

*Ecclesiastes:
A Reflective Exposition*

An important virtue that every Christian seeks to have is the ability to live gratefully in the present moment. This is no easy task. So easily our minds wander either to the future – what I want to be someday! – or revert to the past – what I regret about yesterday – instead of focusing on the present moment – where has God placed me right now? Our failure to live with contentment and gratitude in the present moment is not without consequence; how many worries and fears we bear up under because we fail to do this very thing!

Rev. T. Miersma's reflections on the book of Ecclesiastes will be helpful to the one who is striving to grow in the Christian grace of contentment. Solomon, the inspired writer, finishes the book: "Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments; for this is the whole duty of man" (Eccl. 12:13). Miersma writes with the goal of helping the Christian honor God in his day by day living. He states at the outset: "[Ecclesiastes'] purpose is not so much to give what is mistakenly called practical instruction or instruction on how to *do* something, but rather to give true practical wisdom by giving us to *see* the realities of life with spiritual discernment" (7).

Miersma's book contains biblical instruction for many different areas of life. This is done in accord with the duty of the wise preacher. "And moreover, because the preacher was wise, he still taught the people knowledge; yea, he gave good heed, and sought out, and set in order many proverbs," (Eccl. 12:9). Miersma's exposition teaches about parenting, work and employment, the nature and power of the Holy Scriptures, the proper use of money, and the struggle against lust and discontent. Mothers and fathers, old and young, male and female alike will find application to their lives as they read through it.

This is not to say that the book is simplistic or legalistic. Rather, the book is powerful, for the book presents to the reader the gospel. Miersma writes honestly and soberly: "Man is finite and fallen in sin. That which is new can only be of God and that by a wonder of grace. Ecclesiastes stands as part of the background of the gospel. For as it paints a true portrait of the vanity of life it points us to God and the new thing which he alone has wrought in Jesus Christ" (33).

Miersma is qualified to have written such a spiritual commentary. One qualification that stands out is his many years of experience as a pastor. Years of laboring as an under-shepherd

has given him to see firsthand the transitory nature of life on this earth. He has observed that “to every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven” (Eccl. 3:1). These life experiences, in conjunction with his own personal conviction of life after death, add depth and warmth to the book.

The book could be recommended for many reasons, but what stands out is the wise and time-appropriate instruction about money. We live in a world in which materialism is not only permitted but even encouraged. Men spend their days trying to earn more dollars; women and men alike spend their free time dreaming of ways they may spend their money. Miersma cautions against such: “Earthly abundance does not satisfy. Enough, whether of gold and silver or abundance, is never enough” (86). Indeed, “the abundance of the rich will not suffer him to sleep” (Eccl. 5:12), because “riches for a man given to covetousness bring with them fretful care and worry lest they be lost” (89). The sad end of the covetous man is “he now has nothing, and he will die and carry nothing away. He has striven for the wind and obtained empty air” (92). In contrast is the blessing “that grace brings to us as the children of God and [which] gives to us the light of life, even eternal life” (92).

Ecclesiastes is a deep book. Anyone who has read through it will acknowledge the difficulty of understanding the figurative language used by Solomon. Miersma, as a good teacher, has worked hard at taking that which is deep and mysterious and making it discernable and concrete to the reader. Nonetheless, some readers will struggle to stay engaged; after all, the book is a biblical exposition, not a novel. May I recommend that the earnest reader take small sections at a time – perhaps reading only a few pages at a time – and then meditate and pray over the truth, and you will find this book to be a blessing to you.