

01-03-11a Ecclesiastes

Let's continue our worship this morning by turning in our Bibles to Proverbs chapter 7. I'm sorry, Proverbs chapter 8. You can turn to 7, but then you'll have to go a little further. Because our reading is in Proverbs chapter 8. I have come to Proverbs chapter 8 this morning because I've been studying in Ecclesiastes chapter 2 all week. And at the point in the development of Solomon's thought, where we find ourselves in that chapter, he has got his perspective entirely under the glass dome, everything that takes place under the sun.

And this is just as much for my benefit as yours, because this is relief. This is the same author, Solomon, but this is his unlimited perspective. We find a very useful contrast as we see that wisdom is also in view.

But so is the Lord God, and so are the limits that go beyond the rising and setting of the sun. If you can call them limits, it's actually the limitless vistas of eternity are present here. So for me, this is a boost while we get through the earlier part of Ecclesiastes.

And it is a reminder to us, we have the benefit of hindsight. We are not limited in the ways that Solomon was when he conducted his investigation. This chapter in the New King James is subtitled, The Excellence of Wisdom.

You will notice, if you have this version, that we have four categories under this heading. Wisdom, 10, its excellency, 18, riches, 22, eternity, and 32, and desirability. So excellency, riches, eternity, and desirability.

All of these are concepts that we find in our present study being called into question. Does something really turn out to be excellent if it doesn't last? Are riches of any use if they don't last? We don't find the concept of eternity in view at all thus far in Ecclesiastes, do we? He hasn't talked about, I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever. He hasn't talked about some of the things we are going to see in this chapter.

So this is useful just in terms of reminding us of the perspective that we are studying. Ecclesiastes chapter 1 and 2. Proverbs chapter 8. Does not wisdom cry out and understanding lift up her voice? She takes her stand on the top of the high hill beside the way where the paths meet. By the way, where the paths meet, this is a decision point, isn't it? You have to choose which way to go.

She cries out by the gates at the entry of the city, at the entrance of the doors. To you, O men, I call. And my voice is directed to the sons of men.

O you simple ones, understand prudence. And you fools, be of an understanding heart. Listen, for I will speak of excellent things.

And from the opening of my lips will come right things. For my mouth will speak truth. Wickedness is an abomination to my lips.

All the words of my mouth are with righteousness. Nothing crooked or perverse is in them. Remember Solomon's been bewailing the fact that the crooked cannot be made straight? Well, you don't have to worry about that with wisdom because it comes out straight and not crooked.

Nothing crooked or perverse is in them. They are plain to him who understands. And they are right to those who find knowledge.

Receive my instruction and not silver. And knowledge rather than choice gold. For wisdom is better than rubies.

And all the things one may desire cannot be compared with her. I, wisdom, dwell with prudence and find out knowledge and discretion. The fear of the Lord is to hate evil.

Pride and arrogance and the evil way and the perverse mouth I hate. Counsel is mine and sound wisdom. I am understanding.

I have strength. By me kings reign and rulers decree justice. By me princes rule and nobles.

All the judges of the earth. I love those who love me. And those who seek me diligently will find me.

Riches and honor are with me. Enduring riches and righteousness. My fruit is better than gold.

Yes, than fine gold. And my revenue than choice silver. I traverse the way of righteousness.

In the midst of the paths of justice. So that I may cause those who love me to inherit wealth. That I may fill their treasuries.

The Lord possessed me at the beginning of his way. Before his works of old. I have been established from everlasting.

From the beginning before there ever was an earth. When there were no depths I was brought forth. When there were no fountains abounding with water.

Before the mountains were settled. Before the hills I was brought forth. While as yet he had not made the earth or the fields.

Or the primal dust of the world. When he prepared the heavens I was there. When he drew a circle on the face of the deep.

When he established the clouds above. When he strengthened the fountains of the deep. When he assigned to the sea its limit.

So that the waters would not transgress his command. When he marked out the foundations of the earth. Then I was beside him as a master craftsman.

And I was daily his delight. Rejoicing always before him. Rejoicing in his inhabited world.

And my delight was with the sons of men. Now therefore listen to me my children. For blessed are those who keep my ways.

Hear instruction and be wise. And do not disdain it. Blessed is the man who listens to me.

Watching daily at my gates. Waiting at the posts of my doors. For whoever finds me.

Finds life. And obtains favor from the Lord. But he who sins against me.

Wrongs his own soul. All those who hate me. Love death.

It's a very powerful reminder of the importance. Of having divine viewpoint. Of looking at our lives.

Of looking at the world around us. In wisdom. The wisdom that comes from God.

The Chakma. It is the gift of God to those who seek it. To those who ask for it.

Most of us are not over blessed even with common sense. Much less divine wisdom. And this is something that we have to seek.

That we have to ask for. You flip back a few pages to Proverbs chapter 2. My oft quoted and all time favorite chapter in Proverbs. My son if you receive my words.

And treasure my commands within you. So that you incline your ear to wisdom. And apply your heart to understanding.

Cry out for discernment. Lift up your voice for understanding. Seek her as silver.

Search for her as for hidden treasures. Then you will understand the fear of the Lord. And find the knowledge of God.

This is not automatic at birth. And it is not automatic at new birth. We are going to be looking at something next week.

That I think will illuminate that concept to a great extent. An analogy or a comparison. Something that often you see God doing something on a macro scale.

That comes down and applies to the individual believer. An example would be the history of Israel. And bondage in Egypt.

Then deliverance associated with the blood of the Passover lamb. And then the journey to the

place of blessing. And prosperity and fruitfulness.

People dropping along the way. Some not making it. And others making it.

And the basis for that. And then the battles that take place. Even when you reach the place of fruitfulness.

All of that national history of Israel is a large view. That was written for our instruction. Because it has application to our individual progress.

From spiritual birth to the place of what has been called maturity. Completeness. Functionality.

Fruitfulness. And we are going to see another study along those lines next time. But the way of wisdom.

The excellence of wisdom. Is something that Solomon harps on. If I can use that term in Proverbs.

So we would be surprised if this same hakmah wisdom would commend something evil. Or something untoward. Something outside the will of God to Solomon.

And yet a superficial reading of Ecclesiastes would seem to suggest that. And in many translations and interpretations. You find that it seems as though there is some other kind of wisdom.

That is accompanying Solomon on his explorations. And I think our study will vindicate wisdom. And vindicate Solomon in his application of wisdom.

That these things that he observes and tests. And draws conclusions about. Under the rubric of divine wisdom.

The hakmah wisdom from God. Is consistent. Wisdom is not going to tell him to collect concubines.

Wisdom is not going to tell him to get drunk. Yet some of these conclusions have been drawn in the past. Let's return now to Ecclesiastes.

I could spend some time on application from Proverbs chapter 8. But I think we are all well aware of how important that wisdom from God is. We know its source. We know its role.

We know that it is the truth of God. And the spirit of God. That enable God's power to function in our lives.

The Holy Spirit has no voice. The Holy Spirit has no say in our souls. Apart from that wisdom.

Apart from the Word of God. And the fact that we are here. Gathered in a study of the Word of

God.

Indicates that we understand the importance of that. Does it not seem strange to you. As it does to me.

That in Solomon's words thus far. Through the first chapter and into the second. That we don't see that eternal perspective.

So often in Proverbs when he is talking about wisdom. And he is talking about life and the importance of righteousness. You see that occurrence of God's name.

God's existence. God's plan. God's creative power.

As we saw it there in chapter 8 of Proverbs. That is almost completely absent. In what we have seen thus far.

The words of Kohelet. The son of David. His king.

He says I can't find anything permanent. As I look at the progress of life. From birth to death.

I don't see anything that lasts. So I am going to search it out. Verse 13 of chapter 1. By wisdom.

By Chakma. Concerning all that is done under heaven. Because this is a sore answer.

That God has given the sons of men to be answered with. It is grievous. It is unsatisfactory.

That is what Ra. Resh. And the evil ion there.

That is how you spell evil in Hebrew. The ion by the way. You know Hebrew writes from right to left.

And if you could imagine a J. That you just flip upside down. So that the little hook points to the left. Straighten out the J a little bit.

So you basically have almost a right angle. But it has a curved angle. It comes up on the right.

And then points over to the left. That is the letter R. Like a small R in English. Only just backwards.

And it doesn't have the little curly Q on it. It is just a little round angle. And then the letter ion.

Looks a little bit like a backwards 3. Well it is kind of hard to describe. But it is an easy letter to detect. When you look at it in the Hebrew text.

And it is just those two letters. And of course Masorete has put vowel points under it. But that is Ra.

That is evil. Or troublesome. Or grievous.

Or misery inducing. Sor is sometimes a translation of this. It is unpleasant.

It has a wide range of meanings. Everything from disagreeable to moral evil. But this is a very unsatisfactory.

A troublesome answer. That God has given the sons of men to be answered with. Now this has troubled scholars and interpreters.

Who come to Ecclesiastes. And that is why they have changed the translation here. To say well it is a burdensome task.

That God has given to the sons of men. To be burdened with. But people struggle.

They say well this seems sort of like God is the author of evil. Reformed theology has this big passage they like to go to. I didn't write the reference down.

But he says I form good and create evil. Or some such thing. They like to go to that.

When you say well God can't be the author of sin. They say well it says in the Old Testament. But it has the idea of calamity.

When it says God creates Ra. And oddly enough this is a good thing. The fact that this is a troublesome.

Grievous. Unsatisfactory answer. That God gives men.

Is a good thing. Because it leaves us unsatisfied. If we were conceived in iniquity.

And born in sin. If we are fallen. If we are condemned.

If we are alienated from the life of God. If we are born enemies without hope. And without God in this world.

We ought to be disturbed. There ought to be something to make us aware of our need. And there is.

And it is this troublesome answer. If anyone bothers. Because of what can be known of God.

You go back to Romans chapter 1. And you find all of the evil that is in the world. And what may be known of God. Is manifest in creation.

Someone who stops to contemplate. You know you've got your nose on the grindstone. And you're plowing along.

Going from pillar to post. At some point. All human beings.

Pause and consider. Is this really worthwhile? Is this all there is? Is there not something more? Some of us do it as children. Some of us do it as adults.

It can be brought about in a variety of ways. But sooner or later. Every rational human being.

Every human being. Who comes to a point of what has been called accountability. Pauses in the midst of life's rat race.

And says. There has got to be. I feel that there's a lack here.

There's got to be something I'm missing. Well this is the troublesome answer that God has given to us. God doesn't let us find satisfaction.

In the temporary. Ephemeral. Transient.

Things of life. Our soul is not constructed. To.

Go. For a lifetime. On Twinkies.

We find a hunger. We find an empty place. And much of what takes place on planet earth.

Much of what people do. By way of endeavors. Apart from God.

Is motivated. It is a. Shoveling in of various materials. Into this void that we detect.

I've. Most recently. Was thinking about this.

Of people who are. Adopted. And who.

You know. Buckner has adoption of maternity services. We have queries that come in all the time.

From people who. May have come through the system. In years gone by.

Now they're adults. And they want to go back and find their birth parents. And.

I. Suspect. In fact I know. From.

From conversations. With. Some of these folks.

That. In many cases. These are people who don't have a relationship with God.

Who have come. To an adult stage of life. And feel a void.

And have concluded. That. They that this is unique to them.

And that it's because they don't really know. Their. Birth.

Parents they don't know the circumstances of why they were. Put up for adoption and so forth and. And in recognizing that there is a void.

And trying to figure it out. They conclude well. If I just find out.

Where I really came from. And who it was that. Had me in the hospital.

And why they didn't keep me in this and the other. This will. This will.

Fill that void. There are others. Who decide that it is accomplishment.

And and it fuels their ambition. Well if I could just achieve. If I could.

Make my name. If I could. Prove myself in some arena.

There are people who have gone into the military. To prove themselves. Maybe there were other people in their family.

Who were in the military. And they feel this emptiness. But at its root.

And at its core. All human beings. Have this dissatisfaction.

This bad answer. That that life is not fulfilling. Life is not satisfying.

There's something missing. All of the world's religions. Apart from Christianity.

And you can't really. You know in the technical sense. Christianity is not a religion.

But in the world's mind it is. But people who go in for. Some sort of spiritualism.

Or spiritual perspective in their life. Whether it's Scientology. Or Buddhism.

Or Near Eastern. New Age. Whatever it might be.

What are they doing? They're trying to fill this void. So don't panic. When it says that God has given an evil answer.

To the sons of men. To be answered with. That's a gift from God.

That's a good thing. Because it makes us aware of our need. In the same way.

That your stomach growls. And it's an unpleasant sensation to be hungry. It tells you that you need something.

And it's not pleasant. In fact it can be very unpleasant. It's also embarrassing.

Lots of times you're getting close to lunch time. I go around and work on people's computers and things. Sometimes it's me.

And sometimes it's them. But things can be real quiet. While you're sitting there.

Trying to figure out what's wrong with the computer. And all of a sudden you hear this little noise. And you say.

Well. Somebody's hungry. It's a sign.

We get thirsty. We have different things that are built into our body. To tell us that we have a need.

And it motivates us. It's a good thing. So there's no big dilemma here.

You'd be amazed at people just getting all twisted in knots. Over the fact that God gives evil. Or God sends an evil spirit to Saul.

When he's out of line. Saul needed an evil spirit. If you're a believer.

And you belong to God. And you're on a wrong path. You would hope.

Whom the Lord loves. Because he chases. And he scourges every son whom he receives.

If we are not disciplined. Then we are not sons. So it is God's desire that none should perish.

But that all should come to repentance. So we all need this evil answer. This misery inducing.

This troublesome. Uncomfortable sense to be answered with. And so Solomon says.

Well I'm going to see what the solution is here. Now he's not looking for salvation. He's already a believer.

He's been evangelized if you will. Under the tutelage of his father David. He knows who the God of Israel is.

He is a believer. But he's looking at after salvation what? How should we then live? What is the point of our lives? And the answer to this question is different. In Solomon's day than it is today.

In its details. In its outworking. All of us have an obligation to God.

Believers in every age. But the details of how this purpose of God. The calling of God to Israel in the Old Testament.

Is different than the calling of God to us. So in our hermeneutical triangle. That I've mentioned to you before.

Observation. Interpretation. Application.

As we observe Solomon's struggle. To find the deeper meaning of life here. We remember that there are.

As we go from observation to interpretation. What are we looking for? We're looking for the timeless truths. That were true in his day.

And true in ours. And we have to distinguish between the things. That only apply in the Old Testament Israel days.

Such as observing the law of Moses. Ritual sacrifice. All of the various ordinances and things.

Belonging to the nation of Israel. That is something that doesn't transfer. Up to the top of the triangle and back down.

Into application for us. I just saw a fresh. I got a new addition to my library.

Which I'm really tickled with. They had a great bargain on it. Through Rejoice Christian Software.

Anybody looking for Christian Software. Get on the web. Search on Rejoice.com. I think they actually have a different path.

But look for Rejoice Christian Software. In the search engine. You'll find that they have the best prices.

And are really great to deal with. They have a great variety of software. And I got an addition to my Logos Library.

Which is from the World Evangelical Fellowship. W.E.F. And this thing originally retailed for a couple of \$300. They had it for like \$40.

So I picked it up. And it's got 23 years worth of the W.E.F. journal. It's got many, many books edited by D.A. Carson.

And I really like Carson. He worked on the Anchor Bible volumes. For 1st and 2nd Samuel.

That I used when we went through that study. Anyway. And he's written many other things.

He's got a good head on his shoulders there. But I say all that to say. When I got this CD up and got it running.

I was looking around in there. They had some articles. And somebody was speculating on the Sabbath.

And there was a link. And it went up to Bible.org. And I went up there and found an article at

Bible.org. And Bible.org is a collection of unrelated materials that people have contributed. It's not a denominational or no association.

There's no doctrinal creed. So you can find all kinds of stuff up there. Well, somebody was launching the old view that the Sabbath keeping was never revoked.

That it's one of the Ten Commandments. We keep the other nine. How come we don't worship on Saturday? And they go to Acts.

And here's Paul teaching the Gentiles on the Sabbath. Going to the synagogues on the Sabbath. Where do you find in the Bible that we should ever stop observing the Sabbath? Well, that's a subject unto itself.

And this is one of the problems. If you can't tell the difference between timeless truth and time-bound truth. If you can't navigate the hermeneutical triangle from observing the fact that Israelites were to observe the Sabbath.

But the church doesn't have to observe the Sabbath. There is a Sabbath principle that is there that is timeless. And when we do our interpretation and application, every day is the Sabbath.

There is a Sabbath rest for the people of God that transcends some legalistic observation of a day. It doesn't matter if we meet for church on Sunday or not. It doesn't matter if we meet on Friday night or if we wanted to meet on Saturday.

If you meet on Saturday because you think you're Sabbath-keeping, you haven't gotten past the first corner of your hermeneutical triangle. You haven't figured out the difference between a law for Israel and the timeless truth that that law was supposed to communicate. Sabbath-keeping is a daily responsibility for each of us.

There is a Sabbath rest that remains to the people of God. And it is fulfilled when we rest by faith in God's promises. When we meditate daily at the gates of wisdom, we have a responsibility to keep Sabbath every single day.

The reason we worship on Sunday mornings is not because we think the Sabbath has been transferred to Sunday. It's because it's a convenient way to memorialize the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. He's the first fruits of them that sleep.

And on the first day of the week, to begin the week with setting aside a day to honor God, is a great... But there's no law, there's no New Testament passage that says, thou must convene thy church on Sunday morning. God isn't horrified if we skip a Sunday because several of us are out of town or Dan's drilling and I'm traveling and whatever it might be. It doesn't matter when we worship.

It is why we worship. It is what we think about as we worship that counts. And when I was

traveling around in the sea of Japan and around Thailand and I was looking at some pictures yesterday, leafing through my little book of memories there, looking at myself 20 years ago floating around on deployment.

You know, I had my... I lugged around my Sony reel-to-reel. Back then, cassettes were not as ubiquitous as they are now. And if you wanted tapes, you had to have reel-to-reel.

And I lugged my big ole reel-to-reel and a big box of tapes around with me and I listened at all odd hours of the day and night whenever I could fit it in because that's just how it had to be. Well, what's the point? As we look at Solomon here in Ecclesiastes, we're going to see that he's struggling with some issues that were unique to his day. But the principles apply to us.

And what I want to do here is pick up in chapter 2 because Solomon says in Ecclesiastes 2.1, I said in my heart, Come now, I will test you with mirth. Therefore, enjoy pleasure. But surely this also was havel.

It was vapor. It was transient. It didn't last.

I said of laughter, madness. And this is silliness, foolishness. It doesn't have any substance.

I said of mirth, what does it accomplish? Solomon is looking for something that's going to make his life meaningful and just laughing all the time doesn't do it. Now, let's think about this. What were the forms of entertainment in his day of laughter and folly and mirth? Well, there have been comedians ever since the earliest days.

They were laughing and celebrating in the days before the flood. You go read Peter and read Genesis. They were making merry.

How do you make merry? Well, you jest and laugh and entertain one another with anecdotes and stories and amusing conversation. Well, people have been doing that since time immemorial. What do we do today? We have far less of that than we used to even a few decades ago when people used to gather at each other's homes.

People used to throw parties. You watch movies from the 30s, 40s, and 50s, and the main form of entertainment was getting together, having groups, cocktail parties, gatherings of all different kinds, gathering around the piano and singing. People used to do that just without even thinking about it all the way back in the late 1800s and World War I days.

Popular songs and popular sayings and things would travel around in that manner. So people would get together and entertain each other. The great humorists of the last century like Samuel Clemens or Mark Twain and E.E. Cummins and many of the others that were noted wits and all these bon-muts that used to float around.

Well, this is what Solomon is talking about. Well, is it being witty? Is it being mirthful? Is it having

things to chuckle over and laugh about? It's madness not in the sense of insanity. It's madness in the sense of silliness.

In the ancient world, silliness and fooliness was something that didn't produce anything. It would be silly to sow your seed in your field in the fall. It would be that kind of madness.

Why would you do something that's going to cost you time and trouble and not produce anything? Pointlessness would be perhaps a better translation here because that's the idea. I said of laughter, it's pointless. And of mirth, what does it accomplish? This has its analogy in the modern day.

What is the most popular form of television up until just lately? Situation comedies. Just make me laugh. And when you watch those, it's like, well, they can't go more than about 15 seconds.

There's a beat to those shows where they've got to just contrive to have a little situation and punchline every 15 or 20 seconds. And the laugh track goes. It's really strange sometimes.

I saw this happen. They're running the marathon Give Me Money thing on PBS, on the public television this week. And you have the British comedies that are real popular.

One of the most popular shows are the Britcoms. So they have the making of shows where they show how they make. They had one on Monty Python.

And they had the old pythons come back and talk about 25, 30 years ago when they were making Monty Python and talk about how the sketches came about and how they did the animations and how they made the different movies and things. And as they interview these guys, they are just as witty as they ever were. And if your mind is twisted in a certain direction or you get in the right mood, you can find Monty Python pretty amusing.

And I will confess, I am one of those people. But what's odd is there was a laugh track behind those or there were people laughing. And they would fire off a witty saying and you would hear these chuckles in the audience.

And when these guys are talking and they're interviewing them, they're saying things that are just as funny, but there's no laugh track behind it. And you notice it. You think, how come no one's laughing? And then you realize, oh, well, it's because there's just a guy with a microphone, a cameraman, and here's John Cleese or here's Eric Idle or one of the other guys.

And sometimes on the British comedies that they show now that are from 20, 25 years ago, there was no laugh track. And it's just an odd thing when there's no one else laughing because it's a group type of thing. And so you hear these little chuckles.

If you start listening to it and distract yourself from the show, you realize it's the exact same laugh. They've got like five laughs stored, like little laugh, medium laugh, big laugh, huge thigh-

slapping, screaming, rolling in the aisles laugh. And depending on how good they think the joke is, they push one of those buttons and that's the laughter that takes place.

And you think when you get all done and you realize that after 30 minutes or an hour or more of watching situation comedies and you stand up from your chair and go in the kitchen to get a glass of water or something, you think, well, now, what do I have to show for that? It was just chewing gum for the mind. It just passed the time. It was amusing.

It made me chuckle. But the next time I'm in a tight spot, the next time I'm under pressure or I'm under temptation or I am miserable, I'm sick and afflicted or something, I don't think back to, oh, I remember last Tuesday. Wasn't that a funny scene in X little comedy? We don't think back on chuckles to sustain us for anything.

When the chips are down, when we need strength, when we need endurance, when we're striving for the higher things of life, we don't think back to what we chuckled at and, well, you know, just smile a happy smile and it will carry you through. There used to be a song about that, you know, smile, smile, smile. Well, that song rings pretty hollow when you're actually in a tight spot.

So this is what Solomon is talking about. It's not that there's anything intrinsically evil about laughing. Everybody likes a good joke.

Everybody likes an amusing anecdote. I watched my one funny show, I think, and Patty hates it because when Monty Python comes on, she just can hardly abide it. I find it amusing.

But it is Havel. There's no lasting benefit to it, and it is probably a huge waste of time. But there's nothing evil.

There's nothing intrinsically wrong. There's nothing wrong with wasting your time once in a while. If you need to unwind and relax, if you want to do something other than just be a Calvinist all the time with your nose to the grindstone, trudging through life, singing songs in the minor key, everybody needs to lighten up.

Jesus made amusing remarks to his disciples. Paul makes jokes in the epistles. There's nothing wrong with having a little levity.

That's part of the joy and peace that you have in your soul. But, of course, it has to be in its place. We don't sit there watching five solid hours of sitcoms, hopefully.

But Solomon says, look, when it comes to laughter, there's nothing you can grab onto. I would not ever make a career out of being a comedian. Patty says, I don't have the ability to do it anyway.

I'm picking on her this morning. I normally would not mention you, but it just serves my purpose. But I don't think a career as a comedian would befit eternal things.

It's just levity. It's just lightness. And when you have Christian comedians, they usually try to bring their routine down to a point.

They try to leave you with something that has a little bit more weight. So Solomon says of laughter, it's pointless. It doesn't go anywhere.

It's like a madman who just kind of wanders around in circles. And of mirth, what does it accomplish? So he moves on, and he says, I searched in my heart how to gratify my flesh with wine. Now, this word for gratify is real hard to pin down in Hebrew.

There are many words in Ecclesiastes that don't get used elsewhere in the Scripture. And gratify is kind of a guess. Nobody really knows what this means.

The root of this word means to draw along or drag. And then with wine, yayan is the word for wine. You get the idea that the Hebrews enjoyed wine, but didn't think a lot of it just from the word they used for it.

Yayan kind of sounds like somebody who can't say any of his consonants properly. So he's just, you know, yayan. You can say that even when you're totally drunk.

You know, more yayan. But he's doing something to his body or his flesh with wine. And the root of the word has the idea of to draw along or drag.

So, you know, there are a lot of people who think that alcohol is a stimulant when in fact it is a depressant. And it's kind of a well-known mythology that people will say, well, I take a little nip now and then to keep me going, when in fact it drags you down. And I think the irony may be present here that Solomon said, well, I'll draw myself along.

I'll drag myself along. I'll keep going on wine. I'll sustain myself and move forward.

In fact, there are some English translations that say, sustain my flesh with wine. And it's this idea of draw or drag along. And, of course, that's exactly what it does.

It winds up dragging you down instead of dragging you along. But some people do the same thing with coffee. Or Jerry Reed used to have a song, Caffeine, Nicotine, Benzedrine, and Wish Me Luck kind of a thing.

It was kind of a truck-driving song. We think, well, I'll find a way to pep myself up with some substance, whether it's, you know, people kind of get a buzz off of diet pills or caffeine or whatever else. So I searched in my heart and I thought, well, I'll sustain my flesh.

I'll drag my flesh along with something. I'll do this with physical energy of some sort. And I'll use a supplement.

There are people that live on vitamins and ginseng and ginkgo lacoba. I guess that stuff is good for your memory. I should take some because I can't remember the name of it.

Ginkgo lacoba or whatever it is. It's some kind of herbal things that are supposed to help you out. And I promise you some of that stuff will.

We stopped at a truck stop once and they had one of these things where there's all of this little baggie full of vitamin E and ginseng and alfalfa and all this other stuff. And just on a lark I thought, well, you know, it's a long drive and I'm feeling pretty tired. I'll get one of these and try it out.

So I just got this handful of, you know, everything but the kitchen sink and washed it down with some V8. And that will widen your eyes. I don't know what all is in there.

But it's all natural and legal and everything. And I get the idea here that Solomon says, well, what is it that will stimulate? What is it that's stimulating in life? And so you say, well, laughter. Laughter doeth good like a medicine, it says elsewhere.

So I'll work on that for a while. But there's nothing permanent in that. So he says, well, I look around in my heart.

Many of the English translations say, I decided in my mind, wherever it says heart, which is leb, L-E-B, or L-E-B-H, depending on how you say soft B there. But leb is heart. And that's the seat of intellect.

This is where you do your thinking and your emoting. He says, well, I searched in my heart how to sustain my flesh, to drag my flesh along with wine while guiding my heart with wisdom. So if this is the genuine wisdom from God, he's not saying, well, I'm just going to get into substance abuse.

He's not trying to get drunk. He's not saying, well, I'm just going to see how far I can get with wine. I'm just going to get so knee-walking under the table drunk that I can't even uncross my eyes.

He says, the wisdom is with me all this time. I'm using it as a supplement. It's supposed to be an enhancement.

And there are medical studies that say a glass of wine a day is good for your heart, good for your circulation, good for your mental abilities, kind of helps clean out your system and all that. I think there's probably other ways to do that. Probably a good brisk walk would do as much for you as a glass of wine.

But that's what they say. And Solomon is not, this is not substance abuse. This is my point.

This is supposed to be an enhancement. He says this in his heart, and he's guiding himself, he's guiding his heart with wisdom. Wisdom says, be not drunk with wine wherein is excess.

Paul says to Timothy, take a little wine for your stomach's sake and your ongoing afflictions. And so this is medicinal. It's supposed to be an enhancement.

And he thought, I want to lay hold on folly. Now, he's not going to become a fool. He doesn't say, well, I decided to be a fool and see if that gets me anywhere.

He wants to lay hold on folly. What do you do when you lay hold on something? What do you do when you lay hold on a child? Well, I lay hold on them to correct them, to point them in the narrow way. When you lay hold on something, you're controlling it.

You're trying to get a grip on it. You're trying to get it put down in its place. And that's what Solomon is trying to do, so that he can see what is good for the sons of men to do.

Obviously, Solomon knows folly is not good for the sons of men to do, so he's trying to lay hold on folly. He's trying to control it. How can I minimize this folly? Well, we have efforts like that all over America today, don't we? We have all kinds of supplements.

We have all kinds of diet plans. We have all kinds of substances that are offered as being. It's no different than the snake oil and elixirs that were offered 100 years ago.

You can read the old Sears catalogs and, you know, Carter's little liver pills and all these other things. It's no different. People just give it scientific names and use a lot of mumbo-jumbo to make us think that it's going to work when it's not.

Solomon tried all these things, and what is his conclusion? I'm trying to find what people should do under heaven all the days of their lives. Well, that same thing goes on today, and we have to guard our hearts and minds from being distracted into these because it has infiltrated the Christian world, and the principle is the same. Programs, seminars, self-help books.

I mean, self-help all by itself ought to tell you if it's not God's help, there's something the matter with it. We need to examine ourselves and make sure that we have not lapsed into this and wind up generating vapor, trying to lay hold on vapor. And we can look at our television watching.

We can look at different decisions we make in life about how we use our time and what we depend on. If we become dependent on coffee, it's a wrong thing. If we're trying to drag our flesh along with various things, that's a wrong thing.

God has made provision, and we know exactly what it is. We know how the power of God comes into the life of the believer. It doesn't come through wine.

It doesn't come through trying to control folly with some procedure or some self-help steps that

are offered so often in Christianity and Christian counseling today. There is a way that seems right to a man, but the ends thereof are the ways of death. Well, this is a good place to pause because we're going to pick up in verse 4 and see the other things that Solomon tries along this line when we return.