

**SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSON**

(Lesson for August 9)  
**LIFE—VANITY OR VICTORY?**  
 (Temperance)  
 Ecclesiastes  
**GOLDEN TEXT**—Let not thine heart envy sinners: but be thou in the fear of the Lord all the day long.—Prov. 23:17  
**THE LESSON AS A WHOLE**  
 Approach to the Lesson  
 The author of Ecclesiastes was doubtless Solomon, the wise, wealthy, and powerful son of David. He calls himself "the Preacher" (1:1, 2, 12). In Hebrew this is Koheleth, the con- venger of an assembly. Ecclesiastes is a Greek title similar to

ecclesia ("church," those who are "called out").  
 Solomon reminds his readers that human life apart from God is empty, futile, and vain. In itself it has nothing whatever to offer that brings enduring satisfaction.  
 The ruler spoke with the voice of experience. As "king over Israel in Jerusalem" (1:12) he had all that man could wish. God had endowed him with unusual wisdom. His wealth was immense, his possessions fabulous, his palace magnificent, his household huge. He was universally respected. In short, if any man could have found permanent pleasure in things, people, and achievements, Solomon should have been that man.  
 But his verdict is the opposite of what one might expect. He makes it clear that the heart of man will never find perpetual peace until it rests in God.  
**Verse by Verse**  
 Eccles. 5:1—"Keep thy foot when thou goest to the house of God . . . be more ready to hear, than . . . sacrifice of fools; they consider not that they do evil." "Keep thy foot" is "guard your steps"; for one's outward walk reflects, and sometimes controls his inward attitudes. To "draw near to hear" (Heb.), i.e., "to pay attention and obey" (See 1 Sam. 15:22), is more important than meaningless external rites; although fools, in performing

such rites, may not realize in their perversity that their sacrifices—mere formal ceremonies unaccompanied by obedience—are evil in God's sight.  
**Verse 2**—"Be not rash with thy mouth . . . to utter any thing before God . . . God is in heaven, and thou upon earth; therefore let thy words be few." The warning is against vain, empty thoughtlessness in prayer. (See Mat. 6:7). To be hasty in utterance implies carelessness, a lack of heart preparedness in approaching the Lord in prayer. What right has the creature ("upon earth") thus to draw near to the God of majesty and heavenly glory?  
**Verse 4**—"When thou vowest . . . unto God, defer not to pay it; for he hath no pleasure in fools . . ." Compare these words with Deuteronomy 23:21-23. Vows were voluntary promises or commitments which men made to God. Wise men made such vows only when their hearts so dictated. Because their vows were sincere, they performed them. Fools delayed or failed to keep their vows, either from laziness, neglect, or stubbornness, thus proving their insincerity. Of course the Almighty was displeased with them.  
**Verse 5**—"Better is it that thou shouldst not vow, than that thou shouldst vow and not pay." It was no sin not to make promises to God (See Deu. 23:22). But once a vow was made, a person's faith, sincerity, and integrity demanded that he fulfill it.

**Verse 6**—"Suffer not thy mouth to cause thy flesh to sin; neither say . . . before the angel . . ." It was an error; wherefore should God be angry at thy voice, and destroy . . . ? Making rash vows may lead to evil deeds ("flesh" signifies man's evil nature). Study, for example, the vow of Jephthah in Judges 11:30, 31) or of Saul (1 Sam. 14:24, 39). "Angel" simply means the "messenger" of God, as the priest or minister (See Rev. 2:1). The thought is: Do not dodge the issue of your disobedience in failing to keep a vow. Your obvious evasion and unwarranted self-defense will provoke God to anger.  
**Verse 8**—"If thou seest the oppression of the poor, and . . . perverting of judgment . . . in a province, marvel not . . . he that is higher than the highest regardeth . . ." There be higher than they." Out in the provinces, far from the center of government, injustices would more likely occur. The refusal is to corruption in the system of graded legislative and financial control, e.g. to fraud in tax-gathering, biased law courts, and unfair legal procedures. Even "high-ups" in such officialdom may be involved. But above them all is God, who keeps His divine record.  
**Verse 9**—"Moreover the profit of the earth is for all: the king himself is served by the field." The law of supply and demand, which goes back to its root in agriculture, applies to all men, even to a monarch. Hence all are tempted in the



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matters of justice and personal gain.  
**Verse 10**—"He that loveth silver shall not be satisfied with silver; nor he that loveth abundance with increase: this is . . . vanity." "Vanity" means "emptiness." Man's appetite for money and goods is never satisfied by their acquisition. The more his possessions, the greater his greed, and, consequently, are heart attitudes. They are changed, not by things, but only when the heart is changed.  
**Verse 11**—"When goods increase, they are increased that eat them . . . what good . . . to the owners . . . saving the beholding of them . . . ?" The greater a man's possessions the more servants are needed to manage them. These servants must eat! A vicious circle commences: gain leads to expansion which causes the gain to diminish! The owner cannot enjoy more than his own capacity to enjoy! He must simply look on while his underlings devour his earnings.  
**Verse 12**—"The sleep of a labouring man is sweet, whether he eat little or much . . . the abundance of the rich will not suffer him to sleep." Contentment and lack of anxiety are the lot of the man whose possessions are adequate but limited. He sleeps because his worries are few. The rich man has a complex assortment of tensions which keep him awake. Are his investments wise, will his goods be safe, can he trust his employees, what about his competitors, and so forth?  
**Verse 18**—"Behold that which I have seen . . . It is good . . . to eat and to drink, and to enjoy the good of all his labour . . . under the sun all the days of his life, which God giveth him . . ." This is Solomon's personal conclusion. He advocates the simple, not the self-indulgent life, as "comely" (fitting, Heb.). This is in contrast to the greed of the avaricious man. The contented person is the one who recognizes God's gracious provisions sustaining him.  
**Verse 19**—"Every man also to whom God hath given riches and . . . power to eat thereof . . . and to rejoice in his labour; this is the gift of God." Possessions are valuable only when their owner can personally enjoy them and when he is happy in the work through which he earns them.



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