

Wisdom about Youth A Special Invitation to the Young

Intro: As the preacher brings his sermon to a close, he has exhorted us all to embrace the life of faith; but the preacher reserves a special series of exhortations for the young. Like all wisdom literature, one goal is to help those who are naïve and open to all ideas (as young people often are) to center their thoughts on the true way that comes from God and leads to happiness.

So the preacher gives a special invitation to the young in the form of a string of commands or exhortations (rejoice, follow, remove, know, remember). In them we find a prescription for a truly satisfied life.

Rejoice and let your heart be pleasant! (v. 9)

It comes as quite a surprise to young people that God wants them to have joy! Perhaps because they have been given this impression all their lives that God is some kind of cosmic “kill joy” who as one young person put it “goes around finding people having fun and trying to stop it”! Every young person needs to know that God wants them to enjoy life and if they are not doing so, then there is something terribly wrong!

Some young people seem to really enjoy life; others seem to be only tolerating it! Some let the imperfections in their world create clouds of darkness over them; others learn to look past life’s imperfections and seize the good part of life.

Young people, are you living in the sunshine or hovering in the darkness?

Follow the impulses of your heart and the desires of your eyes (v. 9b)

Sometimes young people are waiting around for someone else to take charge their lives, to make them happy. God wants young people to respond to life, to pursue what their eyes see and what their hearts long for. What are your dreams? What do you want to do with your life? Are you sitting around waiting for something to happen or are you actively seeking to achieve your dreams and aspirations?

Know that God will however bring you into judgment for these things.

In the former exhortations, Solomon is not advocating some kind of unrestrained hedonism. Solomon says, “Live it up; but not so as to have to spend the rest of your life trying to live it down!”

You are not free to do as you please! You are accountable to God! And much of the unhappiness people experience in life is due to rebellion against their accountability to God and the illusion of “freedom”. The story never changes: I want to be my own god and do what I want. The outcome is always the same: sadness and death!

Only when we live with accountability can we also live a life with godly goals and joy in their achievement.

Young people, whatever happiness you pursue, whatever impulses you follow, make sure that you are engaged in what is right and moral. Make sure that you will not ultimately be condemned for your pursuits.

Remove vexation from your heart and pain from your body! (v. 10)

The call to rejoice has a “flip side” corollary truth. Remove from your life what brings inward vexation.

It must break God’s heart to see how young people suffer spiritually. What pain is greater than the pain of rejection, of loneliness? What is sadder than a young person who has lost the desire to live? Yet many young people seem more drawn to death than life, closing themselves off from the world listening to dark music, unwilling to acknowledge that happiness can exist.

If we are to live a life of joy, we must learn to cope with cynicism at its root (Eaton).

Remove vexation—all that brings emotional pain (anger, discontentment, boredom). Young people need the peace of a clear conscience. They need the peace of trusting their problems to God.

Remove from your life what brings outward pain.

How often do young people on a dare do something that will cause them physical pain for the rest of their lives? (Drugs, recklessness) How many brain cells can you afford to give up? How many friends can you afford to lose?

Young people need to see the need to be good stewards of their bodies. A young body can certainly absorb a lot of abuse; but it will eventually come back to haunt you!

Remember God! (12:1)

Solomon gives us an interesting portrayal of old age (v. 1b-5) He uses various figures to show us what is in store.

Evil days are coming. The reference is not moral and ethical, but descriptive of the calamitous and chaotic days of old age.

The passing years will press the reader to self-confessed despair (Eaton). I.e. “you will say I have no pleasure in them”.

How would one describe those days? Solomon uses various figures:

Days of light are replaced with continual days of darkness. It is a time when life is like one storm after another.

The keepers of the house tremble (the arms and hands grow weak and shake).

Strong men stoop, that is, the legs grow bent and feeble.

The grinders cease because they are few refers to the teeth becoming fewer.

Those looking through the windows grow dim refers to the eyesight beginning to fail.

The doors to the street are closed may picture the lips sinking in, due to the loss of teeth.

When men rise up at the sound of birds suggests that old people get up early because of their inability to sleep.

All their songs grow faint speaks of hearing that becomes impaired.

Being afraid of heights and of dangers in the streets points up lack of vigor and the fear that makes older people afraid to venture out.

The almond tree blossoms refers to the hair turning gray and white (almond blossoms are white).

The grasshopper drags himself along speaks of the body being bent and one's walk being slowed; the grasshopper, normally moving about quickly, is an apt figure of the past liveliness of one's childhood and youth.

Desire no longer is stirred speaks of diminished appetites.

Finally the process leads to death.

Man goes to his eternal home (i.e., the grave; cf. comments on 11:8-9).

People grieve (mourners go about in the streets).

Powerful metaphors call to mind the unyielding permanence of death.

Light being extinguished: the silver cord holding a golden bowl (in which the light burns) snaps and the bowl is broken and it can't be put back together.

The pitcher which holds the water is shattered and the wheel by which it is drawn from the well is broken.

Man has come full cycle. He was made from dust and into his nostrils the breath of life was breathed. Now he returns to the dust and his breath returns to God who gave it.

The point of this long paragraph is that all of us are getting old. Our time to really live productive and happy lives is now!

The world would say, "Live it up now while you are young and get religious after you can't have fun any more". God says, "Only when you follow my word, can you truly experience a really happy life! So, don't miss out!

The best way to live life is according to the instructions of God. This is what assures us that we will be happy and productive before "evil days" come for us! Thus young people need to remember Him.

Remember your Creator means to revere God, to keep His laws faithfully, to serve Him responsibly, remembering that because He created people, everyone owes Him his life.

Conclusion: No one, young or old, who reads this paragraph honestly cannot go away without a feeling of sadness, or perhaps emptiness—that it all comes down to this. Yet Solomon has not taken us here to leave us in despair and hopelessness; but to empower us to recoil from such a moment to make a more determined attempt to acknowledge God and live while we can!