

Ecclesiastes 9:7 – “... a Time to Laugh”

- 1) The book of Ecclesiastes is placed differently in the Christian Old Testament and the Hebrew Bible
 - a) The “Books of Wisdom” in the Christian Bible: Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Solomon
 - b) In the Hebrew Bible, Ecclesiastes is called Kohelet and was read yearly during the Feast of Tabernacles
 - c) In the Hebrew Bible it is found in a section called ‘The Writings’ – which also contains Psalms, Lamentations, Proverbs, Esther, Ezra-Nehemiah and 1-2 Chronicles
- 2) It is an example of what is called “Wisdom Literature”
 - a) Wisdom Literature attempts to provide application of God’s perfect Truth in an imperfect world
 - b) It offers advice, not than commands; and observations of what is, rather than declarations of what should be
- 3) Because of the different way the Hebrew mind viewed life, as opposed to Western thought, Western Christians often struggle with much of Ecclesiastes
 - a) Hebrew thought focuses on the struggle between eternal truth and temporary nature of this life
 - i) It views the pleasures of life as gifts from God – to be embraced and enjoyed **because** they are fleeting
 - ii) Pleasure should be embraced as the gift it is, God is to be praised, and then the pleasure let go of when its time is past
 - iii) Sin is seeking pleasure for its own sake or outside the boundaries God sets for it
 - b) Some aspects of Western thought – and the Christian teachings which are heavily influenced by it – view life as a battle between the flesh (seen as evil) and the spirit (seen as good)
 - i) Pleasure livens the flesh and tempts our appetites, leading us to waste ourselves
 - ii) Meaning is found in denying pleasure for a greater good – the advancement of civilization
- 4) Other passages in Ecclesiastes echo the same sentiment as today’s passage – particularly:
 - a) 2:24-25: Pleasure itself, as well as the ability to accept it, are gifts from God
 - b) 3:12-13: Adds that God intends pleasure to be the proper reward for faithful labor
 - c) 3:22: God intended work to be satisfying, and since its joy is temporary (like all things in this life) it should be enjoyed as it comes
 - d) 5:18: Joy in one’s labor is part of the reward labor offers
 - e) 8:15: When the labor is over, the joy it brings remains for a time and should be embraced
 - f) Not only Ecclesiastes, but other parts of the Old Testament echo the same, as in Nehemiah 8:10: “Don’t remain in grief, because the joy of the LORD is your strength
 - g) All of this explains the gift of the Sabbath to the Jews – the commandment to relax and enjoy the blessing that is meaningful labor
- 5) Despite the Christian emphasis on sin and repentance, the New Testament also advocates joy and pleasure rightly experienced
 - a) Matthew 11:19: Jesus was accused of enjoying life too much
 - b) Luke 15:7, 10: “There is joy in heaven over every sinner who repents”
 - c) Acts 14:17: Food for the body and joy for the soul are evidence of the existence of God
 - d) 1 Timothy 6:17: “God richly provides us with all things for our enjoyment”
- 6) The ability to experience joy and pleasure without being obsessed by them or seeking them outside God’s will is itself a form of praise to God, the giver of all good things
 - iii) Therefore pleasure is evil by its very nature