

Getting Old is not for Sissies Nor Bodes Well for the Unrighteous

Chapter 11:7-12:8

The Present and the Future

His big manly voice,
Turning again toward childish treble, pipes
And whistles in his sound. Last scene of all,
That ends this strange eventful history,
Is second childishness and mere oblivion;
Sans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste, sans everything.

Shakespeare As You Like It 2.7

Solomon addresses young people several times throughout the book, but this section is especially directed to them. His argument here can be condensed into this statement: Enjoy life while you're young, but remember that God will bring you into judgment some day. He also goes into a lengthy description of old age, somewhat similar to Shakespeare's description above.

Pleasure and Judgment (11:7-10)

Read this section and fill out the table below.

Advice	Reasons/Comments/Contrast
<i>Enjoy the light/sun (good things of life) .7</i>	<i>Darkness (death) will arrive soon enuf. All that comes will be vanity.</i>
<i>Remember the dark days .8</i>	<i>They shall be many. All that comes is vanity.</i>
<i>Rejoice/be happy in the days of your youth. Follow your heart and your eyes. .9</i>	<i>God will judge all your activities.</i>
<i>Remove sorrow and evil .10</i>	<i>Youth is vanity.</i>

Verse 9 is another text in which Solomon seems to be advocating hedonism—do whatever you want, seek pleasure, follow whatever your heart and your eyes desire.

Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth; and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thine heart, and in the sight of thine eyes:

Is Solomon really advocating a pleasure-seeking lifestyle?

No. Note the end of the verse: *but know thou, that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment.* All behavior should be limited by the fact that God will judge one for it. The author is not advocating an “anything goes” lifestyle.

He's advising his readers to rejoice and enjoy themselves, but to also keep in mind the final judgment, in which the events of today will be evaluated. His point: Enjoy the present, but be prepared for the future. Live with eternal values in mind.

Note the Quote: Enjoyment and judgment, though strange partners, come together in this section because both clamor for man's deepest commitment. Surprisingly, one does not win out over the other. In a world created for enjoyment but damaged by sin, judgment and enjoyment/pleasure are held in tension. With too much pleasure, judgment stands as a threatening force; with too much judgment, enjoyment suffers. In the final analysis, both are prominent themes of life that are resolved in our relationship to God, the primary issue of life and this book.¹

Remember Your Creator (12:1)

In the first verse of chapter twelve, Solomon urges his readers to "remember your creator in the days of your youth." What does the expression "remember" mean? Not "don't forget," not simple mental recall. *The idea is to live in the light of the fact that you will one day stand before your creator to give an account. Think about God and His claim on your life. We should reflect and ponder upon God's providence in our lives, and determine to act in a way that is consistent with God's character.* Biblically, "to remember" is usually attached to an action (c.f. 1 Sam 1:19). So Solomon is calling us to action based on who God is and what he's done for us.

Why do you think Solomon urges his readers to "remember" the Creator especially while they are young?

Because that's what's going to make your life enjoyable and meaningful. Also, once you become old and weak, you'll not be able to serve God as much or enjoy life as much. There are "evil days" coming when the body and mind start to fail, and thus the potential for service diminishes.

Can you think of biblical examples of young people who served God?

Jesus, Samuel, David, Paul's nephew, the boy with the loaves and fishes.

Young believers are often called "the church of tomorrow."

What do you think about such a description? It implies that young people will serve God at some point in the future, but not now. The attitude that puts youth off until maturity is dangerous. Youth need to be involved in service/ministry as soon as possible.

What can young people do to serve God?

Lots of things. Our youth ministry is designed to give youth plenty of service-oriented activities. The regular ministry of the church also allows youth to be involved.

¹John F. MacArthur, Jr., *The MacArthur Study Bible*, (Dallas: Word Publishing) 1997.

Old Age and Death (12:3-7)

Solomon proceeds in this section to give a long series of descriptions of old age, failing faculties, and death. He urges his readers to “remember” their Creator before the weaknesses and limitations of old age arrive.

The onset of old age is pictured under a wide variety of metaphors.

- When the keepers of the house shall tremble *arms and hands tremble?*
- The strong men shall bow themselves *bad back, legs bend, knees totter*
- The grinders cease because they are few *grinders=teeth, can't chew*
- Those that look out of the windows be darkened *eyes lose sight, cataracts*
- And the doors shall be shut in the streets *lips stay shut*
- Then the sound of the grinding is low *little grinding/chewing is possible*
- He shall rise up at the voice of the bird *little noise awakens him—can't sleep*
- All the daughters of music shall be brought low; *can't enjoy music anymore*
- They shall be afraid of that which is high, and fears shall be in the way *fear of heights and traffic? Can't find his way home.*
- The almond tree shall flourish *almond trees have white “hair” when in bloom*
- The grasshopper shall be a burden *a normally springy animals slow down, halting walk*
- Desire shall fail *some trans. desire “caperberry”—a berry used as an appetizer—normal appetites lost*
- The mourners go about the streets: *funeral service*
- The silver cord be loosed *spinal cord?*
- The golden bowl be broken *brain? Head?*
- The pitcher be broken at the fountain *heart fails and blood flows out*
- The wheel broken at the cistern.
- The dust return to the earth as it was: *body decays and rots*
- The spirit shall return unto God who gave it. *One's soul goes to God*

What's the point of this descriptive language?

Old age and death come soon enough. Serve God and enjoy the benefits of life while there is still time and opportunity to do so. Don't put off til later what you should do now.

Having warned the young man to make the most of life while he has the faculties to enjoy it, remembering that he is accountable to God for the use of God's gifts, the Teacher reminds him that these gifts and life itself are fleeting.

At the moment his faculties are flexible, but as he grows older they will harden and decay. One day all will cease in death, the supreme frustration and apparent meaningless end to life.²

Are these descriptions primarily negative or positive? Negative. What words suggest a negative viewpoint? Tremble, cease, darkened, bring low, fear, burden, fail, mourners, loosed, broken, dust return.

Why do you suppose Solomon was so negative about old age and death?

Because he was likely experiencing it first hand. The whole book is from the perspective of a frustrated old man looking back over his life of vanity. Also, remember what we said about the attitude many OT saints had about death—it was a gloomy and dark prospect.

Note, that verse 7 asserts that the “spirit returns to God.” This statement proves that Solomon did not teach “soul sleep” or the equality of man and animals. Although his body returns to the soil (“dust”), his soul/spirit is personally and consciously with God.

How does Solomon conclude his remarks? (verse 8)

Vanity of vanities, saith the preacher; all is vanity. This idea/assertion brackets the contents of the book—found at both the beginning and the end. All of life is a puzzling enigma.

Excellent Elements (and Twinkling) of Ecclesiastes Eleven and Twelve

1. We should live with eternal values in mind. Rejoice and enjoy yourself, but keep in mind the final judgment, in which the events of today will be evaluated. Enjoy the present, but be prepared for the future.
2. We should “remember our creator,” that is, think about God and His claim on our lives, and determine to act in a way that is consistent with God’s character.
3. Old age limits our activities. We will eventually lose the privilege of working for God here on earth. We should determine to serve God while we still have the desire and abilities to do so.
4. Life is a puzzling enigma. The best thing for us to do is trust God.

² Expositor's

For Further Discussion:

1. **Why is it that young people often don't make serving God a priority?**

Other things seem to be more important; they think they have plenty of life in front of them for that; they've been told that they have no place of service.

2. **How does the idea of judgment temper how one pursues enjoyment?**

Before seeking pleasure, one will think about what God wants. One might ask, "Is this rewardable or punishable behavior?"

3. **Why is it significant that this advice comes from Solomon?**

He was a very wise person; this comes at the end of his life—he's got good perspective and experience. It's almost like he's saying that he wishes he had served God more as a young man.