

Remember Your Creator

📖 Ecclesiastes 12:1-14

👤 Pastor Jeremy Thomas

📅 April 25, 2018

🌐 fbgbible.org

📍 Fredericksburg Bible Church

107 East Austin Street

Fredericksburg, Texas 78624

(830) 997-8834

In Ecclesiastes 11:7 we come to the climax of Solomon's argument in Ecclesiastes. Essentially what Solomon has argued in the book is that attempts to find satisfaction in life devoid of God are futile. The reason is that God is the giver of all joy, and He withholds it from those who do not give thanks to Him. Therefore, the way to find satisfaction in life is to put God at the center of all our activities and give thanks to Him. When we do, we find satisfaction by finding something good that came out of our labor, by enjoying some of the fruits of our labor, by wearing nice clothes, by putting on perfumes and lotions and by partaking in marital bliss. Because life is fleeting we should put God at the center of all our activities and enjoy it as much as possible. What Solomon does in these final verses is emphasize the importance of putting God at the center of our life early in youth, and not putting it off until later.

Last time we studied the first part of the climax, Eccl 11:7-10. In verse 7, Solomon said "The light is pleasant, and it is good for the eyes to see the sun." "Light" is metonymy for "life." The word "pleasant" is a word used of honey, it means "sweet." He is saying "life is sweet," and "it is good for the eyes to see the sun," meaning it is good to be alive. Therefore, life is like honey and something to be savored. In verse 8 he adds, "Indeed, if a man should live many years, let him rejoice in them all, and let him remember the days of darkness, for they will be many." "The days of darkness" refer to the days of death. We should remember that we are going to death and that once we die we can't come back here and live this life again. So we might as well rejoice in all the years of our life. He concludes with the words, "Everything that is to come will be futility." The Hebrew word translated "futility" should be translated "obscurity." Since the OT saints did not have a clear picture of what would come after death, they concluded that it was obscure, even though there are some pre-Solomonic passages that imply resurrection and one or two that teach it, but it seems Solomon did not know much of anything about it. Therefore, in his mind what happened after death was obscure. Therefore, we should enjoy life now as much as possible. In verse 9 he turns to address the youth in particular, "Rejoice, young man, during your youth, and let your heart be pleasant during the days of young manhood. And follow the impulses of your heart and the desires of your eyes. Yet know that God will bring you to judgment for all these things." What Solomon is condoning here is not sin, as some might hastily conclude, but rather pursuing one's dreams and desires in

youth, within the boundaries of God's moral law. The young believer should make the most of his youth, trying to find God's plan for their life. So whatever you enjoy, pursue it, just make sure you keep God at the center of it. In order to do this, Solomon instructs them in verse 10, "remove grief and anger from your heart and put away pain from your body, because youth and the prime of life are fleeting." In other words, put away emotional trauma, you don't need all that drama, and also put away physical injury. Don't physically injure yourself as you pursue your interests because that will not lead to a productive and enjoyable life. Youth and the time immediately after are the prime of life, and those days are fleeting. So you might as well enjoy them while you can.

In 12:1 Solomon continues to instruct the youth, telling them to live responsibly by underscoring in vivid word pictures the increasing gloom and declining powers of old age that culminate in death. He gives his grand conclusion in the last two verses of the book. 12:1-8 the verses can be outlined around the idea of "Remember Him...before..." Three times he says "Remember Him...before..." Verse 1, **Remember your Creator...before the evil days come...** In verse 2, **Remember your Creator...before the sun and the light, the moon and the stars are darkened.** And in verse 6, **Remember your Creator...before the silver cord is broken and the golden bowl is crushed.** So the main idea is to remember Him in the youth of life so that you live responsibly, because old age is coming and then you will lose virility of life.

In verse 1, the command to **Remember your Creator** does not merely mean, "think about your Creator." The word *zekor* fundamentally means "call to mind," as in remember, but in the sense of remember so as to obey and acknowledge. Wallace says it is a "metonymy of association," meaning obey God and acknowledge His lordship over every area of life.¹ This understanding is also implied by the epithet used of God, **your Creator**, since as the Creator of all He is Lord of all and we should obey and acknowledge Him. It is also the obvious understanding in light of 11:9 where He reminded the youth that "God will bring...into judgment...all these things," since when we remember that we will face judgment we tend to obey and acknowledge Him. Furthermore, the word *zekor* is used in parallel with obeying the Law in Ps 119:55 and Deut 8:18, reinforcing the idea that remember involves obeying. And finally, Eccl 12:13-14 spell out what it means to "remember God." And there it clearly says "fear God and keep His commandments...For God will bring every act to judgment, everything which is hidden, whether it is good or evil." So, we are on solid ground concluding that the imperative **Remember your Creator** means more than just think about Him, it means to obey Him and acknowledge Him as Lord over your whole life.

When should you **Remember your Creator**? Solomon says, **in the days of your youth.** And when are **the days of your youth**? Solomon says, **before the evil days come and the years draw near when you will say, "I have no delight in them"**. The big idea is to do this early in life, learn to obey God and acknowledge His lordship over every area of life early, so that you live a responsible life. This will establish you before God and men before you grow old and start having all kinds of problems. The words **evil days** should be translated "difficult days." The difficult days are the days when you are growing old and **the years are drawing near when you will say, I have**

no delight in them.” So, probably in your late 50’s and 60’s the years draw near and then by the time you are in the 70’s or 80’s **you say, “I have no delight** in this anymore.” The reason is because you wake up each day and you have so many physical problems that it is very difficult to enjoy life. So, the imperative is to establish a good pattern early in life, learn to obey God and acknowledge His lordship over every area of life.

In verses 3-7 we have a highly figurative description of old age. Wiersbe said, “Verses 3–7 give us one of the most imaginative descriptions of old age and death found anywhere in literature.”² In verse 3. **Before the sun and the light, the moon and the stars are darkened, and clouds return after the rain.** In this picture, **the sun and the light, the moon and the stars are darkened.** This is during a storm where the clouds cover the sky and it rains. It is figurative describing a difficult time in life. So you undergo a difficult time in life, then it says, the **clouds return after the rain**, meaning, another storm comes. And this is the pattern in old age, you get sick and then when you get past that you get hurt and then after that you have some other problem and it’s just difficult times followed by very brief respites and then more difficult times. Glenn, in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary* said, “As **clouds** often block out the light of **the sun**, the **moon, and the stars**, so old age is a period of diminishing joy (**light**) and increasing gloom (**dark**), heralding the approach of the long night of death. This obviously alludes to the earlier figurative use of light and darkness to depict life and death (11:7–8). This allusion would have been obvious to the ancient Hebrews who held a more dynamic view of death than people have today. Any decrease in the vitality of a person, even a young person, was viewed as the onset of death (cf., e.g., Ps. 18:4–5; 88:3–5).”³ So his point there is that gradually you lose vitality and that means you are getting closer to death and so, in light of this, what should you do? Remember your Creator before the onset of death, obey and acknowledge Him in the prime of life. Don’t wait till the end when there is no delight in life.

In verse 3 he continues, **in the day that the watchmen of the house tremble, and mighty men stoop, the grinding ones stand idle because they are few, and those who look through windows grow dim and the doors on the street are shut as the sound of the grinding mill is low, and one will arise at the sound of the bird, and all the daughters of song will sing softly. Furthermore, men are afraid of a high place and of terrors on the road; the almond tree blossoms, the grasshopper drags himself along, and the caperberry is ineffective.** These many highly descriptive figures of speech are somewhat difficult to interpret, but they all refer to the declining physical and psychological powers that accompany old age. At the beginning of verse 3, **in the day that the watchmen of the house tremble** refers to the onset of old age when **the man of the house trembles** for fear rather than stands courageously as he once did. Due to weakness and frailty a once courageous man will tremble in fear in old age. And further, **mighty men stoop**. This refers to the characteristic bending over or stooping that comes with old age as the core muscles weaken and the spine begins to deteriorate, so you are humped over. The next phrase, **the grinding ones stand idle because they are few**, refers to the teeth becoming fewer in number so that there are not many left to do the work of grinding. Old age is not for the young of heart. It has many challenges. So remember your Creator in your youth. **And those who look through windows grow dim.** Who are those **who look through windows**? They are the eyes. They **grow**

dim as macular degeneration or cataracts or other eye problems occur in old age, such that you look out the window and you can't see clearly anymore.

In verse 4, **and the doors on the street are shut as the sound of the grinding mill is low**. The **doors on the street** probably refer to the lips being shut so as to hold food in the mouth so it doesn't fall out. Older people who have lost several teeth have this problem and the lips are the solution. They seal up the mouth as **the sound of the grinding mill is low**, meaning as the few molar teeth left to grind do their work of grinding. Furthermore, **one will arise at the sound of the bird**. This means that they awaken early because even the slightest sound will wake them. And lastly in verse 4, **and all the daughters of song will sing softly**. It doesn't mean that they actually **sing softly**, but that the old person perceives that they **sing softly**, because of their hearing loss. So a number of physical and psychological problems come with old age in verses 3-4; psychologically, fear due to loss of strength; physically, the eyesight grows dim, the stature deteriorates, teeth fall out and hearing is lost.

In verse 5 he adds even more troubles that come with old age. **Furthermore, men are afraid of a high place and of terrors on the road**. Psychologically, as people get older they are afraid of going to **high places** because they might fall. They are also afraid of **terrors on the road**, that is, of venturing out. **The almond tree blossoms** refer to the hair turning gray and white. Almond blossoms are white. **The grasshopper drags himself along** refers to the slow pace an elderly person walks. By referring to them as a **grasshopper**, it reminds us of when we used to be young and lively like a **grasshopper**. But in old age we inch along. It's no fun getting old, so we should remember our Creator in our youth so that we are prepared for old age. **The caperberry is ineffective**. The **caperberry** is a Hebrew *hapax legomenon*, meaning it is used once and only once in the OT. It is a fruit that was an aphrodisiac. It was supposed to stimulate sexual desire at the onset of old age, but it is no longer effective. Youth and virility are lost.

At the end of verse 5, **For man goes to his eternal home while mourners go about in the street**. Eventually the old go to death. The expression **his eternal home** refers merely to the grave. It is Hebrew Wallace says, "This is an idiom for the grave as the resting place of the body (e.g., Ps 49:12 [11]; Job 7:9; 14:10–12; Eccl 12:5) or Sheol as the residence of the dead (e.g., Job 17:13; 30:23); see HALOT 124 s.v. לְבַיִת 2; 799 (5); BDB 109 s.v. בַּיִת..."⁴ It was used in post-Biblical Hebrew as a euphemism for the cemetery or the grave. So the old man goes to the grave **while** those who mourn his death **go about in the street** mourning. And the instruction is this; before all this happens, we should remember our Creator, meaning live a life of obedience to His Law and acknowledgement of His lordship over every area of life. That is the best way to enjoy life.

In verse 6 we come to the last **Remember Him...before** statement. These statements are all to impress upon us the importance of living our lives as responsible to God. **Remember Him before the silver cord is broken and the golden bowl is crushed, the pitcher by the well is shattered and the wheel at the cistern is crushed; then the dust will return to the earth as it was, and the spirit will return to God who gave it**. All these

figurative descriptions refer to death. **Remember Him before the silver cord is broken and the golden bowl is crushed.** The **silver cord** is holding **the golden bowl**, but once the cord is broken, the bowl is crushed, a reference to physical death. Also, when the **pitcher by the well is shattered**, it can hold no more water, and the **wheel** that brings up the water **at the cistern is crushed**, another reference to physical death.

The final description of death is a straightforward one in 12:7, **then the dust will return to the earth as it was, and the spirit will return to God who gave it.** This obviously reminds us of the creation of Adam in Gen 2:7, except it is the reverse of creation. There the **dust** was formed into the body of man but here the body returns **to the earth**. This is exactly what God said would happen after the Fall of man in Genesis 3. At creation the **spirit** was given by God to form the spirit of man, but at death the **spirit will return to God who gave it.** Whether God gives the spirit to all men directly or indirectly is not clarified here. Some think that God directly gives the first breath to a baby when it comes forth from the womb. This view holds that life does not begin until the baby comes forth from the womb and takes its first breath. This is an overly literalistic reading that contradicts many passages that treat those in the womb as full persons and not mere fetus'. Even Elizabeth referred to the One in Mary's womb as her Lord. How could non-living biological material be the Lord? The description of Solomon here also has no bearing on the case. He is simply referring to physical death as he did in the previous verse. To take it any further than that is an overly-literal interpretation that was not the intent of Solomon.

In 12:8 Solomon returns to his theme one last time, **"Vanity of vanities," says the Preacher, "all is vanity!"** This is the way Solomon began the book in 1:2 and this is the way he ended it in 12:8. Like book-ends Solomon brackets all that he has written by this carefully analyzed theme that all is vanity when life is pursued apart from and independent from God. To repeat a word in the Hebrew is a Hebrew superlative. It means the highest of vanities, or the greatest of vanities. Human endeavor apart from God is the greatest of vanities. The word "vanity" is *hevel* and means "worthless, obscure, fleeting and meaningless." Life is worthless, obscure, fleeting and meaningless when God is not placed at the center of it. That means that there is no use pursuing anything apart from God.

In verses 9-12 we have a peculiar statement of the authority of this book. This book is different from other books in the world. This book has the mark of divine inspiration. In verse 9 he says, **In addition to being a wise man, the Preacher also taught the people knowledge; and he pondered, searched out and arranged many proverbs.** Solomon was **a wise man**. The Lord Jesus Christ said that there was no one in all of history as wise as Solomon until Himself. This meant that Solomon had tremendous skill in living. This skill was given to him by God when he requested it before ascending to the throne of David. However, after many years, he tried his experiment with human wisdom and human effort apart from God. During that time he found what he has reported in verse 8, that all human wisdom and effort apart from God is futile. At the end of his life he came back to God and his true wisdom was restored. **In addition** to this characteristic of Solomon, he **also taught the people knowledge**. He instructed them in **knowledge**. This is the meaning of Ecclesiastes, "to instruct an

assembly." He evidently instructed an assembly of Israelites, but he also instructed those who came into his presence from all the nations. He taught them knowledge and so he is known as **the Preacher**, or more accurately, "the Teacher." Throughout his life he also **pondered, searched out and arranged many proverbs**. A **proverb** is a short pithy saying that captures some truth. He heard thousands of them through interaction with the wise men of all nations in the ancient world. He wrote these down, studied them carefully and arranged them in the Book of Proverbs. There you can find thousands of the **proverbs** that he considered worthy of being passed on. But ultimately, as we will see in verse 11, these are not Solomon's words, but the words of **one Shepherd**.

In verse 10, **The Preacher sought to find delightful words and to write words of truth correctly**. This was the Teacher's aim, **to find delightful words**, words that were delightful to him, organized masterfully. He enjoyed the way the proverbs were put together. It took much skill to write his masterpieces. **And to write words of truth correctly**. He did not sacrifice truth for literary beauty. But joined the two. He made sure the proverbs he **wrote** were those that were **words of truth**. When we put the two ideas together, Glenn said, "Solomon...sought to give his book an aesthetically pleasing form without sacrificing the truth of what he wrote."⁵ Unger said, "He reflected a writer's concern for his work as a literary masterpiece, but as a true man of God he never let his style obscure his message."

In verse 11 we have one of the most straightforward statements of divine inspiration in all of Scripture. **The words of wise men are like goads, and masters of these collections are like well-driven nails; they are given by one Shepherd**. Solomon was evidently aware that the words he was writing were divinely inspired. He was involved, but they were **given by one Shepherd**. Inspiration teaches that the primary author of Scripture is God, and the secondary author is the human. In this book is given a perfect example of how the two blend. The human author is given the freedom to express himself in his own vocabulary and personality and experience, yet the words chosen are those given by God such that every word is the very word of God. It is not permitted to say it is only the concepts that are the very concepts of God. For the verse says, **The words of wise men are like goads**. It is the words that are inspired. These words **are like goads**. A **goad** is something like a spur that stimulates a horse into action. The **words of wise men** are like that, they stimulate men to take action. The words that stimulate action are the words of the **one Shepherd**. Furthermore, inspiration does extend to the whole of Scripture. As the verse says, **and masters of these collections are like well-driven nails**. The whole of Scriptures are a **collection**. These are **like well-driven nails** when we become **masters** of them. **Well-driven nails** hold a house together and the Scriptures are like that when we master them. To become a **master** of the Scriptures we must live in the Scriptures daily, in study, not mere reading for the sake of reading, but studying for the sake of mastery. When we become **masters** they serve us as **well-driven** nail, they hold our lives together, give us purpose, meaning, significance. As divinely inspired, this book is absolutely unique. This is the one book we need to master. Mastery of other words or collections of words are not like goads or well-driven nails. They won't show you the meaning of life and they won't solve your problems. The reason is simply that

they are not given by the one Shepherd, for there is only one book that is given by Him; the bible. Master it and do not waste your time mastering other books.

This is Solomon's next warning in verse 12, **But beyond this, my son, be warned: the writing of many books is endless, and excessive devotion to books is wearying to the body.** By **beyond this**, Solomon is probably referring to the collections of sayings given by the one Shepherd. If one goes beyond these sayings in seeking wisdom and finding the meaning of life it will be extremely wearying, in the sense that no true wisdom will be found. It will be a never-ending search. The history of philosophy is nothing more than a wearying journey of one philosopher saying he has the answer and the next crossing his answer out and saying he has the answer and so forth and so on. It is a wearying journey because it never comes to an end. No one ever has the answer. The only answer is given by the one Shepherd. Divine revelation is the key. Further he says, **be warned: the writing of many books is endless.** Book after book is written. It seems these days there is a new publishing house every week and you can self-publish your books. That way everyone who has nothing to say can say something and those who have something to say as exegesis of Scripture are lost in the heap. We shouldn't be surprised that a new book comes out every week claiming, "This is the answer to all your problems." That was happening in Solomon's day too. It will keep happening in our day. **The writing of many books is endless.** Don't waste your time. Be warned! They claim to have the answer but they do not have the answer. It is **endless.** **And excessive devotion to books is wearying to the body.** Not only is **the writing of books endless**, but if you devote yourself **to books excessively**, searching for the answer to this, searching for the meaning of that, it is very exhausting to the **body**. The Hebrew for body is flesh and it is synecdoche for the whole person. The flesh is representing the whole person. The whole person gets exhausted by devoting themselves excessively to books. This is a warning to be heeded.

Instead of being dedicated to books trying to find wisdom and all the answers to life, which will only frustrate you to no end, in verse 13, Solomon gives his conclusion to the matter and how to live life well. **The conclusion, when all has been heard, is: fear God and keep His commandments, because this applies to every person. For God will bring every act to judgment, everything which is hidden, whether it is good or evil.** Two things here. And mind you, you have to keep your focus in life or all this other stuff and all those other books will draw you aside. First, verse 13, **fear God and keep His commandments.** To **fear God** is to live as if you are in His presence, as if you are on stage and He is your primary audience. When we live that way we are recognizing His presence and it produces a respectful **fear** of Him, as it governs our thoughts, words and deeds. This is the very first thing, fear God. Proverbs 1:7 says "Fear is the beginning of wisdom." So fear God. That is step one to getting wisdom. Second, **And keep His commandments.** This, of course, refers to the Mosaic Law. This Law was given to the nation Israel by God through Moses. This Law was not for all the nations. It was to keep Israel distinct from the nations. It is not for Christians either, since Christ fulfilled the Law. However, we are not without law, we are under the Law of Christ, which is the law of putting others ahead of ourselves as He did for us on the cross. So the second thing is keep His commandments. The particular commandments you should follow relate to your

dispensation. As far as the first two Solomon says, **this applies to every person**. But the Hebrew says something like this, “this is the duty of man” or “this is the chief end of man” or “this is man’s purpose.” In other words, this is what man was created for. And as long as we fear God and keep His commandments we will be fulfilling our purpose. Many people wander around wondering what God’s will is for their life. They ask silly questions about what color socks to wear or what college to go to, wondering if something they experience might be verifying a word from God. All you have to do is **fear God and keep His commandments**. That is your duty. That is God’s will for your life. And if you are doing that you are fulfilling the will of God for your life.

The reason set forth for fearing God and keeping His commandments is verse 14, **For God will bring every act to judgment, everything which is hidden, whether it is good or evil**. Solomon never viewed future eternal judgment. He always is looking at judgment in time. This is the way it worked under the Mosaic Law. There were penalties for violating the Law. So when Solomon says **God will bring every act to judgment, even the hidden things**, then we know that he is referring to penalties in time for breaking the Law. However, what is interesting is that the Law clearly reached beyond mere external things, and into the heart, because God will judge **the hidden things** of the heart. This is also what Jesus later taught in the Discourse on Kingdom Righteousness, commonly known as the Sermon on the Mount, because the Pharisees only kept the external law, Jesus pointed to the heart. Of course, we are under the Law of Christ and because God is omnipresent, we can’t hide anything from Him. We may try, but He knows all our thoughts, all our motives, all the hidden things. One Greek word says that God is the *kardiognostes*, “the heart knower,” the One who knows your heart. So all these things will be brought to **judgment, whether it is good or evil**. Nothing will be overlooked

In conclusion, “Is life worth living? Yes, *if you are truly alive through faith in Jesus Christ*. Then you can be satisfied, no matter what God may permit to come to your life.”⁶ The way to be satisfied is to put Him front and center every day, all day. There is no enjoyment apart from Him. He is the giver of all good things and He is to be given thanks for them.

¹ Biblical Studies Press, *The NET Bible First Edition; Bible. English. NET Bible.; The NET Bible* (Biblical Studies Press, 2005).

² Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Satisfied*, “Be” Commentary Series (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), 131.

³ Donald R. Glenn, “Ecclesiastes,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 1004.

HALOT The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament.

s.v. under the word (from Latin *sub verbo* or *sub voce*)

BDB The New Brown-Driver-Briggs-Gesenius Hebrew and English Lexicon.

s.v. under the word (from Latin *sub verbo* or *sub voce*)

⁴ Biblical Studies Press, *The NET Bible First Edition; Bible. English. NET Bible.; The NET Bible* (Biblical Studies Press, 2005).

⁵ Donald R. Glenn, "Ecclesiastes," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 1006.

⁶ Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Satisfied*, "Be" Commentary Series (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), 136.