

EVERY ACT COUNTS

Introduction

- A. Text: **Eccl. 12:13,14**.
- B. Our age tends to *blur the distinction* between good people and those who are not.
- C. In the Scriptures, however, there is not only a distinction between *good* and *evil*, but also between good and evil *people*. Those who *submit to God* are clearly distinguished from those who *reject Him* - **Rom. 2:5-10; 6:16**. Cf. **Mal. 3:18**.
- D. But no one is *born* with an evil character — so if some people end up having a character more evil than that of others, it is worth asking how that happened. *How do people get to be the way they are?*

I. OUR CHARACTERS ARE THE ACCUMULATION OF THE DECISIONS WE HAVE MADE

- A. When we're dissatisfied with our present state in life, it is tempting to *blame circumstances beyond our control* — we tend to think we would be better off if we had been "dealt a better hand."
- B. Yet we are each the *product of decisions that we have made* in the freedom of our wills.
 - 1. We have voluntarily thought, spoken, and done the things that have made us what we are.
 - 2. Our *personal characters* are built up not from our external circumstances, but from *what we have chosen to do with those circumstances*.
 - a. Contrast Saul with David.
 - 1) "But now your kingdom shall not continue. The Lord has sought for Himself *a man after His own heart*, and the Lord has commanded him to be commander over His people, because you have not kept what the Lord commanded you" (**1 Sam. 13:14**).
 - 2) "So Samuel said to him, 'The Lord has torn the kingdom of Israel from you today, and has given it to a neighbor of yours, *who is better than you*'" (**1 Sam. 15:28**).
 - b. Mark it well: David was *a better man* than Saul — not because he had better *circumstances*, but because he had made better *choices*.
- C. We need to accept *responsibility* for what we have made of ourselves.
 - 1. We are what we have chosen to be.
 - 2. We are self-made persons.
 - 3. We will reap what we have sown - **Gal. 6:7**.
- D. Decisions and choices have a *cumulative* effect — they tend to "snowball."
 - 1. Even "little" choices are more significant than we might think.
 - 2. Every decision and every act change a person for better or worse — one is never exactly the same after making any choice.
 - 3. Future choices have to be made by a person who has been shaped by the choices already made - e.g. **Dan. 6:10**.
 - 4. With every one of even the slightest deeds, we are building up a character and a self that will find it progressively more easy to act in certain ways and more difficult to act in others.
- E. None of us is standing still.
 - 1. With every choice we are becoming *more like God* or *more like Satan*. Cf. **Jn. 8:44,47**.
 - 2. Contrast **Eph. 4:17-19** with **Hb. 5:14**.

II. IT IS SOBERING TO THINK THAT EVERY ACT COUNTS

- A. God will take every act into account in His judging of our lives.
 - 1. No decision is too small to be significant.
 - 2. "But I say to you that for every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgment" (**Mt. 12:36**).
- B. Like children on the playground, we may want to say "That didn't count" or "I had my fingers crossed" — but when God judges our lives, no such excuses will be accepted.
- C. We may think we are merely being *careless* or *haphazard*, but the consequences of our choices are eternal and we are *responsible* for them.
- D. Hell will not be the *arbitrary* punishment of people who engaged in certain acts.
 - 1. It will be the *telos* (end, goal, outcome) of those acts, the inevitable *consequence* of our choices.
 - 2. "What fruit did you have then in the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death" (**Rom. 6:21**).
- E. God will not "inadvertently" or "mistakenly" consign anyone to eternal punishment.
 - 1. Only those will be there who demanded to be there *by the choices they made*.
 - 2. And few, if any, of those will be people who *set out to be wicked*.
 - 3. "Sooner or later, we must all sit down to a banquet of consequences" (Robert Louis Stevenson).
- F. It is dangerous and detrimental ever to say no to God — even once. Cf. **Hb. 12:25**.

III. IT IS ALSO ENCOURAGING TO THINK THAT EVERY ACT COUNTS

- A. We can never truly say that our lives are *helpless* or *hopeless* — we can always do something.
 - 1. In spiritual matters, there is really no such thing as a stalemate.
 - 2. We need the youthful confidence of David in **1 Sam. 17:26**.
 - 3. We can make choices that will truly *alter the present situation for good*.
- B. We can act in the faith that steps in the direction of goodness and truth, however small and seemingly insignificant, do make a difference. Cf. **Mk. 12:41-44**.
 - 1. God does not require larger steps than we can take, *only small steps taken in faith*.
 - 2. God is not looking for people who can do everything, but for those *willing to do what they can!*
- C. Heaven will be the outcome if we learn to choose actions that *tend in God's direction*. Cf. **Rom. 6:21-23**.

Conclusion

- A. Life is serious business — it pays to live carefully - **Eph. 5:15**.
 - 1. Let us be *sobered* by the fact that each action reaches into eternity, and we must take responsibility for the bad choices we have made.
 - 2. On the other hand, let us be *encouraged* knowing that we can make a difference for good even in "small" acts of faith.
- B. In all things, let us be *grateful* for the opportunity to *make better choices* today. Cf. **1 Cor. 15:9,10**.