson, Delitzsch, H. Jastrow) as interpolations by a later scribe. To illustrate, Morris Jastrow, at the end of his book, A Gentle Cynic, gives a brief running commentary on Ecclesiastes and he prefaces it with this "enlightening" introduction: "The words of Koheleth in their original form, stripped of subsequent interpolations, maxims, comments." Reading along in his modern translation, we arrive at 3:16, which reads 'and furthermore, I saw under the sun in the place of justice wickedness, and where the righteous should have been, the wicked was,' but then 3:17, which speaks of the

the final judgment, is missing. The attention of the reader is then drawn to this omission by a footnote - "Our pious commentator," ridicules Jastrow, "shocked at this picture of perversion in a world supposed to be under the government of a just God, adds, in imitation of the style of Koheleth (v. 17) 'But I reflected that God will judge both the righteous and the wicked, for there is an appointed time for every occurrence and for every (fixed) act.' The commentator thus rather cleverly turns Koheleth's view of preordination against him. A supercommentator has added "fixed." (A Gentle Cynic, p.12).

These interpolations, it is maintained, were necessary additions made by "pious commentators" in order to substantiate the doctrine of a life after death, which in reality was unknown at Solomon's time. But that is not true; this doctrine was known already in Solomon's time. "The promised Woman's Seed was the hope already of the patriarchs in life and in death. The patriarch Jacob, to whom God gave the promise of a Savior and King (Gen. 35:10-12) could hopefully declare with his forebears, Abraham and Isaac, as his death drew near: "I have waited for thy salvation, O Lord" (Gen. 49:18). Hear the Psalmist David voices his trust and rests his hope in Christ, whom he believes will rise from the grave and sit in glory at the right hand of God: "Therefore my heart is glad, and my glory rejoiceth: my flesh also shall rest in hope. For thou wilt not leave my soul in hell; neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption. Thou wilt show me the path of life: in thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore" (Ps. 16:9-11).

with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil."

Cp. Gen. 4:1; 5:24; Job 19:23-30, etc. See also Matt. 22:31,32; Heb. 11:8-22.⁷ Furthermore, if there was anyone who knew of a life after death it was certainly Christ. Yet, at times he uses the same language as Solomon and no one has dared to deny on that account his knowledge of a life after death and a judgment. If we compare Ecclesiastes 9:5,6. and particularly v. 10:

"Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might, for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom in the grave, whither thou goest"

with

John 9:4 - "I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work,"

we see a marked similarity in thought and language.

Moreover, argue the critics (especially Driver), if the passages which seem to teach a life after death are not to be regarded as later interpolations, then they merely refer to temporal judgments. In 3:17 we read: "I said in mine heart, God shall judge the righteous and the wicked; for there is a time there (the emphatic $\square \psi$) for every purpose and for every work." However, Driver, followed by a Delitzsch, changes the punctuation of the emphatic $\square \psi$ to $\square \cdot \psi$ and thereupon translates: "For he hath appointed a time for," etc. and makes out the punishment to be of a temporal nature only.⁸

The judgments spoken of in the following passages are also judged by Driver to be of a temporal nature only:

11:9b - "But know thou, that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment."

12:14 - "For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil, or whether it be evil."

We reply to these arguments by stating that these passages cannot refer only to temporal judgment; since Solomon frequently complains of a lack of justice and judgment in this life and world.⁹ Note these complaints:

2:15a - "Then said I in my heart, as it happeneth to the fool, so it happeneth even to me; and why was I then more wise?"

4:1 - "So I returned and considered all the oppressions that are done under the sun: and behold the tears of such as were oppressed, and they had no comforter; and on the side of their oppressors there was power; but they had no comforter" (Cp. also 5:8).

7:15 - "All things have I seen in the days of my vanity: there is a just man that perisheth in his righteousness, and there is a wicked man that prolongeth his life in his wickedness."

9:2 emphasizes the point that generally speaking there is apparently no discrimination in the distribution of good and evil - "All things come alike to all: there is one event to the righteous, and to the wicked, etc."

Hence, since Solomon's complaint is that judgment is not always executed in this world, then he must refer in the foregoing references to a judgment in the world to come after death.

In view of the wicked men in high position, our author comforts himself with the reflection that in good time the righteous and the wicked will be judged by God - "And moreover I saw under the sun the place of judgment, that wickedness was there; and the place of righteousness, that iniquity was there. I said in mine heart, God shall judge the righteous and the wicked; for there is a time there for every purpose and for every work" (5:16-17). The vague but em-

phatic "there" - 'there is a time there' - implies the world beyond the grave, the adverb undoubtedly referring to God and His world (the preceding clause names God).

This same thought enables the wise man to patiently endure affliction, "because to every purpose there is time and judgment" (8:6a) - the oppressor shall certainly meet with his reward. It is plain that retribution in this present life is not meant, for Solomon's lament is that moral government is not uniformly enforced in this world. Therefore he must be referring to another state of existence, wherein full justice shall be executed. This fact of a future retribution is made quite clear in the warning given to the young in 11:9 - "...but know thou that for all these things, God will bring thee into judgment." What judgment? Not a temporal punishment, wherein God will punish youth with sickness and every form of misery as a consequence of its sins, but what is meant is something much more far-reaching - eternal judgment in the world beyond the grave is here set before youth as a strong warning to avoid all excesses. Solomon's sense of God's justice in the light of the perplexing anomalies of human life was so strong that he could unwaveringly appeal to the inner conviction of a coming time of "accounting" as a motive for the guidance of action and conduct.

That Solomon in 2:26 speaks of retribution as being carried out in this world is no argument that in 11:9 he is not referring to the judgment that is to take place in the hereafter. Rather, experience taught him that temporal punishment and reward

fail to materialize in many cases (Cp. 8:14 where the events befalling the righteous and the wicked are not in accord with our expectations). This strange method of meting out justice (i.e., strange and incongruous to our human way of thinking) forces Solomon to the conclusion that life is not the end of everything; there is another existence where actions shall be tried, final and complete justice executed, where the righteous and the wicked shall receive their just deserts. "Though a sinner do evil an hundred times, and his days be prolonged, yet surely I know that it shall be well with them that fear God, which are as a shadow; because he feareth not before God. There is a vanity which is done upon the earth; that there be just men, unto whom it happeneth according to the work of the wicked; again, there be wickedmen, to whom it happeneth according to the work of the righteous: I said that this also is vanity." (8:12-13). "Yet surely I know" - there is a conviction! There is certainty!

There are passages in Ecclesiastes, however, that when taken by themselves and not together with the context or whole scope of the book itself, seem to lend support to the critical denial of a life after death and of a future judgment. Such a passage that is oft-quoted by the critics is: 3:19,20 - "For that which befalleth the sons of men befalleth beasts; even one thing befalleth them: as the one dieth, so dieth the other; yea, they have all one breath, so that a man hath no preeminence above a beast; for all is vanity. All go unto one place; all are of the dust, and all turn to dust again. Who knoweth the spirit of man that goeth upward, and the spirit of the beast that goeth downward to the earth?"

Maintaining that Solomon knew nothing of a future life, Driver cites this passage as proof, stating that the "doctrine is expressly treated as unproven."¹⁰ Others (Oesterley and Robinson) deduce that the "doctrine of immortality had not as yet been attained," and the reason for this conclusion is that "the writer's intense belief in God, which is so often expressed in the book, would assuredly have suggested a more exalted conception of the life hereafter had the thought of the time been sufficiently advanced."¹¹ But as stated previously, this is not true! The doctrine of a life after death was known at Solomon's time. The strong patriarchal belief in the promised seed of the woman is a recurring triumphal note throughout the Old Testament, a hope which buoyed-up the Old Testament saints, particularly in their dying hour. Note how Job in all his misery, could triumphantly exclaim and rejoice in the coming heavenly bliss which he firmly believed would follow the resurrection: "For I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: and though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God: whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another."

What, therefore, does Solomon mean to say in 3:19-21?

Certainly, he is not giving voice to a bare materialism - that man's end is the same as the beasts'. That would be a gloomy deduction corresponding with the Greek philosophy of life. And he assuredly is not here 'sharing a belief common to the Semites that the dead are gathered in a great cavern in the earth, huddled together, conscious but inactive.'¹² But all he is doing is voicing a general observation

the the beast. Bill reads - "He hath made every thing beautiful

a truth which all must readily acknowledge, namely, that 'judging by only outward appearances, without the light of revelation, there seems to be no difference between man and the lowly beast. After all, if God had not revealed the truth, who would know anything about the life after death,¹³ or man's final destiny?

On the other hand, Solomon sees a definite difference between the spirit of man and that of the lower animals of creation, in that the former goes, as he holds, upward (3:21), returns "unto the God who gave it" (12:7), while the latter goes downward to the earth to extinction. Does not this fact plainly mark a difference in the future destinies of man and the beast? Do not these passages clearly show that there shall be a future for the individual soul, and that it shall be brought into intimate connection with a personal God, who "shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be bad?" (12:14). In fact, the whole course of Solomon's discourse tends to set forth and emphasize one all-important lesson, namely, that man's true wisdom lies in fearing God and looking forward to the judgment (12:13,14).

3. There is an inescapable reason why man will be judged.

If what has been said is not sufficient proof that Ecclesiastes teaches a life after death, then let us examine 3:11, which proves conclusively that Solomon knew of a future life of rewards and punishments. 3:11 proves that there is an inescapable reason why man will be judged. The reason for this is that God has placed "eternity" into the heart of man, differentiating him from the the beast. 3:11 reads - "He hath made every thing beautiful

Olam ist das Nicht-Zeitliche, nicht dem Menschengesetz der Vergänglichkeithkeit Unterworfenene (vgl. \aleph in v.4), fast möchte man sagen: Gottliche (so Wild) im Menchen."

It is for this inescapable reason, therefore, that man will be judged. It is inevitable. Why? Because God has placed eternity into his heart, which "is the seat of life in its every phase and form, physical, moral or ethical, and the highest form, spiritual life. It is what we call soul. Into this heart, the seat of life, God has placed eternity. Not only (as Delitzsch thinks) the idea of eternity, or the struggling after its apprehension, or the longing for it, but eternity itself." ^{but z.A.W. 1854 'Olam #24 contra}

God gave man this eternity on the sixth day of creation when He breathed into him the spirit of life (Gen.2:7), a life, while similar to that of the beasts in its earthy make-up, is far superior to the beasts, because it was made after the image of God, and possesses moral, spiritual, and eternal qualities. These qualities are entirely absent from the animal world.

According to 3:18 God 'manifested men,' i.e., He separated them ($\aleph \gamma \aleph$), placed them in a class by themselves, distinct from the beasts, by placing eternity into their hearts (3:11). And the reason why God did this was that they might perceive that as far as they themselves are concerned, they are beasts. However, to conclude from 2:18-21 that man is no more than the beast is anything, that he is without an immortal soul, is not in harmony with the context, and definitely militates against other clear passages of Scriptures.

the whole duty of man."

If men have no pre-eminence over the beasts in anything, then what about reason, conscience, self-consciousness, morality, hope, an eternal soul? Have the beasts these? The very fact that Solomon concludes that man is not above the beast as far as his physical life is concerned, is a humiliation for man, showing to what low estate he has descended as the result of the Fall. Without the fear of God in his heart, and madly chasing after the vain things of this world, man reduces himself to the level of the beast.

Although man fell from his original uprightness (7:29), yet eternity remains an integral part of his life, and will inhere in him forever. "This life ^e being placed into the very heart of man, into the seat of life, controls, motivates, ^ractuates every form of life, and continues even after physical death. The body dies, the soul lives on, returning to its Maker to receive the things done in the body, whether it be good or bad, II Cor. 5:10; Eccl. 11:9; 12:14. There is eternity in every thought, word, action arising out of the heart of man."¹⁸

This quality of "eternity" in man is certainly a sobering fact, and one that should make everyone conscious of the impending judgment. While it is true that infringement of God's laws does not always bring punishment in this world, nor the observance of those laws reward, still retribution is certain in the life beyond the grave (11:9). It is for no small purpose then that Solomon concludes his treatise with these ~~and~~ urgent words: "Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: fear God and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man."

Why should man do this? "For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil" (12:13,14).

As a creature of the eternal God, created after His image, man's eternity is inseparably bound up with that of God's. Behind the transitory objects of the world, man is able to discern something eternal (Rom. 1:20). Since the eternity of God is set in his heart, it would appear reasonable to expect that the knowledge of God's doings should be accessible to his understanding. But at this point man stumbles and discovers that God has reserved something for Himself. Man cannot fathom the workings of God among men - "No man can find out the work that God maketh from the beginning to the end" (3:11c). This being the case, man ought not be guilty of this attitude: "Bah, lasz alles gehen, wie es geht, lasz kommen, was kommt!"¹⁹

That was not Solomon's attitude, despite the seeming pessimistic and fatalistic bent of his book. True, God's moral government presented many perplexing anomalies to him. But he found a solution; he rose above the enigmas of life. He was a thoughtful, believing observer. He was mindful of that great and comprehensive final judgment which each day brings closer, when both the wicked and the righteous shall be arraigned before the supreme Judge of the universe (3:17). And it was only by an exercise of faith in God's justice and goodness that he rose superior to the depressing effects of experience.

When Socrates drew near to death he said to his friends: "I have faith in the future, and I think I see the golden islands,

but oh that we had a stouter vessel or stronger word." That has been called the most pathetic cry that has come down from the old world.²⁰ At death, we need not be in a quandary as to what the future holds; we have an assured hope of life beyond the grave. Ecclesiastes does not leave us in the dark in that respect. A time of vanity and futility has been appointed for us to meet face to face with God. When that time comes, may each of us be able to stand before our Creator and effort to find true and abiding happiness, he made a searching test of all these things; in short, he withheld not his heart from any joy, but each succeeding test ended in bitter disappointment. He found each wholly incompetent to satisfy the cravings of the soul. So he concludes that all such strivings are as futile as "chasing after the wind" would be. Why? Because these things in themselves cannot secure and are not the cause of any happiness which might accompany them. Happiness, he discovered after his long, fruitless search, is solely the gift of God, who permits enjoyment and possession according to His good pleasure and according to the all-wise dispensing of His moral government.

How we may prepare ourselves to that glorious end, we shall attempt to learn from the advice that Solomon sets forth. This shall be our task in Part III of this thesis, which we shall now consider. Then, ever against this background of fruitlessness, futility, emptiness, ever against this seemingly gloomy outlook on life, we saw God in all His transcendent glory as the marvelous Creator and as the merciful Preserver and as the supreme Judge of the universe. In studying these attributes of God we could not escape the compelling fact that the transience of everything earthly is far outshaded by a God, who is eternal, and who has established eternal decrees in the interest of His creatures; who further, has made man superior to

III. What advice does Solomon give on how to live in this world of vanities?

Up to this point, we have made a brief study of the term ^{5.7} and the words and phrases that the author uses to enlarge upon this thematic concept. In passage after passage the various categories of vanity manifest themselves to us. Solomon predicates the vanity of wisdom, pleasure, wealth, power, mirth, business, labor, etc. In an effort to find true and abiding happiness, he made a searching test of all these things; in short, he withheld not his heart from any joy; but each succeeding test ended in bitter disappointment. He found each wholly incompetent to satisfy the cravings of the soul. So he concludes that all such strivings are as futile as "chasing after the wind" would be. Why? Because these things in themselves cannot secure and are not the cause of any happiness which might accompany them. Happiness, he discovered after his long, fruitless search, is solely the gift of God, who permits enjoyment and possession according to His good pleasure and according to the all-wise dispensing of His moral government.

Then, over against this background of fruitlessness, futility, emptiness, over against this seemingly gloomy outlook on life, we saw God in all His transcendent glory as the marvelous Creator and as the beneficent Preserver and as the supreme Judge of the universe. In studying these attributes of God we could not escape the compelling fact that the transientness of everything earthly is far outshadowed by a God, who is eternal, and who has established eternal decrees in the interest of His creatures; who further, has made man superior to

the beasts by placing eternity into his heart, and in so doing, has made him a responsible creature, answerable to His Maker. And since man is incapable of changing these eternal decrees or of comprehending them, all the vicissitudes and changes of fortune that are his brief earthly lot, should not evoke criticism and judgment of God and His works, but rather, prompt him to forget any notion of independence, and instead, humbly cast himself upon God and His all-embracing mercy.

Now we have come to the third and concluding section of this thesis. After learning what "vanity" is and seeing how God is characterized in Ecclesiastes, we are now ready for advice on how to live in this world of vanities, and how to find happiness in it. No doubt, many disturbing questions are still revolving in the mind, such questions perhaps, as: In this weary world, burdened down with sorrow and sin, is there anything really worth seeking, worth having? anything that will satisfy the cravings of the restless soul, and bring peace of mind to man's troubled heart? What should be the chief object (summum bonum) of man's desire and pursuit on this earth? To what worthwhile goal should one direct and devote his life. What is the chief end of mortal man?

Yes, these are questions that have disturbed the great minds of all ages, not only Solomon. It was such questions as these that impelled him to make his long, comprehensive, wearying search (1:3; 1:13; 2:36). Similar questions regarding the chief good in life were the cause of much of the discussion among the ancient philosophers; they too sought to learn wherein lay true happiness and the answer to

the deep longings and yearnings of man's inner self. To the ancient philosophers the true God was an unknown God (Acts 17,23). Therefore they could not possibly arrive at the true answer to those questions. In the case of Solomon also, there was for many a year a fatal defect in his search, which he did not succeed in uncovering until the declining years of his mispent life. Ever since his apostasy from God he had lost the one important key to happiness and contentment, namely, God; in his inquiry into the chief good he had left God out of the picture. The great Church Father, Augustine, strikes to the core of the matter, when he declares, "Thou hast made us for Thyself, and our hearts are restless until they find rest in Thee."¹ If King Solomon's quest had ended without finding the key to happiness in God, it would be the saddest story ever told.

But out of the maze of life's perplexing experiences, up from the depths of profound disappointment, Solomon emerged victorious; he did not lose himself in hopeless despair. From God's Word, which he had neglected for so many years and which again he had come to cherish, he draws great lessons of life which he learned the hard way, through the bitter trial and error method. These lessons he sets down in Ecclesiastes for the benefit of his readers, with the hope that they may profit from them and thereby avoid the same pitfalls that undermined all his efforts. In particular, he also adds a warning to the young not to try to find happiness in the sins that he himself had indulged in (11:9; 11:10.12). It is only right at the conclusion of this treatise that he sets forth the real moral lesson, namely:

measure toward those creatures of His who are wretched and persecuted;

"Fear God and keep his commandments."(12:13).

A. Solomon exhorts us to fear God.

This is Solomon's first and foremost piece of advice: "Fear God," we are told. Surrounded as this precept is in an atmosphere of "judgment," (the preceding verses as well as the final verse speak of the last judgment), it would not be unlikely for one who is not acquainted with this term "fear" to draw the wrong conclusion, and take our author to mean a "slavish fear;" that in view of the impending judgment and our puny stature over against the Almighty Creator and Ruler and Judge of the universe, man must now realize his most humble station in life and bow low in fear and trembling before the Almighty Presence.

But that is far from what Solomon means. Here, as elsewhere in Scripture, "to fear God" means to revere Him as our God and gracious Father. Our reverence of God should flow from hearts filled with love toward Him (Ps. 73:25-26; Matt. 22:37). The believer realizes and recognizes his responsibility and obligation to God and this inspires him with reverent fear. This fear is not the shrinking fear of the slave or coward, but it is the fear of being disloyal to God and of displeasing Him by committing sin. True fear of God enters our hearts only with faith and becomes the motive power of a godly life.

God is entitled to this fear and reverence, too. Besides being a gracious, redeeming God (we will shortly treat this aspect of God's love), He manifests His love and compassion in a particular measure toward those creatures of His who are wretched and persecuted;

in fact, He "seeketh ^{the} ~~and~~ persecuted." 3:15 reads in the original: (Not KARX God.)

"That which hath been is now and that which is to be hath already been and God seeketh the persecuted." The first part of this verse reminds us that our whole existence from beginning to end is predetermined by God. How is it possible then that anything can befall us, with which His ^{had} ~~had~~ is not concerned, which He does not see, and which in His own good time does not make work out to our best welfare? Truly, God is a God of love; His love is limitless. The Berleburger Bible, commenting on the "persecuted" in the present passage, remarks: "Therefore thou shouldst not take offence thereat as to allow thy self on its account to be drawn away from the highest good. For God will not leave unpunished the injustice and the violence which are done to those that fear Him."² Here, quite manifestly, "those that fear Him" are those that love and revere God and look to Him for compassion and protection. How easy then it should be for a believer to "fear a God" who is such a God of love and mercy!

In this connection, the preceding verse is also helpful.

3:14a, speaking about the unalterable counsels of God, points out that no one can hinder their fulfilment. 3:14b gives the reason for man's insignificant role as far as the eternal decrees of God are concerned: "And God doeth it that they (men) should fear before Him." Since no one can frustrate God's plans, therefore it behooves us, feeling our absolute weakness and helplessness, to cast ourselves in trusting reliance on God. There is no slavish fear inculcated here. Men are not asked to be afraid of God because they are unable to encroach upon His counsels. But, as Hengstenberg correctly says: "Whoever believeth

that whatever happens is not in his own power, will not undertake anything in his own responsibility, will not worry and vex himself too much but let God rule in all things: what God gives, he will use, what God withholds, he will dispense with; if God takes ought away, he will endure it patiently. In this way God maintains fully His own divine honor, and at the same time restrains us from arrogance, inasmuch as no man then can say - I am king, prince, lord, manager, governor, learned or otherwise, but must always confess that God alone is Lord. That is the true fear of God, that is the highest, holiest, and most suitable service of God, the service to which Solomon, David, and all the prophets earnestly summon men."³ Not a servile fear, but a fear that is in reality reverence, which emanates from love and manifests itself in obedience to our Lord and Master. Accordingly, Driver is not correct when he characterizes this fear that Solomon exhorts us to put into practice, as "pale and cheerless."⁴ He does admit, however, that this exerts a constraining power over our author. True, over against the seemingly gloomy background of Ecclesiastes, Solomon's few references to fear (3:14; 5:7; 7:18; 8:12-13; 12:13) may appear to be "pale and cheerless," but although during the main course of his life he forgot wherein the true fear of God lay, nevertheless at the close of life, at which time he now speaks to us, he once more returns to the faith and trust of his youth, to the wisdom of fearing God and keeping His commandments, a wisdom, which he repeatedly urges the young to follow in his Book of Proverbs. His recurring theme in Proverbs is simply this: you are wise only if you fear the Lord. "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge: but fools despise wisdom and instruction." (1:7; 23:17; 24:21; 2:5; 10:27; 19:23).

"Though a sinner do evil an hundred times, and his days be prolonged, yet surely I know that it shall be well with ^{them} ~~him~~ that fear God, which fear before him: But it shall not be well with the wicked, neither shall he prolong his days, which are as a shadow; because he feareth not before God." (8:12-13). It was Solomon's firm conviction and belief that in the long run righteousness would triumph and wickedness eventually meet its just deserts. There certainly is nothing "pale and cheerless" about this "fear;" he was convinced that this was the highest and noblest service that man could render God and one that could bring comfort, and peace of conscience, and keep him on the path that leads to the future world of bliss, the same path that his forefathers had trod; on the other hand, he felt sure that not to fear God would result in inevitable retribution, appearances to the contrary notwithstanding.

We need to remember that we must all appear before the judgment seat of God. But above all, if love toward God, not base fear, is to be the animating motive and dynamic of our life, then we need to remember that God is always with us, observing what we do, not that He may spy upon us in order to accumulate heavy charges against us, but that He may help us to do well; not to frown upon our pleasures but to hallow and prolong them, and to be Himself our chief good and our supreme delight. Such a loving God, therefore, does not evoke fear in the sense of being afraid, but rather trust and reverence in faith and a loving obedience.

"ing" has substantially the same force as "obey-
 ing," is clear from I Sam. 15:22, where Samuel says to Saul, "With the
 Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as obeying

B. Solomon exhorts us to hear and do God's Word.

The second piece of advice that Solomon gives on how to live in this world of vanities is to hear and do God's Word. In 5:1 he admonishes to "keep thy foot when thou goest to the house of God, and be more ready to hear, than to give the sacrifice of fools: for they consider not that they do evil." Paraphrasing this we would say: Watch your conduct when worshipping God in His holy place and take heed to the reading of the Law and Gospel content of Scripture lest you be guilty of "worshiping" God with meaningless formal acts of devotion.

Here in this passage the information is given as to where the pious Israelites of old received the dynamic of the Gospel which prompted them to "fear God and keep His commandments." If Solomon is here referring to the Temple at Jerusalem (and it is not improbable that he is), then we know that the Israelites were instructed in both the Law and Gospel. For in the Temple, not only the Law of Moses was read, expounded and applied, but also the Psalms were sung, and the Prophets read (including, above all, the great Messianic sections, on which the Israelites based their future hope and deliverance). In the Temple services a deep reverence and fear in the Lord was inculcated in the Israelite's heart, which manifested itself in consequent dutiful and loving obedience.

The Berleburger Bible points out in this connection: "But that the matter to be heard is much rather the voice of the Lord, and that consequently "hearing" has substantially the same force as "obeying," is clear from I Sam. 15:22, where Samuel says to Saul, "Hath the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as obeying

the voice of the Lord? Behold, to hear (obey) is better than a good sacrifice, and to hearken better than the fat of rams."⁵(Cp. also Jer. 7:33). Hosea 6:6 is another parallel passage, "for I have pleasure in love, and not in sacrifices; and in knowledge of the Lord more than in burnt offerings."

So hearing and doing are inseparable. The "doing" is the natural outgrowth of faith as the result of hearing and believing the Word. The Bible tells us that "God is love," I John 4:8. Now if love is the highest conception we can have of God, then it is evident that we can think of no higher ideal for man. The character of the believer is formed in faith but it lives in love. In fact, love includes all the other virtues of a believer which grow out of love to God and man. Just as an apple tree produces fruit by virtue of its nature, so the believer's faith issues in love.

It is not strange then that the exhortation to "keep His commandments" immediately follows the exhortation "to fear God," for love is intimately connected with the fear of God; we will not "keep His commandments" if we do not "fear" God. Our faith in Him as our loving Father through Christ impels us to "keep His commandments," for we know that if we disobey these commandments, we sin against His wishes and thereby displease Him. "Fear the Lord and depart from evil," is the voice of Proverbs 3:7. Again, "fear of the Lord is a fountain of life to depart from the snares of death," Proverbs 14:27. This holy fear of the almighty God, is to be the controlling factor of our whole lives; it is the whole duty of man (12:13). Therefore we fear God "when with our whole heart we cling to Him as our God

and gladly revere Him as the highest Being, honor Him as the highest Being, honor Him with our lives, and avoid what displeases Him."⁶ Such fear, of course, is possible only through faith in the Gospel.

Included in Man's whole duty, besides the fear and love he is to show God, is the love that the presence of his neighbor requires. Solomon exhorts us to help the poor and needy and shows how the Lord God will reward the good we do to others. "Cast thy bread upon the waters," is the directive given in 11:1, "for thou shalt find it after many days." In the East, so the Pulpit Commentary informs us (p. 275), *bread is made* in the form of thin flat cakes. Now if these round, flat pieces of bread be thrown onto the water, they will temporarily float, but then sink. Naturally, such a procedure is highly irrational and benefits no one. But that is just the point here. "Do your kindnesses, exert yourself, in the most unlikely quarters, not thinking of gratitude or return, but only of duty." Eventually a recompense will come - "Thou shalt find it after many days." We realize, of course, that to do good to our neighbor with the express object of a reward in mind, is not the right motive that is to prompt an act of charity. But we do have ~~the right motive that in~~ the promise and encouragement that in due course of time a reward will be given to those who partake and practise unselfish charity. In Proverbs, Solomon expresses a similar thought: "He that hath pity upon the poor lendeth unto the Lord and that which he hath given will he pay him again." (19:17). "The liberal soul shall be made fat." (11:25; 11:17).

The subsequent verse (11:2) includes further the unlimited charity that should characterize the person who fears and loves God.

We are enjoined to "give a portion to seven, and also to eight," or in other words, to as many as are in need of our kindness. Lest we become complacent and uncharitable, a reminder immediately follows this injunction: "For thou knowest that not what evil shall be upon the earth." (11:26). Cfr. also 2;14. We ought to be beneficent, for we know not how soon we ourselves may meet with adversity and need help. Not KATA Moffet

True love for our neighbor that flows from love to God will lead us to take the right course. "The desire of a man is his kindness." (Prov. 19:22). The believer's whole heart is filled with eagerness to be kind and loving. What a great blessing we would be to to others and to ourselves if we would always "deligently seek good!"

When our love reaches out to embrace both God and man, then we are keeping God's commandments; then we are fulfilling, as far as it is humanly possible, "the whole duty of man" (12:13). George Eliot, one of the great names in English literature, in a conversation with a friend, spoke of the three words that have been used as inspiring trumpet-calls for man - God, Immortality, Duty. With dire earnestness she declared, "How inconceivable was the first, how unbelievable the second, how peremptory and absolute the third."⁷ We can well imagine the immeasurable sadness that must have filled the soul of George Eliot; for to be without God, without hope, with only duty left, leaves little reason to smile and face life courageously.

However, Ecclesiastes clearly proves the existence of a God and the fact of the Immortality of the soul. As far as Duty is concerned, Ecclesiastes verifies the Biblical truth that when man

fears, loves, and trusts in God above all things, and loves his neighbor as himself then he brings peace and contentment into his life. Solomon had learned that the wisest thing for men to do was "to rejoice and to do good in his life" (3:12). All the "oppressions" (4:1) and inequalities that make the carrying out of duty at times irksome and seemingly useless, are part of God's plan of moral government. Lest we become disgusted and resign ourselves to "slothfulness" and "idle hands," Solomon makes it a point to urge us to apply ourselves to the duty at hand with the utmost diligence and conscientiousness - "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest" (9:10). ^{of Jesus recorded by} The words of St. John the Evangelist show that he too felt the urgency to perform the duty of the moment - "I must work the work of Him that sent me while it is day. The night cometh when no man can work" (John 9:4).

The glorious consolation that we have in carrying out of our duty is that God is our Helper. Without Him we can do nothing. We fulfil our duty alone by God's grace, as the result of the gracious activity of God in our hearts by which He forgives us our sins through Christ Jesus, thus making it possible for us, with the aid of the Holy Spirit, to lead a life of sanctification in the fear of God. Thus only with God's help are we able to do our whole duty to fear God and keep His commandments.

One big objection that most critics voice against Ecclesiastes, including some very conservative critics, is that the Book

has no reference to Christ; this absence of Christ and His work gives them many a serious doubt as to whether the Book has a right to be included in the sacred canon. But if Eccl. 3:15 is studied closely it will be found that there God's love, as it is made possible by the Messiah, is stressed. 3:15 reads like this in the original: "That which hath been is now and what is for the purpose of coming into existence, has been in existence long ago, and "God seeketh the persecuted." The point of the passage is this: Whatever exists today existed already in the eternal counsels of God (including His eternal decree of salvation through Jesus Christ). Everything that happens, happens according to this prearranged plan of God. Since God's decrees decide everything, we should look to God and ^{not} our fellowmen for support. The last clause in the passage, "And God seeketh the persecuted," falls into harmony with the preceding two clauses, as soon as it is perceived that the reference they contain to the divine pre-ordination is intended as a consolation: "Nothing can happen to us which He has not sent, and which will not conduce to our blessedness,"⁸ i.e., both physical and spiritual blessedness.

Not only does God seek out "the persecuted" with consolation, not only will He not leave unpunished the violence and injustice done to those of His creatures who fear Him, but at one and the same time He seeks out the persecuted with spiritual comfort and hope; He makes them conscious that Christ is their friend and Good Shepherd; He will not leave them or forsake them. Heaven is waiting for them if they will only remain steadfast and believe in Him unto the end. The Israelites, whom

Solomon is primarily addressing, rested their hopes of deliverance in the promised Messiah.

The critics are not wholly correct then when they deny the absence of Christ and His redemptive work. True, the doctrine of justification is not expressly taught in Ecclesiastes. But it is presupposed. Without any undue stretch of the imagination we find God's love as manifested in the Messiah stressed in 3:15. In addition, let us broach these questions: Why does Ecclesiastes frequently mention a time of future rewards and punishments? Why does it inculcate the fear of God so that one may adequately prepare for the future judgment? Why does it mark a difference in the final destinies of man and beast and speak of the soul of man returning u to God who gave it? Why is God so solicitious in His love toward His downtrodden creatures (3:15)? Why is Solomon so confident that "it shall be well with them that fear God" (8:12)? Why? Because Solomon was now, at long last, finally again aware of the instruction he had received from his father Dawid as a youth. Solomon knew of God's love as it was to be manifested in the person of Christ the Messiah (Cfr. 5:1 where the temple service is referred to. The Temple sacrifices were symbolic of Christ's coming). Furthermore, no judgment could take place until Christ would come and perform His work and take His place as Judge at the right hand of God. While it stands to reason that our whole conception of God's love in Christ Jesus is much clearer than Solomon's because of the fuller New Testament revelations, still it cannot be maintained that Ecclesiastes is totally devoid of the mention of the grace of God in Christ Jesus.

While the doctrine of Justification is presupposed in Ecclesiastes, the need of sanctification is clearly taught; it is very much in evidence; Solomon strongly inculcates a holy life ("do good," "fear God and keep His commandments"). However, without justification there can be no sanctification. This is another reason why we maintain that justification is presupposed in Ecclesiastes.

So man does have a divine Helper in the person of Christ.

By His sacrifice on the cross He took away the sins which had rendered the pursuit of holiness a hopeless task. By the implanting of His Spirit (Who gives us the power to put our faith into practice), ^{and} ~~no less~~ by the inspiration of His example, He seeks to win us to the love of our neighbor, to fidelity in the discharge of our daily duty, and to that cheerful and constant trust in the providence of God by which we are freed from the shackling effects of care and fear. Christ, the Immanuel, by becoming man and dwelling among us, has proved that "God is with us," that He will in very fact dwell with men upon earth as their invisible, yet ever nigh, Helper. He, the Victory over death, by His glorious resurrection from the grave, has proved the truth of a future judgment and eternal life.

B. Solomon encourages us to enjoy what God has given.

The third piece of advice projected by Solomon (and which is intimately linked up with his preceding advice to fear God and hear and do His word, and which can only effectually be carried out when that preliminary advice is constantly kept in mind), is this:

enjoy what God has given! Be satisfied with it! Do not be ungrateful! Neither overestimate nor underestimate His gifts! Live a godly life in the fear of God, do His will, humbly accept what He gives as our lot in life, and by His grace our hearts will be gladdened. Herein lies the real secret to earthly happiness, the "summum bonum" of life. Here, briefly stated, lies the great key to contentment. But now to elaborate.

In 3:12 Solomon bids us "to rejoice and do good in life." The same thought is contained in 3:22, where Solomon concludes "That there is nothing better, than that a man should rejoice in his own works; for that is his portion: for who shall bring him to see what shall be after him?" Man is not the master of his fate; he is powerless to control the providential arrangements of God in the world. Therefore his duty and happiness consist in enjoying the present, in making the best of things as they are, and in using the temporal gifts which God grants. In so doing, we will perform our present duties, content ourselves with the daily flow of events, and not vex our hearts with concern for the future - "For who shall bring him to see what shall be after him?" Why torment ourselves with fear and hopes of the future, when neither we by our own power nor by any one else's power can foresee what the future holds?

"Go thy way," again reiterates Solomon, "eat thy bread with joy, and drink thy wine with a merry heart; for God now accepted thy works" (i.e., the eating and drinking just mentioned).

"Let thy garments be always white (symbols of joy and purity), and let thy head lack no ointment.

"Live joyfully with the wife whom thou lovest all the days of the life of thy vanity, which He hath given thee under the sun, all the days of thy vanity: for this is thy portion in this life, and in thy labour which thou takest under the sun" (9:7-9).

No selfish life of Epicurean pleasure is here enjoined, no unbridled licentiousness and sensuality, but rather a thankful and moderate enjoyment of God's good gifts. Such consecrated and moderate enjoyment is allowed by God for toil which accompanies a properly spent life.⁹

Now at the close of a misspent life, Solomon realized that truth only too keenly. As a result of his bitter experiences he finally was forced to the conclusion that the temperate enjoyment of the good of this life is the only proper aim and that this is entirely the gift of God, who withholds or dispenses this pleasure according to His gracious will, as the following passage clearly indicates: "He that loveth silver shall not be satisfied with silver; nor he that loveth abundance with increase: this is also vanity. When goods increase, they are increased that eat them: what good is there to the owners thereof saving the beholding of them with their eyes? The sleep of a labouring man is sweet, whether he eat little or much: but the abundance of the rich will not suffer him to sleep" (5:10-12). The verse illustrates the fact that no matter how much riches man may try to accumulate, the mere possession of it does not result in enjoyment. He derives no real satisfaction from the luxury which it enables him to procure; instead, it brings him added trouble and worry, increased expenses, sleepless nights. Perhaps the only enjoyment that he

actually gets from his amassed wealth is the contemplation of it, a doubtful pleasure, to say the least!

No, except God grant the enjoyment, man is without it. The unbelieving human heart is like quicksilver, however, never at rest. If a man had the wisdom of Solomon himself, the power of a mighty monarch, the riches of a Rockefeller, or all these combined, he still would not be satisfied and at rest. It is not the wisdom, riches, labor, laughter, power, etc., which Solomon condemns, but the evil, restless desire of unbelieving man, who foolishly looks to these things in themselves to give him the much-desired happiness and enjoyment, instead of confidently trusting in the Giver of all good gifts. "It is vain for you to rise up early, to sit up late, to eat the bread of sorrows," chides Solomon in Psalm 127:2, "for so he giveth his beloved sleep." All this leads to the conclusion that we should make the best of life such as it is, seeking neither poverty nor riches, but being content to enjoy with sobriety the good that God gives, remembering that the power to use and enjoy this good is a gratuitous blessing that comes solely from God. (Cfr. chap. 6, esp. v. 21; 2:26).

This is the same thought with which chapter five concludes: "...it is good and comely for one to eat and drink, and to enjoy the good of all his labour, that he taketh under the sun all the days of his life, which God giveth him: for it is his portion. Every man also to whom God giveth riches and wealth, and hath given him power to eat thereof, and to take his portion, and to rejoice in his labour, this is the gift of God. For he shall not much remember the days of his life;

which is accorded to him by divine beneficence. 10

because God answereth him in the joy of his heart." Man's portion is this calm enjoyment which God allots to him; nothing more than that must be expected. The man who has discovered the true source of calm enjoyment, shall not concern himself much with the shortness of life, or its uncertainties and inequalities, or its troubles. Rather, he puts his mind at ease with the counsel of Christ in Matt. 6:34, namely: "Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof."

God being the Giver of all earthly possessions, and the source of enjoyment itself, should prompt us, as the recipients of this gracious outpouring of providential love, to be always satisfied and content with our lot in life. That man himself cannot secure his own enjoyment and happiness has been adequately shown. In fact, left to himself, he does not even know what is the real good in life that brings happiness - whether pleasure, virtue, wisdom, etc. - even the wisest of mortal beings, Solomon, left to himself, failed miserably to find the answer. "For who knoweth what is good for man in this life, all the days of his vain life which he spendeth as a shadow? For who can tell a man what shall be after him under the sun." (6:12). Man cannot look into the future and arrange his life so as to find the maximum amount of happiness. Therefore he should realize that his happiness consists in not minimizing or under^{my}estimating God's gifts, but in acquiescing "in the divine government, to enjoy with moderation the goods of life, and to be content with the modified satisfaction which is accorded to him by divine beneficence."¹⁰

that we live Solomon not only bids us enjoy life but gives us cogent reasons for enjoying it. If ever we become despondent (and we do because we are frail, sinful beings), then we should remember that it is God's wish that we be happy; He it is that has put us on earth; from eternity he has prepared the way to heaven for us by way of the cross through faith. If this eternal vision at times becomes obscured by the vicissitudes of life, then let us not forget that God is behind the scenes ruling the world for our good. The following facts are sufficient proof for that:

3:11a - The harmony in the world which manifests itself in the creation as a whole and also in God's moral government of the universe.

3:11c - It is true, we cannot always see the working out of this harmony in our individual lives, simply because it is impossible to fathom God's works (Cfr. 8:17).

3:11b - The very fact, however, that God has placed "eternity into our hearts," thus making us highly exalted above the beast, and has an eternal destiny in store for us, ought to free us from despondency and instead, make us,

3:10.18; 6:10 - Extremely humble. After all, we can not contend with God. He is God and knows what is best for us; we don't (6:12). Accordingly, how does God want us to live life? Answer:

11:8 - "For if a man live many years, he ought to rejoice in them all!" (Literally translated from the Hebrew). It is man's duty to enjoy life. Whether his days on earth be many or few, God has ordained only as the duty of the moment, he will also enjoy the pleasure of the

that we live out our allotted span with joyful heart. The wish of God - is not that reason enough to enjoy life?

In view of the facts just presented, we ought not, therefore, ask the question as did Solomon: "What profit hath he that worketh in that wherein he laboureth?" (3:9), but rather rejoice in the manifold gifts which God bestows on us His creatures and do good toward God and man - i.e., our whole duty (3:12; 12:13).

Can we then be ungrateful to a God who^a providential and moral government is directed to our immediate and eternal welfare? Are any more reasons required for enjoying life? of making the best of the present with contentment and a spirit of cheerfulness?

Still another reason for enjoying the present is the consciousness that this is our time of labor and joy, that "the night cometh when no man can work" (John 9:4), or as Ecclesiastes puts it: "Yet let him remember the days of darkness. All that cometh is vanity" (11:8b). After death, there is for the body only, a state from which is completely absent all that constituted life and over which we have no control. Earthly joys shall be unattainable. Accordingly, "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, wither thou goest" (9:10). Therefore, enjoy the present as God wills. There is here no thought of the creed of the sensualists, "To eat and drink, for tomorrow we die" (I Cor. 15:32), but simply a reminder to make the best of the present, to be cheerful and content. Cp. John 9:4.

Therefore the man who attains to the Chief Good will not only do the duty of the moment, he will also enjoy the pleasure of the

moment. While his heart is still fresh, when pleasures are unalloyed by anxiety and care, he should cultivate the cheerful disposition which is a good safeguard against vice and discontent, and the morose fretfulness of a selfish ^{old} age. Life should be enjoyed. However, the assumption that enjoyment is the chief aim of life is not true. For to make enjoyment the aim leads to excesses, the very things that marred Solomon's life.

In 11:9-10, youth is urged to enjoy the present, not because the future is vanity, but because the present is vanity, because youth and manhood soon pass and the pleasures proper to them will be out of reach. Enjoy the present, yes, but keep mindful of the coming judgment.

While the thought of the final judgment is to be a check on pleasure and enjoyment that it may be sane and proper, yet at the same time Solomon certainly uses the final judgment as an incentive to pleasure and cheerfulness. We are to be happy because we are to stand before the bar of judgment where all wrongs and afflictions will be adjusted and compensated (3:16-17; 8:12-13). Unfortunately, not everyone can take to himself the full comfort of this argument.

Only he can do that who makes it his ruling aim in life to do his full duty in respect to God and man, who therefore, is not a fool (5:1), but hears and believes God's Word and lives according to it. He finds the hope of a future judgment - for with him it is a hope rather than a foreboding fear - a valuable check, not on true pleasures, but on those base counterfeits which only too often pass for pleasures and subtly betray man into all kinds of licentiousness, satiety, and debauchery. Because he must someday meet God face to

face and give an account of the things done in the body, he will resist the devil and evil lusts which degrade and pollute the soul. Thus, the prospect of the judgment, not only becomes a safeguard, but also an incentive to modify our pleasure in the fear of God, not to overestimate it, but be satisfied with the legitimate pleasure that God gives, in the proportion that He gives,. In the light of this, can we then not travel toward a future so welcome and inviting, with hearts attuned to pure joy and responsive to every inroad of pleasure?

Certainly all wrongs would be easier to bear, all duties would be faced with a more cheerful attitude, all alleviating pleasures would grow more welcome and gain more adherents who would neither underestimate or overestimate them, if once man were fully persuaded that there was a life beyond the grave, a life in which the righteous and the wicked would receive their just dues. It is on the express ground that there is a judgment that Solomon bids man to banish everything that interferes with cheerfulness - in 11:10, the advice is to "remove sorrow from thy heart." (The Hebrew text has אֲבִיבִי which means "vexation, grief)". All low spirits, all discontentment is to be deliberately removed from our person.

Having his affections set on eternal things above, the true believer is contented and cheerful in enjoying this short earthly life. He knows that herein lies the "summum bonum" of life, namely, that "godliness with contentment is great gain." (I Tim. 6:6). He realizes that worry and dissatisfaction is useless, harmful, sinful; that man is not the master of his fate. He cannot even look into the future; for the future, as well as the past, and present, lie in the hands of

God. Therefore, man is to fear God and keep His commandments. This is the lesson of the entire discourse (chaps. 3-5), as we learn from 5:18-20. Coming as it does at the very end of this treatise, this lesson stands as a beacon light as it were, to guide us erring humans past the dangerous pitfalls that beset Solomon and onto the godly path of contentment.

Such godly living and such a Biblical philosophy of life, will enable the true believer to take pleasure and delight in the labour which falls to his lot on earth. Such a godly life and philosophy of life will result in a good conscience, and help him in living contentedly and cheerfully and hopefully regarding the future (Cfr. Matt. 6:31-34; Ps. 73, 37:1-7). He has a sure hope of better things to come. Even though all do go unto one place, the true believer can know, from the evidence that Ecclesiastes furnishes (3:18-21; 12:7), that man is more than the beast, that there is a distinct difference between man and beast, both as to origin and to end - that at creation God placed "eternity" into the heart of man, thus giving him an immortal soul, which will be brought into judgment (11:9). Let us then hear the Word of God and learn the things contained in that Word from our earliest youth (12:1), serve God in holiness, and while enjoying this earthly sojourn with a good conscience, let us keep our hearts set on things above. Such fear of God is the very beginning of true wisdom and the real secret to true earthly happiness.

God encourages us to enjoy life and shows us how to enjoy

it. But sad to say, there are many who disavow what God desires. They prefer to find their own way in life, to adopt their own methods to find true happiness, the "summum bonum" of life. In the process of this search each develops his own characteristic philosophy of life - the pessimist his; the fatalist his; the skeptic his; the materialist his; the agnostic his; those advocating Sadduceism, Epicureanism, stoicism, develop their peculiar strains of thought.

On the basis of Ecclesiastes, we will prove conclusively the fallacy inherent in each of these various types of thinking, and show that they are entirely unwarranted in the light of the God-centered, positive philosophy of life that Ecclesiastes teaches! The very fact that Solomon stresses both the fear of God and a future time of retribution refutes the assertion that the author advocates the following philosophies:

Pessimism

Pessimism is the doctrine that the evils of life overbalance the happinesses it affords. It maintains that this is the worst of all possible worlds, and there is little reason to believe that it will ever be better.

A typical example of pessimism is to be found in the words of Strauss, who bitterly mocked: "It must have been an ill-advised God, who could fall upon no better amusement than the transforming himself into such a hungry world as this, which is utterly miserable and worse than none at all."¹²

Solomon is a pessimist - that is what H. J. Flowers (in the "Review and Expositor," p. 435) concludes from chapter two of Ecclesiastes. He has in mind, particularly, such passages as 2:17-18, 22., where Solomon bewails the vanity of all human labor: "Therefore I hated life: because the work that it wrought under the sun is grievous unto men: for all is vanity and vexation of spirit. Yea, I hated all my labour which I had taken under the sun: because I should leave it unto the man that shall be after me...For what hath man of all his labour, and of the vexation of his heart, wherein he hath laboured under the sun?"

Flowers characterizes this as "the very depths of pessimism, the abomination of life itself. One would have thought that the logical conclusion would have been that the author should commit suicide. But sceptics rarely have the courage of their creed."¹³

"The dismal outlook" of the book, its opening and closing note of hopelessness as contained in the theme of the book, "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity," lead Oesterley and Robinson (An Introduction to the Books of the Old Testament, pp. 213f) to concur in the opinion that the author has a pessimistic outlook on life. The fact that Solomon calls both life and labor empty and purposeless furthers their conviction that Solomon is a pessimist - a rank pessimist - no, but one who believes that since man is placed in this world the only thing to do is to make the best of it in such a way as to secure the maximum of the natural good to be got out of life. (Ibid, pp. 212-213).

~~Delitzsch, in turn, bases his contention of the pessimistic~~

The case for Ecclesiastes:

Is Solomon really a pessimist? Can we deduce that from such passages as 1:18; 2:16; 7:26-28; 9:2-6? True, the fact that much wisdom and knowledge leads to grief and sorrow (1:18), that the wise man is no more remembered after death than the fool (2:16), the fact that there are many evil women who mislead men (7:26-28); that the same events happen to the righteous as well as to the wicked; that death is the inevitable earthly climax for all men (9:2-6) - all this does appear to point to a rather gloomy outlook, especially when emphasized by passages like the following: "And this also is a sore evil, that in all points as he came, so shall he go: and what profit hath he that hath laboured for the wind?" (5:16). "Wherefore I praised the dead which are already dead more than the living which are yet alive" (4:2).

Now what shall we say to all this? We maintain on the positive side, that when the Book of Ecclesiastes is considered in its totality and not judged by isolated passages, the charge of pessimism falls to the ground, and for these reasons. (We shall list them so that their points refuted may stand out in clearer contrast).

- (1) Solomon's so-called pessimism is only a cloud seeming to obscure his faith for a time. He has faith in the justice and benevolence of God. His assertion in 3:11 that "God hath made everything beautiful in its time" proves that he believes in the moral government of the universe.

- (2) When he speaks in despondent tones and bewails the

(7) If he seems to lack a bright faith, still it is evident "vanity of all things," he does so in an effort to

recall our attention to the underlying weak point, in-
herent in earthly things. In this way, he desires to
show the mistake that men commonly make in thinking

they can secure happiness by their own efforts, where-

as, as he points out, success and happiness are con-

ditioned and dispensed by God as His gracious gifts

and according to His all-wise providence.

(3) When he asserts that the day of death is preferable

to the day of one's birth he is merely emphasizing the

truism that the dead are better off than the living,

in so far that they are freed from suffering and oppression

(4:2) as well as the sight of the evils in the world.

In the case of the still-born child, it too is spared

the sight and knowledge of life's vanities with its

accompanying sorrows and trials (6:3-4).

(4) He acknowledges the reality of sin and looks to a life

beyond the grave.

(5) There is no negation of labor; for he bids men to do

work with diligence and to be kind toward others.

(6) He repeatedly encourages men to enjoy life - this should

be done in the fear of God. It should be remembered as

far as 2:17-18 is concerned, where he speaks of "hating

life," that this was spoken during the time he was

estranged from God.

(7) If he seems to lack a bright faith, still it is evident from his belief in God's moral and providential ordering that he feels that all does work together for good to them that love God, if not in this world, then surely in the next.

Fatalism

Fatalism is the doctrine that all events are determined, by necessity or fate, over which man has entirely no control.¹⁴ Oesterley and Robinson see a fatalistic strain in Ecclesiastes which they call "determinism," and point to 7:13 as illustrative of the "determinism" which runs through the book. "Man is a helpless being, everything is fixed, and there is nothing he can do to shape or alter the events of life." (pp. 213f).

Hertzberg is another commentator who believes Solomon was a Determinist. He sees fatalism in such passages as 3:1ff - "For every thing there is a season and a time to every purpose under the heaven:" also in the recurring phrase: "What profit hath he that worketh in that wherein he laboureth? (3:9), and likewise in 9:11.12 - "I returned, and saw under the sun, that the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, neither yet bread to the wise, nor yet riches to men of understandings, nor yet favour to men of skill; but time and chance happeneth to them all. For man also knoweth not his time: as the fishes that are taken in an evil net, and as the birds that are caught in the snare; so are the sons of men snared in an evil time, when it falleth suddenly upon them."

Other passages that supposedly reveal the fatalism of Solomon are 3:21; 4:3; 9:1.2.3.5.

The Case of Ecclesiastes against Fatalism:

- (1) "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity" and "What profit hath a man of all his labour?" does not justify the argument that man is the prey of blind destiny. For what Solomon is attempting to do is to predicate vanity of all earthly things, to show that wisdom, pleasure, wealth, etc. fail in themselves to secure the happiness for which they are pursued and come only to those persons whom divine providence blesses.
- (2) The very fact that there is "harmony" in all created things and in God's moral government (3:11) certainly speaks against the working of an irresponsible and uncontrollable destiny. It behooves us as true believers, therefore, to ^{try to} see this divine harmony, and ^{to} trust in it, regardless of whether that harmony is discernible to us (3:11a).
- (3) Furthermore, it must be remembered that man does not know what is best for him and often seeks for things that are contrary to the will of God. So what happens? God overrules his efforts and controls the final result.

The enumeration of events in 3:1-8 serves to illustrate the fact that providence governs every salvation, or to the glory of the devil and eternal damnation.

(3) single detail of life by appointing the proper time and season for it. Thus everything is regulated according to a mysterious plan which is impossible for us to fathom.

(4) The fact that it is impossible for us to understand all the works of God gives us no right to be fatalistic. Who are we to contend with God (6:10)? He has made us; He is responsible to no one. The fact that in many respects he is like the beast should keep him humble. In addition, the fact that labor is imposed upon him by God, as work to be done under conditions prescribed by time and season in view of man's free will and God's ruling, furnishes another reason why man should regard the whole question of God's providence with the proper humility as befits an obedient child of God (3:10).

(5) There is no blind destiny, for God has placed "eternity" into the heart of every mortal human. Life is not just a span of three score years and ten, but there is an eternity for which every man ought to prepare (3:11b).

(6) Solomon counsels men to find God and to practise the all-inclusive commandment of love, not as though they were the victims of a cruel destiny, but as responsible beings who are accountable to God for their actions. In this respect, man has his life in his own hands, for he either can live it to the glory of God and ultimate salvation, or to the glory of the devil and eternal damnation.

(7) Creation is not ruled by a capricious, arbitrary Being; But God does in time only what He has determined to do in eternity. He creates and rules all things in accordance with a well-defined plan which must work ^{out} to the salvation of man, to the greater glory of God, and science under the feet of Him who disposes and controls all the circumstances of life.

Skepticism

Skepticism is the doctrine that all knowledge is uncertain. ¹⁵

Because Solomon professes the inability of man to understand the doings of God and the uselessness of wisdom and knowledge in satisfying human aspirations, he is accused of being a skeptic. The accusations are allegedly supported by such passages as 1:8.13-18; 3:9.18-22; 8:16-17. The last named passage reads: "When I applied mine heart to know wisdom, and to see the business that is done upon the earth; (for also there is that neither day nor night seeth sleep with his eyes:) Then I beheld all the work of God, that a man cannot find out the work that is done under the sun; because though a man labour to seek it out, yet he shall not find it; yea farther; thought a wise man think to know it, yet shall he not be able to find it."

Solomon does not say here that man can comprehend nothing, but he asserts that human reason is completely at a loss to fathom the designs of God. There are definite limits to man's reason; it cannot explain everything.

Again, when Solomon calls wisdom and knowledge "vanity," he is stating the truth that no human wisdom can secure happiness;

"The spirit of man goeth upward." The following facts vitiate

that it alone is a gift of God. Underlying all his utterances in Ecclesiastes, is a profound belief in a governing providence. It is the mysteriousness of this government that seizes his attention and impells him to contrast with it man's ignorance and impotence. This comparison finally convinces him to lay all skill, knowledge, and science under the feet of Him who disposes and controls all the circumstances of life.

Another point on which Solomon is said to betray his skeptical bent is on the question of the immortality of the soul. He is said to teach that man does not differ from the beast, and has nothing to expect after death. 3:18-22 is the passage in question; controversy centers around the twenty-first verse in particular: - "Who knoweth the spirit of man that goeth upward, and the spirit of the beast that goeth downward to the earth?"

In the foregoing verses Solomon had stated that man, regarded as a mere animal and irrespective of the relation in which he stands to God, is like the beast. Both are made of dust and both return to death. When the breath of life is withdrawn, both die. So in this respect man has no advantage over the beast. Thus far there is no skepticism. But when we come to v. 21 and Solomon asks "who knoweth the spirit of man that goeth upward, and the spirit of the beast that goeth downward to the earth?" this is said to denote a lack of uncertainty in Solomon's mind as to the destiny of the spirit of man and the beast. However, the Authorized Version (following the Masoretic reading) states the fact of man's continued existence after death: "The spirit of man goeth upward," The following facts vitiate

any apparent skepticism that may be found in this passage:

- (1) Solomon is not referring here to the physical, animal life as in the preceding verse, but to the spirit, the "ego" of man.
- (2) The very question itself implies belief in the continued existence after death. If the spirit (soul) of man were annihilated, there could be no inquiry as to what became of it. But to say that man is unable to trace the spirit's course is to imply that it does have a course before it, although this cannot be demonstrated from experience. That is what Solomon means when he questions: "Who knoweth..." i.e., who knows by actual experience what becomes of man and beast after death? The answer: No one. No one can see a distinction as to their destinies, for as far as man's experience is concerned, there does not seem to be any difference between the death of man and the beast.

(3) Moreover, Solomon differentiates the fate of man and the beast. The life-giving principle of the beast may go with its body back to the dust, but the spirit of man returns to the God who gave it (12:7).

(4) Another argument against skepticism in this connection, is that God has "manifested" man, i.e., placed him in a class by himself (3:18) by placing "eternity" into his heart (3:11). Thus at birth man becomes an immortal

soul, ~~as~~ an inheritor of an eternal destiny. Does not this circumstance exalt man above the beast? The fact that man cannot understand from personal experience this mysterious subject of his future destiny, does not make him a skeptic. That Solomon is definitely not a skeptic is evident from the fact that he holds the fear of God to be "the highest duty and condition of true prosperity as well as highest truth and surest knowledge."¹⁶ (12:13; 7:12). Instead of calling Ecclesiastes "The Song of Skepticism" as did the long-time skeptic and scoffer Heinrich Heine, we ought rather to title the book: "The Song of the Fear of God," for the author's faith in God in the midst of the recurring disappointments of the world, stands firm as a rock.¹⁷

Materialism

Materialism holds to the premise that only nature and matter exist, not the soul. Says Hartman in his "Das ¹⁵⁰ ~~After~~ vom Ewigen" (1859), quoted by Delitzsch in his commentary, p. 188:³ "This book (Ecclesiastes) which contains almost as many contradictions as verses, may be regarded as the Breviary of the most modern materialism." 3:18-22 is again adduced as a case in point, this time, as teaching crass materialism. However, an intelligent perusal of Ecclesiastes in its entirety, instead of looking at 3:18-22 out of its context, will reveal that the charge of materialism is unwarranted.

Essentially the same arguments that were brought forth to disprove the charge of skepticism, apply here. The source of the trouble is the similar fate of man and the beast, which gives an appearance and flavor of a materialistic strain. But we repeat:

- (1) As far as the experience of man goes, there seems to be no difference in the death of man and the beast. To all appearances, man's death is the same as the beast's. Death terminates the earthly existence of both.
- (2) But then there is an invisible part of man, namely, his soul, which has an eternal quality in it. In this respect, God has exalted man above the beast, separated him in a class by himself (3:18), thus making him a responsible, rational creature, and answerable to God for his actions (12:14).
- (3) After all, if God had not revealed the truth of the hereafter in Revelation, how would anyone know anything about man's future destiny? the beast's?
- (4) Solomon sees a definite difference between the fate of man and the beast. He holds that the spirit of the former "goeth upward" (3:21), returns "unto the God who gave it," while the latter goeth downward to the earth to extinction.

Agnosticism

(4) Solomon was aware of both the existence and nature of God for God is mentioned no less than 37

Agnosticism is "the doctrine that neither the existence

nor the nature of God, nor the ultimate origin of the universe is known or knowable."¹⁸ That Solomon is a disciple of this doctrine of ~~this doctrine~~ can be shown to be false, for the following cogent reasons:

(1) In passages like 1:13-18; 8:16-17 in which Solomon confesses man's inability to understand the doings of God, he does not assert that man can know nothing, comprehend nothing.

(2) Reason can receive facts; it can compare them and argue from them, but it cannot explain everything. Perfect intellectual knowledge and satisfaction is beyond the attainment of mortal man. Not even a wise man can comprehend the work of God (8:17). "We see now only in part."

But to conclude from this that man has not the power of gaining any certitude or truth does not logically follow. Puny, impotent man cannot contend with the Almighty God (6:10).

(3) If man is incapable from personal experience to trace the course of man's spirit after death, how then can he expect to attain to the perfect understanding of God's moral and providential government? To keep man humble, God has reserved such things for himself (3:18; 6:10; Cp. v. 5: "For God is in heaven and thou upon earth").

(4) Solomon certainly was aware of both the existence and nature of God for God is mentioned no less than 37

times in Ecclesiastes. That Solomon firmly believed in God as the transcendent Creator, Preserver, and Judge of the universe has been shown at length in Part II of this thesis.

- (5) Solomon not only knew of the existence and nature of God, but he also believed in the same. For that reason he repeatedly urges men to "fear God and keep His commandments, so that they may be able to give a good account of themselves at the final judgment (12:13-14).

Sadduceism and Epicureanism

Both of these "isms" have as a tenet that pleasure is the chief good. However, from the very passages which purportedly teach such a doctrine (3:13; 3:22; 5:18-20; 9:7-10) we shall show that Solomon advocates neither a coarse sensuality nor even a modified Epicureanism.

The labelling of Solomon as a Sadduceist and Epicurean grows out of a basic misunderstanding of certain phrases in Ecclesiastes. For example, one oft-recurring phrase is: "It is good and comely for one to eat and to drink, and to enjoy the good of all his labour that he taketh under the sun all the days of his life," (5:18; cfr. 2:24; 3:22; 8:15).

- A. The expression "to eat and drink" in the ears of the Hebrew, did not convey the low, materialistic meaning which it does today, namely, "enjoy the pleasures

of the table,' but it is evident from Jer. 22:15 that the phrase is a metaphor for prosperity, ease and comfort.¹⁹

Reproaching Shallum for departing from the paths of righteousness, Jeremiah asks: Did not thy father eat and drink, and do judgment and justice, and then it was well with him?" Surely, the prophet Jeremiah is not indicating that Shallum's father, Josiah, pleased God by an Epicurean life!

When Solomon inquires (2:25): "Who can eat, or who can have enjoyment, more than I?" he means to say that no one had better opportunities for enjoying life than he. No one had a better opportunity for verifying the principle that all enjoyment depends on the gift of God. (In the preceding verse he had said: "And that he should make his soul enjoy good in his labour. This I saw, that it was from the hand of God," i.e., the power to enjoy life depends solely on the will of God).

Even the joys of heaven are described in terms of a glorious banquet. Spoke Christ to His assembled disciples in the upper room on Maunday Thursday eve: "I appoint unto you a kingdom that ye may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom." (Luke 22:29; cfr. Luke 14:15; Rev. 19:9).

So in phrases like "to rejoice," "to see good," "to eat and drink," the idea intended by Solomon is not to encourage selfish sensuality, but a well-regulated,

such, in whatever manner and proportion it may come, godly contentment and an enjoyment of the temporal. Therefore, it not be discontent and impatient, but in goods that God freely bestows out of the bountifulness of His love (Ps. 16:5; 23:5).

- B. There is really only one passage that seemingly advocates unbridled licence and immorality and that is 11:9.

Oetinger and Mendelssohn and others, remarks Delitzsch, discover here for the first time the utterance of an epicurean thought.²⁰ 11:9 reads: "Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth; and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thine heart, and in the sight of thine eyes."

Taken by itself this seems to encourage youth to give free rein to its passions. But 11:9a must not be separated from its solemn conclusion: "But know thou that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment" (11:9b). And so the advice amounts to this:

youth, enjoy yourself while your senses are keen and unimpaired by age, but remember all you do, will have to be accounted for at the bar of the final judgment. Keep indifference to pleasure and pain. They are unmoved by the joy and sorrows of life. In the final analysis, what the Stoic doctrine really stand divine scrutiny.

- C. From such passages as 3:13, 22; 5:18-20 it can readily

be discerned that Solomon encourages man to make the best of the present, realizing that he can not secure happiness and enjoyment by his own efforts, but that this is a gracious gift of God, to be thankfully accepted as

7:16-17 in proof. 7:16-17 reads: "Do not make thyself wise over wise, why shouldst thou destroy thyself? Do not over-wicked, neither be thou foolish, why shouldst thou die before thy time?"

such, in whatever manner and proportion it may come.

Therefore, do not be discontent and impatient, but in a spirit of cheerfulness, enjoy the present discreetly and moderately, always keeping in mind the future account that must be rendered.

From 11:9-10 we learn that piety ought to be practised from early years and that life should be so guided as not to offend the laws of the Creator and Judge. Moreover, that virtue should not be postponed until the failure of faculties makes pleasure unattainable and death closes the scene. So Delitzsch remarks: "From this that there is only one life, life on this side of eternity, Solomon deduced the exhortation to enjoy the one as much as possible; God Himself, to whom we owe it, will have it so that we enjoy it within the moral limits prescribed by Himself."²¹

Stoicism

Stoics are people who hold to the principle of showing indifference to pleasure and pain. They are unmoved by the joy and sorrows of life. In the final analysis, what the Stoic doctrine really amounts to is an apathy toward the things of this life and a contempt for the world.

Those who see stoic doctrine in Ecclesiastes point to 7:16-17 in proof. 7:16-17 reads: "Be not righteous over much; neither make thyself over wise: why shouldst thou destroy thyself. Be not over wicked, neither be thou foolish; why shouldst thou die before thy time?"

But here is no mistaken piety which neglects all earthly affairs. This is no injunction to apathy. Neither does 7:16-17 restate the doctrine of the epicure, "to live and let live." Neither is there here an "undisguised cynicism" as Morris Jastrow is wont to interpret the passage. "Do not lose your chance of enjoyment of life by taking yourself too seriously. This is the extent of his gentle cynicism,"²² according to Jastrow.

Rather, 7:16-17 is an injunction to fear God. We should not strive to be more righteous nor wise in judging His ways! We should not question the wisdom of His moral government. Despite the fact that righteousness has the promise of long life (7:15), there are exceptions to this promise. When the righteous do die before the wicked, we should not arrogantly find fault with such divine ordering. St. Paul argues: "Thou wilt say then unto men, why doth he yet find fault? For who hath resisted His will? Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus?" (9:19-20). To estimate God's dealings according to our own preconceived opinions is both wicked and foolish and deserving of punishment at the hands of God. Therefore, in the fear of God, accept both the justice and wisdom of God and the apparently contradictory action of His moral government.

In v. 17 Solomon does not recommend moderation in wickedness as if he considered a certain degree of wickedness to be allowable. He does not say "follow the wicked path provided you do not go at too rapid a pace."²³ Rather he urges man to enjoy life and to accommodate himself to it in the fear of God. The principle to be followed is not knowledge. As there are laws that direct the forces of material nature,

"not anything to excess" (Ne quid nimis), but rather: Fear God and be moderate in all things." Why be a fool and wantonly place yourself above law and discipline? Why destroy yourself by want of understanding? (Prov. 10:21). Accordingly then, to be moderate in all things does not justify the assertion of the presence of a Stoic element here: 7:16-17 warns against four dangers:

- (a) Be not self-righteous, "for there is not a just man upon earth that doeth good and sinneth not;"
- (b) Be not self wise. Divinely ordered circumstances are not for us to question.
- (c) Be not overly wicked; although you are sinful by nature, do not use this as an excuse for the wickedness you do commit.
- (d) Be not foolish, for you bring the retributive judgment of God upon you; besides, all excesses will shorten your life!²⁴

Further evidence of Stoical teachings are said to be found in the language that speaks of the endless recurrence of the same phenomena in the life of man (1:5-7.11 etc.). The vanity of man's life and labor, his strivings and pleasures, is maintained to be derived from the apathy of the Stoic and his contempt for this world, whereas in reality it springs from the teaching of bitter experience. Experience taught Solomon that pleasure, labor, etc. are conditioned by Providence and in themselves cannot bring happiness; it taught him that everything in life is regulated according to mysterious rules which are beyond our knowledge. As there are laws that direct the forces of material nature,

so there are laws that control man's intellectual and moral nature.

And it is from the obedience or disobedience of these laws (e.g. 12:13:

"Fear God and keep his commandments.") that happiness or pain results.

However, disobedience of these laws does not always bring punishment in this world, nor their observance reward, but ultimate retribution

is certain in the life beyond the grave (11:9; 12:14). Would all this

indicate that Solomon was emotionally impassive toward all the things in life? Hardly!

If Stoicism asserts that human efforts are vain and empty, and that life therefore can only be adequately coped with by resorting

to apathy, then Solomon argues to the contrary, urging diligence upon

man and summons him to use with profit the time granted him and make

the best of his present circumstances (9:10).

the true gain, the real riches which we ought to seek. St. Paul says it thus: "Godliness with contentment is great gain." (1 Tim. 6:8), i.e., piety with contentment is great gain; this does more to promote happiness than any amount of wealth or accomplishments can ever do. Piety, connected with a mind that humbly acquiesces to whatever divine providence sends, that is always calm and satisfied and free from murmuring and complaining, is to be regarded as the real gain, the "summum bonum" of life. Solomon says it thus: "Rejoice and do good in life; Fear God and keep his commandments" (12:13). Contentment based on godliness, will by the grace of God, gladden our heart so that the labors and sorrows of life will not press too heavily on our mind. This is beautifully expressed in the words of St. Paul: "Rejoice in the Lord always; and again I say, Rejoice. Let your moderation be known unto all men. The

Conclusion

If we compare the wisdom in Ecclesiastes with the wisdom contained in the writings of the sages of antiquity, it will be found that the wisdom of Ecclesiastes is far superior in that it adapts itself to the practical needs of men busied in the common affairs of life.

Reading Confucius or Plato, for example, one is struck with their immense grasp of thought and their moral enthusiasm. But they give little help. These wise men made no effort to lift their followers to a height from which they might see that the whole of morality lay in the love of God, in charity, in diligent devotion to duty, in cheerfulness.

That is the great object of life, the true gain, the real riches which we ought to seek. St. Paul says it thus: "Godliness with contentment is great gain." (I Tim. 6:6), i.e., piety with contentment is great gain! This does more to promote happiness than any amount of wealth or accomplishments can ever do. Piety, connected with a mind that humbly acquiesces to whatever divine providence sends, that is always calm and satisfied and free from murmuring and complaining, is to be regarded as the real gain, the "summum bonum" of life. Solomon says it thus; "Rejoice and do good in life;" fear God and keep his commandments" (12:13). Contentment based on godliness, will by the grace of God, gladden our heart so that the labors and sorrows of life will not press too heavily on our mind. This is beautifully expressed in the words of St. Paul: "Rejoice in the Lord always: and again I say, Rejoice. Let your moderation be known unto all men. The

Lord is at hand. Be careful for nothing: but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue and if there be any praise, think on these things." (Phil. 4:4-8).

The advice that Solomon gives us in Ecclesiastes on how to live in this world of vanities is to enjoy the gifts of divine bounty temperately and thankfully, cheerfully enduring toil and calamity; combining this with a sincere service to God and man and a steadfast faith in the future life in which all wrongs will be righted and all the problems which now afflict us will receive a triumphant solution.

Therefore, the man who achieves the quest for the Chief Good is one who fears God and keeps His commandments - who is charitable, who is dutiful, who is cheerful; who prepares for death by a useful and happy life, for future judgment by a constant reference to the present judgment, for meeting God in the hereafter by walking with Him here in this world of vanities.

Can we hope to find a more enduring Good? What to us are the blows of circumstance, the fluctuations of fortune? These cannot touch the Good which we hold to be chief. If they bring trouble we can bear it and profit by it; if they bring prosperity and success, we can bear these, neither valuing them beyond their worth nor abusing them

to our own hurt; for our God, and therefore our peace and blessedness, are founded on a Rock, over which the changeful waves cannot prevail. For to the believer there is a plan and purpose that has its center in Christ. Believers have been predestinated to be an integral part of God's eternal world plan. Believers have been "created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them" (Eph. 2:10). But not even to the believer has it been given to comprehend God's plan fully. Not even a believer can explain how everything fits into the divine plan. Nevertheless, there is a wholeness that links together all the individual experiences of the believer. In the confident words of St. Paul, "we know that all things works together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose" (Rom. 8:28).

The attitude of the believer, therefore, is one of faith and confidence in God, the Ordainer of life and the Giver of all good gifts. The believer humbly says: "I know that all things must play their part in God's eternal plan of world government. I long to fully comprehend that divine plan, but since God has withheld individual steps in that plan, I will accept the whole plan by faith, and meanwhile, while the breath of life is in me, live my life to the glory of my Creator, by fearing Him and keeping His commandments, always keeping mindful of the approaching judgment. In all I do, I will be content with what God gives and thankfully accept whatever He gives with a joyful heart, as part of His eternal, gracious plan for me.

If like Solomon we can resist the cruel temptation to

criticize and fall into pessimism and hold fast a faith in God as our transcendent Creator, Preserver, and Judge; if we can rest in the assurance that after all "the little that a righteous man hath is better than the riches of many wicked;" that God has something far better than wealth and good fortune for the good, and correctives of a more sovereign potency than poverty and misfortune for the wicked. If we have this faith and a firm trust, then our study of Ecclesiastes could hardly have failed to deepen this faith.

Because we have a gracious God ever at our side, because a bright future stretches before us in widening vistas of hope, we can carry to all the wrongs and afflictions of time a cheerful spirit, a spirit before which even the somber specter of death will be dispelled, and the solemnities of the judgment be turned into an event of triumph. Why should we then, with so bright a prospect and a good so enduring open to us, with the Spirit to guide our faltering steps, creep about the earth the slaves of every accident?

After many years of fruitless search a wiser old man returns to the God of His Fathers. It has been questioned whether Solomon should be reckoned among the saved or lost. In Florence a picture presents him rising from the tomb at Judgment day, uncertain whether to take his place at the right or left hand of the Judge. Repenting of his past mistakes, Solomon did find his way home at last. Ecclesiastes, particularly the closing chapter, is sufficient evidence for that.

Let the experience of Solomon teach us that man is wretched ~~w~~aking through life without God at his side; that though he may possess

wealth, success, wisdom, fame, power, etc., all these are vain, because they fail in themselves to bring satisfaction and happiness for which they are pursued. For, as the well-known hymn expresses it:

William Greenleaf, *Hymns and English Lyrics*, pp. 241-242

1. J. J. Burns, *Religious Sentiments*, p. 273

2. P. L. Kreutzmann

3. Franz Delitzsch

4. Burns, op. cit.

"All depends on our possessing,
God's abundant grace and blessing."

But the treatise of Solomon also teaches us that man is made in God's image, that he lives in God's world - the stamp of vanity being placed upon it by man; that man is subject to God's eternal, mysterious decrees, blessed by God's merciful providence, the recipient of God's love through faith in Christ, answerable before the judgment seat of God.

5. *Retrospect*, op. cit., p. 224

6. *Retrospect*, op. cit., p. 225

7. *Delitzsch*, op. cit., p. 226

8. *Retrospect*, op. cit., p. 227

Surely, it is the part of wisdom to begin our search

where Solomon's search ended, namely, with God. Where God is first and

foremost in our lives, then the problem of שׁוֹמֵר יְהוָה that manifests itself

in life is not so discouraging, so depressing, so hopeless.

As humble creatures of the Almighty Creator, Preserver, and Judge of the world, living in a world of man-made vanities, our sincere prayer ought to be that one which was spoken by Solomon's father,

1. *Theodore*, op. cit., p. 18

2. *Theodore*, op. cit., p. 19

3. *Theodore*, op. cit., p. 20

4. *Theodore*, op. cit., p. 21

5. *Theodore*, op. cit., p. 22

6. *Theodore*, op. cit., p. 23

7. *Theodore*, op. cit., p. 24

8. *Theodore*, op. cit., p. 25

9. *Theodore*, op. cit., p. 26

10. *Theodore*, op. cit., p. 27

11. *Theodore*, op. cit., p. 28

12. *Theodore*, op. cit., p. 29

13. *Theodore*, op. cit., p. 30

14. *Theodore*, op. cit., p. 31

15. *Theodore*, op. cit., p. 32

16. *Theodore*, op. cit., p. 33

17. *Theodore*, op. cit., p. 34

18. *Theodore*, op. cit., p. 35

19. *Theodore*, op. cit., p. 36

20. *Theodore*, op. cit., p. 37

21. *Theodore*, op. cit., p. 38

22. *Theodore*, op. cit., p. 39

23. *Theodore*, op. cit., p. 40

24. *Theodore*, op. cit., p. 41

25. *Theodore*, op. cit., p. 42

26. *Theodore*, op. cit., p. 43

27. *Theodore*, op. cit., p. 44

28. *Theodore*, op. cit., p. 45

29. *Theodore*, op. cit., p. 46

30. *Theodore*, op. cit., p. 47

Lord, make me to know mine end, and the measure of my days, what it is; that I may know how frail I am. Behold, thou hast made my days as an handbreadth; and mine age is as nothing before thee: verily, every man at his best state is altogether vanity. Surely every man walketh in a vain shew: he heapeth up riches, and knoweth not who shall gather them. And now, Lord, what wait I for? my hope is in thee." (Ps. 39:4-7).

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Part I: All earthly things are vanity.

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