

FREE MORAL AGENTS

The existence of sin is certain. The evidence for the existence of sin is written everywhere upon time and timely things. The devastating results of sin are entwined with the history of man. The heinous crimes committed daily as reported by the news media tell the ghastly story of sin, as also do the penal institutions wherein millions of men and women in this nation alone are incarcerated.

Sin has been defined variously as “disobedience to a personal God,” “rebellion against the omnipotent Creator,” “an unethical act,” “missing the mark or aim,” “overpassing or transgressing of a line,” and “transgression of the law of God.” The so-called deadly or capital sins are listed as pride, covetousness, lust, anger, gluttony, envy, and sloth. Further, the sins that are said to cry out to heaven for vengeance are willful murder (Genesis 4:10), sodomy (Genesis 18:20-21), the oppression of the poor (Exodus 2:23), and defrauding a laborer of his wages (James 5:4).

When faced with the horrors of sin, men project searching questions. Some person will ask, “If there is a good, righteous, and all-powerful God, why did He not create man so that he could not sin?” The question on its face, seems to be a pertinent one. The answer, however, to that seemingly insurmountable question is quite simple when contemplated.

God created man in His own image—that is, He created man with intellect and the freedom of will or choice. He created man for His own association, and man could qualify for such society only if he were a free moral agent. If God had created man otherwise, man would be unfit for the society and association of the God head and the angelic host. Then, too, who is there who would desire to be divested of his freedom of will? Another person will ask, “If there is a good, righteous, and all-powerful God, why did he not create man so that he would not sin?” The answer is that God cannot do contradictory things or bring about contradictory results. He cannot make a square circle. He cannot create two high mountains without a valley between the two mountains. If God had created man so that he would not sin, then he would have created man on a par with brute animals that are controlled by brute instinct. Man so created would not be—could not be—a free moral agent.

The point is that God, including the Godhead, is infinite. Man, as well as the angels, are finite beings, and no finite being is, or can be infinitely perfect. When God created man, He knew the possibility, the probability, and the certainty that man in time would sin. Thus God made a plan of redemption for man before He made man—a plan delicately balanced between justice and mercy (I Peter 1:17-20).

To illustrate the fact of such a plan of redemption, Paul wrote: “For whom he [God] foreknew, he also foreordained to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren: and whom he foreordained, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified” (Romans 8:29-30).

God foreknew that if He created man in His own image, or with the intelligence and the power of free will, that man would in time sin. Therefore, God, before he created man, foreordained, foreplanned, or foremade a plan of salvation for man.

The plan was calculated to lead a man when he had so fallen to become like His Son in righteousness; for God is just, and as a just God, all demands of violated justice would have to be met; and His Son was the only person who could qualify to meet the demands of violated justice.

Christ, God’s Son, was the “firstborn” from the grave to ascend into heaven to die no more. “Many brethren” would include the men of the Patriarchal and Jewish ages who would, through faith in the promised redeemer, offer animal sacrifices of temporary cleansing from sin. This means of sacrificial cleansing would and did continue until the time when Christ shed His blood.

Thus, that blood so shed did reach back and cleanse those who had received the

THE PLEASANT VIEW PLUMB LINE

“...then said the Lord, Behold, I will set a plumb line in the midst of my people Israel...” (Amos 7:8)

JESUS: THE MASTER COMMANDER

Text: _____

- He Commanded _____ for the _____
- He Commanded _____ for the _____
- He Commanded _____ for _____
- He Commanded _____ for the _____
- He Commanded _____ for the _____
- He Commanded _____ for the _____
- He Commanded _____ for the _____
- He Commanded _____ for the _____
- He Commanded _____ for the _____
- He Commanded _____ for the _____

Conclusion:

- He Commanded _____ for the _____

SOLOMON THE SCIENTIST

Text: _____

I. Is Happiness found in being _____?

Hypothesis:

Conclusion:

II. Is Happiness found in being _____?

Hypothesis:

Conclusion:

III. Is Happiness found in being _____?

Hypothesis:

Conclusion:

IV. Is Happiness found in being _____?

Hypothesis:

Conclusion:

V. Is Happiness found in being _____?

Hypothesis:

Conclusion:

Result: _____

temporary blood cleansings. Further, that blood would reach forward to the permanent blood cleansing for all who can be admonished to come under the cleansing power of the blood of Christ.

God foreordained or planned a scheme of redemption for man when man fell. God called them through the Gospel. So certain was the glorification of all the saints throughout the ages that God spoke through Paul as if they all had already been glorified.

A third person will ask: "Why did God not content Himself with the spreading forth of planets and stars, the bringing forth of mountains of rocks and diamonds, the springing forth of forests of trees and flowers? In short, why create man whom He knew would sin?" The answer lies in the fact that God is a social being. He desires to have the company of His own offspring with whom He can share His love, righteousness, and glory. Why do a husband and wife desire offspring?

The fact that a good and righteous God would desire to have offspring is really no wonder. Further, God so strongly desired to have offspring that He was prepared to sacrifice His own Son in order to have myriads of righteous souls in His great family.

The origin of evil has been a problem for man throughout the ages. The case is, however, that sin stemmed from the principle of free moral agency of angels and men.

-Rex A. Turner, Sr.

TWO HORSES NEAR MY HOUSE

Just up the road from my home is a field, with two horses in it. From a distance, each looks like every other horse. But if one stops the car, or is walking by, he will notice something quite amazing.

Looking into the eyes of one horse will disclose that he is blind. His owner has chosen not to have him put down, but has made a good home for him. This alone is amazing.

Listening, one will hear the sound of a bell. Looking around for the source of the sound, one will see that it comes from the smaller horse in the field. Attached to her bridle is a small bell. It lets her blind friend know where she is, so he can follow her. As one stands and watches these two friends, one will see how she is always checking on him, and that he will listen for her bell and then slowly walk to where she is trusting that she will not lead him astray.

Like the owners of these two horses, God does not throw us away just because we are not perfect or because we have problems or challenges. He watches over us and even brings others into our lives to help us when we are in need. Sometimes we are the blind horse being guided by God and those whom He places in our lives. Other times we are the guide horse, helping others see God.

THE BOOK OF THE PREACHER

The word “Ecclesiastes” refers to “one who speaks publicly in an assembly” (Smith’s Bible Dictionary). That is the way the writer of this book presents himself: “*The words of the Preacher...*” (Ecclesiastes 1:1a). In it, the writer sets out to contrast the infinite wisdom of God with the comparable foolishness of man. In the end, concluded is the fact that heavenly understanding is the one thing set out above all others that is worthwhile to obtain. The book itself, though, is arranged as an investigation. The writer seeks wisdom in certain areas, realizing the futility of it, until ultimately reaching his timely conclusion: “*Let us here the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments; for this is the whole duty of man*” (Ecclesiastes 12:13).

This preacher identifies himself at the end of verse one: “*...the son of David, king in Jerusalem*” Solomon then is the writer, continuing his expositions of wisdom began in the book of Proverbs. Jewish tradition states that the proverbs were written early in his life while the Ecclesiastes was written later in life as he reflects back upon years lived and spent. This is likely in view of the book’s theme perhaps being influenced by Solomon’s youthful vanities later remember with disdain.

A constant companion word throughout this book is “vanity.” The book is opened with the harsh reality of carnal living: “*Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, vanity of vanities; all is vanity*” (Ecclesiastes 1:2). Solomon’s sorrow is felt in every word of the verse. He had throughout his life sought various means of fulfillment, his exploits being forever contained in the scriptures:

“But king Solomon loved many strange women, together with the daughter of Pharaoh, women of the Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Zidonians, and Hittites; of the nations concerning which the Lord said unto the children of Israel, Ye shall not go in to them, neither shall they come in unto you: for surely they will turn away your heart after their gods: Solomon clave unto these in love. And he had seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines: and his wives turned away his heart. For it came to pass, when Solomon was old, that his wives turned away his heart after other gods: and his heart was not perfect with the Lord his God, as was the heart of David his father. For Solomon went after Ashteroth the goddess of the Zidonians, and after Milcom the abomination of the Ammonites. And Solomon did evil in the sight of the Lord, and went not fully after the Lord, as did David his father. Then did Solomon build an high place for Chemosh, the abomination of Moab, in the hill that is before Jerusalem, and for Molech, the abomination of the children of Ammon. And likewise did he for all his strange wives, which burnt incense and sacrificed unto their gods” (I Kings 11:1-8).

All of those many years spent chasing after multitudes of women and gods brought anguish which is reflected in Solomon’s writings. It is a harsh reality to have to look back over the span of one’s life and conclude that it was all wasted in vanity. However, Solomon does so in order to provide a valuable lesson for generations to come. He speaks from the experience of one who had wasted his early years and his advice to all others was to “*Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them...*” (Ecclesiastes 12:1).

Frank J. Dunn provided a valuable tool to understanding the layout of Ecclesiastes in his Know Your Bible. Under the heading of “Solomon’s Experiment (Chapter 1:4-11:10),” he stated:

“Solomon sought satisfaction in the following earthy pursuits:

1. In natural science, and he found nothing new under the sun (1:4-11).
2. In wisdom and philosophy, but all to no purpose (1:12-18).
3. In pleasure in all forms of mirth, drinking, great works, building, agriculture, great possessions, wealth, and great music, but found them all to be empty (2:1-11).
4. Materialism, living merely for the present, in ‘wisdom, and madness, and folly’ (2:12); all is ‘vanity and vexation of spirit’ (2:12-26).
5. In fatalism, and found life to be a weary round of monotonous repetition (3:1-22).
6. In observation of social evils, and found all wanting (4:1-16).
7. In religion without God, and was convinced that enjoyment of life was his portion (5:1-20).
8. In wealth, honor, and long life, and found that these cannot satisfy (6:1-12).
9. Morality and civil duties, and even these, if done for their own sake cannot give satisfaction (7:1-8).
10. In observing the good and the bad, wise and the foolish, he concludes that the grave is the goal of all (9:1-10:20).
11. In benevolence and seed-sowing, and a future harvest will result. “*God will bring thee to judgment*” (11:1-10).

Though satisfaction in life was sought in each of these by Solomon personally, his conclusion in chapter twelve is that satisfaction is only found with God.

Christ is picture in Ecclesiastes as the “one shepherd” that makes life worth living through His offer of the truly abundant life. If only man would see the folly of carnal vanity and recognize the need to seek and know God then surely Solomon’s wasted life would be vindicated in the righteousness of others. Such is the purpose of Ecclesiastes.