

		the focus of the Consummation of the Covenant of Grace and the History of Mankind (Revelation 21-22).	
DWELLING OF GOD	Though God seems absent with us, because of His ever-present-covenant love and power, though life can seem “vanity of vanities” it is not, for He is with us. He ultimately reveals this to us in Christ.	God is present with us in a bond of marriage union by His Spirit. We are betrothed to Him as His Beloved Bride.	Christ will dwell with His Bride for all eternity, and all of our labor, pleasure, oppression, even death will be in proper perspective for all eternity when God “above the sun” unites the restored, recreated earth “under the sun” and God will dwell with His people forever in Christ: “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with men. He will dwell with them, and they will be His people, and God Himself will be with them as their God” (Rev. 21:3).

Introduction to the “Megilloth” (Heb.) or “The Five Scrolls”

The five scrolls were used as lectionary readings from the Old Testament for five of the major festivals in Israel:

Feast	Scroll/Garment	Meaning/Christ
Passover	<i>Song of Songs/Song of Solomon</i> <i>A Garment of Love</i>	True covenantal love can become a return to Eden. Book emphasizes the love of YHWH for His Bride.
Feast of Weeks	<i>Ruth</i> <i>A Garment of Kindness</i>	A kind of “Rom-Com” or romantic comedy that moves from death to life (resurrection): barrenness to fruitfulness, emptiness to fullness, curse to blessing, childless to David’s greater Son. Hope for the Gentiles, through a Gentile (cf. Matt. 1:1-18).
Tisha B’av: Ninth of Ab	<i>Lamentations</i> <i>A Garment of Suffering</i>	Suffering in exile, awaiting for the coming of the King and redemption-restoration (Lam. 3:19-24).

Feast of Tabernacles	<i>Ecclesiastes</i> <i>A Garment of Vexation</i>	“Ecclesiastes is a garment to wear when we have finished with performance and are ready for work—note with an inflated idea of what we can achieve, but with contentment and confidence, knowing that our times are in God’s hands” (Barry Webb).
Festival of Purim	Esther <i>A Garment of Deliverance</i>	History is God’s story rather than mere chronicle. What happens to God’s people, though God is not necessarily mentioned is all according to God’s purpose, plan, and providential oversight.

Book of Ecclesiastes

Ecclesiastes is a wonderful book. It should be understood as the musings and observations of King Solomon.

The glorious and exalted King Solomon wearing the golden crown experiences what it is like to wear the Adamic-Crown of Thorns (toil, trouble, thistles and thorns of the fall, Gen. 3).

King Solomon had the privilege of seeing and experiencing many wonderful things in God's creation. But he came to realize through experience that all of the wonderful created things that God had given to him were as nothing if he didn't first have God with him.

That's really the meaning of the book of Ecclesiastes: How to find meaning in God's good creation, while always fearing God and keeping his Commandments and enjoying him in our lives.

Ecclesiastes is about knowing that we can't really enjoy life without God, for we were made for God and this life. The Book of Ecclesiastes is really about the fact that only Christians can truly enjoy the good life.

Ecclesiastes is a book of wisdom of literature in the Old Testament “Writings”.

What is *Wisdom Literature*?

Simply put: Wisdom Literature, or more particularly the Book of Ecclesiastes is not merely a collection of dogmatic-theological truths like in a systematic theology. Rather, they are inspired observations about life in light of the knowledge one has under the sun. It is about one’s perspective, and getting that right perspective from God’s word-revelation in Holy Scripture.

In contrast to knowledge that one can gain from say reading an informative book, wisdom is obtained throughout life. You can never gain wisdom by merely obtaining a “liberal arts” degree, or seminary education- - it takes time and God’s grace to develop (see Proverbs chapters 1-9)!

Metaphorically, wisdom Literature, or more particularly the Book of Ecclesiastes’ teaching, is a Tree of Life, planted in the good soil of the knowledge God reveals to man here in creation. This *Tree* grows through experiences and observations during our lives and this brings *wisdom* and *discernment!* It teaches us how to live.

Wisdom is achieved over time and progressively grows like the tree planted next to the water in Psalm 1:3: *He shall be like a tree Planted by the rivers of water, That brings forth its fruit in its season, Whose leaf also shall not wither; And whatever he does shall prosper.* Wisdom literature is concerned about life *under the sun*, or every aspect of our life experience that calls for an interpretation by our life philosophy.

In the Book of Ecclesiastes, the main character is “The Preacher” or the one some call *Qoheleth*, and some identify as King Solomon (*Qoheleth* is the Hebrew word translated “teacher”). The author Qoheleth begins his book with the sentence:

“Vanity of vanities! All is vanity!” (or, “All is meaninglessness”)

The Hebrew word *hevel* translated above as “vanity” can be translated as “futile” or “meaninglessness” as well. Is this true? Is all of life merely *hevel* (vanity, futile, meaninglessness)? Well, the Book of Ecclesiastes is an inspired book, so what do we as Christians, people of the truth, what do we do with a book that makes such claims?

We as Christians can learn a true and real perspective of living the Christian life from the Book of Ecclesiastes. The author paints a real portrait of the world created by God and what the world at times “seems” to those who are not afraid to take a look.

Qoheleth, or the Preacher speaks of labor and work, knowledge and wisdom, riches and possessions, injustice and oppression, the righteous and the wicked, and the times and seasons of life and death; he just about covers everything we experience here in this life “under the sun”.

From one perspective, we must agree that “under the sun” it does seem like the wicked and unrighteous truly do get far ahead success-wise in this world contrasted with the righteous. Also, hard work does not always seem to pay off and we gather in our barns, feed our flock on the farm, pay our bills, then we die. It seems in this real life that even our best efforts for Christ are not appreciated and go unnoticed.

As the author of Ecclesiastes says in places, he says that it seems that the righteous and the unrighteous differ little in the things they experience: debt, troubles, war, difficulties, sufferings, then death. What are we to make of this?

Anyone who has lived the Christian life for more than 24 hours is bound to agree with some of what he says. Sometimes we throw up our own hands and say: “Meaningless, meaningless” or “Vanity of vanities, all is vanity!”

The Way of Wisdom - Michael Card

The Way of Wisdom starts out

With a step of holy fear

And it makes its way alone

By every good word that you hear

It has to do with passion

And it has to do with pain

It has to do with One

Who has both died and rose again

Died and rose again

And the Way of Wisdom is living

The Path of Peace is forgiving

Behold the Man of Meaning

Behold, He is the Lord

The way of understanding lies

In not how much you know

Where the pathway is a person

That you've come to love and so

You can stop pretending that it all depends on you

For it's not how much you love

As much as how much He loves you

How much He loves you

And the Way of Wisdom is living

The Path of Peace is forgiving

Behold the Man of Meaning

Behold, He is the Lord
And the Way of Wisdom is living
The Path of Peace is forgiving
Behold the Man of Meaning
Behold, He is the Lord

The Way of Wisdom beckons us
To find the end of fear that perfect love pursues
Wisdom did not come to simply speak the words of truth
He's the Word that makes us true
The Way of Wisdom starts out
With a step of holy fear
That's only the beginning
And there's much more that is clear
The path leads on to love
And love is fearless in its ways
For Love Himself was not afraid
To die that we'd be saved
To die that we'd be saved

And the Way of Wisdom is living
The Path of Peace is forgiving
Behold the Man of Meaning
Behold, He is the Lord
And the Way of Wisdom is living
The Path of Peace is forgiving
Behold the Man of Meaning
Behold, He is the Lord

Behold, He is the Lord

Two Important Themes of the Book

Two themes that are focused upon early in Ecclesiastes, and then throughout the book are: "Vanity" and "Life Under the Sun".

Life without God is meaningless. Life without God is vain; it is vanity. You can have a good life and yet not have God, and your life will be vain. You will work and work and work and work, and then die.

The other theme is "Under the Sun". This is King Solomon's way of describing life as we see and experience it here in this world. There is "nothing new under the sun". One generation comes and goes, and gives way to the next generation; water runs into the sea, the sun rises and sets, and people live and die; there's nothing new under the sun.

If this life as we see and experience it is all there is, then it would seem vain or meaningless. Thus the reason why many pagan peoples and philosophers, although they are religious by nature, nevertheless can fall into despair.

Remember as we read through the Book of Ecclesiastes to keep in mind that Solomon is seeking wisdom through what he sees and experiences in this creation.

We must have the special revelation of God in Holy Scripture to teach us not only of the origin of our lives, but also the salvation found in Jesus Christ, and the destination that God has prepared for those who love him. If we do not have this full knowledge and wisdom revealed by God as we find it in Holy Scripture, we can be tempted to despair; tempted to think that life is all vanity and striving after the wind.

We can be tempted to think that life is purposeless. But it is not. God has created all things, and revealed himself clearly to us, given himself to us in Christ Jesus, and called us to glorify and enjoy him.

Let us enjoy life. Only Christians truly can enjoy life.

Outline

Prologue of the Book: 1:1-11

Body of the Book: 1:12-12:8

Epilogue: 12:9-14

Who is the Author? tl,h,qo [*Qoheleth*]; historically understood as King Solomon. We will call him *Qoheleth* which means literally: "speaker of an assembly" or "preacher". This title or name

comes from the root word in Hebrew *lhq* meaning “assembly” and where we get the word for “church”. Translated in the Greek as *Ekkhlesiasth,j* where we get the name of the book because of the LXX (Septuagint, the Greek trans. of the OT). Interesting to compare with the speech of Stephen in Acts 7:38 where he uses the Hebrew word “assembly” or “congregation” to refer to the “church in the wilderness” when speaking of the Israelites.

- **Futility, Meaninglessness, Vanity**- *lbh/ hebel* (pronounced “hevel”). This word can mean vapor, breath, vanity (check context of each verse: OT- “breath”-Job 7:16; “vanity”- Job 9:29; 21:34; 27:12; Ps. 39:6; 94:11; Is. 30:7; “vapor”- Prov. 21:6; “wind”- Is. 57:13. NT [mataiothj]: Rom. 8:20; Eph. 4:17; James 1:26; 2 Peter 2:18). The idea of *hebel* is the temporal nature of life and what seems to be futility in a world that is fleeting as our lives. Ecclesiastes 3:1-8 summarizes the times and seasons of this life and this world which is passing away (its temporal nature). What does “chasing after the wind” feel like?
- **Passages in Ecclesiastes on vanity/hebel:** 1:2; 2:11, 15, 17, 19, 26; 3:19; 4:4, 7, 16; 5:7, 10; 6:2, 9; 9:9; 12:8.

The Book of Ecclesiastes is to remind us that we live in a fallen world "under the sun". To use an illustration from one of our favorite stories, 'The Lord of the Rings', all is not right in the Shire. And the truth is, the Shire can never remain the shire permanently. There is evil in this present age, and it will indeed find its way to the Shire. The Book of Ecclesiastes reminds us to prepare ourselves for the future, not through fearing, but through getting to know our Creator and his goodness toward all of his creatures, particularly his unfailing love toward us in Christ.

Yes, there are good times, but bad times will also come. The point of this passage is that we trust God and put our hope in him alone, and that we look forward to his promise to restore us and all things.

We know that while destruction and discouragement will visit us here in this present age, the Lord is with us and will never leave us nor forsake us. As our Lord Jesus said: "In this world you will have tribulation, but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world!" (John 16:33). Amen.

- History as Eschatological (Plan, Purpose, Progressive):
***...A time to...A time to...* – 3:1-8**

The Greeks in their philosophy of history said that history is going nowhere and is always cyclical in nature (history just repeats itself over and over and over and over etc. etc.).

This was similar to other pagan philosophies of history. It implies that history has no real purpose or meaning, and it is not going in any particular direction. Therefore, according to pagan philosophies, the seasons of our lives are just repeating events with no real purpose, and they will just recur again and again.

This pagan philosophy of history is drastically faulty and different from God's revelation of history in the Bible. In God's revelation of history, God has created all things, and he has created history, including all of space and time and every season of our lives he has ordained for his glory and are good.

History, in the Bible, is a well thought out decree and plan of God that will culminate and consummate in the New Heavens and New Earth.

History in the Bible has an end and a purpose and it is to glorify God and to bring all of history under the Lordship of Christ for his glory alone.

Although there is much repetition in history, it is more than merely cyclical, or it repetitive in nature. God's history is moving to an end, to the glorifying and exalting of Jesus Christ as King of Kings and Lord of lords.

"...Making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth." - Ephesians 1:9-10

- **Labor/Work**: 1:3, 14; 2:18; 3:9-10; 4:4-12; 6:7-9; 9:10; 10:8-11.
Even toiling or work in this present age "under the sun" is meaningless and vain if we are not working and toiling for God as His stewards.

What makes toil and work satisfying is that God calls us to do our work, gives gifts to us to accomplish our work, and gives us hope of rewards for our work, both now and in the age to come.

In this fallen life full of sin and misery "under the sun", men will often labor skillfully and work hard because they're trying to be better than others.

In other words, envy can drive sinful people to be the best at what they do. If we were to just observe this "under the sun" without the help of the Holy Scriptures we might be discouraged and call work and skill a "chasing after the wind."

But the Bible teaches us that God gives all callings; God gives us all gifts; we are stewards of everything we do for God.

We are not to envy our neighbors, but to use our gifts and talents, and work unto the Lord for his glory, and enjoy his good gifts and the rewards that will come from them.

Fallen mankind full of sin often will work his fingers to the bone, working extremely hard all of his days, but have no one to share his well with.

Often sinful man like this are working hard because their trust in in their idol which is security, and they want to try to ensure that nothing bad will happen to them in their lives. But this is very "unhappy business.

- **Knowledge/Wisdom:** 1:18; 2:12-23; 4:13-16; 6:7-9; 7:11-12, 16-26; 8:1-9, 16-17; 9:13-18; 10:12; 12:11. Contrasted to *folly*: 7:1-14; 10:1-7, 12-20.
- **Entertainment/Enjoyment/Pleasure:** 2:1-26
King Solomon seeks to enjoy life under the sun. He wants to know if entertainment and pleasure have any meaning to them?

We learn that pleasure like knowledge, is vanity and meaningless apart from God.

As we learn elsewhere in the Scriptures there is no good apart from God. Although man can laugh and he can enjoy himself with many things that God has given to him, nevertheless, always hanging over him is the reality of death and condemnation and judgment.

On the one hand, if there is no God then pleasure means nothing because the pleasure doesn't satisfy man, we're always wanting more.

On the other hand if God exists, and we do not acknowledge him in our pleasures, we are easily discontented and bored, and ultimately because we are made in God's image we know something is missing and that death and condemnation await us.

Pleasure and enjoyment are only meaningful with God. We were made for God, and our hearts will never be happy and fully at rest until they find happiness and rest in God.

^{ESV} Ecclesiastes 3:11 He has made everything beautiful in its time. Also, he has put eternity into man's heart, yet so that he cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end.

God makes everything beautiful in its time. God has placed eternity, the desire for God and eternity in men's souls. Although sin has darkened man's mind has caused his conscience not to work as well as it should, nevertheless, men grasp after and desire higher things than themselves.

Man looks around in creation and sees what God has made, and desires to worship and adore something or someone. Man worships and adores the wrong things, but he seeks to worship. This is significant. Man knows that death is wrong, man aspires for some kind of eternal life, and he knows something has gone wrong in this world (To prove this all you have to do is read fairytales and myths and legends to see that eternity has been put into men's hearts).

The eternity that God has planted in men's hearts, is revealed in this longing and aspiring to worship and to obtain eternal life. If God had not placed it in man's heart then man would be fine just to live as a creature and die just like the animals. But man inherently, inside himself, knows that he's more than an animal.

The eternity that God has made us for has an open door in the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ. In Jesus Christ, God has clearly revealed to us his purpose for men, for history, and for our eternity. In time, because of the completed work of Jesus Christ, God will indeed make everything beautiful-- nothing will be tainted by sin, death, and corruption any longer.

We should be thankful that God gives us the joy of enjoying food and drink, or created things to help us in this life full of sin and misery. We must never put our trust in these creative things, we can enjoy them.

"For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, for it is made holy by the word of God and prayer." - 1 Timothy 4:4-5

Marriage/Companionship: God has made man to have a wife; God said that it was not good for Adam to be alone, so he made a wife. God has made us for friendship and companionship; we enjoy sometimes being alone, but we are not made to be permanently alone.

Our God is Triune and he is a community of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We are beings made in God's image, and this ensures that we, too, will seek after community and communion with God and others. Like Christian and Faithful, or Christian and Hopeful in Bunyan's 'Pilgrims Progress'.

We should enjoy the spouses that God gives to us and to enjoy our work.

But our wives and our work are not the end for which we were created. Our wives and our work are merely creaturely comforts and kind gifts of our Creator.

The end for which we were created is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever. Let us worship and serve him first, while enjoying our spouses and our work in this life.

- **Possessions/Riches**: 2:1-11; 4:7-8; 5:10-17; 6:1-6; 9:11; 10:19.

What does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and yet loses his soul, our Lord Jesus Christ asks poignantly. As we have learned elsewhere in the Bible, we brought nothing into the world and we will take nothing out of the world.

The greatest riches and treasures we can find in this world is the riches and treasures found in the salvation and love of Jesus Christ. This is a treasure that we may enjoy in this world, we can take it out of this world and enjoy it in the life to come for all eternity.

If we are greedy and seek after money, we will never sleep well, and we will always fear losing what we have obtained. Many troubles come with much money and riches. Those who

pursue them and seek after them have made them their gods, their idols that are offensive to the living God.

Greedy people will never rest or be satisfied until they find their portion, their most valuable possession, and their riches in God himself.

JESUS is the pearl of greatest price. JESUS is our treasure!

- **Injustice/Oppression**: 4:1-3; 5:8-9, 18-20.
In this fallen life of sin and misery "under the sun," there are very strong and powerful people who oppress the weak. It is not right, and God will make all things right when he judges the living and the dead. Sometimes this can be discouraging, and even disconcerting, if we only see things "under the sun" without the help of the Holy Scriptures to tell us that God will make all things right in the end and judge the wicked oppressors.
- **Death**: 4:2-3; 7:1b, 7; 8:10; 9:12; 11:8.
Death comes to both the wise man and the foolish man in this present age. If we were merely looking at things "under the sun" apart from God's special revelation in Holy Scripture, we might come to the conclusion that there's no real gain from wisdom, and we might be tempted to think it satisfying just to be a fool.

But the Scriptures teach us that wisdom comes from God, and when wisdom is from God through creation and Holy Scripture, we can understand that death has been defeated by our great God, and we can enjoy being wise and living for him--and not for ourselves as fools do.

Life under the sun can be disappointing and despairing and even dark.

We must have Holy Scripture to give us light and illumination by the Holy Spirit, so that we can put our hope in God and walk with well-lit paths in this present age of sin and misery.

If we observe death merely "under the sun", apart from the truth of God revealed in Holy Scripture, then we might be tempted (like the pagans) to think that men are just like animals.

We might be tempted to think that men, like the animals, are mere dust and just die.

But the Bible tells us that man is made in God's image, has a unique, eternal soul that will live forever, and that man will live body and soul eternally either in the presence of God in Bliss, or eternally body and soul in the pains and fires of hell.

As we learned earlier in this chapter, man has eternity in his heart. That means his soul is eternal and his soul longs for eternal things. Death is not the end for man as it is for animals.

This is an important reminder about the Book of Ecclesiastes: You can't understand life "under the sun" without the truth of God that is revealed in Holy Scripture.

A primary purpose of the book of Ecclesiastes is to remind us of the importance of God's Word and using it to help us to interpret life.

"Under the sun" it may seem that the same things happen to both the righteous and unrighteous, both the saint and the sinner.

The word of God teaches us that the children of men are deformed and depraved because of sin. God has seen our condition, and come in the incarnation to rescue us from our sins, and to remake us and reform us into his image.

The end is not the same for all: Some will be resurrected to eternal life, some will be resurrected to eternal death. Amen.

- **Righteous/Wicked or Unrighteous Men**: 7:15-29; 8:10-15; 9:2-6
- **God**: 2:24-26; 3:9-22; 5:1-7; 6:10-12; 7:13-14, 27-29; 8:12-13, 16-17; 9:1, 7-9; 11:1-6, 9-10; 12:1-7, 13-14.

^{ESV} Ecclesiastes 9:11 Again I saw that under the sun the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, nor bread to the wise, nor riches to the intelligent, nor favor to those with knowledge, but time and chance happen to them all.

This has become a famous piece of wisdom in history.

It is true that it is not the strictest, nor the richest, nor the most knowledgeable necessarily that succeeds in this life.

This reminds us that all things are working together according to God's purposes. Sometimes it is the weak who win the battle (Hobbits against orcs!??), the slow who finish the race (tortoise and hare!??), the poor who get all the riches (Robin Hood!??).

In fact, it is just this truth that points us to Jesus Christ: He seemed slow but was very fast; He seemed poor, but was very rich; he seemed ignorant, but was very knowledgeable! Praise the name of the Lord!

God is good!!

We can be thankful for all of God's love to us.

There are many mysteries in this life. What we have is the truth of God's word to give us light and direction and guidance. But we don't understand deep things such as how the Spirit creates us within our mother's womb, or how the Spirit gives us strength, neither do we fully understand how seeds grow and flourish.

Let us trust in God's providential ordering of all things for his glory and our good, as we do the things we know according to Scripture are right.

Let us live by God's word and be faithful to him.

Conclusion: Read Epilogue 12:9-14.

There are four things from this passage in the book of Ecclesiastes that I want you girls to memorize this morning:

1. Fear God and keep his Commandments: This is most important. To fear God is not to be frightened or scared of him, but to reverence and honor and worship him as your God. To fear God is to live for him by living according to his word.
2. This is the whole duty of man: This means that to fear God and to live for him according to his word is what you were created to do. This is what God requires of every human being. We can only do this in Christ by his Holy Spirit, in reliance upon his grace.
3. There is a judgment coming: This judgment for the Christian is one of being vindicated and revealed publicly to all the world that you are truly the children of God. But it is important to live knowing that there is a judgment that is to come that all men will stand before. We must stand at that judgment Day in Christ alone, or we will be condemn along with the world.
4. Meditate on the truths that you have learned from this book: Life "under the sun" will often look strange and you will be tempted to think that your life is lived in vain. This book helps you to remember that this is not true. You are to live by the light of the Holy Scriptures guiding you through the darkness of this wilderness of this present age.

Conclusion

The reason why all is not meaninglessness and vanity is what the author of Ecclesiastes points us toward at the end of his book of observations and proverbs. Christ has overcome sin and death on our behalf and called us to be real people in a real world, not becoming tainted by the unbelievers, not seeing the unbelievers as enemies (you know, the "us and them" conflict that some well-meaning Christians fall into), but looking to them as they are- - those created in the image of our Creator God.

As well as those who need to know of the Sovereign God who rules his creation providentially for the good of those who love Christ. This is why the Apostle Paul can charge the Corinthians in chapter 15, the chapter on the resurrection, that all is not vain in this world *just because* Christ has been raised from death and overcome sin and the devil. He says:

“Stand firm; let nothing move you. Always give yourselves to the work of the Lord for you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain”.

Our labor, our labor of love and light because Christ has empowered us as witnesses and promised he would never leave us nor forsake us, our labor is *never* in vain! Our labor in Christ is not *hebel*! This is good news! Even the Apostle Paul’s heritage as a Jew before seeing the resurrected Christ was *hebel*. Listen to his remarks in Philippians chapter 3. It seems as if he might have recently been reading the Book of Ecclesiastes:

For we are the circumcision, who worship God in the Spirit, rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh, 4 though I also might have confidence in the flesh. If anyone else thinks he may have confidence in the flesh, I more so: 5 circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews; concerning the law, a Pharisee; 6 concerning zeal, persecuting the church; concerning the righteousness which is in the law, blameless. 7 **But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. 8 Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish [dung, skubala- -refuse, he counted them as “nothing”], that I may gain Christ 9 and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith; 10 that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, 11 if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.**

Our hope as well as all those to whom God has called us to witness is in the Sovereign God who sent Jesus Christ and paid the penalty for our sins, propitiated God’s wrath and reconciled us to God. We are redeemed because of Christ, and we are being redeemed and renewed in his image, but we are not wholly there yet!

But no one- - nothing (including culture and the ways of this world), can snatch us out of his hand, nor separate us from the love of God in Christ! Remember that Jesus did not pray for his disciples to be taken out of the world, but for them to be kept from the Evil One (John 17), and we can rest in this prayer request of Jesus.

We are sinners who have been redeemed, but are being redeemed from the sins with which we truly struggle. May the Lord make us real, so that what the world sees in the church as synthetic and unrealistic may call them as well out of darkness and into His marvelous light! Remember, we who make up the church if we are not doing all of our labors unto the Lord *just because* we want to “glorify God and enjoy him forever,” our service is also *hebel*. This is where the ecclesiastical “rubber” meets the road of serving Christ.

This means, if you are doing your work for God to “please him”- -be careful, it is Christ who ultimately “pleased him” and you have been created in Christ Jesus to do good works which God prepared beforehand for you to do! The labors of Christ on our behalf are the only labors for God that are not *hebel*!

All is indeed *hebel* or meaninglessness if we are not serving Christ by the power of his spirit in gratitude for our salvation in response to his great love for us, even our service “for Christ” is in vain if we are doing it in order to earn something; if we are serving Christ in order to “get on his good side,” or to “achieve or merit salvation,” or even to look more religious than others in, or outside the church, and not *ultimately* for God’s glory, we too are living a *hebel*-ous, or meaningless, or vain, or fleeting existence...even in the church.

Major Themes:

Human beings are designed for love (Gen. 1:26-28; Matt. 19:4-6). Relationships, union, communion, etc.

What kind of love?

Intimacy: God's gift of sex and intimacy within the bounds of marriage.

Counterfeits/Idolatry: Against counterfeit forms of love and intimacy: hedonism, free love, homosexuality, etc. (cf. Col. 3:5ff; Rom. 1:26-32).

A Time for Love: Wisdom and patience and waiting on God for love (S of Sgs, 2:7, 3:5, 8:4).

Honoring God's gift of love: Love is fierce and jealous: 8:6-7.

Asceticism and focus on merely abstinence can undermine the true beauty and glory of biblical love in marriage?

Asceticism is unbiblical and dangerous (1 Tim. 4:1-4; 1 Cor. 7:1ff).

Not merely abstinence, but so much more!

If called to married, God gives a gift of passionate, lifetime intimacy.

Our marriages should never be first, and never will be enough, even our best marriages!!
(Read Ephesians 5:21-32; Psalm 45).

Ultimately, all created marriages in a fallen world are to a certain extent broken and in need of wholeness and God's restoring mercy and grace in Christ.

Ultimately, as *Ecclesiastes* reminds us (8:8), death awaits us all, and therefore our hope for eternal bliss in a love relationship must be had somewhere else.

Ultimately, all marriages in this present age according to Scripture are pictures of Christ and His Church. So much of the application and implications of the *Song of Songs* can be an encouragement to a whole and healthy marriage bond on pilgrimage here in this present age, as well as an incentive and encouragement to deeper and greater intimacy and communion with the Triune God in Jesus Christ our Bridegroom.

Read Revelation 19:7-9; 22:17

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