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"Be Careful . . ."

ECCLESIASTES 12:13-14

Introduction

1. Many of us grew up learning the children's song which says . . .
 - "O, be careful little eyes what you see . . ."
 - "O, be careful little ears what you hear . . ."
 - "O, be careful little tongue what you say . . ."
 - "O, be careful little hands what you do . . ."
 - "O, be careful little feet where you go . . ."
2. It teaches us that, when it comes to following Jesus, our actions are important.
3. We now live in an age and culture that tends to *blur the distinction* between good and evil, those people who are good and those who are not.
4. God's Word not only makes a distinction between *good* and *evil*, but between those people who are good and those who aren't.
 - a. Through His prophet Isaiah, God said, "Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil; who substitute darkness for light and light for darkness; who substitute bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter!" (Isaiah 5:20, NASB95)
 - b. Through His prophet, Malachi, God spoke of a time when His people would again "distinguish between the righteous and the wicked, between one who serves God and one who does not serve Him" (Malachi 3:18, NASB95).

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5. Why is this so important? Solomon tells us at the end of the book in the Bible known as Ecclesiastes.

"The conclusion, when all has been heard, is: fear God and keep His

commandments, because this applies to every person. For God will bring every act to judgment, everything which is hidden, whether it is good or evil." (*Ecclesiastes 12:13-14, NASB95*)

6. As we begin our lesson this evening, I want you to consider this — no one is *born* with an evil character, so, if some people end up with a character more evil than that of others, it is worth asking how that happened.
7. How do people get to be the way they are?

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I. Our Characters Are The Accumulation Of Our Decisions Over Time

A. OUR TENDENCY TO BLAME OUR CIRCUMSTANCES

1. When we find ourselves dissatisfied with our present state in life, we are tempted to blame circumstances beyond our control.
 - a. The parents to which we were borne.
 - b. The community in which we lived.
 - c. The "bad hand that life dealt to us."
2. When Adam sinned in the garden, he blamed the woman God had given to him, "The woman whom You gave to be with me, she gave me from the tree, and I ate" (*Genesis 3:12*).
3. She in turn blamed the serpent, "The serpent deceived me" (*Genesis 3:13*).
4. In 1 Samuel 13, when the Samuel confronted King Saul for offering sacrifices which he alone was to offer, Saul blamed his circumstances, "Because I saw the people were scattering from me, and that you did not come within the appointed days, and that the Philistines were assembling at Micmash, therefore I said, 'Now the Philistines will come down against me at Gilgal, and I hve not asked the favor of the Lord.' So I forced myself and offered the burnt offering" (*1 Samuel 13:11-12*).

5. Oftentimes, we too reason our lives would have turned out better if our circumstances had been different.
6. However, there is something else which figures in to this.

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B. WE ARE THE PRODUCT OF THE DECISIONS WE HAVE MADE

1. Each of us have voluntarily thought, spoken and done the things which have resulted in us becoming the people we are.
2. Our *personal characters* are not determined by our external circumstances, but by what we have chosen to do with those circumstances.
3. Consider for a moment the difference between Saul and David:
 - a. "But now your kingdom shall not endure. The Lord has sought out for Himself a man after His own heart, and the Lord has appointed him as ruler over His people, because you have not kept what the Lord commanded you." (1 Samuel 13:14, NASB95)
 - b. "So Samuel said to him, "The Lord has torn the kingdom of Israel from you today and has given it to your neighbor, who is better than you." (1 Samuel 15:28, NASB95)
 - ❑ David was a better man than Saul, not because he had better circumstances, but because he had made better choices.

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C. WE MUST ACCEPT RESPONSIBILITY FOR WHAT WE HAVE MADE OF OURSELVES

1. We are what we have chosen to become.
2. We can't blame God or anyone else.

"Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God"; for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone. But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust." (James 1:13-14, NASB95)

3. We reap the harvest of what we ourselves have sown (Galatians 6:7).

"Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap." (Galatians 6:7, NASB95)

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D. OUR DECISIONS AND CHOICES HAVE A CUMULATIVE EFFECT

1. Another way to put it is that they tend to "snowball."
2. Even our "little" choices are more significant than we may think.
3. Every decision and every act changes us for better or worse — we are never the same after making any choice.
4. The future choices we will make are determined by the person we have become because of the choices we have already made (i.e. Daniel).

"Now when Daniel knew that the document was signed, he entered his house (now in his roof chamber he had windows open toward Jerusalem); and he continued kneeling on his knees three times a day, praying and giving thanks before his God, as he had been doing previously." (Daniel 6:10, NASB95)

5. Perhaps you remember the quote from Ralph Waldo Emerson, who said, "Sow a thought and you reap an action; sow an act and you reap a habit; sow a habit and you reap a character; sow a character and you reap a destiny."
6. Each of us over time is building a character which is becoming more like God or more like Satan.

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II. It Is Sobering To Realize Every Deed Counts

A. GOD WILL BRING EVERY DEED INTO JUDGMENT

1. This is what Solomon promised (*Ecclesiastes 11:9; 12:14*)

"Rejoice, young man, during your childhood, and let your heart be

pleasant during the days of young manhood. And follow the impulses of your heart and the desires of your eyes. Yet know that God will bring you to judgment for all these things." (*Ecclesiastes 11:9, NASB95*)

"For God will bring every act to judgment, everything which is hidden, whether it is good or evil." (*Ecclesiastes 12:14, NASB95*)

2. On one occasion, Jesus was talking about how our words reveal our character (*Matthew 12:34b-35*).

"For the mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart. The good man brings out of his good treasure what is good; and the evil man brings out of his evil treasure what is evil." (*Matthew 12:34–35, NASB95*)

3. In verse 36, He then adds, "But I tell you that every careless word that people may speak, they shall give an accounting for it in the day of judgment."
4. Many of us have seen the child, who, in the midst of a game said, "That didn't count," or "I had my fingers crossed," in an effort to negate a previous word or action.
5. Jesus said that we will be responsible for our "careless" words — we can't say to God, "that didn't count," or "I didn't mean that."

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B. GOD WILL NOT "INADVERTENTLY" OR "MISTAKENLY" CONSIGN ANYONE TO ETERNAL PUNISHMENT

1. If we are there, it is because we have demanded to be there by the choices we have made.
2. Few of those will be people who intentionally set out to be wicked.
3. Robert Louis Stevenson who is perhaps best known for "Treasure Island" and "The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde," once said, "Sooner or later, we must all sit down to a banquet of consequences."
4. It is important that we consider the consequences of our choices.

[While it is sobering for us to consider that every deed counts, . . .]

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II. It Is Also Encouraging To Think That Every Act Counts

A. NEVER ARE OUR LIVES TRULY HELPLESS OR HOPELESS

1. When it comes to the matter of our eternal soul, there is no such thing as a stalemate.
2. We can always do something.
3. As with Joshua and the Israelites, we can "choose for [ourselves] today whom [we] will serve" (Joshua 24:15).
4. As Elihu, one of Job's friends said, "Let us choose for ourselves what is right; let us know among ourselves what is good" (Job 34:4).
5. You and I can make choices that will truly alter our present situation for that which is good.

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B. TAKE STEPS IN THE DIRECTION OF GOODNESS AND TRUTH

1. When we do so in faith, those steps, no matter how small and seemingly insignificant, do make a difference.
2. In his gospel, Mark tells us about a time when Jesus was watching people put money into the temple treasury (Mark 12:41-44).
 - a. Many of the rich were putting in large sums.
 - b. A poor widow came along and put in "two small copper coins" (Gk. *Lepta*) which was "all she owned, all she had to live on" (Mark 12:44).
3. God doesn't require of us larger steps than we are able to take, only small steps taken in faith.
4. He is looking for people who can do everything, only those who are willing to do what they can.

Conclusion

1. The important for us to remember in all of this is that God gives us the opportunity, this side of eternity to make better choices.
2. In his first letter to the Christians in Corinth, the apostle Paul wrote of his own life, "For I am the least of the apostles, and not fit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me did not prove vain; but I labored even more than all of them, yet not I, but the grace of God with me." (1 Corinthians 15:9–10, NASB95)

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3. As you think about the choices you make each day, please take to heart the words of Paul to the brethren in Ephesus, "Therefore be careful how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise" (Ephesians 5:15).
4. Your deeds reach into eternity, your works will follow after you.
5. Are you storing up treasure in heaven? If not, why not start today?