

Solomon's Fatal Flaw

GETTING OUR PRIORITIES RIGHT

What is our principal aim in this life? It is happiness above all? The Scriptures tell us that we must through much tribulation enter the kingdom of God. It is the accumulation of wealth in order to achieve happiness and security? Agur wrote, in Proverbs 30, "Give me neither poverty nor riches, but give me only my daily bread. Otherwise, I may have too much and disown You, and say, "Who is the Lord?" Or I may become poor and steal and so dishonour the name of my God." This holds up the ideal of contentment.

Sinking oneself into one's work is a goal that many people settle for. There are two sides to this, too. Solomon wrote, negatively, in Ecclesiastes, "For what falls to a man's share for all his labour, and for the striving of his heart, with which he has toiled under the sun? For all his days are full of pain, and his occupation is an irritation. Even in the night his mind does not rest. This also is vanity." Further on, he says, "To the sinner God gives the task of gathering and collecting wealth, that he may give it to him who is good before God. This also is vanity and a chasing after the wind." On the other hand, he goes on to say, positively: "Nothing is better for a man than that he should eat, drink, and let his soul see good in his labour. This also, I have seen, is from the hand of God. For who will eat, or who will rejoice, except for God? For God gives wisdom and knowledge and joy to a man who is good in His sight."

An important theme of the wisdom writings of the Old Testament, such as Psalm III and Proverbs, is: "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom; all who observe His precepts have good understanding." That can be illustrated by one of the wisest men of all, Solomon. However, even his example was not without flaws.

Solomon began his reign over Israel well. His one major flaw during the early part of his reign was that he did not follow consistently what the Law of Moses said about legitimate places of worship. He kept offering sacrifices and burning incense on the high places, such as at Gibeon, even after David had brought the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem.

In a dream, God offered Solomon the choice of any gift he wanted. He could have asked for long life, or for great wealth and honour, or for the defeat and death of his enemies. Instead, as an inexperienced man of about twenty years, he recognised that what really mattered was God's kindness, as he had seen it in his father, David. He recognised the fact that he was on the throne of Israel as a gift from God. He made his request: "I, Your servant, am among Your people, whom You have chosen, a numerous people, too many to count or record. Therefore give me, Your servant, a heart that listens, so that I may judge Your people, and distinguish between good and evil. For who is able to judge this great people of Yours?"

God approved of Solomon's choice of wisdom and discernment. He promised him what he had not asked for as well: "I have also given you what you have not asked for, both riches and honour, so that no other king will have been like you as long as you live. And if you live according to My ways and keep My prescriptions and My commandments as your fathers have lived, then I shall give you a long life."

The writer of 1 Kings recorded, "Solomon's wisdom was greater than the wisdom of all the men of the East, and greater than all the wisdom of Egypt." His fame spread to all the surrounding nations. He composed thousands of proverbs. He was expert in botany and zoology. People of many nations came to hear his wisdom. The queen of Sheba said to him, "The report I have heard in my own country about your achievements and your wisdom is true. However, I did not believe these things until I came and saw with my own eyes. Indeed, not even half was told to me. In wisdom and wealth you have far exceeded the report I heard. How happy your men must be! How happy your officials... Praise be to the LORD your God, who has delighted in you and placed you on the throne of Israel! Because of the eternal love of the LORD for Israel, He has made you king to maintain justice and righteousness. "

Solomon's fleet of ships and his trading arrangements with Hiram of Tyre brought him great splendour and wealth. He had a lavish palace. Everything in it was made of gold, nothing of silver, because silver was considered of little value in his days. One of his greatest achievements was the building of the splendid temple of God at Jerusalem. His greatest glory was that God chose him to be a bearer of revelation in sacred scripture. He wrote at least two psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Solomon by inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

Surely, his experience is an example of the principle that Jesus stated: "First be eager to have the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will also be given to you." We should be cautious about misapplying this. It is not that people serve God in order that God may make them rich. God has to be served for His own sake alone. The one who serves God should be free from worry. Each day has enough trouble of its

own. Therefore, we should not begin to worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Proper fear of the Lord should lead to contentment. Hope for God's gift of eternal life in Christ Jesus should keep everything in proper perspective.

Solomon's fatal flaw was that his many foreign wives, who kept up the worship of their own gods, led him astray. His wives turned his heart after other gods, so that he was not fully devoted to the LORD. He even made high places for the gods of the Sidonians and the Ammonites on the Mount of Olives near Jerusalem. The LORD was angry with Solomon because his heart had turned away from Him. Consequently, most of his kingdom was torn away from his son Rehoboam and given to one of his subordinates, Jeroboam. For the sake of his David, his father, however, the LORD did not divide his kingdom during his lifetime. In the later period of his life he had trouble from neighbouring nations and Jeroboam led a rebellion against him.

All this is a reminder that even men who wrote portions of the Scriptures under inspiration of the Holy Spirit were themselves, apart from this, sinners like us. They included David, Peter, Paul, and the rest. It should also remind us of what Paul wrote when he considered that many of the Israelites who saw God's wonders during their time in the wilderness failed to continue under God's good pleasure. He stated the principle: "Therefore the one who thinks that he is standing firm should beware that he does not fall."

The history of the Christian church, too, is a history of tragedy. Satan continues to work against it. The greatest tragedies of modern Christianity are the horrific results of humanism and liberalism, and the fact that many people who have been baptised are now living as pagans. At the time of the early church, the Christian faith was a new faith in the whole Mediterranean area. The church spread in spite of persecution and opposition.

Today Christianity to many people is the old, and a secular life, the pursuit of riches and a means to happiness offers new and fascinating appeal. This, of course, is not new. A quick study of congregational records quickly shows tremendous loss. Jesus stated an important principle: "He who has not known, and has done things for which he has deserved to be beaten, will be beaten with few blows. Much will be required from everyone who has been given much; and if people have entrusted much to someone, they will require more from him." If we are truly wise, we shall take this to heart. People who have received the great blessings of baptism, instruction in the faith, and the example of Christian parents, and, in spite of that, have turned their backs on the Lord will, sadly, to their lasting chagrin, regret it. God does not permit anyone to trifle with Him. May God grant that we follow the good example of Solomon in his choice of discernment, so that our priorities continue to be right!