

A Guide To The Reader

Pastor recommends that to obtain maximum benefit from his comments you read in full from the Bible every reference whenever one appears. Otherwise the reading of the comments is simply a skimming over the surface. They are rather designed to make you stop and meditate and even look up further references as the Holy Spirit guides you. Do pray before you read that the Holy Spirit will be your Tutor and that the time you spend will be time spent with Him.

Ecclesiastes 11

11.1. The general thrust of this proverb is clear; what is challenging is the picture language. If literal bread were thrown into a pond or a river it would, in the former case, be eaten by ducks or fish and, in the latter, be swept away. If not devoured it would go mouldy and disintegrate.

So we are to think metaphorically. Bread may stand for food in general as it does where it is first mentioned, in Genesis 3.19. Waters may certainly stand for people, as in Revelation 17.15, “the waters which thou sawest, where the whore sitteth, are peoples, and multitudes, and nations, and tongues.” The usage here is also plural, whereas it is “thy” bread. What a person “casts” in such circumstances is to all intents and purposes normally lost.

Therefore there is a losing which is a gaining. By providing food, and by extension any other needful commodity, to those who cannot repay, it will be made up to the generous soul. When their turn of need comes, the Lord will see to it, even if the very people previously helped are not the means of that repayment. “I mean not that other men be eased, and ye burdened: but by an equality, that now at this time your abundance may be a supply for their want, that their abundance also may be a supply for your want: that there may be equality: as it is written “He that gathered much had nothing over; and he that had gathered little had no lack” (2 Corinthians 8.13-15).

Solomon speaks generally, Paul among the brethren, though Solomon might well be thought to refer to his subjects.

11.2 Furthermore, generosity by definition is not to be stinting, else it would not be generosity. While we have the chance, while we have the means, let us provide for as many as we may and even find a space for an extra. Circumstances may change for the worse and it may be no longer possible later.

11.3 The power of this verse lies in its obviousness, so that we ask ourselves what is the point of the observation. Quite simply, where we live is where our generosity is to be shown. It is “nigh thee” (Romans 10.8), “very nigh thee” (Deuteronomy 30.14). It is a common failing that we do not look to do our “great things” at home.

11.4. With weather forecasting prominently thrust before us these days this is a very apt illustration. It is often better to make a start in any enterprise until circumstances dictate otherwise than to indulge our laziness and make no attempt; only to discover the circumstances would have been favourable and the job done had we set about it.

11.5. Two attributes are combined in this proverb. Invisibility and wonder. “The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit” (John 3.8). Wonderfully hidden these things are, and yet they are happening all the time. Scientists may be discovering things but they have been going on all the time. These things constantly remind us that we are to stand in awe of things that are beyond us but have always been known by the Lord who created and continues them. If we have atheistic inclinations such thoughts as these should teach us that atheistic inclinations are seriously in error.

11.6. If it is seedtime we may expect to be about the sowing at all hours. The Lord Jesus Christ applies the picture language of sowing to the spreading of the gospel (Luke 8. 4-15). Whatever the time of day, whatever the period of our lives, gospel opportunities are there for the taking. It is not for us to reckon that this or that opportunity is inappropriate. The best scenario of all is that they might all prove to be sown on good ground.

11.7-8. If the enjoyment of the light and warmth of the sun for growth and wellbeing is pleasant as well as necessary, how much more is this true of the gospel of salvation. Paul speaks of, “the light of the glorious gospel of Christ” (2 Corinthians 4.4), and the Psalmist says, “The LORD is my light and my salvation” (Psalm 27.1). It is a “horror of great darkness” (Genesis 15.12) to be in the Egypt of sin. To spend one’s life in the truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ is much wiser. The alternative spiritually is a thick “darkness which may be felt” (Genesis 10. 21,22). “Woe unto them...that put darkness for light, and light for darkness” (Isaiah 5.20). By nature men love darkness rather than light (John 3.19) but the Lord Jesus Christ said, “I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life” (John 8.12).

Days of darkness are many without Christ for “the whole world lieth in wickedness” (1 John 5.19). Once life is over “shall thy wonders be known in the dark?” (Psalm 88.12, that is, in death. “Give glory to the LORD your God, before he cause darkness, and before your feet stumble upon the dark mountains, and, while ye look for (ie “expect”) light, he turn it into the shadow of death and make it gross darkness” (Jeremiah 13.16). The days of darkness in that case shall be many for Solomon speaks in the next chapter that “man goeth to his long home” (12.5); for a long time – even eternity.

“All that cometh is vanity.” If we embrace nihilism, (that there is no God, nothing beyond this life and therefore no hope and no accountability to anyone, with all that follows) it may be possible to rejoice in sheer youthfulness while it lasts but it is shortlived and takes no account of the aspirations, the love and hope (to say nothing of other attributes) which we find within us. Any attempted explanation of the meaning of life which does not take these things into account is no explanation at all, for these are the noblest and highest attributes of man. They can only be explained if we allow that there is a Higher than man, who because He first enjoyed these qualities from everlasting, endowed man with them as a heritage to be treasured, not overruled, in any consideration of his makeup.

9-10. So the crucial failing of the backsliding state is here revealed. It proposes living as if there is no eternity, living for the flesh and for the hour in the sure knowledge that it is inviting God’s judgment. One might imagine that verse 9 was ironical, but verse 10 shows that this is

the serious dilemma of the backsliding state. It is seriously flawed and inconsistent, as the muddle of these verses eminently displays. If we indulge in the attitudes of verse 9 it is not so straightforward to “remove sorrow from thy heart, and put away evil from thy flesh.” To “walk in the ways of thine heart” is to invite sorrow and evil. While it is true (Psalm 37.4) that “he (the LORD) shall give thee the desires of thine heart” it is on the condition that we delight ourselves in Him. The true way is to “repent and believe the gospel” (Mark 1.15) even from childhood. The conclusion (verse 10) to remove sorrow from the heart may only be through the repentance which is at the core of the gospel message; but it is no part of gospel preaching to invite the young to walk in the natural ways of their heart and invite the judgment of God thereby. Faithful preaching is always “Repent and believe the gospel.” A preacher in an unsaved or backslidden state preaches a defective gospel; which, while it may please our Almighty, sovereign God to overrule, is not to be the norm.