

"Better to go to the house of mourning . . ."

"Better to go to the house of mourning than to go to the house of feasting, For that is the end of all men; And the living will take it to heart. Sorrow is better than laughter, For by a sad countenance the heart is made better. The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning, But the heart of fools is in the house of mirth. It is better to hear the rebuke of the wise Than for a man to hear the song of fools. For like the crackling of thorns under a pot, So is the laughter of the fool. This also is vanity."

In this passage, Solomon is telling us that one thing is better, more valuable than another. It would not seem so among men in the world today -- but it is better to go to a funeral than a party.

Solomon is not saying -- you should never go to the house of feasting; this is not a wholesale condemnation of all parties (though those involving sin should be shunned). But there is more personal value for us -- to attend a funeral!

The reason might be explained this way. I'll express this through a question: Typically, when we attend a party, do we go home and think about our spiritual lives, God and eternity? No -- typically, when we go to a party and have a good time; we come home tired, laughing and our stomachs are bloated.

However -- when we attend a funeral, that event tends to generate sobriety, not levity. A funeral brings us face to face with the reality of death and it is good to think about death! And a funeral is one of the few occasions where there is this sober focus on death. Can you imagine - having a few friends over to eat sandwiches and talk about death?

That's not what we do. It takes a funeral for us to take the time to con-temple where we are all headed, and hopefully - think about whether we are ready to die. Solomon says here, "death is the destiny of every man; the living should take this to heart." A funeral may leave us with a sad face - but the thoughts we must entertain about death MAY DO OUR HEARTS GOOD.

"The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning, but the heart of fools is in the house of pleasure." Now -- along this same line - Solomon wants us to know - there is something else that may be unpleasant, but can do us good: It is better to heed a wise man's rebuke than to listen to the song of fools!

At a funeral -- ideally -- you hear the rebuke of a wise man (take note, preachers!). At the party -- you hear the song of fools. Obviously -- the funeral is better for us than the party.

"Like the crackling of thorns under the pot, so is the laughter of fools. This too is meaningless." I'm sure most of you will know what I mean, when I use the word "kindling." When you start a fire -- you gather up some dry twigs, and use them to get the fire going. What happens is, the kindling makes a loud popping noise or crackling sound... but it doesn't last very long. That's the way Solomon describes the laughter that is typical of parties -- LOUD AND ENTERTAINING, but TEMPORARY. Of course, there is more permanence and value in the funeral -- and the thoughts generated by the reality of death can do more for us than the laughter of fools. Let us take this to heart, and do what Solomon recommends at the end of this marvelous book: FEAR GOD, AND KEEP HIS COMMANDMENTS.

- by Warren E. Berkley

Respect for God's Authority

The standard of what is acceptable in religion for many is whether it satisfies the individual. Many "shop" for a religion that meets their personal preferences, treating the Scriptures as a salad bar-- picking things they like and passing over others. Many declare satisfaction with the course they have chosen in religion without ever considering the question, "Is God satisfied with my religion?" The whole conclusion is not, serve God as you please, but "Fear God and keep His commandments" (Eccl. 12:13). Our purpose in daily activities and in worship should be to strive to please God. Those who truly seek to serve God will not be satisfied until they do this. We must be willing to test our practices and beliefs to see if they agree with the Scriptures. "Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves" (2Cor. 13:5).

The only way to please God in all that we do is to follow His revealed will-- to simply read and study the Scriptures and follow them in all we do, not adding to them or taking away (2Jn. 9; Deut. 4:2). Those who fail to do this lack respect for the authority of God as Lord and Master. The

inspired apostle declared, "And whatsoever ye do, in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord" (Col.3:17). To "do all in the name of the Lord" means to respect the authority of the Lord in everything. We must have God's authority for all that we do and that authority must be established from the Scriptures; for it is there that God has revealed His will for us.

So, our personal morality, conduct, religious beliefs, and things practiced in worship must be based on book, chapter, and verse. One may be satisfied with the manner in which they live and worship, while God may not be, making life and worship worthless before the Lord. As Jesus warned,

"This people draweth nigh unto Me with their mouth, and honoureth Me with their lips; but their heart is far from Me. But in vain they do worship Me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men" (Matt. 15:8,9).

Therefore, let us search the Scriptures to establish authority for all that we believe and practice showing respect God's authority.

- by Paul Smithson

Thoughts About The Eclipse

Next week we are set to experience a true once-in-a-lifetime event. A total eclipse of the sun will cross over our area. We're told that the last time a similar event happened here was 99 years ago. And, we're told this cannot be expected again for many years to come (scientists know exactly when it will happen).

But wait a minute! This current event has been foretold for many years. Astronomers have pinpointed the exact path of the eclipse. Maps and charts are available that give precise details for location, time duration, etc. And, as we said, they can tell us accurately when the next one will occur. How is it possible to predict with such certainty - even many years in advance!?!

The answer to this question, of course, lies in the fact of God's incredible creative work. He set the sun, moon, and stars in their order on the fourth day of creation week (Genesis 1:14-19). These celestial bodies were "for signs, and for seasons, and for days, and years" (vs. 14). The very language of the text indicates that there was precision in the movement of these stars and planets from the beginning. So much so that man has always depended on this steady progression to mark time – from the days of the sundial even until now. This exactness underlies all the specific predictions that have been made about this eclipse and the ones that will occur in the future.

There are remarkable signs of intelligent design in the universe. The clockwork precision of the stars and planets is only one of the incredible manifestations of God's power - shown so clearly in what He has created. The eclipse will surely confirm that "the heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork" (Psalms 19:1). Think!

- by Greg Gwin