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# ECCLESIASTES 11:1-6 : THE HEART OF WISDOM

*No. EE10*

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In chapters 1-10 of Ecclesiastes the Preacher (ESV; NKJV; NASV) or Teacher (NIV) - almost certainly Solomon - confronts with irrefutable logic the philosophy and world view of anyone who lives for this world alone, as if there is no afterlife. He talks about 30 times about the person who merely lives "under the sun" (in and for this world); the person who ignores the fact that he or she is accountable to God, and will one day have to answer to Him.

Such a life is "meaningless" (NIV; 36 times). This word refers to a breath - it is empty and worthless.

There is also a third expression the author uses repeatedly. Such a life under the sun is like a "chasing after the wind". It achieves absolutely nothing. It is like running after a bubble or a mirage. It is absurd. It is futile.

The Preacher is not always pessimistic and cynical, however. Throughout the first ten chapters he keeps the reader's hopes alive with small pinpoints of light here and there (e.g. 2:24-26; 5:17-19). Then we find his conclusion in chapters 11-12, especially in the last two verses (12:13-14).

So let us examine the first part of the Preacher's conclusion. Here for a change he sounds more positive. Here he tells us how to live in order to find sense and meaning in this life.

## THE BASIC KEY TO FINDING MEANING IN LIFE

□ The expression in 11:1, "cast your bread upon the waters", was well understood in those days.

The Hebrew word translated as "bread" can also refer to grain or seed-corn (Isa 28:28: "grain"; NIV; ESV). This expression is a reference to the tradition of sowing in, for instance, the Nile Delta as the floodwater after the rains begins to subside. The seed falls in the shallow, stationary water, sinks into the silt on the bottom, and becomes covered with more silt as the water drains away completely. Once all the water is gone, the seed grows naturally and yields wonderful fruit.

The expression therefore refers to an action that is aimed at producing fruit in time. *This is inevitably something does in faith.* You trust that what you are throwing away irretrievably today, will return as next year's bread. The point the Preacher is making, is that there is only one way to make sense of your present existence: *to live in faith that what you sow now, will one day yield a good crop.* And, of course, it is wisdom to sow the best seed, because it will yield the best fruit.

□ This attitude alone gives meaning to what appears to be the aimless muddle that we call "this life". Remove *faith* from the equation, and all that remains is the futility found in chapters 1-10.

What is it that one sees when you do not look with the eye of faith? Periods and eras, seasons and cycles that endlessly repeat themselves (1:4vv). Uncontrollable circumstances driving history willy-nilly (3:1vv; 9:11vv). Death to everyone, unrelated to the life one has lead, whether good or bad (7:15; 8:8). People dying like animals - very often good people like bad people, the wise like the foolish (2:14, 17; 9:2vv). You see unchecked wickedness wreaking havoc (3:16; 4:1; 5:8; 8:11; 9:3), and bad people attaining success, while good people encounter adversity and failure (8:14).

It is not surprising that unbelievers cannot make out head or tail of what is going on. The person who simply lives "under the sun" can come to only one conclusion: it *must* be the god of coincidence who reigns thus - most certainly not a good and wise

God who rewards that which is good, and punishes that which is wicked!

## OUR DILEMMA: A HIDDEN GOD

Why does the Bible so often address the issue of faith? Why does God place such emphasis on the fact that we should serve Him in faith? Why does nothing remain when you remove faith from your Christianity? Why is everything futile when you have no faith?

There are certainly many different reasons - but one significant reason is that we cannot perceive God with our senses. He simply lives in different dimensions from us. He is the *Deus Absconditus* - the hidden God.

Yes, we can look at the world around us - general revelation - and come to some important conclusions about God. And we can read the Bible in faith - Biblical revelation - and know much more about God. But I have to do this in faith, and I have to build my whole life on it.

Few are the people who are prepared to do this! What a dilemma we are in! I must either live by what I can see, touch, hear, taste and smell - and then fall into the lunacy of absurdity. Or I must accept that there is a Higher Power that will finally bring about meaning and justice from the chaos of life "under the sun". *But to this only faith can enable me to hold!*

## TRUE WISDOM

□ This is the point the Preacher wants to drive home. *Because we serve a hidden God, we need to live by faith.* We therefore need to accept the fact that God is busy building a new creation from the ashes of a fallen one. And whenever things look so absurd and aimless and unjust, we must remember that construction sites always appear chaotic. It is only through the spectacles of faith that life remains in focus. The moment you remove these spectacles, things distort and blur.

O, the Preacher teaches us an important lesson!

- V.5: Make your peace once and for all with the fact that there will always be a thousand things that you do not understand. Least of all will we be able to always understand the ways of God.

- V.6: Stop brooding and treading water. Begin to live life by entirely trusting in God's just nature, and the conviction that His justice will finally triumph.

- V2: Therefore, live a life of generous giving. After all, that is what God promises to reward one day. Whatever you have, just give - and continue to give. Give generously, up to seven - the number of fullness. And when you have given what is needed, give even more - go to eight. Walk the second mile!

Be a footwasher; be a servant. Lay down your life for your neighbour according to the will of God.

And do not postpone, for disaster strikes unexpectedly. Tomorrow you might not be in a position to serve anymore.

- V.3-4: Do not delay and hesitate endlessly. A farmer who constantly watches the clouds never gets round to ploughing and planting. When the rain then comes, the water flows away without benefitting him in any way.

And when a tree topples over, it is futile to stand around wishing that it had fallen in another direction. The fact is - it did not. And it will remain where it has fallen. Mull over everything that might have been, and you remain milling about in one place. Cease your perpetual "why's" and "if only's".

☐ So, face your responsibilities squarely. Do whatever you have to do. Live on the forefoot. And in faith leave those things you cannot control in God's hands.

## WHAT DOES THIS TELL US?

**1. There is simply no other way than the way of faith.**

Do you sometimes also have the feeling that it is insanity to hang your everything - your life, your future, your eternity - on the conviction that a Man, two thousand years ago, died on a cross and rose again?

But exactly that is what Christianity is all about - trusting Christ, as God's great Prophet, Priest and King.

Faith in Him is really my only option, is it not? The moment I let go of Him, I tumble into the insanity of absurdity. To be honest, in a way I am a Christian because nothing else in this life makes sense. All other alternatives, in the words of a former prime minister, are "too ghastly to contemplate"!

Even this world's religions are unthinkable as alternatives. I am too profoundly convinced of my sinfulness and imperfection to imagine that I could climb up a ladder of morality and ritual to a holy God all by myself.

*Therefore, all that remains is trusting Christ!  
Only He shields me from insanity!*

## 2. The path of faith is not irrational, however.

Consider how integrated and consistent the Bible message is. And this despite sixty-six books written by about forty authors from very different backgrounds, writing over a period of a millennium and a half! It is because the Bible in reality has only one author - God the Holy Spirit.

Consider all the Biblical statements that are irrefutably true in historical terms. Many dozens of Old Testament prophecies about Christ were fulfilled in the finest detail. Isaiah 53 had been written centuries before He came! Moreover, the historical accuracy of the Bible has been verified in hundreds of instances by archaeological discoveries.

Consider the enrichment that the Bible has brought to your life. It casts light again and again on our intellectual and philosophical questions. The norms and directions found therein leads to a life of meaning and excellence, whereas deviation from its paths inevitably results in catastrophe. And, most precious of all, it solves for us the question how a

sinner can stand justified before his or her Creator.

Consider all the positive effects that you have known from living your life in obedience to God. Do the Biblical prescriptions not lead without exception to ultimate prosperity - spiritually, emotionally, morally and even materially?

And this is not only true for individuals. The degree to which a society embraces the Bible message and values, is the degree to which that society is ennobled by it. Likewise, to the degree to which the Bible is discarded by a community, to that degree corrosion and decay ultimately takes over.

Moreover, throughout the ages no assault succeeded in blotting out the deep-rooted Biblical convictions of believers. What is more, the fiercer the persecution, the more powerful the church becomes. But unbelievers, do they remain standing in times of attack?

## 3. Let us give all the glory to God for the fact that we have faith.

My faith and yours is the work of God the Holy Spirit. It is based on the perfect mediatory work of Christ. And it flows from the Father's predestinating initiative.

Truly, salvation, from A to Z, flows from God's loving heart. Grace, grace, grace!

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