

Ecclesiastes 3:14-17

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/eccl/eccl-3/ecclesiastes-314-17/>

Solomon declares the cycles of time and circumstance are God's sovereign handiwork. Since man cannot fully fathom the mysteries of God and because His judgment is coming, we ought to fear Him.

Solomon now makes an interesting statement. Solomon says he knows *that everything God does will remain forever*. We know that the current earth will be destroyed, and be replaced by a new earth (2 Peter 3:10-12; Revelation 21:1). Solomon clearly saw people as God's handiwork, yet knew that people die. So what does Solomon mean by this phrase, that God's handiwork will *remain forever*?

The Hebrew word translated *forever* is the same root word translated "eternity" in Ecclesiastes 3:11. It is translated "successive" in Genesis 9:12, where God says of His rainbow in the sky: "This is the sign of the covenant which I am making between Me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all successive generations." In Genesis 6:4 it is translated "of old" and refers to a past age in which mighty men of renown lived. Men who were no more, because that age had passed. The sense of the word covers the entire span of a particular age. Or, depending on the context, perhaps the span of all ages. In this case, it seems the context would indicate that all God does will remain for the determined time, no more and no less. It appears to be a restatement of the assertions that God has an "appointed time for everything" and that "He has made everything appropriate in its time" (Ecclesiastes 3:11).

Not only has God made all things *appropriate for its time*, God will also ensure that all things and all times exist for their appointed purpose. Each age is created by God, and *will remain* until it passes to another age. In each case, it will be something *God does*, and it will *remain* for the appointed time.

Solomon also observes with respect to God's handiwork that *there is nothing to add to it and there is nothing to take from it*. God's work is totally complete. He didn't leave anything out. He didn't add anything that was superfluous. All that is, is all that should be. This could be viewed as another way to state that God "has made an appointed time for everything" (3:11). And that God "has made everything appropriate in its time" (3:11). Similarly, Solomon's statement that *everything will remain* could be viewed as a similar statement

as his assertion that God made “work which He has done from the beginning even to the end” (3:11).

Why has God placed into the heart of man the desire to discover purpose, then made it apparent that His purpose was undiscoverable based on human reason and experience? Solomon answers: because *God has so worked that men should fear Him*. Our human desire to know purpose together with the frustration of not being able to discover that purpose *should* drive us to *fear God*.

Solomon tells us in Proverbs that the *fear* of *God* is the starting place for both wisdom and knowledge ([Proverbs 1:7](#); [9:10](#)). The realities of the world around us require us to have a starting place, a definition, before we can know anything. All true starting places are rooted in the *fear* of *God*. The root of *fear* is concern of consequences. We *fear* cancer because the consequence of contracting cancer can be death. We *fear* criticism from other people because the consequence can be shame. We *fear* an economic downturn because the consequence can be the loss of our job.

The *fear* of God includes caring what God thinks. We fear authorities because we care what they think of us, because of what they can do to or for us. To fear God would mean living a life that aims to please Him, so that He will think well of us. But we cannot please God apart from faith. We are told in the New Testament that “without faith it is impossible to please Him, for the one who comes to God must believe that He exists, and that He proves to be One who rewards those who seek Him” ([Hebrews 11:6](#)).

The core consequence that Solomon admonishes us to focus on is the reality that *God will judge both the righteous man and the wicked man*. This is a theme that echoes throughout the Bible. Judgment from *God* is certain. Will you be prepared? It is easy for us to *fear* many other things that are more visible, more present, and more immediate. Some ignore judgment from an invisible *God* at a time that seems far off. These people exercise *wickedness in the place of justice*. It can certainly seem like *wickedness* will pay. But ultimately it won't. Because *God will judge* everyone, including the *wicked man*. *Wickedness* will, in fact, turn out to be vaporous.

There will be *a time for every matter and for every deed* to be judged by God. The beginning of both wisdom and of knowledge is to live every moment with our top priority being what God will say to us in that day about our actions. The Hebrew word translated *matter* is usually translated “desire,” “pleasure,” or “delight.” It is probably expressing the notion of intent. [Hebrews 4:12](#) tells

us that God is able to “judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.” God will judge both what we do, as well as why we did it. If we want to gain the most meaning and purpose from life, then we need to live it with the day of our judgment in constant view.

Although God’s judgment is a certain reality, Solomon makes an observation, saying he has *seen under the sun that in the place of justice there is wickedness and in the place of righteousness there is wickedness*. The phrase *under the sun* means in observable life. Solomon contemplates this observation, in light of what he has concluded thus far: *I said to myself*. Once again Solomon has acute awareness of his thoughts and is a careful steward of his self-talk. Solomon’s statement to himself concerns the certainty of God’s judgment. Although God has ordered events such that *men should fear Him*, it is observable that some men choose to ignore that knowledge and work *wickedness* anyway.

Solomon notes that there is nothing new about what’s currently happening, stating *that which is has been already*. Whatever we see going on right now *has already* happened before. He further asserts it will always be that way, because *that which will be has already been*. What is going to happen in the future will be things that have occurred before.

God has so worked that men should fear Him. The cycles that make up life, the vaporous realities, combined with the desire to seek eternity placed within our heart are orchestrated by God to drive us to *fear Him*. The phrase *for God seeks what has passed by* is translated in various ways. It is translated “And God requires an account of what is past” in the NKJV.

The word translated *what has passed by* is found eight times in Proverbs and is translated a form of “pursue” seven times and “follow” once. This phrase could emphasize God’s active engagement in the present, as the inevitable cycles of life pass by. God is actively working every facet of that *which is* to pursue the creatures He made in His image, to bring them to a knowledge of Him through faith.

Biblical Text:

¹⁴ I know that everything God does will remain forever; there is nothing to add to it and there is nothing to take from it, for God has so worked that men should fear Him. ¹⁵ That which is has been already and that which will be has already been, for God seeks what has passed by. ¹⁶ Furthermore, I have seen under the sun *that in the place of justice there is wickedness and in the place of righteousness there is*

wickedness. ¹⁷I said to myself, “God will judge both the righteous man and the wicked man,” for a time for every matter and for every deed is there.