

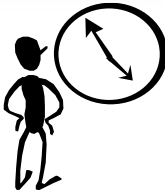
THE BATTLE CREEK BULLETIN

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Time of Assembly



Sunday:

Bible Study 9:00 a.m.
Worship 10:00 a.m.
(Or every other week)

Bible Study 4:00 p.m.

Worship 5:00 p.m.

Wednesday:

Bible Study 7:00 p. m.

The Conclusion of the Whole Matter

By David R. Pharr

Frank Sinatra was only 54 when he recorded his popular song, "I Did It My Way." The song may imply his life was nearly over. "And now the end is near, So I face the final curtain." The lyrics may suggest a full and mostly successful life, with emphasis on it being "My Way."

"I've lived a life that's full. I've traveled every highway. . . .
And I planned each charted course, Each step along life's byway,
And more and more than this, I did it my way.
I loved, I laughed, I cried, Had my share of losing,
And now as tears subside, I find it so amusing,
Just to think I did all that, And may I say not in a shy way,
Oh no, oh no, not me, I did it my way."

It became one of the artist's most popular songs, probably because it appealed to human desires for absolute self-autonomy. Its appeal is in the common inclination to do what pleases self, to find happiness on one's own terms, to determine one's own destiny. According to a survey by Cooperative Funeralcare in the United Kingdom, as late as 2019, almost fifty years after it was published, "I Did It My Way" was the most requested funeral song.

We know no more about Sinatra than what was widely published and it's not our place to judge whether the song fairly represents his life. Regardless, however, of how well or how much he insisted on living his life "My Way," Sinatra died in 1998, at age 82. In the last few years of his life, he suffered from heart and breathing problems, bladder cancer, pneumonia, and dementia-like symptoms. "I Did it My Way" was not sung at his funeral (Wikipedia).

In Solomon's advice to youth, he recognized the possibility and appeal of one choosing to live his life "my way." "*Rejoice, O young man, in your youth, And let your heart cheer you in the days of your youth; Walk in the ways of your*

heart, And in the sight of your eyes" (Ecclesiastes 11:9). So far the verse sounds very much like the sometimes popular advice: "Do your own thing," or "If it feels good, do it!" The text suggests that people, especially when young, to a considerable extent, may choose to do whatever they want to do, good or bad. Solomon's sobering caveat, however, is in the rest of the verse: "*But know that for all these God will bring you into judgment.*" There will be an accounting (Romans 14:12). What is more, what one has the mind and strength to do at one stage of life, he cannot expect to always have. In a series of powerful metaphors, Solomon then shows the changes that come with age and the ultimate end for every person. Self-will and pleasure, whether innocent or carnal, are transitory. The only real happiness is in the right relationship with God (Psalms 1). Therefore, "*Remember now your Creator in the days of your youth,*" and in mature years, and old age, and always!

What Can We Get Out of Life?

King Solomon wrote Ecclesiastes to describe his experiences in living his life "my way." He was the richest, most powerful, and wisest of the kings of Israel. He was crowned at age twenty and ruled for forty years. Until the end of the book, it is about experiments and observations over the things which most engage human beings "under the sun." The point was that he had tried it all and seen it all. A note in the Dickson Bible summarizes:

"Solomon drank deeply from all the fountains of life mentioned in this book. He had an abundance of riches which enabled him to indulge in every sense of pleasure and luxury. He had distinction to gratify every passion for fame. This was in recognition of his knowledge, his wisdom and his works. Monarchs sat at his feet for instruction. He had every opportunity to gratify every wish. His wealth, endowments and fame brought him hundreds of foreign wives. Silver was as stones in Jerusalem" (785).

The Preacher's purpose is to show the meaningless and transitory nature of earthly successes. In describing his endeavors there is an obvious emphasis on "my way," what "I" did. "*I made my works great, I built myself houses . . . I made myself gardens and orchards . . . I made myself water pools . . . I acquired male and female servants . . . Yes, I had greater possessions of herds and flocks than all who were in Jerusalem before me. I also gathered for myself silver and gold and the special treasures of kings . . . I acquired male and female singers . . . and musical instruments of all kinds. So I became great and excelled more than all who were before me in Jerusalem. Also my wisdom remained with me. Whatever my eyes desired I did not keep from them. I did not withhold my heart from any pleasure. . .*" (Ecclesiastes 2:4-10).

The point is that he was able to be actually successful in all the temporal pursuits in which people seek to find satisfaction and happiness. He also gave himself to pursuits of the mind and saw that wisdom excels folly. "*The wise man's eyes are in his head, But*

the fool walks in darkness. Yet I myself perceived that the same event [death] happens to them all” (Ecclesiastes 2:12ff).

There are factors that affect every endeavor. The realities Solomon states are too obvious to be denied, but too seldom calculated into man’s grasping for happiness by his own agenda. Every purpose and plan has its uncertainties. Pleasures sought can become burdens to bear. Lives are over before they are finished. *“I have seen all the works that are done under the sun; and indeed, all is vanity and grasping for the wind” (Ecclesiastes 1:2, 14).*

Is Life Worth Living?

“Vanity of vanities!” Solomon insists on the obvious. Regardless of how much we have, or what we are able to do, there are always disappointments, uncertainties, and threats. *“He who loves silver will not be satisfied with silver; Nor he who loves abundance, with increase. This also is vanity.” “There is an evil which I have seen under the sun, and it is common among men: A man to whom God has given riches and wealth and honor, so that he lacks nothing for himself of all he desires; yet God does not give him power to eat of it . . .” (Ecclesiastes 6:1f).*

Is pessimism the rule to live by? Is life worth living? Is it not meant that we enjoy life? Much emphasis is given by Solomon on being honest with life’s realities. This is because so much is out of balance in the world’s value systems. Still, in spite of the unprofitableness of *“grasping for the wind,”* when we live in view of God’s benevolent providence, it is intended that life is to be enjoyed. *“I know that nothing is better for them than to rejoice, and to do good in their lives, and also that every man should eat and drink and enjoy the good of all his labor — it is the gift of God” (Ecclesiastes 3:12f).* Paul reminds that if godly people have the basics for survival, there is a reason for contentment (I Timothy 6:6ff). *“The sleep of a laboring man is sweet, whether he eats little or much” (Ecclesiastes 5:12).* All that is more than this is by God’s graciousness and to be enjoyed with thanksgiving. *“Go, eat your bread with joy, And drink your wine with a merry heart; For God has already accepted your works. Let your garments always be white, And let your head lack no oil. Live joyfully with the wife whom you love all the days of your vain life which He has given you under the sun, all your days of vanity; for that is your portion in life, and in the labor which you perform under the sun” (Ecclesiastes 9:7ff).*

“When All Is Said . . .”

A common way to introduce one’s conclusion is to say, *“When all is said and done . . .”* This works well with Solomon’s observations about life. He tried to survey it all. Gadgets may change and centuries pass, but things stay the same. *“That which has been is what will be, that which is done is what will be done, and there is nothing new under the sun” (Ecclesiastes 1:9).* Therefore, when all is said and done, there is one purpose for our existence. *“Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: fear God and*

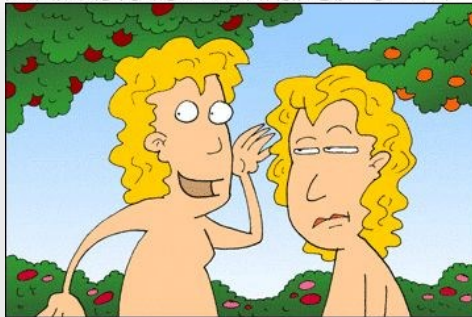
keep His commandments, for this is man's all' (Ecclesiastes 12:13). The one purpose for our existence is to reverence God and do his will. All other pursuits, even the most legitimate and satisfying, are secondary to this purpose and should always be measured by the will of our Maker.

Particular attention is given to: *"For this is man's all."* The familiar KJV has, *"For this is the whole duty of man."* The NASV says, *"because this applies to every person."* Specifics as to commandments to obey are stated in other places. Solomon's wording here is comprehensive. Other passages are similar in declaring the priority of a godly heart and godly conduct. *"And now, Israel, what does the Lord your God require of you, but to fear the Lord your God, to walk in all His ways and to love Him, to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul?"* (Deuteronomy 10:12). *"And what does the Lord require of you, but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God?"* (Micah 6:8). *"But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you"* (Matthew 6:33).

Numerous are the uncertainties of living in this time of our probation. Life is not always just. Things may as likely be unfair as fair. *"There is a vanity which occurs on earth, that there are just men to whom it happens according to the work of the wicked; again, there are wicked men to whom it happens according to the work of the righteous. I said that this also is vanity"* (Ecclesiastes 8:14). Not so, however, in the *"conclusion of the whole matter."* God misses no details, is not swayed by influence, and is infinitely perfect in judgment. *"All things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account"* (Hebrews 4:13). *"He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him"* (Hebrews 11:6). *"Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?"* If we fear God and keep his commandments, he assures us of true and eternal happiness.

If, however, in disregard to the will of his Maker, one insists that he will live his life "my way," and even if overall it seems to be a satisfying life, there is a reality that never goes away. Solomon had already inserted this in his observations. *"Though a sinner does evil a hundred times, and his days are prolonged, yet I surely know that it will be well with those who fear God, who fear before Him. But it will not be well with the wicked; nor will he prolong his days, which are as a shadow, because he does not fear before God"* (Ecclesiastes 8:12). When good happens to bad people, we are not to think that's the end of the story. Because when all is said and done *"God will bring every work into judgment, including every secret thing, whether good or evil."*

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Thanks to Richard Germain 07-31-2006
HEY EVE, I HAVE A GREAT SECRET BUT
YOU GOTTA PROMISE NOT TO TELL
ANYBODY ELSE

Hagar and Exclusion

By Matthew W. Bassford

This became apparent last week when we studied the use of the story of Lot by Jesus and Peter. Today, gospel preachers like to bag on Lot. They condemn him for “pitching his tent towards Sodom” and point to the corruption of his family with grim satisfaction. By contrast, the New Testament uniformly describes Lot as righteous and uses his escape from destruction as an example of the way that God will save His people.

Much the same thing happens in the New Testament’s use of Genesis 21. This chapter contains the story of Sarah driving Hagar out because Ishmael made fun of Isaac. Here too, we like to moralize about Abraham’s mistake in trying to hurry God’s promise along by sleeping with Hagar. If anything, our sympathies lie with the servant girl and her child, who are thrown out into the desert.

Our first clue that this is a mistake lies with Abraham’s motivation for allowing it to happen. He consents to Hagar’s expulsion because God tells him to. In Galatians 4:21-30, Paul picks up on this theme. He compares Hagar to the earthly city of Jerusalem and Sarah to the Jerusalem above. Similarly, he likens Ishmael to the Jews and Isaac to Christians. The Jews might be persecuting Christians like Ishmael harassed Isaac, but in the end, they will be driven out of the kingdom.

We live in an era that exalts tolerance. Anything goes, except for those who refuse to line up with progressive talking points. If we dare to suggest that someone might go to hell because of their practice of sin, we are condemned as hateful bigots. Even within our brotherhood, there are those who embrace members of denominations as fully Christian. If we disagree, they claim that we are tied to church tradition, narrow-minded, and so on.

However, all of this inclusiveness fails to reckon with the exclusive nature of the gospel. Yes, anyone who wishes to become a Christian may do so. Transformation, though, takes place on Christ’s terms, not our terms. Thereafter, we must live God’s way, not our way. All who refuse the first of these things will not have their names written in the book of life. Those who refuse the second will have their names blotted out.

This sounds awfully ugly, but it is no uglier than the exclusion of Hagar and Ishmael. If God tells us through His word that someone does not belong with His people, we have no more right to argue with Him than Abraham did. In fact, we are responsible for solemnly warning the deluded about the danger that they are in, even though this leads to more unpleasantness. It appears harsh, but it is the kindest thing that we can do. Conversely, when we welcome those whom the scriptures exclude, it will cost us our souls along with theirs.