

Mt Zion Baptist Church Special Bible Education
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Hosted by Missionary Bill Hardecker

The Person, Performance, and Power of a *Qoheleth*
Ecclesiastes 12:9-12
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Introduction

Solomon wrote the book Ecclesiastes in his old age having gone through apostate days. He composed it from the perspective of a natural person – without the use of God’s standards in life and work.¹ Thus, he repetitiously recognized the vanity of life and work under that condition (1:1-3). In every chapter, he revealed this vain life pursuit. And culminated in 11:9-12:14 as the book’s final section. In this section, he addressed the young man² – probably may refer to his successor son Rehoboam.³ Solomon desired to equip his son into the throne and perhaps aimed to discourage him from repeating his errors. As he attempts to enable Rehoboam, he manifested the preparations, performance, and power of a *Qoheleth*. This Hebrew word means one who collects words or sentences; or one who speaks in public [a necessity for a ruler], and one who assembles people. The word was used seven times (7x: 1:1, 2, 12; 7:27; 12:8-10) throughout the book. Solomon was neither a prophet nor a priest. But as a king, he was divinely anointed (1 Kings 1:34, 39) and must speak in public too like the two *messiahs* (Lev. 16:32; 1 Kings 19:15-16). So, in that sense, he is a preacher – a preaching king.

Pursuant to this passage, what does God expect from the person of a preacher? What are the contents of a preacher’s job description? And, where does the preacher source his power that energizes his ministry? These queries shall be answered by the three truths presented in this paper.

¹ The book of Proverbs provides a contrast in many ways with Ecclesiastes. The former was composed under a perspective of God’s standards while the latter was bereft of divine norms of human life and work. However, both books were written under divine inspiration rendering them free from error. Hence, when studied comparatively, both are beneficial in human life and work particularly with the saved people desiring to be a light and godly testimony in this sin-darkened world. Unfortunately, his son – Rehoboam, failed to heed his wisdom from both books.

² Rehoboam began to rule at age 41 (1 Kgs. 14:21) immediately after the death of his father Solomon. His advisers who grew with him were called as “young men” thrice in 1 Kgs. 12:8-14. Since Solomon must have written it possibly, in his old age, after having experienced deviation from God’s standards of life and work.

³ “My son” from Hebrew בן *ben* noun masculine singular refers to Rehoboam.

The aim of this study is to educate preachers in three areas that cover his life and ministry particularly his personality, his ministerial work, and his effectiveness in the ministry pursuant to the divine revelation in Ecclesiastes 12:9-12.

Outline

I. The Person of a *Qoheleth*

The *Qoheleth* as a person must possess three biblical descriptions, one who is wise, one who is excellent, and one who heeds admonition. This is revealed in verses 9a and 12.

First, a *Qoheleth* is described as wise (v. 9). The word comes from Hebrew adjective חָכָם *chakam* which means skillful. He is skillful in technical aspect of his trade. Likewise, he is prudent in administration of things such as in ethics, and religion. However, such virtue is not quickly acquired as it is a product of one's devoted engagement in repetitious tasks. For modern day preacher, he is to be skillful in study, in preparation of messages to deliver, and in the discernment of his flock (Prov. 27:23).

Solomon cited the consequences of acquiring this skill in verse 12b saying “of making many⁴ books⁵ there is no end; and much study⁶ is a weariness [Hebrew יְגִיעַ יְגִיעַ *yegi`ah* means tiring or exhausting] of the flesh [body]. Hence, “wise” or skillful is used in the field of study necessary for a preaching king or in this modern era for the preacher. Some biblical truths that support this are as follows; first, in producing written documents (i.e., academic paper, thesis, dissertation, sermons, lessons, messages, articles, teaching curriculum, and books) is unending in the life and work of a preacher; it is necessary both in the pre-ministry and in-ministry situations. Second, devotion to study is exhausting both in the body and in spirit; hence, the preacher must develop a system to combat this sinful propensity just as Solomon gave several antidotes to human covetousness.⁷ And if it is not properly dealt with, it may lead to failure to acquire the skill in the preacher's life and his work will be affected. Thus, many desire to pursue (formal) study but

⁴ “Many and much” both from Hebrew Hiphil (causative) Infinitive רָבָה *rabah* not only refers to the number [multiplying] but also the duration of time involved in composition.

⁵ “Books” from Hebrew noun סֵפֶר *cepher* means any [written] document and when extended or compiled becomes a book.

⁶ “Study” from Hebrew noun לָהַג *lahag* means devotion to study

⁷ Ecclesiastes 7:1-29 provides several antidotes to sinful propensity (i.e., covetousness) of man namely; choosing good testimony than great wealth (v. 1), training oneself in hardship than indulging in feasting (v. 2-4), listening to rebuke than the praise of a fool (v. 5-6), avoiding bribery (v. 7), patiently acquiring wealth than yielding to quick rich schemes (v. 8-10), prefers wisdom than wealth (v.11-12), be prepared with God's work of prosperity and adversity (v. 13-14), exercise moderation in righteousness or sin (v. 15-18), consider human imperfection (v. 19-22), consider personal imperfection too (v. 23-25), and avoid the negative influence of women (v. 26-29).

unwilling to endure the consequence or to pay the prize of the skill and others are lacking in the basic skills to acquire greater skill in study that they relegate to non-study or copying.

Second, a *Qoheleth* is viewed as superiorly advantageous (v. 9a). The word “moreover” is from Hebrew noun יֹתֵר *yowther* which means superior, advantageous. In 2:15, it means very or extremely, and in 6:8, it means excellent in reference to the wise. At his old age, having studied the Torah, the many fields of human studies (i.e., botany, zoology, dendrology, ichthyology, etc., 1 Kings 4:32-34), he enjoyed the affluence and power of kingly reign, and worldly pursuits, he concluded that being a preacher is more excellent if not much more advantageous than all his pursuits and acquisitions. Here lies, how a biblical preacher ought to see the nobility of his life and work to overcome the worldly temptations of numerical power, earthly wealth, kingdom-like ministries, yet unbiblical in his life and ministry in the church.⁸

Third, a *Qoheleth* should seriously take admonition (v. 12a). The word came from Hebrew Niphal Imperative זָהַר from the root זָהַר *zahar* means be taught. As a divine injunction, this admonition refers to the goads and nails that need to be planted in the hearers’ heart. That is as preacher-leader, one is to be teachable with the truths of God’s revelation which Solomon harked back to earlier truth on being wise or skillful.

The Preacher is a person divinely called to deliver messages. As a person, to accomplish this task, he ought to be skillful or wise both in life and work. And this requires effort, time and testing to discover the necessary skill. Ecclesiastes 7:25 provides four (4) infinitives showing Solomon’s attempts to discover wickedness of folly [self-confidence or stupidity], foolishness [as is], and madness [delusion]. Then, he realized the vanity after going through with these worldly unbiblical pursuits as he wrote “applied” in 8:16. The word is from Hebrew סָבַב *cabab* means a changed direction, turned around [implies apostasy]. Solomon recognized, perhaps in his old age, that he should have focused on the Torah and in the divine task and not on vanity things. This warns preachers from pursuit of hobby, advocacy, entertainment, engagement that may distract him from focused duty and ministry or taint one’s testimony.⁹

As a person, a *Qoheleth* must pursue to acquire the skill of being “wise;” he is to imbibe in his being the nobility of his life and work which is divinely ascribed as superiorly advantageous over all earthly pursuits; and he is subject to admonition.

⁸ Some preachers gloried on these status symbols and remain in the ministry though biblically no longer qualified. Others, prefer those earthly acquisitions over what Solomon had revealed in the text. Still others are contemplating to imitate the unbiblical ones and ways to counter the decline in their ministries.

⁹ Illustrations for this truth abounds. Those who entered politics, be it elected or appointed position or engaged in political advocacy in any country, came out of it hardly without damage in their honor, reputation, and Christian testimony. Others chose questionable, unlawful, or invocation of privacy kind of entertainment, hobby, and engagement that eventually caused them to fall into temptations of the flesh thereby destroying their lives and ministries as they land in jail (cf. Ephesians 5:1-7).

II. The Performance of a *Qoheleth*

The works of a *Qoheleth* involves five (5) tasks as Solomon revealed it in verses 9 and 10. All these five works or how he performs [or ministers] as a preacher were constructed to be intensive in degree of engagement¹⁰ namely; a) he is to teach knowledge; b) he weighs/tests/proves things; c) he searches or examines things; d) he straightens things or makes them orderly or arranges them; and e) he seeks fit words in the delivery or writing of messages.

As to his performance, he is to imbibe five characteristics, though Solomon did not reveal them chronologically. All these ministerial skills could be discovered, and developed during formal schooling both in the secular and sacred fields of studies. Luke the physician illustrates this quality whom God used as a historian gathering his data from missionary exposure with Paul and other preachers (Luke 1:1-4). Paul too manifests his varied knowledge in both fields of studies in his sermon at Mars' Hill (Acts 17:22-31).¹¹

First, a preacher is a teacher of knowledge. As such, he must be constantly in the habit of acquiring knowledge, particularly, the divine knowledge which is superior to all earthly and human knowledge. Secular knowledge enables him to keep himself abreast of his environment and learns how to address its weakness and errors in the light of his expertise in divine revelation. This will equip him to teach and lead the listeners from their errors towards the supremacy of the biblical revelation. As a pastor he is expected to be “apt to teach” [Greek adjective διδακτικόν describes the office of bishop means competent or skillful to teach] as 1 Tim. 3:2 requires.

Second, a preacher is to test and prove information or any knowledge he acquires whether they are of God or if they pass the biblical test. He is to determine the profitability of this knowledge in earthly life and in eternity. This knowledge includes secular and sacred ones. Solomon's Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Solomon provide tremendous inspired wealth of godly knowledge helpful in a successful life and work. However, one's weakness in any theological field, more so in linguistic skills, will certainly affect his ability to probe independently any information obtained. John's warning in 1 John 4:1 [“try” from Greek imperative δοκιμάζω means continue testing] is fit for this (cf. 2 Cor. 10:5).

Third, a preacher searches and examines things, be it spiritual or earthly issues of life and work. Solomon declared this task in Ecclesiastes 1:13 and 7:25. Thus, hearing a preacher ever researching things particularly that which is of God or His revelation warms the heart. But this can be accomplished only depending on one's status of knowledge for it will serve as his framework in examining available information.

¹⁰ All five Hebrew verbs namely (taught) לָמַד *lamad*, (gave good heed) אָזַן *'azan*, (sought out) חָקַר *chaqar*, (set in order) תָּקַן *taqan*, (sought to find out) בָּקַשׁ *baqash* in vv. 9-10 are in Piel Perfect form indicates an intense action.

¹¹ He knew well the religious environment of his listeners (vv. 22-25), declared the unity and singularity of human race (v. 26), quoted Greek writers (vv. 27-28), exalted the divine creation of all things (v. 29), and declared the universal divine call for men to repent to receive salvation (vv. 30-31).

Fourth, a preacher organizes or systematically arranges knowledge he acquired. So, in the process, he may improve and discard some earlier acquired knowledge or harmonizes them. However, not many could succeed to acquire this skill outside formal schooling system. For a school system is designed to direct students into rigorous and repetitious activities that will enable him to acquire the skill expressed in his course papers, degree theses and dissertations, and publications of articles and books. How the diligent student or preacher uses this skill; or what he makes use of these acquired skill will depend on himself in cooperation with the Spirit of God for it is beyond the work of the teacher. Luke clearly displayed this skill in his narrative on Christ's life and ministry in the Gospel account and that of the early churches in the book of Acts (Luke 1:1-4).

Finally, a preacher strives to deliver in an effective manner the truths he acquired either in speaking or in writing. A preacher is not one if he does not speak God's revelation. But he must be accurate in the manner of speaking for spoken words are powerful¹² even as Solomon said in Proverbs 25:11 "A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in pictures of silver." Further, writing preserves whatever is orally delivered. It may help the current and future generations to be more effective in the ministry. As Solomon reiterated in Ecclesiastes 12:10b "and *that which was written was upright, even words of truth.*" Though writing articles or publishing "of making many books *there is no end*" is not for the sluggard. Thus, a faithful preacher will write his sermon for others' benefits.

III. The Power of a *Qoheleth*

The *Qoheleth* is a powerful and influential person as verses 11 and 12a states. Whether a preacher realizes it or not, he affects people who hear him speak, and who read his writings.¹³ That is why Solomon likened his "words," [and perhaps his writings] to goads and nails. For they are pointed and may hurt when thrust on.

A *Qoheleth's* speaking ("words") affects hearers. The Hebrew word דָּבָר *dabar* initially means speaking, utterances, and by extension may include his manner. A preacher collects to construct messages and when he compiles them into a book it becomes his writing. His words are likened to "goads" and "nails." A goad is from Hebrew noun דֶּרְבֹן *dorbohn* which is an iron-tip of a pole used to drive cattle at work (cf. 1 Sam. 13:21).¹⁴ When it is thrust into the animal's back it hurts but the animal returns to its normal work as directed by the farmer. A nail is from Hebrew noun מַשְׁמֶרֶת *masmerah* which refers to the tip of goad – a pointed material used to join wood. Thus,

¹² Proverbs 15:1-2, 4, 7, 23, and 28; Ecclesiastes 5:2.

¹³ Baldwin, Alice M., and Joel Mc Durmon, editor. *The New England Pulpit and the American Revolution: When American Pastors Preached Politics, Resisted Tyranny, and Founded a Nation on the Bible*. Second edition. Devoted Books. Dallas, Georgia. 2019.

The author narrated with detailed documentation how New England Protestant pastors' and Baptists' sermons, writings, and visitations influenced the Americans towards independence from Great Britain leading to the American Revolution of the 18th century. See the foreword section (pp. vii – xxiii).

¹⁴ Judges 3:31 pertains to Shamgar's use of an ox-goad to kill the Philistines.

both are pointed instruments designed to be thrust into an object to create pain that reminds the object to act accordingly.

The source of these pointed instruments is the “one shepherd.” The words in Hebrew מְרֹעֶה :רָחֵק are substantive participle which means the one who is tending the flock, one who is “pastoring,” one who is teaching. More so, Solomon acknowledged the role of “master of assemblies” from Hebrew which may mean “lord of collection” possibly a synonym of *Qoheleth*. That he “fastened” (Hebrew Qal passive participle נִטְוָעִים means to be planted or established) these pointed instruments to the hearers. Thus, a *Qoheleth* speaks [and writes] planting and establishing truths to the listeners, though they will hurt them or caught their attention (cf. Hebrews 4:12 “sharper” [it cuts like a sword] and “piercing” [it penetrates]).¹⁵

As an influential person, a *Qoheleth* will affect listeners and or readers with his messages especially if they are pointedly designed. New Testament preachers practiced this manner as shown in the ministries of John the Baptist (Luke 3:8-14), Christ (Mat. 15:1-3, 7-9), Peter (Acts 2:14-15, 37 “pricked in their heart”), Stephen (Acts 7:2, 51-54), and Paul (Acts 13:16, 44-45, 50).

As to the power of the preacher, he is to provoke the hearers and readers of his work creating decisions. Thus, listeners may either receive or reject the message delivered. Also, he admonishes them not only for eternity but especially for earthly issues of life and work. For the spirit and the body, constituting the human being, are intertwined as Solomon revealed it. Thus, both should be covered by the preacher’s rebuke and instruction to protect the youth from potential ruin in either life or work. However, he acknowledged the endless work of book writing and distribution. More so, studying, or deep devotion to study is exhausting in the body (“flesh” here certainly refers to the general body parts, i.e., brain, long seating, bodily pains, etc.).

Conclusion

Someone said that one of the hardest people to recruit to study in a formal way are the sluggards and the soul-winning preachers. Others view formal study that leads to greater skill in the acquisition of biblical truths as a hindrance to building up a church or in church plant. These positions are foreign to what we learn from the biblical *Qoheleth*.

As a person, a biblical preacher will watch his personal characteristics namely; he strives to become wise knowing that his position is superiorly advantageous yet he remains subject to admonition. Then, as to his ministry performance, he will hone his five ministerial skills as a teacher of knowledge, as one who tests or proves things, as one who searches or examines things,

¹⁵ The truth that a preacher’s or prophet’s words do hurt is illustrated by rulers’ responses to his messages namely; a) King Ahab of NK of Israel attitude towards Elijah in 1 Kings 18:17-18 whom he called as the troubler (anti-peace) of Israel; b) also his hatred towards prophet Micaiah whom he called as preaching only evil and not good about him and his reign (1 Kings 22:8, 18); c) Zedekiah imprisoned prophet Jeremiah with false charge of treason (Jeremiah 37:6-21) due to his faithful delivery of divine messages; and d) John the Baptist went to prison and death due to Herod the tetrarch’s political expediency and his criticism of the ruler’s wicked governance (Luke 3:18-20).

as one who straightens or arranges things, and as one who seeks fit words in the delivery or writing of messages.

Then, as to his influence or power, he affects people, their lives and decisions, and their eternity destination. Likewise, the believing hearers' eternal reward in the kingdom of God rests upon this influence. Thus, he must ensure the Spirit's empowerment in his life and ministry to effect godly influence in people's lives.

END

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