

Eccl. 3:1-8 To every *thing there is* a season, and a time to every purpose under the 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, and a time to cast away; A time to rend, and a time to sew; a time to keep silence, and a time to speak; A time to love, and a time to hate; a time of war, and a time of peace.

This set of verses provides a window into Solomon's mind as he processes thoughts of the contrasting events that make up one's life. He understands that there is a right time and a wrong time for the things we do. All the actions/events listed make up the span of one's life between birth and death, a time Pastor Bob refers to as your "hyphen" (1929 – 1999).

It is especially important for the Christian to realize that God's timing is always the right timing, and the believer can be sure that everything that happens in his/her life is determined/allowed by God for good.

Romans 8:28 "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose."

When we choose to leave God out of the equation in these processes, we are asking for trouble. More and more today through the advances in technology we are trying to override God's established natural processes.

I think it is important to note that some of the negatives in life are necessary to the appreciation of its blessings. Some of the negatives are actually beneficial to us; e.g., weeping is part of the healing process of mourning.

The reference to there being a proper time for embracing and for refraining from embracing jumped out to me in light of today's culture of loose morals. We have come to the point that it is considered infringing upon the "rights" of others to expect them to refrain from the public display of sin. We call it "art" or "entertainment" to justify public display of nudity and sex. It's called smart business to prey upon the lusts of the flesh in advertising.

Knowing when to speak and when to stay silent are very important to the testimony of the Christian. Scripture is very clear on the importance of controlling the tongue.

Psalms 39:1 "I said, I will take heed to my ways, that I sin not with my tongue: I will keep my mouth with a bridle, while the wicked is before me."

Proverbs 21:23 "Whoso keepeth his mouth and his tongue keepeth his soul from troubles."

James 3:5-6 "Even so the tongue is a little member, and boasteth great things. Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth! And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity: so is the tongue among our members, that it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell."

Eccl. 3:9-11 **What profit hath he that worketh in that wherein he laboureth? I have seen the travail, which God hath given to the sons of men to be exercised in it. He hath made every *thing* beautiful in his time: also he hath set the world in their heart, so that no man can find out the work that God maketh from the beginning to the end.**

In recognition of all that is a part of life, Solomon still wants to know what 's the purpose of it all. He understands that God is the source of life and that He is the one that has set in motion the natural process that are a part of our life. He understands that God has a purpose for the things that are part of our life. Everything in the life of the child of God becomes "beautiful in His time."

I liked the CJB translation of the last part of verse 11: "...*He has given human beings an awareness of eternity; but in such a way that they can't fully comprehend, from beginning to end, the things God does.*"

The Hebrew for "world" is a reference to eternity. We have a divinely implanted understanding of our Creator as testified through the creation. The Holy Spirit affirmed this truth through the Apostle Paul.

Romans 1:19-20 "Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them. For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse...."

Whether we choose to admit it or not, we also have an understanding of God as eternal and that our being is eternal as well. The historical record of heathen cultures evidence belief in life after death. The fact that they created idols of false gods is indicative of their understanding of a supreme being positioned outside of time. In doing a little research I found an interesting argument from primitive man's perspective in an article by Professor Peter Kreeft at www.leaderu.com/truth/1truth28.html.

"Primitive Man has two cows. One dies. What is the difference between Dead Cow and Live Cow? Primitive man looks. (He's really quite bright.) There appears no material difference in size or weight immediately upon death. Yet there is an enormous difference; something is missing. What? Life, of course. And what is that? The answer is obvious to any intelligent observer whose head is not clouded with theories: life is what makes Live Cow breathe. Life is breath. (The word for 'soul', or 'life', and 'breath' is the same in many ancient languages.) Soul is not air, which is still in Dead Cow's lungs, but the power to move it."

The article posted several other logical arguments evidencing the immaterial part of our being such as mind over matter, recognizing that "I am more than my

body," etc. That immaterial part of our being that we call our soul/spirit is what connects with the eternal nature of God. I could really get side-tracked following up the research on this subject in glancing at titles in the search results.

We have an innate recognition that the works of God are far beyond our ability to understand, and scripture declares this truth.

Isaiah 55:8-9 "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts."

Eccl. 3:12-13 I know that *there is no good in them, but for a man to rejoice, and to do good in his life. And also that every man should eat and drink, and enjoy the good of all his labour, it is the gift of God.*

The KJV is a bit confusing, but other translations clarify that Solomon is concluding that the best approach to life is to enjoy the works of God. He should take pleasure in doing good things and recognize that the ability to enjoy the fruits of one's labor is in itself a gift of God.

I think that is an important truth to grasp in light of difficult times. We should focus on the blessings of God and be thankful for the abilities He has given us to be able to provide for our families and ourselves.

Eccl. 3:14 I know that, whatsoever God doeth, it shall be for ever: nothing can be put to it, nor any thing taken from it: and God doeth *it*, that *men* should fear before him.

As noted at the close of chapter two, Solomon's own words testify to his understanding that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. I was listening to a sermon by Adrian Rogers the other night, and he defined fear of the Lord as "love on its knees"; I think that is the best definition I've heard.

I liked what Ray Stedman had to say about this verse (www.raystedman.org) as it applies to us: "Most of the struggle of life comes from us wanting to play God ourselves, wanting to be in charge of what happens to us. That is true even of Christians. When God refuses to go along we sulk and pout and get angry with him. We throw away our faith and say, "What's the use? I tried it but it doesn't work." What a foolish statement! God will not surrender his prerogatives. "Nothing can be added to it, nor anything taken from it -- God has made it so in order that men should fear before him."

Eccl. 3:15 That which hath been is now; and that which is to be hath already been; and God requireth that which is past.

This verse is basically a repeat of 1:9: "The thing that hath been, *it is that* which shall be; and that which is done *is that* which shall be done: and *there is* no new *thing* under the sun."

The interesting added observation in this verse is that all that is past has a purpose in God's plan. I think in context that the reference is to the natural flow of things as set into motion through creation. I liked the application to us as stated in the NIV commentary: "We may discard the lessons of history, but God confronts us with them again and again." He gives us every opportunity to learn.

Eccl. 3:16-17 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.

"Under the sun" is a reference to life on planet earth. After reading through several translations, I think Solomon has concluded that where man is in charge of determining justice, you will find corruption and injustice. He takes solace in the thought that God will judge both the righteous and the wicked.

We need to realize that it was man that brought sin into the world. Because God has chosen to give man freedom of choice, the continued actions of sinful man often result in situations that we would call "unfair." The masses always like to blame God for "bad" things, without considering man's responsibility. We want to hold God accountable for His actions toward us while accepting no accountability to Him for our own actions. It's our response to God and His provision for us in this fallen world that will determine God's judgment regarding our eternal being. If we respond in faith and obedience to His provision for us through His Son Jesus Christ, we will be clothed in righteousness to live with Him for eternity. If we choose to indulge the flesh and reject God as Lord, we will be condemned to eternity apart from Him.

John 3:16-18 "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved. He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God."

Eccl. 3:18-22 I said in mine heart concerning the estate of the sons of men, that God might manifest them, and that they might see that they themselves are beasts. 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? Wherefore I perceive 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?

I think it is important to remember the context of this section to the previous section of verses. Solomon is expressing his thoughts that God is testing these wicked and unjust men; observation should make them recognize that man

without God, the wicked and unjust, is no better off than the animals. Both man and beast return to the dust of the ground in death. Without faith in God, man has no assurance of life after death. He can hope for nothing better than to enjoy the pleasures of this life for a season.

Some commentators regard the words in verse 21, "Who knoweth the spirit of man...," as a statement, not a question. In a verse from chapter 12 Solomon clarifies his understanding that there is a difference in the fate of the "spirit" of the beast and the "spirit" of man. In reference to the death of a man he states:

Eccl. 12:7 Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it.

In other words, the spirit of man is going to face judgment in the presence of Almighty God.

The beautiful truth for the Christian is that Jesus has already been judged in our place; He suffered the judgment of our sin. The only judgment the Christian will face is one of determination of eternal rewards.

1 Corinthians 3:11-15 "For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is. If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire."

The wicked and unjust will, however, face God alone in judgment based on his works in this life.

Revelation 20:12 "And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works."