

The joy I receive from the Bible

CLAYTON'S CORNER

by Michael Ollie Clayton

Now that I've got your attention, let me impose further by imparting to you, the reader, the joy that I receive from the Bible.

Man, having written the Bible (with the inspiration by God) is at his best when he leaves the pronoun "I" out of his writing.

Conveyance of literature in the first person tends to be self-righteous.

It is the "Hawthorne Effect" on skates (i.e., behavior modified because one is being watched, knows that he or she is being watched, and therefore acts and reacts according to what makes him or her look clean and pure).

There are certain books and certain passages in the Bible that haven't suffered man's infatuation with self as a sinless entity amongst a (big) world of sinful entities. Two books in particular strike me as devoid of man's self-righteous prophecies. Those two books are Proverbs and Ecclesiastes.

Both Proverbs and Ecclesiastes are insightful proclamations as to the virtue of wisdom.

Wisdom, as defined (rather aridly) by the Webster Dictionary is: "The quality of being wise; good judgement, based on knowledge, etc.; discretion; sagacity."

Proverbs and Ecclesiastes go one step beyond a definitive summation of wisdom. What we find in these two books (which, incidentally, follow each other in the Bible) is a text of literature based on man's—the author was gracious here—extraction from having gone from BIG fool to reticent observer and caustic doer.

Proverbs is wisdom penned, and Ecclesiastes is the words of a preacher, who has, instead of exporting to the reader his holier-than-thou self, purposely exposed himself as a vain man searching to make sense of the foolishness around him.

Properly read, Proverbs and Ecclesiastes, as they are rather clear cut, can change one's outlook on life for the better.

These two books are an excellent source of material that all young adults should read. Though of all of the things taught to me in school (I did attend Catholic high school for four very, very long years.) I was never once tasked to inspect (read) Proverbs and Ecclesiastes. It was quite probably for their own good as they did have a time of it getting me to swallow "The Acts" as a pattern by which I should base my life. Ultimately, it became a showdown between my new found wisdom and their stifling conformity. *Wisdom won...*

The Book of Proverbs and the Ecclesiastes are both conscious raising commentary and have served as the infrastructure of "most" of my adult life (when I'm not being an ass...).

What does one find in Prov-

erbs and Ecclesiastes? The Book of Proverbs opens: "The Proverbs of Solomon, son of David, King of Israel: That men may know wisdom and instruction, understand words of insight, receive instruction in wise dealing, righteousness, justice, and equity; that prudence may be given to the simple, knowledge and discretion to the youth—the wise man also may hear and increase in learning, and the man of understanding acquire skill, to understand a proverb and a figure, the words of the wise and their riddles."

Plain words! Heavy words!

No "man" in particular is elevated or raised as a sinless, chosen, prophesying individual in Proverbs and Ecclesiastes. What is so strong and moving about Proverbs and Ecclesiastes is the voice of wisdom being authored. Exposure to the sentiments within find them equitable, fair, balanced, and useful.

The Book of Proverbs continues: "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge..." For those who have personified the Lord, the aforementioned statement could send shivers down their spine. *It is here that I have taken discourse.*

For me, God is a spirit, an entity. And I have, for myself, come to perceive God as the essence of all things good, of things moral. For me, "the fear of the Lord, isn't so much running and hiding my animal self from a chastising being as much as it is a healthy respect for moral codes and moral laws. This is what I think God to be: The spirit of morality. I therefore fear doing a bad thing as it may be unfair to another. I am not an initiator of aggression, though I do reticently respond to acts of injustice both personal and otherwise. Enough about me—I'm straying!

What will you find in Proverbs and Ecclesiastes? Well, try (in modern terms) human interpersonal relations: "Those who devise good meet loyalty and faithfulness." "A soft answer turns away wrath." "He who is greedy for unjust gain makes trouble for his household, but he who hates bribes will live." "He who forgives an offense seeks love, but he who repeats a matter alienates a friend." "There are friends who pretend to be friends, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother."

There are other insightful passages that are not only inviting as works of literature but can be experienced in day to day living. "He who keeps his mouth and tongue keeps himself out of trouble." "A prudent man sees danger and hides himself; but the simple go on, and suffer for it."

Like a dog that returns to his vomit is a fool that repeats his folly." "Do not put yourself forward in the king's presence or stand in the place of the great for it is better to be told, "Come up here," than to be put lower in the presence of the prince." "...There is the righteous man who perishes in his righteousness, and there is a wicked man who pro-

longs his life in his evil-doing. Be not righteous overmuch, and do not make yourself overwise; why should you destroy yourself? Be not wicked overmuch, neither be a fool; why should you die before your time?" "The words of a wise man's mouth win him favour, but the lips of a fool consume him." "Sweet is the sleep of a laborer, whether he eats little or much..."

I enjoy these words. I enjoy trying to be wise (at least 50 percent of the time). I enjoy age, for I can see a lot of things that I couldn't see when I was younger. I am not perfect, I make mistakes, and I am foolish at times, but still, I cannot express to you the joy I get during the times when I am naturally high from wisdom. I get this thrust when I read about wisdom in Proverbs and Ecclesiastes.

In a world where people are trying to find themselves (we all have) I strongly suggest, fervently insist that you begin the search for yourself in the Books of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes.

At one point in my life, when I thought God to be a bearded man sitting on a throne, I discovered, through wisdom, that He wasn't so. Also debunked were my beliefs—things I was told, albeit tradition, but certainly word-of-mouth—such as evil spirits being all around me.

Wisdom made me sit down and openly, honestly, and most importantly, objectively assess my own experience, and to draw my own conclusions and opinions.

I looked at past experiences. I also opened my eyes and looked both in front of me as well as behind me (present tense), only to see that there were no evil spirits (visible or invisible) nicking and kicking me. There was only what I felt inside and only what I believed. Nothing more, nothing less...

Being in the wrong place at the wrong time were (and still are) only a matter of timing. Sure, I was being tested, but not by some pre-ordained divination as much as me being an animal stressed into adaptability. (Proverbs comes to mind here: "Like [the same] things happen to good [people] and bad [people].")

What else came of my quest to be endowed with wisdom? I was granted authority to interpret the Bible. It is here that I found my interpretation varied from every other person's interpretation. The point being that my very exacting summations were, in essence, subject to my subjective self: I was either taking away from or adding to someone else's interpretation of the Bible, and someone else's interpretation of God (author's of the Bible included).

The biggest variation of interpretation came when I realized that man's interpretation of God has changed, changes, and is changing (i.e., is being added to or taken away, ad infinitum.)

How do I draw this conclusion? Well, whomever it was who penned Genesis, all so long ago, was, ap-

parently, infatuated with man not becoming wise—(Specifically, man, as author, taking poetic license to quote God telling Adam and Eve not to eat of the Tree of Wisdom. And yes there are those who suggest that the story was symbolic, and I take carte blanche to retort that if all is symbolic than you who have made that summation have damned the Bible as being a book of mythology.)

Anyway, somewhere during the course of some rather eventful, dynamic times man, as author, became revolutionary (sacrilegious and blasphemous in the words of a zealot) and wrote of the virtue of wisdom (Proverbs and Ecclesiastes). The change in philosophy here is as great and wide as the chasm between the Old and the New Testaments.

Finally, the realization hit me one day! There is joy in wisdom. For wisdom has sung to me and has made me drunk with a passion for living. It has debunked the superstitions taught to me. It has made me see that there is truly "a time for everything" (Ecclesiastes). It has made me syllogistic—even somewhat empirical. It has also made me aware that I have two eyeballs and two testicles, and that I should enjoy all four of my balls! It has told me that I shall die, and hence, should wisely make the best of what I've got before I die.

Some people call it joy!

Shades of black: The invisible man revisited

by Michael Ollie Clayton

I do not believe that "society" is out to get me...

Still, would I be fair in assuming that imbalances exist? Would I be fair to assume that part of society does ignore me? Some say naught, and it is here that I challenge the person(s) who says that—and I am upset with the person(s) for saying that when the evidence is right in front of their face(s).

What evidence? The media! The media's continual subsistence on the negative side of African-American life. Not only that, but the media ignores African-American's opinions and outlooks on life in general. The media thinks that they know us. Yes, we are, in fact, very invisible.

A point in case is the recent UNLV-Georgia Tech Final Four Tournament Game.

If a Martian would have landed in Las Vegas and tuned in to anyone of the three local network-affiliated stations (KVBC, KLAS, KTNV) they would have thought Greg Anthony, Stacey Augmon, David Butler, Anderson Hunt, Larry

Johnson, and Moses Scurry gods—and surely the only black men in Las Vegas. They would have thought European-Americans (white people) crazed in their zealous appreciation of the African-Americans (black guys) on TV.

The point here is that while all of Las Vegas was on fire with Rebel fever, how did some places like "Sneakers" for example, capture a 100 percent lion's share of the local media's attention.

Why weren't establishments on the West side of Las Vegas sought after?

Doesn't the media want to know how African-American fans feel about the African-American players?

This is the alienation that hurts so much. This "tokenization" of a few for, frankly, doing what a child could do is not very tasteful. And this is not just me talking...

This is an across the board sentiment by every African-American in the dormitories I encountered hours after the game and hours after the televised press conference.

It is particularly interesting to me that crime and social unrest

are the only two forums/vehicles that the local media chose to spotlight African-Americans in this town with, aside from, of course, athletics.

(It is interesting that so many always wonder why a black youth's outlook on life is so limited in scope, when, in fact, the limitations of their scope is reinforced by a manipulative media who glorify athletics as the only area of expression for African-Americans to experience adulation and status. Athletics is already haphazardly overrun and overwrought with *wanna-bees, shoulda-beens, woulda-beens, might-bees, coulda-beens, has-beens, and ain't-got-no-business-tryin-to-be.*)

You'd swear that nobody in the African-American community watches the Rebels.

I think it grossly negligent on the part of three local network-affiliates not to have gone into the African-American community, when, after all, it is the African-American community who gave the media these black basketball players to "oogle" and "google" over in the first place...